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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: I give up

Years ago I learned from Jerry Cornfield that “*Pigs is pigs and data is data*”. Obviously grammatically incorrect to remind us that data is plural and, hence, requires a plural verb. So we write “*the data are consistent with the hypothesis*” not “*the data is consistent with the hypothesis*”.

Indeed, there are circumstances when data is used as a mass noun when it requires a singular verb, for example, “*the census data was old*” but for those toiling in the vineyard of trials most uses require a plural verb form.

I have spent most of my teaching years correcting students when they refer to data in the singular form. I have an “ear” for the miss uses and a tendency for on the spot corrections “*you mean data are*”. But no more. I give up. Let students say what they will. Data are or data is. Who cares?

The fight is hopeless with “*data is*” all over the place. Now, with my teaching days over, I am reduced to muttering “*you mean data are*” to my TV when I hear announcers use data as a singular when it is plural. Datum as the singular of data is obsolete. Data as a plural is headed in the same direction. Maybe Cornfield knew something we did not with his “*data is data*”.