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# Tables

When tables are not structured accessibly, the data they contain can quickly become a meaningless sea of numbers, facts and figures to someone moving through them a cell at a time. Readers who cannot see the table cannot use visual cheats like checking the alignment and scanning back to the top headings to orient themselves as they go. Equivalent information needs to be encoded into the table to facilitate comprehension.

Tables are meant to be used for tabular information (data). Tables should never be used to lay out documents. When editing a book, recreate charts and tables using the default functionality of the software (i.e. the Insert Table tool).

Tables have a logical reading order from left to right and top to bottom. Screenreader users can easily navigate to and examine data in tables. There are specific keyboard controls for reading tables that differ to the controls for reading regular text. When non-tabular text is rendered with tables, the reading controls are incorrect. This can make it confusing and difficult to read the document with a screenreader.

Do not present non-tabular information in a table format even if it presented as such in a book (i.e. a grocery list with two columns). Present such information as a list in two columns (see [Formatting Columns](#)).



Columns are rarely used when reformatting a book, since they are often just for aesthetics. If this is the case the information is probably best formatted as a [list](#) or normal depending on the context. If you are unsure please contact the Production Coordinator.

## How to insert a table

### [Insert a table in Word](#)

Keep your tables simple without any extra modifications.

## Descriptions, Titles and Captions for Tables

Captions come with the table (they're provided by the publisher.) Descriptions, or Alt-text, is usually not provided by the publisher, and that's what we add in. Just like with images, you will need to reinsert the captions. See below for more details.



If the table has a title, add it to the Title field in table priorities. See below for details.



If the table **does not** have a title, add one to the Title field in table priorities. See below for details.

## Descriptions (Alt-Text)

A description should always be included to give context to a table. Never rely on the surrounding text to explain the presence of a table, especially when the table is offset from the content.

Descriptions should answer the question: "What is the table's purpose and how is it organized?"

### Example:

"A sample order form with separate columns for the item name, price and quantity."

Remember to keep the description short and direct. A good guideline is to keep it around 140 words. See the [Alt-Text page](#) for more information.



Tables never come with Alt-Text description, so you will have to always include it. Some tables will come with captions, but these tables will still need the additional Alt-Text description along with the caption. Remember to always include a title in Table Properties. See below for details.

### Create a description for your table:

- Right click on the table and choose Table Properties.
- Under the Alt text tab, insert your description in the Description area.
- Insert title into the Title field.

## Captions

Captions are provided by the publisher, and are treated the same way as we would a caption for an image with one small difference—the caption goes above the table as opposed to below it.

### Add a caption to your table:

- Select the entire table or right click near the edge of the chart, graph or table, and choose Insert Caption.
- In the Caption dialog box, type in a short description.
- For tables, the caption should be **above** the table.

For more information on Captions in general go to [Captions](#) page.

## Table Headers

Table cells should be marked as table headers or header rows when they serve as labels to help interpret the other cells in the table. Correctly identified headers provide metadata that the reader can call up as needed as they navigate the data points.

### Identify a "Header Row" (usually entire first row)

- Click anywhere in the table.
- Go to the Table Tools Design tab at the top of the page. Check the Header Row check box.
- Type (or retype) your column headings.
- Press the Enter key.

### Ensure "Repeat Header Rows" is enabled

This ensures the header row is repeated across pages. Do this even if the table does not go over multiple pages:

- Place the cursor anywhere in the first row of the table. Right click and select Table Properties from the pop-up menu.
- Select the Row tab in the Properties dialog box.
- Check Repeat as header row at the top of each page



If you have done the above, and it is not working try the following steps.

### Identify a "Header Row"

- Click anywhere in the table.
- Go to the Table Tools Design tab at the top of the page. Check the Header Row check box.
- Type (or retype) your column headings.
- Press the Enter key.

### Apply "Repeat Header Row"

This ensures the header row is repeated across pages. Do this even if the table does not go over multiple pages so the screen reader can identify the header row from the rest of the table:

- Click anywhere in the table
- Go to the Table Tools Layout tab at the top of the page
- select the Repeat Header Row button (it should be located to the far left of the ribbon menu)
- Note: If the Header Row does not automatically repeat on each page, then do the next step.

## Ensure "Repeat Header Rows" is enabled

- Place the cursor anywhere in the first row of the table. Right click and select Table Properties from the pop-up menu.
- Select the Row tab in the Properties dialog box.
- Check Repeat as header row at the top of each page

## Ensure "Allow row to break across pages" is unchecked

- Do not use split or merged cells in a Table. Screenreaders can't handle it.
- In Table Properties, under the Row tab, ensure Allow row to break across pages is unchecked (make sure to uncheck this for each row by clicking on Next Row then unchecking, etc.).

## Avoid blank cells

- Do not use blank rows or columns in a table for formatting. Blank cells, rows, or columns could mislead someone using a screenreader into thinking that there is nothing more in the table. You can fix this by:
  - removing unnecessary blank cells, rows, or columns.
  - adding some text indicating the cell is intentionally blank, i.e. N/A, "No data" or a hyphen.

## Further Help

[Accessible Word Document Design: Tables and Columns](#)

## Other tips

### Formatting Tip

- Use Word tools to create desired format, i.e. borders, line spacing, and other cell styles.
  - You can add more spacing by going to Table properties > Table > Options > Set the Top, Bottom, Left and Right margins to add more spaces around the text
- If you have multiple tables, you can create a Table style and apply this style to all new tables.
- [Handout on creating accessible tables in Word from Karlen Communications](#)

### How to Convert a Table to Normal Text

- Sometimes you will need to convert a table to normal text:
  - First you highlight the table
  - This will create the 'Table Tools' section in the ribbon menu
  - Select the 'Layout' tab
  - On this menu select the 'Convert to Text' button
  - This will open a pop up, you then choose the paragraph break option to separate the text and hit okay

## Tips for Fitting Large Tables Within Page Margins

- If the table is very large, or has a lot of information, there are a few steps you can take to ensure that it fits within the page margins.
  - You can use landscape layout instead of portrait for the pages that the table falls on. In order to enable this, you must first put a section break before and after the table, then select the table (and accompanying headings and/or captions), and choose Landscape orientation.
  - If the table still does not fit within the margins, you can also change the size of the pages (i.e. from US Letter to US Legal) by selecting the table and accompanying info, and choosing a different page size. If you want to try this without switching to Landscape orientation, you will still need to add section breaks before and after.
  - If you have done both of these, and the table still does not fit, you can try decreasing the font size.
  - Still having issues? Time to ask for assistance!

## Q&A Archive

Q: Unsure if the tables were formatted correctly in Appendix A at the end of the book 101 ways to meeting angels by Karen Paolino.

From the Tables section of the wiki: "A caption or description should always be included to give context to a table"

I am interpreting the 'or' in 'caption or description' to mean to include one of the two (either caption or description). But given our past conversation on inclusion of alt text, perhaps i should be including both? Caption and Description? But when I followed the wiki's instructions to add a description, it was greyed out and I was unable to edit it, so only captions are present for the tables.

A: I will fix the wording in the wiki, but every table should have Alt-Text. When it comes to not being able to access the Alt-Text in the table priorities, it looks like this is an issue with they way the document was saved. Just resave and replace the document using the 'Save As' option and double check to ensure it is saving as a .docx file. It will prompt you to replace the file, just accept and replace the file. It should now work!

I creates a short video to illustrate what I mean: <https://screencast-o-matic.com/watch/cYn6q2wTtP>

Word is a finicky beast!

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Q: Follow up question regarding the song title tables in Four Boys and a Guitar: When I'm making a separate table for each song, I have been putting the song title in the spot labeled "Title" under Table Properties - Alt Text. However, when you look at the tables on the page, there is no visible indication of the song title for each table. I'm wondering if it would improve usability for sighted users to add a level H2 header in front of each table with the song title for that table?

A: Yes, adding the heading and the title in the alt-text priorities works.

Q: I have come to the appendixes at the end of this book and there is a very long and complex table in Appendix D (starts on page 195 of the PDF, titled Mills Brothers Discography-by song title) that I could use some direction on. It's going to take a lot of time and I just want to make sure I'm tackling it the best way before I start. The issue I'm having is the subheadings for each song title. Here's a screenshot of one way I thought of to deal with them. But I'm also wondering if it would be better to create a separate table for each song. What do you think?

Mills Brothers Discography - By Song Title									
Song Title	Release Date	Release Label	Session Number	Master Number	Album Title	Album Number	Notes		
Acro ss the Alley From The	04/15/47	Decca	03/03/47	73811					
Acro ss the Alley From The	08/15/55	Decca	03/03/47	73811	Source Album	MG4154			
Acro ss the Alley From The	03/13/01	Decca	03/03/47	73811	Out-Golden Favorites	MG7813			A2
Acro ss the Alley From The	08/01/68	Decca	03/03/47	73811	The Best	MG10406			A3

A: In this case you should create separate tables for each song title.

Set the heading of the section as 'Mills Brothers Discography-By Song Title

Set each table tile as simply the song title.

Q: There is a table in "The Canadian Prairies" that I am struggling with. The table is extensive and is split into two pages, and the header column is only visible on the first page - should I combine them

514 Appendix									
TABLE 7 Prairie and Canadian population, urban and rural (farm and non-farm) 1971-1981									
	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021			
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	'000
Manitoba									
Rural									
Farm									
Non-farm									
Total	24 86	52 84	111 73	180 72	261 57	349 57			
Urban	1 4	30 18	40 27	70 28	200 43	252 43			
Total	25	62	153	251	461	613			
Saskatchewan									
Rural									
Farm									
Non-farm									
Total	361 73	534 71							
Urban	131 27	219 29							
Total	493	758							
Alberta									
Rural									
Farm									
Non-farm									
Total	237 43	366 42							
Urban	138 27	223 36							
Total	375	589							
Prairie region									
Rural									
Farm									
Non-farm									
Total	899 45	1,293 44							
Urban	469 25	753 36							
Total	1,328	1,956							
Canada									
Rural									
Farm									
Non-farm									
Total	2,967 80	3,215 74	3,296 68	3,357 67	3,954 81	4,436 80			
Urban	722 30	1,113 26	1,807 32	2,614 38	3,273 45	4,352 50			
Total	3,689	4,329	4,833	5,371	7,227	8,788			
Sources: 1971 Census Vol. 1, Table 5 "Population, rural and urban, Canada, 1971-1981"; 1981 Census c98-0910; 1991 Vol. 1, Pop. "Cen" Characteristics, Tables 14 and 15; 1996 Census c96-096, 1996 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13; 2001 Census c99-099, 2001 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13; 2006 Census c96-096, 2006 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13; 2011 Census c96-096, 2011 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13; 2016 Census c96-096, 2016 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13; 2021 Census c96-096, 2021 Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Table 13									

into a single table?

A: You can combine it into the same table. If you follow the instructions on header rows in the wiki it



will be fine: [https://bclc.wiki.libraries.coop/doku.php?id=public:nnels:etext:tables#table\\_headers](https://bclc.wiki.libraries.coop/doku.php?id=public:nnels:etext:tables#table_headers)

Q: I am editing a book that has very long tables that are images. I obviously need to convert them to readable tables in Word, but my question is should I create on very large table, or should I cut it down into smaller tables?



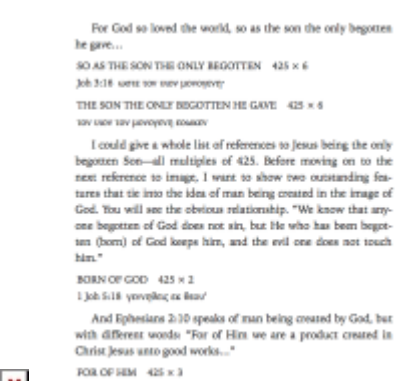
A: In this case you can break the sub-sections down into their own tables with each disorder its own table. You can caption each table with the name of the disorder.

Q: In Theomatics, instead of creating tables the author has used images. Should I put a producers note in for each 'table'?



A: Images of tables need to be presented as tables, just as images of text should be presented as text. You can see how to make accessible tables here:[Tables](#). If you have questions about creating tables, let us know! We may need to add in a short alt description if the table is not sufficiently described in the surrounding text.

Q: Theomatics uses tables-A LOT-but it seems like they are not necessary. It appears that tables are used for formatting spacing, as opposed to actually creating a table. For example; the Chapter headings are in tables (which I remove.) But what should I do with the other 'tables'? There are instances in the book where similar information is presented as a list, and not a table. Should I just remove the tables and have the information formatted as 'Normal' with paragraph breaks between each line? I have included a screen shout of a page from the .doc file and the .epub file as examples. UPDATE: I have been thinking more about this as I move through editing other parts of the book. These sections could work as bulleted lists. If you need more examples I can give you other page numbers, or just open the epub yourself. There are oh so many.



A: You've got that right - none of the tables in this book should be there (as far as I can tell). As you

say, they've been used for formatting purposes, a big no-no. All the tables should be converted to text within the narrative flow. I don't think these are true lists (a list of items); I would format these as normal paragraph text.

Q: I have a question regarding tables in Satan is a Socialist. There are a few simple tables in the book formatted similar to the image of the table below. The tables usually have two rows, one header row and one with all the content. Should I be adding separate rows for each element in the list (e.g. one row for high/low government control, one row for high/low level of entitlements, and so on). Or is this fine as is? Thanks!

A: It looks like none of these are actually tables, but they used tables to create a columns for comparative lists. You can reformat them as nested lists.

Q: I am currently working on "The Red Road and Other Narratives of the Dakota Sioux" and in part 1 there are three lists of tribes presented in tables. The first column contains the tribes name and the second column contains the english meaning of the tribes name. Because there are no column headers, I am wondering if it would be better to reformat the information in normal style?

mon anglicized names and the names spelled with the Dakota orthography, indicating proper pronunciation, used in this volume.<sup>3</sup> Assuming their main location in the early 1800s, and going roughly from east to west, from the Mississippi River in present-day Minnesota westward to beyond the Missouri River (see maps 2 and 3), they are:

Eastern Sioux, Dakota or Santee (4 councils)

Mdewakanton	Mdewakantayway, Spirit Lake dwellers
Wahpekute	Wahpekute, Shooters among the deciduous leaves
Wahpeton	Wahpetayway, Village among the deciduous leaves
Sisseton	Sissetayway or Village among the fisheries

Middle Sioux, or Winema (2 councils)

Yankton	Yanktayway, Dwellers at End Village
Yanktonai	Yanktaywayna, Dwellers at Little End Village

Western Sioux or Lakota (1 council)

Teton	Titayway, Dwellers on the prairies
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The general name for the Dakota people (Isiyi, Isiyen or Santee, meaning dwellers at the knife), was derived from a lake they called Isiyta-mde (Knife Lake), southeast of Mille Lacs Lake in Minnesota (Pond 1986, 175). The term Isiyi applied first to the particular Mdewakanton band located at Knife Lake, and then to all

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A: So this is an example of a publisher using a table for layout purposes. If the information is a list, then it must be reformatted as a list to be accessible. See the [List section for more information](#). For example:

- Title of List
  - First Language; Indigenous Name

Q: I'm working on People, State, and War Under the French Regime in Canada and in the appendices at the end are several images of tables that I'm transcribing into text. I have two questions about these tables (I put the question here instead of the image Q&A because I felt like it was more applicable to tables). Some of the tables have arrows connecting the data in different cells, and a Note at the end of appendix A reads "Figures given with arrows indicate the combined total for the categories in question." I'm not sure how to indicate this in a table.

Second question, in Appendix A, in the second last table the edge of the last column is cut off, so I

cant read all the text. I can infer what the words are intended to be? Or I can leave as is which will mean some partial words and individual letters. How should I proceed?

A: It seems like the Arrows are in the Regular column. You can enter them using [unicode](https://unicode-table.com/en/sets/arrow-symbols/). [Here are all the codes for arrows](https://unicode-table.com/en/sets/arrow-symbols/).

If you can with confidence fill in those missing letters and words, then go for it!

Q: Can we use lists within a cell in a table? For example, in "I Had the Craziest Dream," some of the tables identify up to five different LP Reissue identifiers. Can I use an unordered list in that case?

A: No. Lists within tables are not accessible. Could you give me a specific example of what you are trying to reformat?

Q: One of the tables in "I Had the Craziest Dream" is formatted a little funky. It looks like this:

PART 10 1958-1974			
	Recorded	Label	Number
Hollywood			
228. "I Don't Want to Walk With-out You" with orchestra conducted by Wilbur Hatch issued in album <i>They Sold Twenty Million</i> W-1216 (mono) / WS-1216 (stereo) (1958) reissued in album <i>Remember the Night, and the Girl, and the Song</i> W-1426 (mono) / WS-1426 (stereo) (1961)	1958	Warner Bros	W/WS-1216 W/WS-1426
RCA Victor album <i>The New Tommy Dorsey Orchestra Recorded Live at the Royal Box of the Americana, New York (1964)</i> Four selections as featured artist			
New York			
229. "Just One of Those Things"	1964	RCA Victor	LPM/ LSP-2830 (mono/stereo)
230. "The Lonesome Road"	1964	RCA Victor	LPM/ LSP-2830
231. "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate"	1964	RCA Victor	LPM/ LSP-2830
232. "My Melancholy Baby" above with orchestra directed by Sam Donahue	1964	RCA Victor	LPM/ LSP-2830

I'm hoping you can help me decide what exactly is going on in number 228. I think that it's meant to still be under the song title column? And how should I write that up so it's accessible?

A: Great question! There looks to be 4 columns in this table, (and the publisher used a list to also order the information fun!):

-(Number, Song Title, Orchestra details)	Recorded (includes place and year)	Label	Number
--	------------------------------------	-------	--------

It seems to me the best way to do this is as follows (only write the number not list format):

-	Recorded	Label	Number
228."I Don't ... by Willbur Hatch	Hollywood 1958	Warner Bros	W/WS-1216, W/WS-1426
issued in album They Sold...	-	-	W-1216(mono)/WS-1216(stereo)
issued in album....	Hollywood 1961	-	W-1426(mono)/WS1426(stereo)

Note: I used shorthand in my example. In your version you need to type out the full titles and phrases.

Q: Atlantic’s Last Stop. What is the difference between the title and the caption of a table? What if the caption provided is essentially the title? (For an example, see the table in Chapter 18.)

A: If the caption is a title, then just repeat it in the title in the properties. All accessible tables require titles in the properties as per the wiki instructions.

WCAG 2.0 — H39: [Using caption elements to associate data table captions with data tables](#)

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