

Textual References to Figures and Tables

When integrating references to figures and tables within your text, follow these guidelines:

- Number figures and tables consecutively in the text, beginning with the number 1. Be sure to number figures and tables separately from each other.
- **Capitalize** the “t” in “table” and the “f” in “figure” when you refer to a specific table or figure created in your text. (Some journals do not follow this convention, but most do.)
- “Table 3 and 4” is incorrect because each table is a separate entity. If you refer to more than one table or figure at a time, pluralize the reference. “**Tables 3 and 4**” is correct.
- Introduce figures and tables in your text in **logical places and in logical ways**. In some cases, it may simply be appropriate to write “**see Figure 7**” in parentheses **at the end of a paragraph** that prepared the reader to view the figure; in other cases, it is appropriate to **introduce a figure or table at the beginning of the paragraph and build the entire paragraph around it**.
- In your body text, always spell out the point that you want your reader to get from your figure or table. Example:

As Figure 8 indicates, the modulus of the transverse direction was always equal to or greater than the modulus of the machine direction.

- Use some of your body text to interpret a table or figure, but only to a sensible degree, and after it is introduced rather than before. When interpreting, **avoid needless redundancy**. If your pie chart shows percentages for the market distribution of platinum, say, there is no point in your repeating all these percentages in your body text unless you have something meaningful to say about them.
- When a reference to a table or a figure is a sentence subject, match it with an interpretive verb to describe the work that the table or figure performs. Examples:

Figure 2 illustrates the predominant orientation of acicular particles in magnetic storage material.

Figure 5 compares two magnetization curves for hard and soft magnetic materials.

- “**Show**” is generally a safe verb to use to describe a table or figure, but beware of overusing it or using it too loosely. Good alternatives to “show” include “**display**,” “**demonstrate**,” “**illustrate**,” “**depict**” (for figures), and “**list**” (for tables). As always, search for the *best* verb to describe your figure or table. For ideas on active verbs you can use to refer to figures and tables, see the handy table on the “[Using Active Verbs](#) [1]” page in chapter 1 of this manual.

Author: [Joe Schall](#), College of Earth and Mineral Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University.