**Which chart to use?**

You have a dataset of the total number of public & private schools in some Europe countries from 1980 to 2013. Ask yourself: what you want the audience to understand?

- **Show a trend**
  Ok, so you want to compare the data to show differences. But, compare against what?

- **Compare categories**
  Compare among countries (items) to show which countries have highest or lowest number of schools sounds like a good idea.

- **Parts of a whole**
  You want to show the composition of public & private schools in each country, and also compare the school numbers among countries? Sure, use a stacked column chart. You may be tempted to use a pie chart. Don’t.

**2 variables per item**

Apart from comparison among countries, you also want to show the difference between public & private schools in each country? That’s 2 variables (school type) per item (country). A group column chart would be good. To avoid a clutter chart, limit your variables to 3, and keep your items within 5 or 7, depending on your chart width.

**1 variable per item**

Only want to show the difference in total number of schools? That’s 1 variable (school type) per item (country). A simple column chart will do.

**Compare over time**

You want to show the changes of school number over time.

- **Few periods**
  Instead of all periods (over 30 years), you only select data in last 10 years.

- **Single item**
  If you just want to show the data of one country or the whole Europe, a column chart is your best friend.

- **Many items**
  You want to show the difference among several countries (items), a multi-series line chart will do the job.

Caution: Too many lines will make the chart appears clutter, avoid it!

**When to use a table?**

Sometimes a single table is a better choice than dozens of charts.

- When the dataset contains few numbers
- When precise value is crucial (chart is bad at showing precise value)
- When you DON’T want to show a relationship/comparison among numbers
- When a table is clear enough to understand your message