

The Basics of Table Design

▶ Arranging Your Data

Arranging Columns and Rows

For every table, you'll need to decide the layout of your rows and columns. Version 1 uses columns for both categories, while Version 2 uses both rows and columns for categories.

Version 1

Department	Expense type	Expenses
Finance	Compensation	158,232
	Supplies	455,669
	Travel	44,555
Sales	Compensation	187,469
	Supplies	454,545
	Travel	48,815
Total		1,349,285

Version 2

Expense type	Department		Total
	Finance	Sales	
Compensation	158,232	187,469	345,701
Supplies	455,669	454,545	910,214
Travel	44,555	48,815	93,370
Total	658,456	690,829	1,349,285

Version 2:

- ▶ Uses less space
- ▶ Includes totals by column and row
- ▶ Supports easy comparison between departments

Time Series

Sort time series (monthly, quarterly, annually) from left to right. Time moves left to right.

Department	2010	2011	2012	2013
311 Call Center	12	13	14	14
Academy Of Sciences	5	6	5	4
Accessible Services	6	6	6	6
Accounting	21	18	17	17

Ranking and Sorting

Sort rankings (first to last, smallest to largest) from top to bottom.

Rank	Department	FTE
1	311 Call Center	65
2	Academy Of Sciences	42
3	Accessible Services	37
4	Accounting	25

Column Order

Choose your column order wisely - don't introduce confusion.

Sales Rep	Variance		% of	
	Target	to Target	Target	Actual
Doe, Jane	200	-17	92%	183
Albert, Finney	150	84	156%	234
Rogers, Grace	100	-57	43%	43
Black, Jack	300	-26	91%	274

Actual makes more sense next to the Target column

▶ Text Alignment, Fonts, and Format

Right align numbers and decimals

Center	Left	Right	Percent	Percent
345458	345458	345458	91.50%	91.5%
54512	54512	54512	156.0000%	156.0%
454945	454945	454945	43%	43.0%
1879374	1879374	1879374	91.3%	91.3%

Right align numbers to easily detect differences

Align decimals & use the same number of points

Left align text

Center	Left	Right	In process?	In process?	In process?
311 Call Center	311 Call Center	311 Call Center	Y	Y	Y
Cal Academy	Cal Academy	Cal Academy	N	N	N
Access Services	Access Services	Access Services	Y	Y	Y
Accounting	Accounting	Accounting	N	N	N

Left align text which makes it easier to scan

Exception: If the text is the same length across rows and the column name is long, try centering

Left align dates

Date	Date	Date	Date
4/15/06	04/15/06	04/15/06	4/15/06
10/22/99	10/22/99	10/22/99	10/22/99
2/6/15	02/06/15	02/06/15	2/6/15
3/9/09	03/09/09	03/09/09	3/9/09

Left align dates and use a format (MM/DD/YY) that makes the length consistent

Use legible fonts

Serif	Sans-Serif
Times New Roman	Arial
Palatino	Verdana
Georgia	Trebuchet MS

Serif	Sans-Serif
Script	Berlin
@ (English)	Haettenschweiler
Harlow	STENCIL

Legible

Not legible

Formatting text

Numbers
345,458
345458

Use commas with numbers

Percents
91.5%
91.5

Include percent signs

Big numbers
300M
50M
300,000,000
50,000,000

Remove sets of zeros

► White Space, Borders, and Fill

Use lines sparingly; Avoid Grids

Heavy grids make it difficult to scan across rows. Remove borders from all but header and footer rows.

Department	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cal Academy	12.53	13.45	12.48	12.35	12.35
Arts Commission	19.41	19.89	19.37	26.87	28.43
Law Library	3	2.99	3	3	3
Public Library	649.31	645.37	628.41	640.48	652.22
Controller	180.32	193.54	200.68	197.67	204.11

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Add white space (but not too much!)

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► The first version is legible, but a bit more white space makes it easier to scan across.

► Too much white space takes up space without helping the user.

Use group labels once

► The repetition of group labels adds clutter and makes it harder to scan.

Service Area	Department	2010	2011	2012	2013
Culture & Recreation	Cal Academy	12.53	13.45	12.48	12.35
	Arts Commission	19.41	19.89	19.37	26.87
	Asian Art Museum	53.93	59.08	58.31	57.91
	Fine Arts Museum	110.47	105.82	106.06	109.86
	Law Library	3	2.99	3	3
	Public Library	649.31	645.37	628.41	640.48
Recreation and Parks	War Memorial	898.36	850.58	833.73	841.26
	Assessor/Recorder	62.56	63.07	62.73	63.33
	General Administration	130.51	134.69	146.67	142.04
General Administration	Board of Supervisors	63.42	62.01	62.7	70.32
	City Attorney	305.8	300.21	299.29	303.47
	City Planning	149.35	146.01	150.83	151.77
General Administration	Civil Service Commission	5.85	5.76	5.7	5.7
	Controller	180.32	193.54	200.68	197.67

Long tables may need fill instead of white space

Department	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Cal Academy	12.53	13.45	12.48	12.35	12.35	12.35	12.35	12.53	13.45	12.48	12.35	12.35	12.35	12.35
Arts Commission	19.41	19.89	19.37	26.87	28.43	28.77	28.79	19.41	19.89	19.37	26.87	28.43	28.77	28.79
City Planning	149.35	146.01	150.83	151.77	156.52	170.26	171.34	149.35	146.01	150.83	151.77	156.52	170.26	171.34
Civil Service	5.85	5.76	5.7	5.7	6.02	6.02	6.02	5.85	5.76	5.7	5.7	6.02	6.02	6.02
Controller	180.32	193.54	200.68	197.67	204.11	218.51	243.46	180.32	193.54	200.68	197.67	204.11	218.51	243.46
Total	367.46	378.65	389.06	394.36	407.43	435.91	461.96	367.46	378.65	389.06	394.36	407.43	435.91	461.96

► The fill can be very subtle (your lightest gray). Dark colors can create too much contrast.