



ID de Contribution: 12

Type: Non spécifié

What is visualization literacy and how should we measure it

mercredi 21 janvier 2026 10:30 (25 minutes)

Researchers have proposed many definitions of visualization literacy, targeting various aspects of the term. But we have yet to fully capture what it really means to be literate in visualizations, which has important downstream implications, such as how to effectively teach visualization skills to younger generations. Despite not having a clear sense of what it is, we must design tests that measure this ability in order to run empirical studies and evaluate interventions to make progress within the visualization community. This tension between not fully understanding visualization literacy as a construct while still needing to measure it is what makes the study of it so challenging. We ran a one-day workshop at CHI 2024 to facilitate critical conversations around understanding, measuring, and improving visualization literacy. This workshop led to a multi-institutional collaborative autoethnography on the topic of visualization literacy measurements. Based on our reflections on the complexity and fluidity of visualization literacy, we propose several calls to action from the conceptual, operational, and methodological perspectives such as broadening test scopes and modalities, improving test ecological validity, and seeking interdisciplinary collaboration.

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