



Center for Clinical Trials

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

*Department of Medicine
Department of Ophthalmology
Oncology Center*

Wednesday, 5 October 2005

Memorandum

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

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Tables 101: Tab setting, tabbing, and indentation

To make an omelette you have to crack some eggs and to make a table you have to set some tabs.

You cannot produce decent looking tables without setting tabs. One of the problems with the ADAPT table, distributed in relation to the first homework assignment, was that it was built using default settings for cells within the table.

I have already spoken of using the tab key to move the cursor in tables. If you find yourself having to press that key two or more times in succession before keying anything it likely means you have improper tab settings.

An essential use of the tab key in text material is to indicate paragraphing. A curse of our time is "block paragraphing". It has no place here in scientific writing. I hate it!

In the old days, a tab was used to signal the start of a new paragraph, but somebody, probably someone sitting in some fancy office somewhere, decided things look better without a tab for paragraphing and thus block paragraphing was born.

If everything we write would fit on one page there would be no objection to block paragraphing. The problem comes with page breaks. The reader is left guessing as to paragraphing every time the last line of a page is filled and ends with a period. Is the top line on the next page part of the preceding paragraph or is it the start of a new paragraph? Only the author knows.

The indent and tab keys are great graphic devices for tables and text. The two keys produce the same effect for the first line of print as seen below:

This line is preceded by a "tab".

This line is preceded by an "indent".

Hence, table makers may indiscriminately "tab" or "indent" when keying stubs in tables because the visual effect is the same – until the stub line breaks to a second line. In text material the difference is

This text is preceded by "tab". The difference between "tab" and "indent" is obvious only in the presence of a second and subsequent lines.

This text is preceded by "indent". The difference between "tab" and "indent" is obvious only in the presence of a second and subsequent lines.

The two keys are not interchangeable.

A hanging indentation is where the first line of text is flushed against the left margin or a tab and subsequent lines are indented.

A hanging indentation is created by pressing "indent" and then "margin release". The strokes cause lines below the first line to be indented.

This hanging indentation is preceded by a tab and then "indent" and "margin release". Note that the amount of "hang" is a function of the distance between the first and second tab set for a line, whereas the "hang" in the example above is defined by distance between the left margin and first tab stop.

Hanging indentations aid the eye. Consider the list below with and without hanging indentations. Which one is easier to read?

No hanging indentations

Guiding data collection principles and truisms

- Do not collect more than 10 times too much data
- Distinguish between data needed for the trial and those needed for clinical care
- Do not mix data collected by different protocols (eg, data collected via clinic visits vs data collected by home visits)
- Do not mix data collected retrospectively with data collected prospectively
- Do not present data for a composite outcome measure without first presenting the component parts of the measure
- Data cannot be spoiled by looking at them!
- Regard ad hoc data collection schemes as suspect
- Use raw unadjudicated counts for primary analysis; use adjudicated counts for secondary analysis

Hanging indentations from bullets

Guiding data collection principles and truisms

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Consider the reference lists below. Which of the three is easiest on the eye?

Example 1: No hanging indentation; no line separators

- 1 Aickin M: A program for balancing the allocation of subjects to treatment in a clinical trial. Computers and Biomedical Research 15:519-524, 1982.
- 2 *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991.
- 3 Anderson LK, Hendershot RA, Schoolmaker RC: Self-checking digit concepts. J Systems Management 25:36-42, 1974.

Example 2: Hanging indentation from number; no line separators

- 1 **Aickin** M: A program for balancing the allocation of subjects to treatment in a clinical trial. Computers and Biomedical Research 15:519-524, 1982.
- 2 *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991.
- 3 **Anderson** LK, Hendershot RA, Schoolmaker RC: Self-checking digit concepts. J Systems Management 25:36-42, 1974.

Example 3: Hanging indentation from number; line separators

- 1 **Aickin** M: A program for balancing the allocation of subjects to treatment in a clinical trial. Computers and Biomedical Research 15:519-524, 1982.
- 2 *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991.
- 3 **Anderson** LK, Hendershot RA, Schoolmaker RC: Self-checking digit concepts. J Systems Management 25:36-42, 1974.

If one "hang" is good then a "double hang" is better? Usually not. The lists in examples 2 and 3 are hung once from the citation number. Does the double hang in the list below aid reading? Basically, the only effect of the 2nd hang is to create more white space.

- 1 **Aickin M:** A program for balancing the allocation of subjects to treatment in a clinical trial. Computers and Biomedical Research 15:519-524, 1982.
- 2 *The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition.* Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1991.
- 3 **Anderson LK, Hendershot RA, Schoolmaker RC:** Self-checking digit concepts. J Systems Management 25:36-42, 1974.

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