

# Tables

Advice on creating clear, usable presentation tables, published as part of a report.

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Tables should be used to:

- allow comparison of individual data values
- present a very precise level of detail
- show multiple units of measure (for example, measurements and percentages)
- present only a small number of data values
- show values and their sums

## Types of table

Use a reference table (dataset) to make statistics available for future reference. These typically have a large number of entries covering a variety of different statistics broken down into different categories. They are supplied alongside the main commentary in an accompanying spreadsheet or dataset.

Create a presentation table to demonstrate a point that is being made in the text. These use data extracted from datasets, laid out so as to quickly reinforce the point. The design should ensure that patterns and exceptions are obvious at a glance.

Group the data into meaningful subsets and make it clear in what order it should be read. Hierarchy and grouping can be shown by using white space and indenting column headings.

EXAMPLE

<b>UK total</b>
<b>England</b>
North East
Darlington
Durham
Gateshead
: (other Local Authorities
: in the North East)
North West
Blackburn with Darwen
Blackpool
Bolton
: (other Local Authorities
: in the North West)
: (other regions and breakdown
: by Local Authorities)
<b>Wales</b>
Blaenau Gwent
Bridgend
: (other Unitary Authorities in Wales)
:
<b>Scotland</b>
City of Aberdeen
Aberdeenshire
: (other Council Areas in Scotland)
:
<b>Northern Ireland</b>
Antrim
Ards
: (other District Council Areas
: in Northern Ireland)

A table is made up of classification variables and data values, either of these can be used to order your table depending on the context.

If the table is not ranked by data value and the classification variables have a natural order, like age or geography, keep this order in the table.

Additional guidance is available on the [recommended standard presentation order of statistics](#).

Put the variables that are most likely to be compared in columns, with the units, tens or hundreds beneath one another.

EXAMPLE

<b>Where data are most likely to be compared between years</b>
<b>Where data are most likely to be compared between ages</b>

Time should run from left to right or top to bottom.

Show hierarchy and grouping using white space and by indenting column headings.

EXAMPLE

**Do**

Registered deaths by sex			
England and Wales, 2013	number of deaths		
	All persons	Males	Females
England and Wales	505,690	244,934	260,756
England	473,552	229,291	244,261
North East	26,465	12,589	13,876
North West	69,045	33,385	35,660
Yorkshire and The Humber	50,342	24,237	26,105
East Midlands	42,277	20,739	21,538
West Midlands	52,260	25,742	26,518
East	53,269	25,694	27,575
London	47,580	23,609	23,971
South East	77,778	37,213	40,565
South West	54,536	26,083	28,453
Wales	32,138	15,643	16,495

It's easier to read columns of numbers if they are tightly spaced. Columns should use equal spacing, unless there is a specific reason for altering it. Split column headings over lines to save using wide columns, but choose a sensible place to put the line break.

The font type and size should match the font used in your publication. The font should be mono-spaced, with the same width for each character or digit, so that all the units align.

Don't put numbers in bold as they will move from their correct alignment.

EXAMPLE

46,363
<b>Not</b>
<b>46,363</b>

Always right-align headings and data in columns so that units, tens, hundreds and thousands are aligned and numbers of equal value are easily comparable.

EXAMPLE

	524,623
	12
	22,354
	7,356
	457
	3
<b>Not</b>	
	524,623
	12
	22,354
	7,356
	457
	3
<b>Or</b>	
524,623	
12	
22,354	
7,356	
457	
3	

Always use a consistent level of precision, but use the lowest level possible for the intended user.

EXAMPLE

For the “inquiring citizen”, that is, a broader, less statistical audience :
260,000

EXAMPLE

For the “information forager”, for example, a local politician making decisions about future council tax charges:
264,300

EXAMPLE

For the “expert analyst”, for example, in a statistical journal discussing the detailed methodology behind the estimation, or in a situation where reproducibility is important:
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264,337

Effective rounding can be used to communicate and present numbers so that they can be understood quickly and easily. Remove any unimportant or irrelevant information, but keep the detail in the data.

Look at whether there is a difference between the first numbers, second numbers, third numbers and so on. You should round the numbers for comparison to two effective digits.

#### EXAMPLE

When using effective rounding you may need an extra level of rounding when a value is small enough that the detail is removed when using two effective digits. If the value is not important it could be removed from the table. If it is important the level of effective rounding should be adjusted to an appropriate level.

#### EXAMPLE

##### **Three levels of effective rounding**

21.9 million  
17.3 million  
11.2 million  
0.4 million

##### **Not (no effective rounding)**

21,912,963  
17,271,420  
11,243,817  
436,254

##### **Not (two levels of effective rounding)**

21 million  
17 million  
11 million  
0 million

Totals can go at the top or the bottom of a table, depending on their relevance and importance.

If your data are hierarchical, positioning the totals at the top can help emphasise that the total is broken down.

Use the same measure across all variables where possible.

Make it clear if different measures, for example measurements and percentages, are being used in the same table.

Use lines and shading sparingly. Use subtle colours or greyscale. Make sure the shading doesn't distract from the data.

Shading can be used to track data across rows but also to highlight specific values.

Put the units as a header in the top right corner of the chart. Use subheadings if the units change within a chart.

Captions can be very useful to highlight key messages within a table. Captions are optional and should only be used where there is an appropriate story.

Titles should be clear and concise, noting the main axes of the table, unless one of the categories is included in the subtitle. Don't use capital letters for table titles or headings in tables.

Subtitles should include the geography and a time period, either a single year or the range of years covered in the data.

The heading should be slightly larger than the table font and in bold.

#### EXAMPLE

The gap between male and female life expectancy has narrowed

**Life expectancy at birth by sex**

UK, 1980 to 2014

Use letters to annotate numbers and numbers to annotate words or letters.

#### EXAMPLE

24.7<sup>a</sup>

Wales<sup>3</sup>

Position the explanation of the annotations underneath the table.

Annotations should be slightly smaller than the table font.

If the data within your publication are from multiple sources list the individual data source(s) beneath each table.

If all data within your publication are from the same data source reference it in the main body text.