



Center for Clinical Trials

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Tuesday, 30 August 2005

Memorandum

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

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Tables 101: Table breaks.

A bad break in life is when you get slapped in the face by the tail of chance. A bad break in documents is when text splits across pages that should not be split.

"Widows" and "orphans" are sources of "bad breaks" in writing. A "widow" is where the first line of a multi-line panel of text, eg, as in a paragraph, is the last line on a page. An "orphan" is where the last line of such material is the first line of a new page. You can protect against "widows" and "orphans" in word processing by having widow and orphan protection on.

But those features will not keep blocks of text from splitting. The protection required is "block protect" or "conditional end of page" code.

The most common bad breaks of blocks of text in letters relate to closings. An "orphan closing" is where the closing is isolated from the body of the letter. An "orphan PS" is where a postscript to the letter is separated from the closing. An "orphan distribution list" is where the distribution list is separated from the closing.

The closing should be accompanied by at least the last two lines of a letter.

The break business is more complicated with multi-page tables because one has to worry about breaks for each page of the table. If you find yourself adding or deleting hard returns or inserting hard page code in the middle of tables you are in the page management business. Stay out of that business! Word processors are far superior to us as page managers. Your ad hoc fixes may solve here and now problems but are likely to create their own problems when and if the table is changed in the future.

Broadly, orphan table breaks are splits of material that belongs together. Examples are total lines separated from lines being summed, end lines separated from table bodies, and explanatory notes separated from table bodies.

Most bad table breaks are the result of failure to have block protected parts of the table not suitable for breaks. Indeed, a useful step before finishing a table is for its creator to insert block protection code for portions not suitable for breaks and to do so even if the table fits on one page in its present form.

Why? Because tables grow and get modified. The code will prevent bad breaks when and if it grows to cover more than one page.

Conditional end of page (Cond EOP) code keeps a specified number of lines together by forcing that number of lines onto a new page if they do not fit on the preceding page. The code is useful in avoiding "widow section headers" – eg, where the header "Methods" in a manuscript is the last line of a page. (Even if "widow protection" is "on", that protection will not prevent this problem because the header is followed by a hard return.) It is not robust in preventing bad table breaks. For example, if the desire is keep a six line panel together that can be done by Cond EOP.6, but the code will not prevent a bad break if a line is added anywhere within the 6 line panel. For example, suppose the 6th line is a total line. Addition of a line above that line will leave the total line unprotected by the code and at risk of a "bad break".

Block protect code is more robust protection in tables because the code is paired. Hence, protection against a bad break remains even if one adds lines of text within a protected block. However, even that code is not 100% robust. The pairing can be lost resulting in unprotected blocks. Hence, some "baby sitting" can be necessary when tables are modified.

(Sun 8:18am) 17 Jul 05

\\Tables 101\Break.WPD

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