Data description game

By this stage in the course, students will be coming across real data quite frequently and need to know how to be able to describe it. A useful exercise for 10–15 minutes is the data description game.

The way it works is that you divide the students into pairs so that within each pair one student faces away from the main whiteboard with a table in front of them and a mini whiteboard (and a pen, obviously) and the other student is facing towards the whiteboard.

Then bring up a chart on the main whiteboard (I generally use unemployment from the BBC's economy tracker site). The student facing the whiteboard has a minute to describe to their partner the graph that they can see (neither student is permitted to turn around).

Generally this is pretty disastrous, but you can open up a discussion to focus on the key elements of data description. Get them to look at the graphs and talk about how it might have been done better. Hopefully the discussion will focus on:

- Start/end points
- Peaks/troughs
- Rates of change
- The need to use raw data from both axes

Then get the students to swap roles and use a different graph (inflation works reasonably well – but you might want to tell them just to focus on one of the lines (RPI or CPI) rather than both). Usually the results are much better the second time…