

About figures

At *Nature Reviews*, we put a lot of effort into creating high-quality figures. Here is what our editors and art editors would like you to be aware of.

Regular readers of our older sister journals can immediately spot *Nature Reviews* figures on slides at conferences and in lecture halls; in the life sciences in particular, the *Nature Reviews* style stands out. A typical example is the first figure in the [Review](#) by Eleanor Stride and Constantin Coussios published in this issue. In *Nature Reviews Physics*, such illustrations are rather unusual, with the majority of figures being graphs. However, even for dry graphs, our art editors have a lot to do.

To maintain a coherent style across the *Nature Reviews* journals, all figures share the same colour scheme, labels always have the same font and size, graphs have the same style and we try to remove all unnecessary information to focus the reader's attention. Sometimes the figures can change dramatically if there is a better way of displaying the information, as in this [example](#).

Here are a few tips to design simple, informative figures. When it comes to illustrations, more is not necessarily better. Try to keep the number of sub-panels to a minimum. Ask yourself what is the main point conveyed by the figure and does it complement the message in the main text or is it illustrative only? Can the reader understand the text without the figure? Does the figure help the reader visualize something that cannot be easily described in words?

Reviews are intended to be accessible, and, therefore, a graph with multiple curves, data points, error

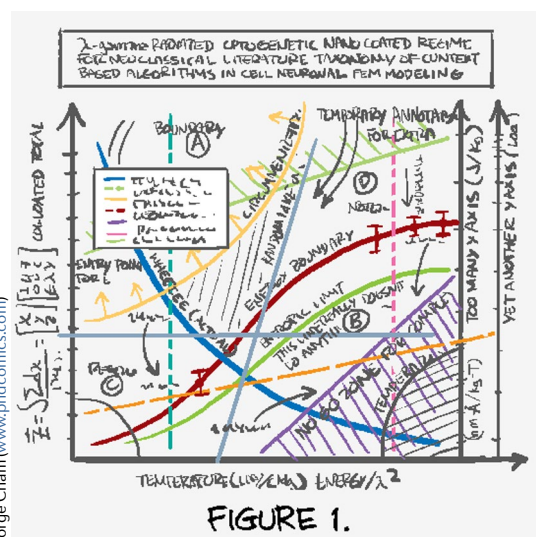
bars, lines, arrows and an inset — which is hard to follow — is not appropriate. In some fields such graphs are the standard way of presenting information, but remember that everything in the figures (axes labels and units, symbols, legends and error bars, data ranges for axes and colour scales) will need to be labelled and defined. Complex figures usually have very long captions that cannot always be displayed on the same page as the figure.

Figures often combine elements reproduced from other publications and schematics drawn by the art editors. Putting together complex figures is not straightforward because there are constraints authors and readers may be unaware of. For example, the arrangement of panels might change because the figures need to be formatted to fit on either one or two columns to optimize the page layout or improve the flow of information. The decision depends on the amount of text, number and size of the display items and article type, and is hard to predict before the actual layout.

Sometimes figure panels need to be replaced or removed, for example, when the resolution is too low and so alternatives are needed. In rare situations, images cannot be used because of copyright issues. We are not able to use any images that can identify individuals or other materials that are sensitive under data protection or copyright laws. Editors will check for such issues and discuss alternatives with the authors.

Some authors provide original illustrations, which require a lot of effort to produce. To their surprise, the final figure might have changed dramatically because the art editor needed to modify them according to our house style (font, size, colour scheme and layout). That said, art editors find it very helpful when authors provide genuine vector files (eps or pdf). If vector files are not available, as in the case of photographs, high-resolution files in other formats are the best alternative.

It can take a lot of back and forth between the authors, editor and art editor to create and polish the high-quality figures you see in our Reviews. Although every figure set is slightly different with its own challenges, it is important to set expectations from the beginning to avoid duplicated efforts or disappointment. We advise our authors to consult the [guide to artwork](#) and discuss with the handling editor before submission. When in doubt, contact us.



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