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Tables – A simple design in black and white is best

Word processing software (for example, Microsoft® Word) provides many options to create “aesthetically pleasing” tables, but these options are not useful for tables that are part of a research article for a journal.

Why is it best to use plain, simple tables for your manuscripts?

1. Because it is less work for everyone
2. Because the data in the table are important, but the colors, shadings and other graphic features in the table are not important. It's better to present your data in the most objective, standardized manner possible, with no colors, shading or special features.
3. Because readers around the world have different preferences for good table design. Something you think is “elegant” or “attractive” may look “ugly”, “distracting” or even “misleading” to a scientist in a different country.
4. Because editors and peer reviewers are often biased against tables that are “complicated” or “distracting”, or that use colors that they don't like
5. Because tables with many graphic features add many bytes to the file, making the file more difficult to send, receive, open and edit
6. Because some table editing features may not be compatible with different computers and systems, so your tables may not appear correctly or may not open. If you work with coauthors, a translator or an author's editor, these colleagues may not be able to work with your tables if they are full of complex graphic features.
7. Because almost all journals require authors to use simple tables
8. Because the coding in complicated tables makes extra work for the journal's and publisher's production staff, who must remove all the coding to make the tables compatible with their own layout and printing software. If your article is accepted it may be published later because of the extra work caused by complicated tables.

How to make a clear, simple table

Open the Table menu, select Insert and then Table.

In the box, specify more columns and more rows than you think you'll need. If there are any empty columns and rows later, it is easy to delete them.

For Autofit, choose Autofit to content.

For Table style, Table with grid, Autoformat, always choose the option Basic table 1 from the list of styles. Basic table 1 fulfills the requirements of most journals and publishers for tables in science research articles. The other formats do not fulfill these requirements.

For "Apply special format to", there are four places. Untick the option "Last row" but tick the other three options "Heading row", "First column" and "Last column".

Then click Accept

On your screen a small, empty table will appear. The cells will increase or decrease in size as you type in the text (Autofit to content). The alignment will be corrected automatically.

If you need to combine two or more adjacent cells on the same line (for example, if you need a long row for the main heading over several columns, followed by another row with shorter subheadings over groups of adjacent columns), highlight the cells you need to combine, open the Table menu and select Combine cells.

If you need to combine two or more adjacent columns, open the Table menu and select Combine cells.

If you need to add a row, put the cursor against the outside of the last row on the right. It should appear as a vertical bar on the outside of the cells. Then hit Enter.

To add or delete rows, you can also use other options in the Table menu. Put the cursor in the cell that is in the row or column you want to remove, or next to the place where you want to add a row or column. Open the Table menus, select Insert or Remove, then select the element you want to insert or remove.

Inside each cell, you can align the text or data by highlighting it and using the Format/Paragraph options, the same as for text. You can also change the type of letter (Times New Roman, Ariel, etc.) and appearance (bold, italics, underline) the same as for text.

Sample	Long sample			
				sample

Tables should be easy to read so that they make a good impression and your data are easy for readers to understand. It is best to use the same type of typeface and font for the tables as for the main text (usually Times New Roman 12 cpi).

If the table is very large, it is not a good idea to use a smaller font size to make the table fit on one page. It is better to use the normal font size and divide the table into two separate tables. If

the font size is too small, many readers will need to enlarge (zoom) the screen to read the table. If the editor or reviewers need to scroll up and down or across the page to see specific rows or columns, this defeats the main purpose of the table: to present all data together in a logical way so that readers can make comparisons easily. This may irritate some reviewers and editors. Moreover, some journals and publishers cannot handle large tables, and if they need to reconstruct your tables during production, this may delay publication.

Data

You should not have any empty cells anywhere in the table. An empty cell or a cell that contains only ... or – can be misinterpreted by editors or reviewers, who may suspect you are hiding the data, or forgot to include it, or did not finish the table before you submitted the manuscript. All these things can bias the editors or reviewers against your manuscript.

If there is no value for a particular cell, the abbreviation NA should appear in the cell. Below the table, the abbreviation NA should appear and be defined as Not applicable.

If the data are not available because a particular measurement or determination was not done or not recorded, the abbreviation ND should appear in the cell. Below the table, the abbreviation ND should appear and be defined as Not determined.

Headings

Usually, the group designations appear in the column headings, and the different variables or parameters that are being compared appear in the row headings (the “stub” of the table, i.e., the first column on the left).

For each group, the number of observations (n) should be given in parentheses. For example, Treatment group (n = 1250).

For each variable or parameter, the unit of measure should be given in parentheses. For example, Body weight (kg).

If the journal’s Instructions for Authors or Guidelines for Manuscript Preparation provide instructions that differ from these guidelines in any way, you should follow the journal’s instructions.