COM 12: Incorporating Tables and Figures

Why do we use tables and figures?
Tables and figures can enhance writing by illustrating a point to the reader that might otherwise be difficult to understand through description only. These elements may display your data in a clear way and further illustrate or prove a point. Tables and figures should enhance rather than detract from your writing, so they should be incorporated purposefully.

When is it appropriate to use tables and figures?
Your use of tables and figures depends on the kind of writing you are doing and may be more appropriate for certain disciplines and writing contexts. If you would like to use one but are unsure if it is appropriate, check with your instructor or consult the style guide (APA, Chicago, etc.) relevant to your project. Each style guide will provide specific rules for how to incorporate tables and figures, including how to label them and where to place them within the document.

Figures
Figures are most commonly graphs, charts, maps, drawings, or photographs that provide information to your reader. When deciding to include a figure, make sure the information presented is clear and provides value to your writing. Keep it simple and easy to understand. Figures are always labeled in documents.

Below is an example figure in APA style. Notice that the figure is clean and easy to read. The figure is labeled and numbered.

Positivism:

A Singular Truth

Mixed

Methods

Naturalism:

Multiple Realities
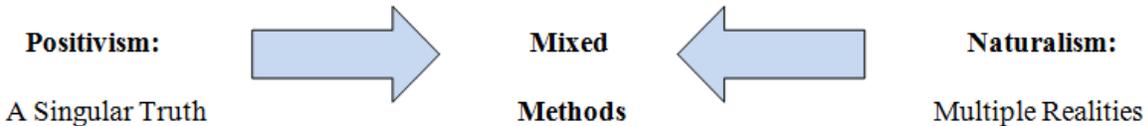
Figure 7. Mixed Methods Theory

Tables
Tables are arrangements of data presented in rows and columns. They are used widely in research and data analysis, and there are many different kinds of tables used in a variety of contexts. A common way to generate tables is to through a program like Excel, which generates a spreadsheet that can then be inserted into a document. Other advanced statistical programs may be used for specific disciplines to generate tables. As with figures, tables should clearly present the data at hand. Keep the ruled lines to a minimum when creating a table. Tables should also be labeled.

Below is an example table in APA style. Notice that the table is clean and easy to read with a minimum number of lines to present the data. The table is labeled and numbered.

Table 2

High Frequency Writing Types

High Frequency Writing Types: School-wide

Writing Type	Frequency
Compare/Contrast	64%
Bell-work	63%
Essay Question Writing	63%
Article Responses	59%
Short Answer	59%
Notes	58%
Article/Source Analysis	49%
Constructed Response	49%

Final Reminders about Tables and Figures

- All style guides will have different rules about how to place, label, and display your tables and figures. For example, in the two shown above, notice that in APA figures are labeled below the image with the figure label and number italicized; tables are labeled above with different spacing and italics.

- Keep tables and figures as simple as possible so that your reader can follow the data presented. With tables, keep lines to a minimum.

- Make sure you actually *need* the table or figure. Does it fully contribute to the reader understanding the information?

- Keep tables and figures focused on a specific data set or topic. This will help your reader see how the information presented relates to your writing.

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