

Figures and tables in scientific reports + articles

The basics

1. They should be **large and clear**. Check the final size - what looks good on a full computer screen may not be acceptable when reduced on paper.
2. They should be **self-explanatory**. The legend can include information you want to convey to the reader, or annotate the figure if there is something important to show.
3. They are an **integral part** of your article/report; they serve a purpose and are not for decoration.
4. Each figure/table needs to be **referred to in the text** either directly or indirectly (see below).
5. They should be **numbered consecutively**.
6. They should have a **consistent look**, where possible.
7. They should **appear near their reference** in the paper.

How should I comment on tables and figures in the text of my article/report?

1. **Be concise – use the active voice**

Avoid: *It can be seen/We can see in Figure 1 that...*

Use: *Figure 1 shows/highlights/reports...*

2. **Refer to tables/figures by their numbers, not their placement in the text.**

Avoid: *See the figure below...*

Use: *See Figure 9...*

3. **Don't tell the reader something they already know - state your results when possible**

- a) *Figure 4 shows the relationship between the number of X and the number of Y.*

Shows the reader what they can already see in Figure 4 and forces them to make their own interpretations.

- b) *The abundances of X and Y were inversely related (Fig. 4)*

More helpful – it focuses on the meaning and saves the reader mental effort! It states the result.

Figure/table captions and legends

1. The *caption* is the title of the figure/table and the *legend* is the additional information. Some researchers just refer to the figures/tables in an article. How much methodology and results are reported in the legends is journal specific.
2. Table captions + legends go ABOVE tables (Table X:.....) and figure caption + legends go BELOW figures (Figure X:....).

3. Make sure the descriptive caption clearly indicates what the figure or table illustrates without having to read anything else on the page.

4. Avoid 'Diagram to show...' or 'Table to show...' in your caption. This is obvious to the reader!

Avoid: **Table 1: Table of critical values of D**

Use: **Table 1: Critical values of D**

5. If your figure or table is essentially the same as or based on another author's, but you recreated or adapted it, include the words "Adapted from" or "After" followed by the citation at the end of the caption.

6. Always cite the figure or table if it—or its data—came from a source. The most logical place for the citation to appear is at the end of the caption.

Bibliography

Wallwork, A. (2016). English for Writing Research Papers, 2nd edition. Springer, pp375

Day, R.A., Day, N. and Sakaduski, N. (2011). Scientific English: A Guide for Scientists and Other Professionals, 3rd Edition. Greenwood, pp 226

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