

English Grammar and Style

Good Writing Practice

Writing abstracts for congresses (2)

Tables and Figures

Unlike manuscript abstracts, congress abstracts may often include tables or figures, or both. Many congresses allow these to be submitted alongside the abstract text, and this is often the most concise and clear way to present large amounts of data.

Limitations of tables and figures

Including a table or figure may reduce the available character or word count of the abstract. Consult the congress abstract guidelines to see if this is the case; some congresses count each table or figure as equivalent to 250 characters of body text. If more than one table or figure is to be included, one way to reduce the impact of this on the overall word count is to upload a single multipanel image containing a number of tables or figures. Depending on the congress and stipulated file size limits, this may count as one figure overall. All table and figure titles and footnotes should be included in the image file to save additional characters or words.

Unlike manuscripts, there is no opportunity to see proofs of congress abstracts, therefore it is crucial to ensure that any tables or figures will be clear and readable when published in the final abstract book. Why

overload a table with data if the end product is illegible in the abstract book? To ensure that tables and figures are published clearly, check the minimum resolution and size requirements for the congress. Many congresses provide little guidance here; if the congress abstract book will be printed, aim for the standard print resolution of 300 dpi.

Tables

If supplying tables in table format (as opposed to uploading as a figure), these will usually be transcribed and copyedited by the congress in the abstract book. While this may seem the preferred option for tables, this may introduce errors, which may disturb the message and clarity of complex tables. Incorrect, or non-translation of row indenting can make the table harder to follow, as can failure to embolden important category headings. When the contents of an individual cell contain a lot of data, these will invariably spill onto two rows and the most appropriate position for the line break may not be used. Using additional columns can also resolve this problem; for example, instead of including the value and upper and lower confidence intervals in the same column, add a separate column for the intervals. Consider the risk of an

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erroneously translated table and whether supplying it as a figure would be preferable.

When supplying tables as a figure, a number of additional details must be considered. Special care should be taken when using superscript footnotes. In our experience, these are sometimes not published clearly in the congress book, whereas using square brackets for footnotes prints well (ie. [a] instead of a). Avoid over-compartmentalising data with grids and excessive row and column borders. Tables should be simple and clean; lines and shading should be thoughtful and should aid in the comprehension of the data presented (Figure 1).

Figures

Many congresses have no specific rules against supplying coloured figures. Colour may be inherent to the figure, eg. photographic material or imaging scans. Otherwise, if colour will improve the understanding of the figure (graphs and charts), its use should be encouraged. When developing figures in colour, consider colourblind users by avoiding red-green and blue-yellow contrasts.

Graphs and charts should clearly focus on the data. Figures may be resized and loss in quality may occur. Gridlines should generally be avoided: include only major lines in a narrow width and lighter shade.

Consistency is key in figures. Consistent shading must be used for each data series and text sizes should be aligned for axes titles, data labels and other on-figure text (keeping in mind the final size of the figure in the abstract book). Inconsistency is more noticeable than consistency, therefore a well-presented figure will draw attention to the data in part by not drawing attention to other less important aspects of the figure.

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Including the title in the image will conserve characters

Table: Effect of Pesticide X on outcomes in apples with and without prior pesticide exposure (observed)

Restrict the use of horizontal borders

Explanatory rows spanning entire table width may be helpful

in-line footnotes appear clearer than superscript

Use shading carefully to enhance data protection

		Apples with prior pesticide exposure (N=108)			Apples without prior pesticide exposure (N=287)		
		Day 0	Day 5	Day 10	Day 0	Day 5	Day 10
Data shown as n/N (%), unless stated otherwise							
Bugs	Present	31/108 (28.7)	17/99 (17.2)	9/95 (9.5)	182/287 (63.4)	51/252 (20.2)	29/248 (11.7)
	Mean (SD) [a]	3.2 (1.1)	1.5 (0.8)	1.2 (0.7)	5.9 (2.2)	2.4 (1.9)	1.1 (1.4)
Holes	Present	8/107 (7.5)	10/99 (10.1)	9/94 (9.6)	10/287 (3.5)	16/250 (6.4)	19/248 (7.7)
	Mean (SD) [b]	0.1 (1.6)	0.5 (2.1)	0.6 (1.9)	0.2 (2.2)	0.4 (2.5)	0.5 (2.1)
Bruises	Present	9/108 (8.3)	10/99 (10.1)	12/95 (12.6)	16/286 (5.6)	17/251 (6.8)	19/248 (7.7)
	Mean (SD) [b]	0.2 (1.8)	0.8 (1.3)	0.8 (1.6)	0.3 (1.8)	0.6 (1.1)	0.7 (1.2)

[a] Mean number of bugs per apple affected; [b] Mean number of holes or bruises per apple.

Figure 1. Example of a well-presented congress abstract table