

# Translating Data Into Information: Choosing a Point of Comparison

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## Key Points

- A comparator is the level of performance against which you are assessing everyone in your report (e.g., State or national average).
- There are several different kinds of possible comparators. Choosing a comparator that's appropriate for the data you are presenting is a key step in your reporting project because it will affect whether your audience perceives differences in performance and understands the messages you are trying to convey. Explore the different kinds of comparators in [Choosing a Comparator](#).
- To help consumers make fair and meaningful comparisons among health care organizations, you should use statistical tests that indicate whether differences in performance are meaningful or random. You can also let consumers know when to pay attention to a point difference in scores. Explore this topic in [Categorizing High and Low Performance](#).
- You have a few options for ordering health care organizations in a data display: ranked in order of performance, alphabetically, within cost tiers, or customized to the user's preferences. Studies of these strategies indicate that rank ordering is the best way to help consumers see differences in performance. Explore the options in [Ordering the Data](#).
- While you will want to keep your data displays as uncluttered as possible, some information needs to be included, such as why you are showing the average score (or another comparator), which kind of score is desirable (high or low), and whether to pay attention to small differences in performance. Explore this topic in [Explaining Your Comparisons](#).

To learn more, go to [Choosing a Point of Comparison](#).

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## Questions and Tasks

- What comparators could you use for the data you plan to report? Can you get the data you would like to use as comparators or will you need additional data?  
*Type your response here.*
- Which of these comparators will be most understandable and helpful to your audience? To the subjects of your report? If you're not sure, how can you find out?  
*Type your response here.*
- What strategies will you use to categorize high and low performance in your report? Document your reasons for selecting a particular strategy and any downsides you can anticipate.  
*Type your response here.*
- Is there a minimum difference in performance that you would regard as meaningful for consumers? How will you determine this?  
*Type your response here.*
- Which ordering options would be appropriate given the measures and data you are presenting in your report?  
*Type your response here.*

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- Which would be most useful for your audience?  
*Type your response here.*
- Which would be acceptable to the entities included in the report?  
*Type your response here.*
- Can you offer alternative options (e.g., alphabetical or rank order)?  
*Type your response here.*
- What will drive your decision?  
*Type your response here.*

How will you explain the comparisons in your report? What information do you need to include around the data display? What information would you want to make available in a technical “appendix?”

*Type your response here.*

How will you test your choices with your audience? Document your findings and note any implications for changing your approach.

*Type your response here.*

- Learn more about [Translating Data Into Information](#).
- List [all topics in the Checklist](#).