



Center for Clinical Trials

*Department of Biostatistics  
Department of Epidemiology  
Department of International Health*

*Department of Medicine  
Department of Ophthalmology  
Oncology Center*

Friday, 15 July 2005

**Memorandum**

**To:** Center for Clinical Trials Students, Staff, and Faculty

**Fr:** Curtis Meinert

**Re:** Tables 101: Introduction

I have achieved a certain amount of "fame" in the corridors of the Center by my "scaffolding" and "football" memos, by my "39 steps to producing a bad report" memo and more recently by my series of GPPP memos, and more recently still by my "Stapling Protocol" for the Dean and his Office. So you might think I would be "memoed" out, but you would be wrong.

Incidentally, Watson has copies of the aforementioned documents should you wish to know what I am talking about if you are a "new kid on the block" or an "old-timer" wanting a "refresher".

This memo and those following concern tables, not the ones you put your feet on but rather the ones found in papers and reports.

Why on tables? Because tables are our most important product. Virtually everything we do, sooner or later, migrates into tables of one kind or another. Performance monitoring and treatment monitoring reports are pretty much nothing but tables and the heart and soul of manuscripts is tables. Indeed, a good paper is readable simply by looking at the tables. One only reads the supporting text when the tables are "bad".

Broadly, there are two classes of tables; herein referred to as "number tables" (aka "data tables") and "text tables". Look at almost any report produced here and you are likely to find examples of both and even hybrid crosses of the two types.

A number table becomes a "math table" if the math feature of the word processor is used to generate values displayed in one or more columns in the table via formulas involving values in the table.

A "table" herein is a "stand alone" document, ie, created and maintained as a separate document even when produced for inclusion in a larger report or manuscript. Operationally, this means that tables are created and saved as individual documents with the electronic file for each being retrievable and manipulable independent of all other tables.

---

The essential parts of a table are:

- Title
- Column headers
- Continuation header containing abbreviated title and column headers
- Table body
- Endline
- Footer giving date of creation or modification, file name, and path

and

Stubs for number tables and for some text tables

Typically, tables will have two or more columns (except for some text tables). All "number tables" will have multiple rows and columns with the first column being the stub (labels for the rows) column. Text tables may or may not have stubs. Indeed, in some cases text tables may be comprised simply of a list of items arranged in a column.

A kissing cousin of the table is the spreadsheet. Spreadsheets may make it into finished reports, but more likely will be used on the way to producing tables and will fall to the "cutting room" floor when the report is assembled.

If a picture is worth a thousand words then a table is intended to save a thousand words. Tables are used to facilitate and simplify the task of presenting information. They are used as vehicles to economize use of written text.

Basically, every electronic table starts from a paper and pencil "sketch" or as "sketched" in one's head. The electronic version will go through varying stages of refinement and iteration, depending on intended use. The quality of a table will, by and large, be a function of the number of times it is iterated and revised. One can say about tables what is said about manuscripts, namely, that "The difference between a good and bad manuscript is about 15 iterations".

<u># iterations/revisions</u>	<u>Quality class</u>
0 - 3	Draft
4 - 8	Presentation
9 - 15	Publication

The focus here and throughout in subsequent Table 101 memos is on "number tables" and "template number tables". Broadly, a "template table" is a table shell or an existing table used to create a new table. Basically, every time you retrieve an existing table for "pirating" to make a new table you are using the "template" technique.

The default mind-set when creating tables is the "template" mind-set. Virtually every table one creates comes from a template of some kind. If you doubt that, just remind yourself of the times you have started the creation of a new table by retrieving an "old" one and going from there with modifications until a new table has been created. If you question the need for the "template" mind-set, think of the number of times you thought you were producing a "one time use" table, only to discover that you go back to it to start building a new table.

---

When it comes to tables, you can say as they say in that engine oil ad on TV "Pay me now, or pay me later". So the push here is to pay now in the hope of building robust tables that can be used as stepping stones to subsequent tables.

---

(12:36pm Friday) 15 July 2005

\\Tables.101\TabIntro.WPD

### Distribution

Debbie Amend-Libercci  
Ming-Wen An  
Jeannette Beasley  
Pat Belt  
Elena Blasco-Colemanares  
Cathy Bosley  
Rob Casper  
Hui-Ming Chung  
Betty Collison  
Ryan Colvin  
Kay Dickersin  
John Dodge  
Michele Donithan  
Lea Drye  
Ann Ervin  
Ingrid Friberg  
Julia Gage  
Judy Harle  
Janet Holbrook  
Rosemary Hollick

Milana Isaacson  
Rosetta Jackson  
Jennifer Jones  
Charlene Levine  
Simon Liu  
Hope Livingston  
Nancy Maldeis  
Barbara Martin  
Reena Masih  
Curtis Meinert  
Jill Meinert  
Wai Ping Ng  
Deborah Nowakowski  
Kapreena Owens  
Bonnie Piantadosi  
Steven Piantadosi  
Nancy Prusakowski  
Linda Roberts  
Karen Robinson  
Dave Shade

Anne Shanklin  
Jackie Smith  
Michael Smith  
Paul Smith  
Alice Sternberg  
Christine Szekely  
Jennifer Thorne  
Andrea Tibbs  
Ada Tieman  
James Tonascia  
Susan Tonascia  
Aynur Ünalp-Arida  
Mark Van Natta  
Margie Wild  
Laura Wilson  
Robert Wise  
Claudine Woo Shinoff  
Kathy Yates  
Tables Notebook  
Chronologic file