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20 November 2020

**Memorandum**

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Why can't editors remember what they learned in grade school?

Early on we are taught to right align numbers for addition and subtraction and work right to left when multiplying and dividing.

So in grade school if we had 4, 7, 14, 119, and 9 to add we right aligned the numbers in a column and then summed.

So, now years later, we have a table in a paper being prepared for publication.

**Presence and absence of Conditions A, B, and C**

	Condition A		Condition B		Condition C	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Present	25	19.08%	9	6.87%	75	57.25%
Absent	99	75.57%	104	79.39%	9	6.87%
Uncertain	7	5.34%	18	13.74%	47	35.88%
Total	131	100.00%	131	100.00%	131	100.00%

Odds are when the table is published, the columns will be left aligned and squeezed together, as below for condition A.

25(19.1)  
99(75.6)  
7(5.3)  
**131(100.0)**

What happened? The editors forgot what they learned in grade school?

Not likely. More likely they got run over by word processors and the space grinch. It is easier and faster to left align when typesetting than right align, and it takes less space if columns are squeezed together.

Gains at the expense of readability.

A pity, because tables are usually the most important part of results publications.