

Editing Medical and Scientific Tables

or

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Grid

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So... why tables?

The purposes of a table in a scientific/technical/medical (STM) journal article are:

- to enhance the presentation of the data in a study to further support the author's conclusions
- to provide a concise overview of a particular aspect of a study's findings
- to highlight significant trends and relationships between data

The “Bird’s Eye” View

Table 1. Patient Characteristics by Type of Supplement Insurance Among Medicare Beneficiaries with Breast, Colon, Rectal, Non-Small Cell, and Ovarian Cancers (Selected Years)

Characteristics	All Patients (N = 1,200)		Type of Insurance					
	No.	Weighted Col %	Medicare with Private (n = 549; 45.8%)		Medicare Only (n = 304; 25.3%)		Medicare and Medicaid (n = 347; 28.9%)	
	No.	Weighted Col %	No.	Weighted Col %	No.	Weighted Col %	No.	Weighted Col %
Age group (years)								
65-69	283	21.5	138	24.5	62	11.9	83	26.2
70-74	303	25.3	133	25.9	72	24.1	98	25.5
75-79	284	24.8	122	21.7	84	33.4	78	22.0
80-84	195	17.8	100	18.3	44	16.9	51	17.5
≥85	135	10.6	56	9.6	42	13.7	37	8.8
Race								
Non-Hispanic white	578	80.3	357	90.2	165	82.1	56	44.1
Non-Hispanic black	269	9.1	94	5.4	71	8.7	104	22.2
Hispanic	161	4.6	49	1.9	37	4.5	75	14.1
Asian/Pacific Islander	181	5.9	45	2.4	29	4.6	107	19.5
American Indian	11	0.1	<11	—	<11	—	<11	—
Marital status								
Married	577	51.2	303	58.8	146	44.1	128	36.8
Unmarried	623	48.8	246	41.2	158	55.9	219	63.2
Cancer site and stage								
Breast IIB-III	120	19.4	62	23.0	23	12.2	35	18.5
Colon III	234	12.2	108	11.6	59	14.4	67	10.8
Rectal II-III	301	17.7	124	15.7	89	22.1	88	17.3
NSCLC II-IV	288	45.2	125	43.9	60	45.9	103	48.8
Ovary II-IV	257	5.5	130	5.8	73	5.5	54	4.6
Charlson comorbidity score								
0	772	59.2	360	59.1	205	62.9	360	59.1
1	313	29.3	139	29.1	72	26.2	139	29.1
2+	115	11.6	50	11.8	27	11.0	50	11.8

Abbreviation: NSCLC, non-small cell lung cancer.

Keys to editing STM tables

- Use as little space as possible
 - Consolidate information wherever possible
 - Avoid repetitious or redundant information
 - Enforce style, consistency, and uniformity
- **DO NO HARM**

Oops! You mean you
didn't want your
Appendix taken out...?



Basic table editing tenets

Conciseness and compactness

- Table titles should be descriptive but concise; avoid lengthy and redundant titles.
- Use straddle headings and combined columns to streamline the presentation of inter-related data.
- Use abbreviations to save space in the table body.

Clarity and consistency

- Ensure that all data are explained; use footnote symbols as necessary to explain specific data points.
- Ensure that explanations of data are presented consistently and clearly.

Consolidation

- Avoid repetitive information that clutters headings, either by consolidating the information or relegating it to a footnote.

Technical tips

Short cuts

- Right clicking
- Quick access toolbar

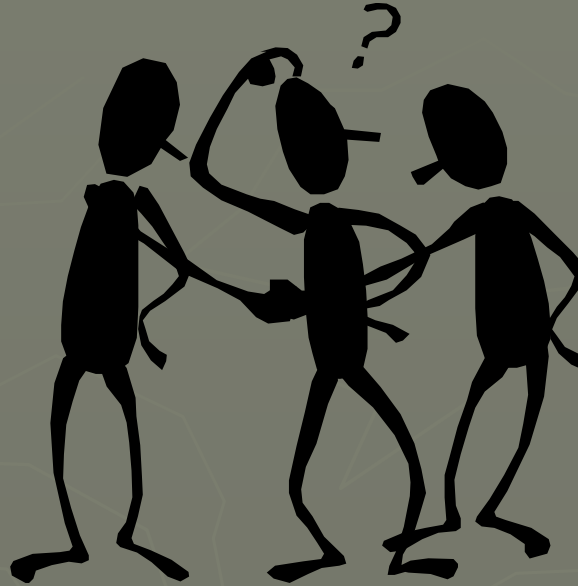
Rows and columns and cells, oh my!

- Inserting and deleting
- Distributing columns evenly
- Splitting and merging
- Decimal alignment

Word text commands that work in tables

- Copy and paste
- Shift + F3 key
- Find and replace
- F4 key

Questions!



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