How to Format Figures in the American University Thesis and Dissertation Template

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Inserting Preexisting Figures

Inserting figures is usually an easy process. Just copy and paste the photo image, chart, graph, or other illustration into the template. Then check to make sure your image fits within the page margins.

Color and Grayscale in Figures

You are allowed to use color in your thesis or dissertation. However, because color reproduces poorly in microfilm and often in print copy as well, it is helpful to your readers to ensure that figures are understandable in grayscale. Choose colors that convert well to grayscale, or be proactive in the issue by using grayscale yourself. The examples below show how you can use grayscale effectively in your images, charts, and graphs.

How to Grayscale an Image

If your figure is an image, you can quickly grayscale it as follows:

2. Click the Format tab, which appears when you have an image selected.

3. Open the Color menu.

1. Click the photo to select it.

4. In the Recolor options, choose Grayscale.

How to Grayscale a Chart

3. Choose a grayscale style.

2. Click the Design tab, which appears when you have a chart or graph selected.

In the case of line graphs, it also helps to pick shapes that are easily distinguishable from one another even in small sizes.

1. Click the edge of the figure to select the entire figure (a border usually appears).

How to Grayscale and Pattern Fill a Graph

When creating a bar graph, you can use different shades of gray instead of gradients—just make sure they are distinguishable when reproduced. If you want to use gradients, follow the two steps below.

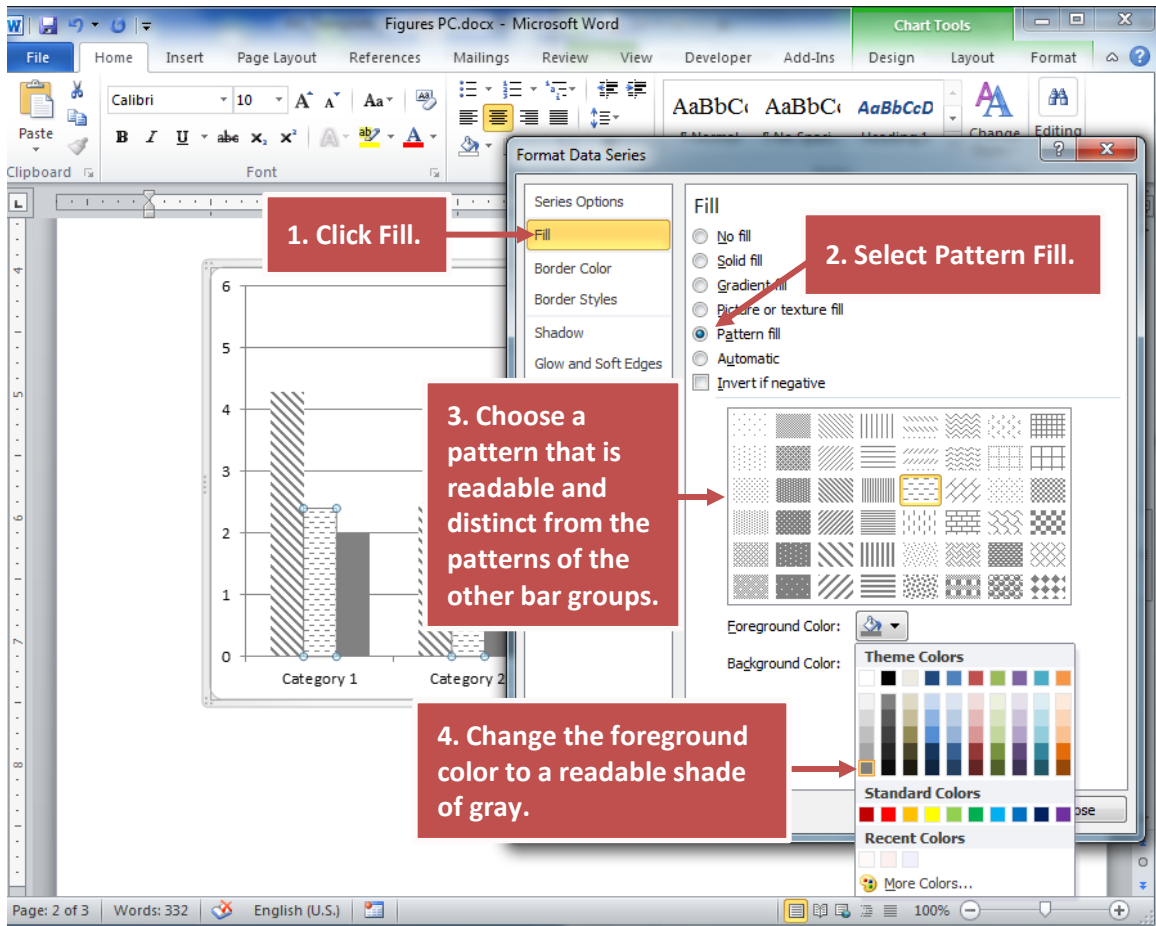*Note:* If you are using Word 2007, the pattern fill options might not be available. The easiest option is to just use different shades of gray, and keep in mind that gray scaling is optional to begin with.
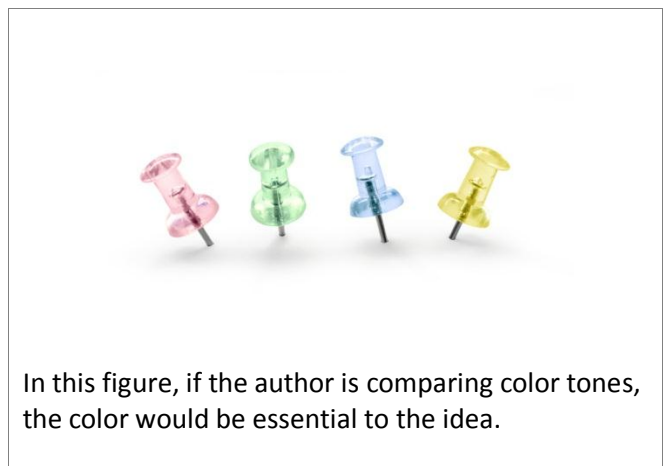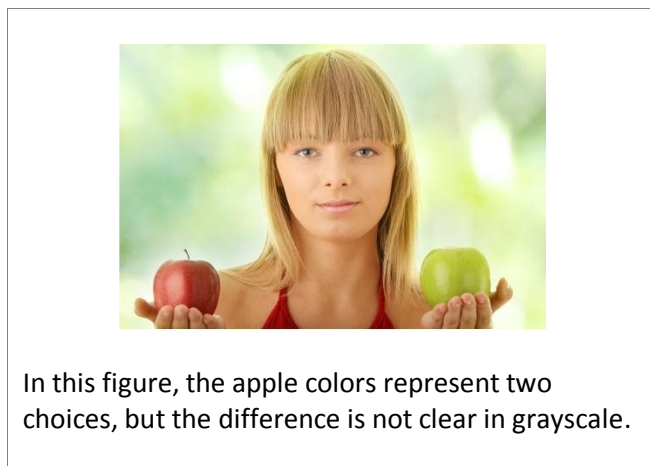
STEP 1. Access the Gradient Options:
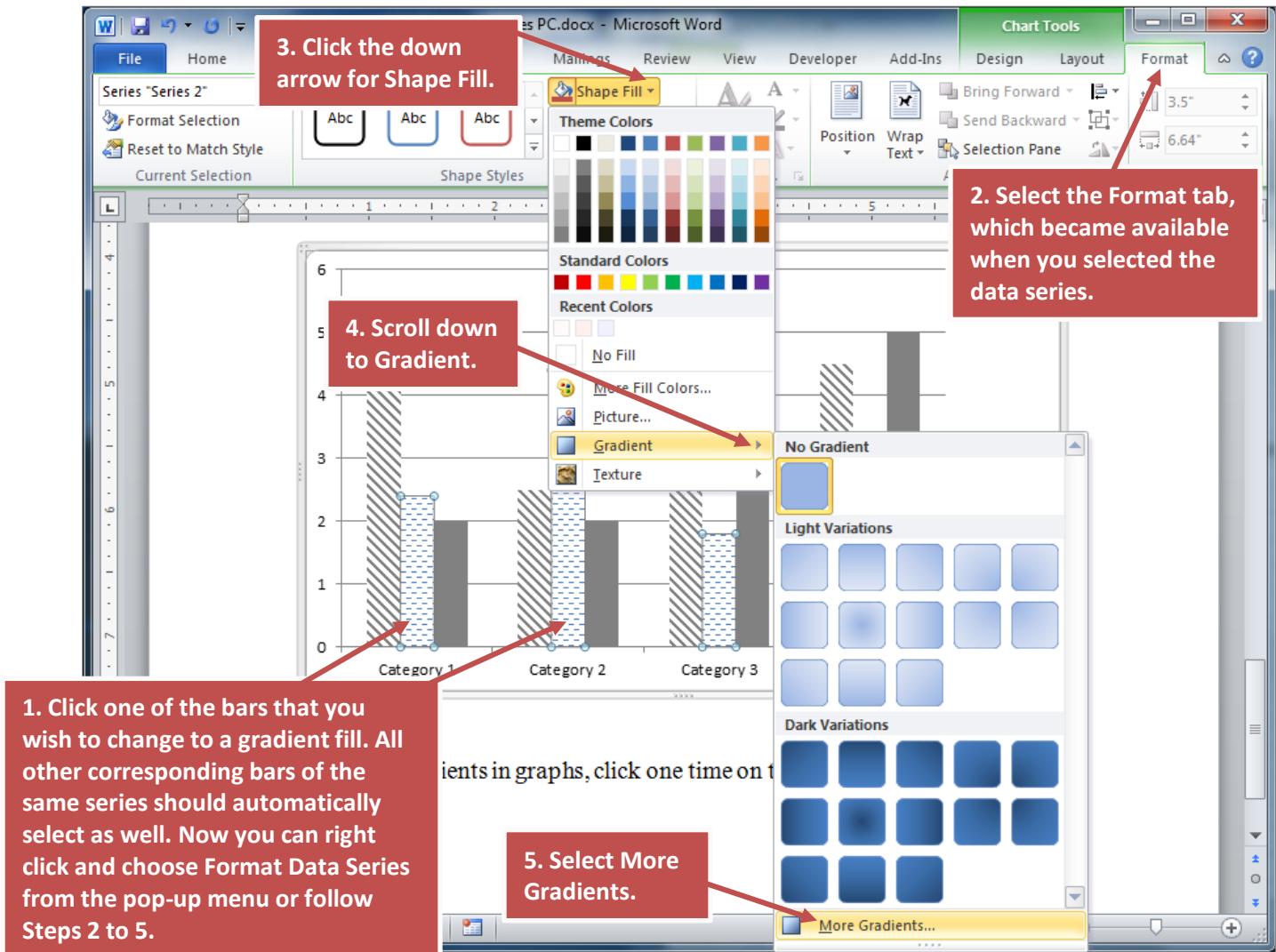
(Instructions Continue on Next Page)

STEP 2. Choose a Pattern Fill style:

When to Use Color

Of course, in some instances, color is indeed important or even essential to understand the material in a figure.

In this figure, the apple colors represent two choices, but the difference is not clear in grayscale.

In this figure, if the author is comparing color tones, the color would be essential to the idea.

In cases like these, be descriptive in the figure captions so that even readers of grayscale versions of the thesis or dissertation can understand the meaning.

Figure Captions

Apply the Figure Caption style to automatically single space the caption, reduce the font size, and ensure that the caption will be included in your List of Illustrations. If you want your captions to display in 12 pt font, right click on the Figure Caption heading style in the Styles menu of the Home tab, choose Modify from the pop-up menu, and change the font size to 12 pt. All captions in the document will then display in 12 pt font.
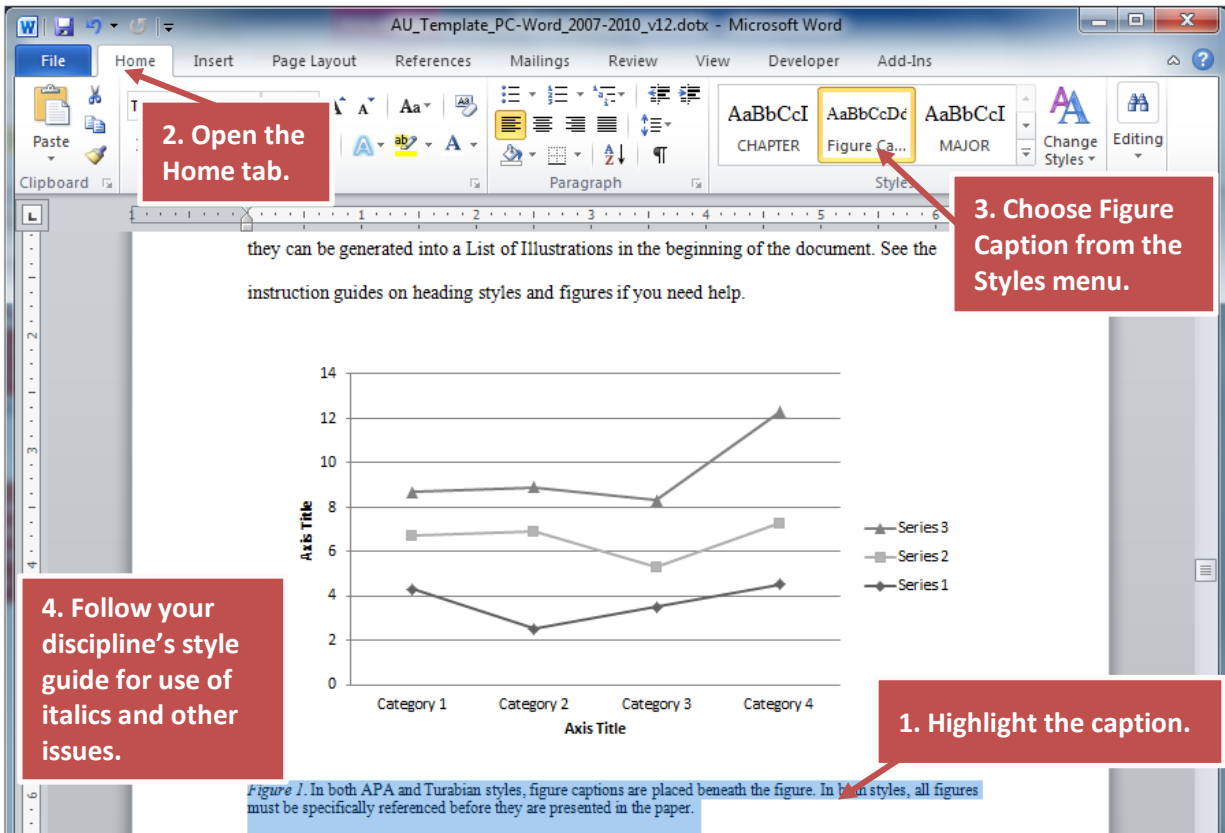
Checking Figures for Clarity

It is always a good idea to look at your figures at 100% zoom in your window because they can sometimes look clear at a smaller view but become fuzzy at regular resolution. Look for the view percentage at the bottom-right corner of your window and set it to 100%.

Also, try to make your figures directly within the document for optimum clarity. If you are converting or copying and pasting figures multiple times, they will likely become fuzzy and perhaps even unreadable when printed.

Additional Figure Issues

There are many other issues related to images, charts, graphs, and other illustrations. Consult your discipline's preferred style guide to ensure proper formatting of your illustrations.