Table Formatting

Making data work for everyone.

Topics

- Proper use of tables
- Table formatting best practices
- Where can I learn more?

Proper use of tables

Use tables for data

Tables must only be used only for data—not layout—and should follow accessibility best practices.

Example layout table

Information in a table must be related to descriptive table header cells. The table below does not contain header cells and is used to arrange information into columns – not to display data.

John Smith 123-456-7890 smithj@ecu.edu	**Jane Doe** 123-456-7890 doeja@ecu.edu	**Sarah Smith** 123-456-7890 smiths@ecu.edu
John Doe 123-456-7890 doejo@ecu.edu	**Sally White** 123-456-7890 whites@ecu.edu	**Bob Smith** 123-456-7890 smithb@ecu.edu

Example data table

The table below contains data associated with descriptive table header cells.

Name	Phone	Email
John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Table formatting best practices

Avoid empty cells

- Empty cells can be difficult to understand for users of assistive technology. If there is no data for a cell, using “not applicable” provides the most consistent user experience.
- If your table has numerous empty cells, consider reformatting the information. For example, could the information be a list instead of a table?

Avoid merged cells

Merged table cells break the cell's association with the table header cells, which can create confusion for users of assistive technology. Tables should be reformatted to remove merged cells.

Consider the following when encountering merged cells:

- Should the information in the merged cells be outside the table?
- Should the table be broken into separate tables instead?

Merged cells example – table title

The example below contains a merged cell for the title of the table.

Office Directory		
Name	**Phone**	**Email**
John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Merged cells solution – table title

To remove the merged cell, the title is moved outside the table.

Office Directory

Name	Phone	Email
John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Merged cells example – footnotes

The example below contains a merged cell for footer information.

Name	Phone	Email
John Doe*	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White**	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu
* = part-time employees, ** = remote employees		

Merged cells solution – footnotes

To remove the merged cell, the footnotes are moved outside the table.

Name	Phone	Email
John Doe*	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White**	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

* = part-time employees, ** = remote employees

Merged cells example – multiple sections (rows)

The table below contains merged cells to mark sections of the table.

Faculty Directory		
Name	**Phone**	**Email**
John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Staff Directory		
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Merged cells example – multiple sections (columns)

The table below contains merged cells to mark categories in the table.

Employee Type	Name	Phone	Email
Faculty	John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
	Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Staff	Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Merged cells solution 1 – multiple sections

To remove the merged cells, the table is broken into separate tables.

Faculty Directory

Name	Phone	Email
John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu

Staff Directory

Name	Phone	Email
Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Merged cells solution 2 – multiple sections

The table below contains merged cells to mark categories in the table.

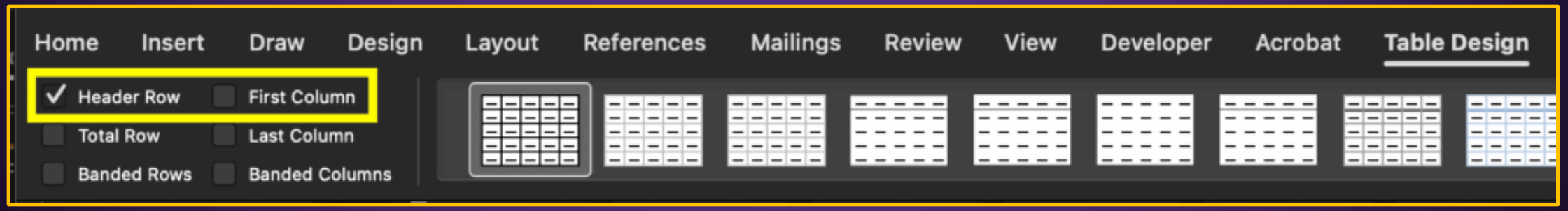
Employee Type	Name	Phone	Email
Faculty	John Doe	123-456-7890	doejo@ecu.edu
Faculty	Sally White	123-456-7890	whites@ecu.edu
Staff	Bob Smith	123-456-7890	smithb@ecu.edu

Provide clear, descriptive header cells

- Header cells provide a label the information present in the associated cells.
- Header cells may be in the first row of the table and/or the first column of the table
- Each header cell must have descriptive text added (no blank header cells)

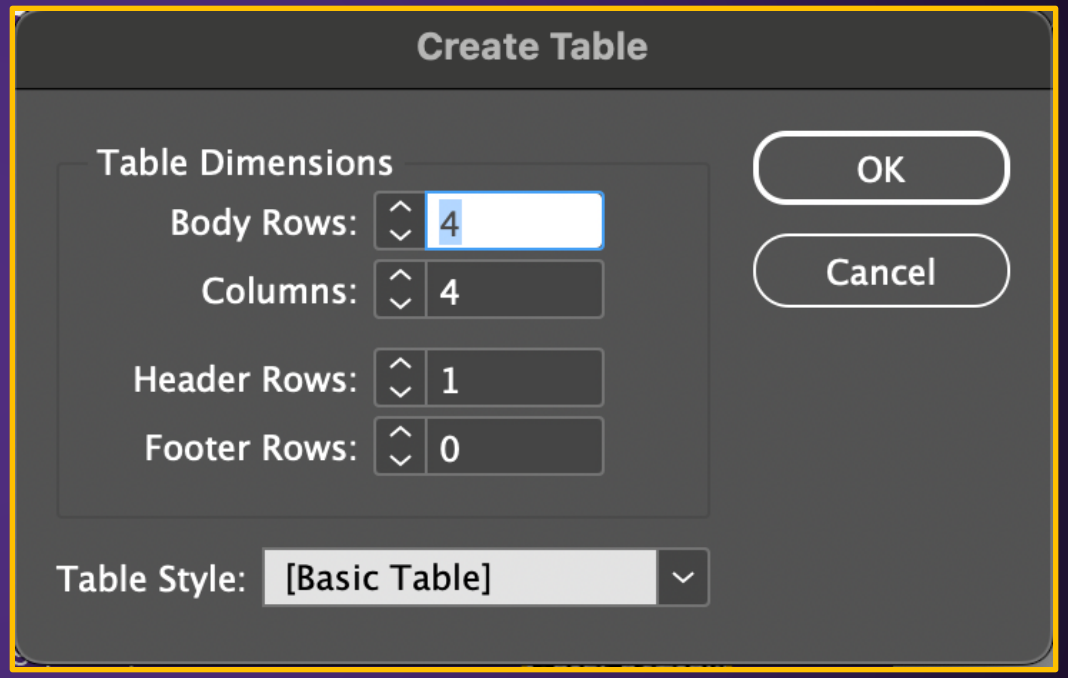
Marking header cells in Word & PowerPoint

- Select the table.
- Go to **Table Design** ribbon.
- Check **Header Row** and/or **First Column**, as appropriate.



Marking header cells in Adobe InDesign

- Create tables via **Table > Create Table**, including a header row.
- To convert an existing row to a header: select it, then go to **Table > Convert Rows > To Header**.



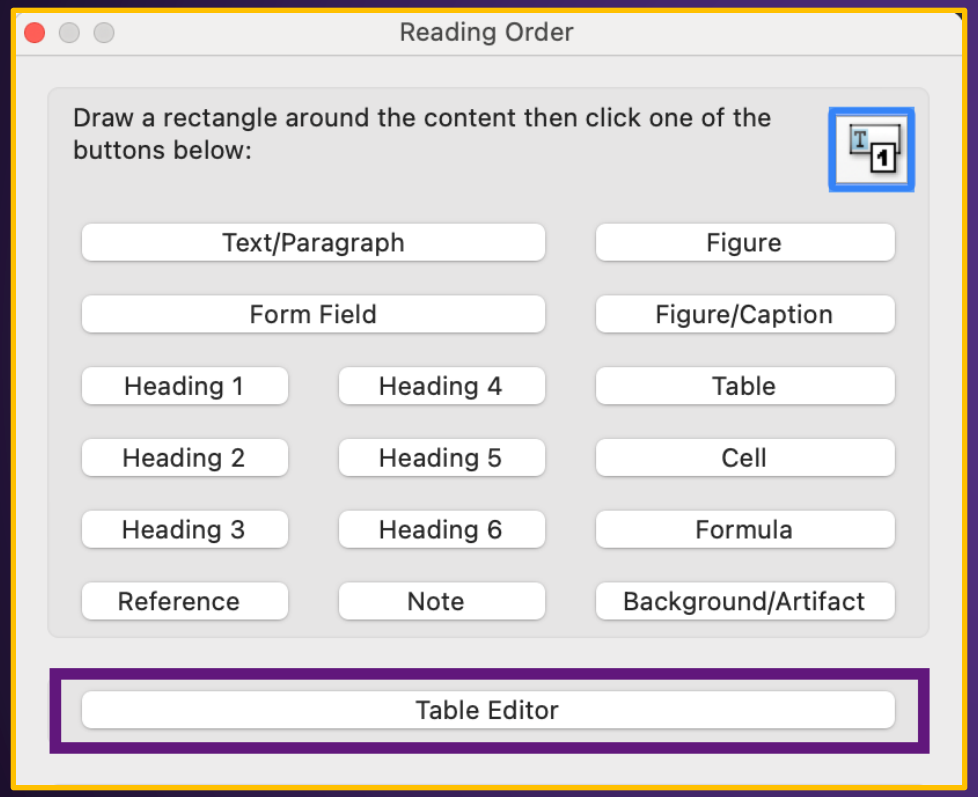
Additional steps in PDF to set header scope

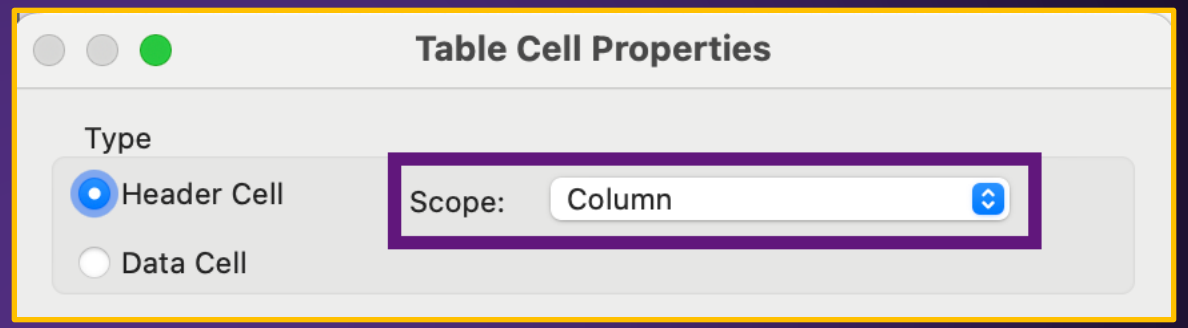
A few additional steps are necessary to set the scope of the header cells in Adobe Acrobat:

- Open the **Reading Order panel**. Click the three dots > **Show Reading Order Panel**.
- Click a table element on the page and click **Table Editor in the Reading Order Panel**.
- Select header cells, right-click > **Table Cell Properties**, set **Scope** to “Column” or “Row” as appropriate

Note: According to the W3C, these steps are not required for simple tables with headers in the first row or column

Screenshots for setting header scope in Acrobat





Where can I learn more?

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accessibility.ecu.edu/digital

Questions?