Technical Writing Information Sheets

Department of Chemical Engineering

Auburn University, AL 36849

*Revision: January 2008*

**Format for Tables in Reports Made Using Microsoft Word**

**Introduction**

Tables are usually comprised of rows and columns of numbers and words, mostly numbers. Often information from Microsoft Excel ® is cut and pasted into Microsoft Word ® documents in the form of tables. They may also be constructed “from scratch” in Word using the Table menu. If table data is simply pasted into Word from Excel, it will not meeting the format requirement for tables in reports. This document discusses the formatting requirements for technical reports.

**Uses for tables**

Although tables primarily are used to display numerical data other situations involving text or equations also benefit from the organization and clarity tables provide.

**Inline tables**

Tables which are uncomplicated and contain only a few rows can be centered and put directly into the text with a blank line above and below the table. In-line tables do not need to be numbered but this limits being able to reference the table data later. In-line tables follow the same format as full tables with the exception of having no number or caption.

**Checklist for table format.**

1. Tables appear centered in reports.
2. Table titles (captions) appear centered over the table. In the case of multi-line captions, the text should be left adjusted and carried over the number of lines required with appropriate indenting (see example below).
3. The first word of the title is capitalized with the remainder of the caption in lowercase. Usually the caption is a descriptive sentence describing the table’s significance and ends with a period.
4. Refer to the table in the text just preceding the table. Explain the significance of the data in the table but do not reiterate all the data. Do not expect readers figure out why the table data is being presented.
5. Tables are numbered sequentially using Arabic numerals. The correct format to refer to a table is “Table 1” (note the capitalization).
6. In the report proper, don't overwhelm readers with monster 11-column, 30-row tables. Simplify the table data down to just that amount of data that illustrates your point. When there is a need to discuss large collections of data, put the full data in the Appendix and refer to this table using the format “Table A-1”. Items in the Appendix are numbered sequentially without regard to the type of information; hence Table A-1 could be followed by “Figure A-2”.
7. Column headings are centered over the columns. Headings are often multi-line so that the width of the column can be minimized. Column headings are frequently displayed in a bold font.
8. Numerical data is always aligned so that the magnitude of the number and decimal information is clearly visible. This is so-called “decimal alignment” (even if a decimal point is not explicitly used). The data is then generally is centered in the column directly under the column heading. For example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Percent Type A** | **Percent Type B** | **Number Type C1** |
| 1960 | 1.5 | 0.002 | 1000 |
| 1970 | 62.123 | 0.13 | 103 |
| 1980 | 64.8 | 15.5 | 2 |

1. Includes hydropower, nuclear, geothermal energy and others.

1. Text data is either left-aligned or centered depending on the appearance the author wishes to achieve.
2. When there is some special point you need to make about one or more of the items in the table, use a footnote instead of clogging up the table with the information. *See example above.*
3. Don't put the word or abbreviation for the unit of measurement in every cell of a column. For example, in a column of measurements all in millimeters, don't put "mm" after every number. Put the abbreviation in parentheses in the column or row heading.
4. Vertical lines dividing columns are usually not necessary, and should be avoided. This can be accomplished using the “Borders and Shading” option. In the example above, there are no vertical lines. What you may see if viewing this in Microsoft Word are “guidelines” which do not show up when printed (use *Print Preview* to see this issue demonstrated).
5. Carefully consider the number of digits reported in tables. Include only a reasonable number of significant digits in tabulated data. Generally data should have the same “precision” or same number of “digits”. By default, Excel will produce numbers with different number of decimal digits because of dropping “zeroes” at the end of some numbers. Make sure you format all data (using *Format Cells Number*) before cutting and pasting.
6. When the table needs to be inserted in the landscape orientation (wide), remember that the “top” of the table should be positioned at the “left” edge of the report. Despite the fact that the page is oriented in landscape mode, the pagination must still appear at the “bottom” of the page in portrait mode. In order to accomplish this, employ the following method:
   1. In the original report, leave a completely blank page where you intend the landscape table to appear. Because this page is blank, it will receive a page number at the bottom of the page, just like any other page of the document.
   2. Remove this blank but numbered page from the report or memo, and print the landscape table on it making sure you have suppressed page numbers so you don’t doubly number the page in two locations.
7. Tables should be wholly on the page they start on. Backfill text as necessary to achieve this. In the case of multi-page tables, the start of the table should start at the top of a new page. Again, backfill text to avoid white space.
8. Tables should be adjusted to remove extra white space. Columns should only be of a width necessary to contain the data provided. Do not span from margin to margin unless the table requires this much space.

**Examples of Tables**

The examples below were selected from various textbooks and demonstrate many of the formatting issues discussed above. Note: There may be minor differences between the department’s format and what the examples show.











