



Center for Clinical Trials

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Wednesday, 26 October 2005

**Memorandum**

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

**Fr:** Curtis Meinert

**Re:** Tables 101: Reports and manuscripts as master documents

What is a manuscript? It is a bunch of tables surrounded by text. Indeed, a good manuscript is readable from the tables alone – sort of like the instructions for assembling a child's toy. The hope there is that the illustrations will be sufficient because, God knows, the written instructions will be unintelligible!

A manuscript is a "living" document and the difference between a good and bad one is about 15 iterations. If there was ever an activity where the H&G approach is necessary, it is in "paper writing".

It has been said by people here that I would change the epithet on my tombstone, given the chance. Perhaps, but I am not alone in that "revising" behavior. "Revision" is the nature of writing. I would hate to count the number of times I have deleted something from a paper in the umpteenth revision only to discover I need it in the umpteenth + 4th revision. Moral: Hang on to old versions! Spread crumbs like H&G so you can find back home!

You do not have to write many manuscripts before you think "master document". Treating the manuscript as one undifferentiated file is inefficient. One ultimately spends too much time "navigating". It is more efficient to deal with "pieces" than with the whole for most of what needs to be done. An obvious advantage to the "piece" approach is the ability to use multiple screens to display different files. For certain, it is easier to switch screens to "navigate" than it is to push the cursor up or down in an undifferentiated document and that says nothing about being able to "park" the cursor on the different screens.

A temptation with a large undifferentiated file is to retrieve the same file to a second screen, but that is an electronic form of Russian roulette. It is virtually certain, with that approach, that sooner or later you made changes to the duplicate file. The end result is that those changes will be "mysteriously" gone the next time you retrieve the file or that you will be greeted by "Access denied" if you try to save the duplicate file.

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My template "pieces" for a traditional manuscript are:

ManSty.Fle	File containing styles to control the "look" and format of manuscript and related files
PgNoRome.Fle	Roman pg numbering
Notes.WPD	Pages used to keep track of outstanding questions and edits
LtrEd.WPD	Letter to journal editor re submission
ManCover.WPD	Manuscript title page
PNoADot.Fle	Paragraph no. definition
HeadA.Fle	Header A definition
FootA.Fle	Footer A definition
SurAll.Fle	Suppression codes
PgNoReg.Fle	Arabic page numbering
Abstman.WPD	Abstract
Man.WPD	Manuscript
Credits.WPD	Credits and acknowledgments
Refs.WPD	References
PNoADot.Fle	Paragraph numbering required for tables
Table.Sh	Table and figure submaster

One spends much more time drafting and redrafting manuscripts than dealing with editors and reviewers. Hence, the focus should be on structures and formats that are "draft friendly". Those structures and features include the following:

- Table of contents
- Section and subsection headers
- Footers
- Sequential page numbering (top right)
- Supporting and "explanatory" tables
- H&G explanatory notes
- Alphabetic ordering of references
- Book form of reference citation
- Full author listing regardless of number
- Reference "check file"

Journals editors want unadorned text stripped of headers and footers, ToC listings, explanatory notes (save for those to be published), and the "journal form" of citation. Too often the "solution" is to forego such features — a solution akin to constructing a building without scaffolding.

The "solution" is to incorporate features such as those listed above and then to "hide" or delete them in the version of the manuscript submitted for publication.

On the list of things I hate are drafts without tables of contents and "blind entries". I loathe having to page through papers to discover their organization and then to have to store that information in my head. "Blind entries" are born of documents without headers. Manuscripts, like textbooks, are reference documents — not intended for "front to back" reading like "Chicken Little". Readers have no clue as to where they are in manuscripts without headers.

But the thing that drives me absolutely crazy are documents without page numbers! Surely, even if one cannot manage to produce a ToC or headers, it should not be too much to ask for page numbering!

By now we should not have anyone here who does not know how to mark documents for generating lists and ToCs. Producing lists and ToCs by hand (ie, by entering page numbers into the List or ToC page) is tedious and a losing proposition even if one is reasonably disciplined in updating numbers. Even "trivial" edits can change pagination.

Like it or not, manuscripts produce bald spots in forests because paper remains the most reader friendly product we have. Even if an author distributes a draft "electronically", recipients will likely print it (save for those who can abide reading through knotholes).

The shortest route to Tower of Babel confusion is by distribution of drafts without proper footer information. Every circulated draft needs a unique footer to indicate draft number or date of generation. Without proper identification people can be reading different drafts and never discover their mistake.

The referencing format for indexed medical literature is by order of citation and number. A more reader friendly approach is alphabetic ordering and the book form of text citation, ie, a form in which the author and year is cited in the body of the manuscript, eg:

*The concept of randomization as a device for treatment assignment was introduced by Fisher while he was involved in agricultural experimentation (Box, 1980; Fisher and MacKenzie, 1923; Fisher, 1926, 1973)*

The alternative form of citation is via number, eg:

*The concept of randomization as a device for treatment assignment was introduced by Fisher while he was involved in agricultural experimentation.*<sup>65,229,231,234</sup>

Clearly, the number form is more conserving of print space, but less reader friendly.

The two systems can be combined, eg:

*The concept of randomization as a device for treatment assignment was introduced by Fisher while he was involved in agricultural experimentation (Box, 1980; Fisher and MacKenzie, 1923; Fisher, 1926, 1973).*<sup>65,229,231,234</sup>

The preferred drafting format is the combination of the two forms. The author and year should be surrounded by "hidden text" code. Drafts should be produced with "hidden text" shown and with the "show" feature turned off for the version of the manuscript submitted for publication.

An annoying feature of referencing requirements in the medical literature is the "et al" denotation to indicate existence of authors beyond three. Every now and again one is interested in a particular author. They are impossible to identify in reference lists when their last name is "et al".

The strategy in drafting should be to produce full author listings, regardless of number. Citations with 4+ authors should include an empty paired style after author three. Authors four and beyond should be enclosed in "hidden text" code. For submissions the style is edited to display "et al" and "show hidden text" is off. For drafts the style is empty and the "show hidden text" is on.

A major problem in manuscript production is ensuring that every reference listed is cited somewhere in the finished manuscript. The solution to this problem is either "eyeballing" (not reliable) or via targeting and referencing as discussed in another memo in this series.

Another problem is ensuring that the references are arranged in order of citation in the finished manuscript. The preferred strategy is to leave the bibliography in alphabetic order until submission. In theory, one could use a software program, such as Reference Manager, to manage references but, personally, I have never found those packages to be worth the aggravation.

A word of caution: You need to get back to Schneider if (when?) the manuscript is rejected – it happens! Hence, save the version with the scaffolding. You may need it to re-scale the building!

(Fri 9:10am) 05 Aug 05

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