Types of Maps

General Reference Maps use symbols to show the exact location of things on the Earth. For example, where the red line is drawn for the roads is where you can actually find the road in real life. The map of California, below, is an example of a general reference map.

Thematic Maps use symbols to show a pattern or “theme.” Usually, the symbols used on these maps are not in an exact location because the maps provide only general information about the theme or pattern. The map of California’s physiographic regions, below, is an example of a thematic map.

Types of Thematic Maps

All five thematic maps show where kids from 5-17 years old live in California. However, each map uses a different way to show that distribution.

- **Dot Density**
  - One dot equals a certain number of kids
  - If dots are close together, lots of kids live in one area
  - If dots are spread out, not very many kids live in one area

- **Choropleth**
  - Each county is shaded a color to show total number of kids
  - The symbol covers an entire county, but it does not mean that kids live everywhere inside the county

- **Isopleth**
  - This map shows a continuous distribution of kids
  - Because we do not know how many kids live in every single place in California, we take an average of two cities in an area to estimate the number of kids in that area

- **Graduated Circle**
  - One circle represents how many kids live in that county
  - The size of the circle is proportional to the number of kids that live in a county - the more kids that live in a county, the larger the circle

- **Color Patch**
  - This map draws boundaries around different groups of people (for example, City Kids and Country Kids)
  - The map does not show how many kids are in each group, just where each group is located