

Using figures, tables and graphs

Figures, tables and graphs are often used in scientific reports. They are valuable because they can be used to present complex results in a readable way, but it is important that they are used carefully.

Labelling and using tables and diagrams

Tables and graphs should be:

- numbered sequentially
- labelled clearly and
- positioned as close to the relevant text as possible.

Placement of tables and diagrams

- Put graphs, tables, figures and diagrams in the Results section and complex raw data in the Appendix.

Refer to figures and tables

- Make specific reference to each figure and table. Do not assume that the reader will make the necessary connection between the text and the figure or table. Write something about each figure and table.
- Refer to each figure or table in the text by its figure or table number.
- Remember to guide the reader in interpreting the information in the table or figure. What does the table show? What specific point are you making?

Labelling

- Label **tables above** the table and **figures below** the figure.
- A table or figure from an **outside source** should be labelled like any other outside information and its source should be provided.
- Number **all** tables and figures, even if you use only one of each.

Figures and tables in appendices

- Number figures and tables in appendices according to the appendix in which they appear. For example in **Appendix A** you would have:
 - **Figure A1**
 - **Table A1**
 - and so on.

Example

The results are shown in **Table 3** below, and the graph of V against M is found in **Appendix A3**.

Titles of tables

- Keep titles **brief but informative**. You can include explanatory notes, if needed, as footnotes under the table or figure.

Example

Table 1. Reagent tests of known nutrients for specific food substances
(Table here)

- Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the range of response for each reagent.

Referring to tables and figures

When referring to tables and figures, you can use:

- clauses beginning with **as**

Example

As shown in Table 1 below, lipids were found in hamburgers, hot dogs, potato chips, pizza and doughnuts.

- passive voice

Example

Mean weights for samples **are shown** in Table 1.

- brackets

You may refer to Tables or figures by using brackets with or without the verb **see**

Examples

On average female wasps were twice as numerous as male wasps (**Table 1**).

Each sample tested positive for the three nutrients (**see Table 2**).

Plant growth did not differ across irrigation treatments (**Figure 1**).

- This pattern can also be used at the end of a sentence.

Example

X and Y remained constant, as shown in Table 1.

If it is appropriate in your discipline you may choose to use the active voice to express the same notion.

See the section on personal or impersonal style.

Example

Table 1 **shows** mean weights for samples.