

# 6

## CREATING EFFECTIVE TABLES

### SUGGESTED COURSE EXTENSIONS

#### A. Reviewing

1. Find a simple table in a newspaper or magazine article. Evaluate whether tables in that article can stand alone without the text, using the guidelines in chapter 6 of *Writing about Numbers*, 2nd Edition. Suggest ways to improve labeling and layout.
2. In a professional journal in your field, find a table that includes column spanners or panels.
  - a. Evaluate whether you can interpret all the numbers in the table without reference to the text, using the guidelines in chapter 6. Suggest ways to improve labeling and layout.
  - b. Using information in the article, revise the table to correct those errors.
  - c. Consider whether a different layout would work more effectively.
  - d. Assess whether other tables are needed in the paper. Can two (or more) tables from the paper be combined into one?
  - e. Take one of the tables in the article and simplify it into one or more tables for a lay audience.
  - f. Pick a chart from the article. Draw a table to present the same information. Show what would go into the rows and columns, whether the table would have spanners or panels, labels, notes, etc.
3. In a journal article from your field, find a table that presents the relationship between a nominal predictor variable with more than two categories, and an outcome variable.
  - a. Identify the principle used to organize the categories of the nominal variable in the rows or columns of the table, referring to the criteria in chapters 6 and 7 of *Writing about Numbers*, 2nd Edition.
  - b. Critique whether that organization coordinates with the associated narrative.
  - c. Sketch a revised version of the table that addresses any shortcomings you identified in part b.

#### B. Applying Statistics

1. Create a table to display univariate frequency distributions for several variables in your data.
2. Create separate tables to show each of the following types of bivariate associations between variables in your data set, using the guidelines in chapter 6 of *Writing about Numbers*, 2nd Edition, about table structure for those types of statistics.
  - a. correlations between pairs of continuous variables
  - b. cross-tabulations between pairs of categorical variables

- c. differences in means for a continuous outcome variable according to values of categorical independent variables
3. Make a list of two or three simple tables to show two-way or three-way associations that pertain to your research question. Write individualized titles for each table.
  4. Obtain a copy of the instructions for authors for a leading journal in your field. Revise the tables you created in questions B.1 through B.3 to satisfy their criteria.

### **C. Writing and Revising**

*Hint:* Save the tables you create for use in the suggested course extensions for chapters 9 and 11.

1. Design a table to report results of a bivariate analysis involving a nominal predictor variable with more than two categories. Specify which organizing principle(s) you would use to display the categories of the predictor variable in the rows, referring to the criteria in chapters 6 and 7 of *Writing about Numbers*, 2nd Edition. Justify your choice, with reference to the specific objectives of your analysis.
2. Evaluate a table of bivariate statistics that you created previously for a paper, using the checklist in chapter 6, the criteria for organizing data in charts (chapter 7), and the instructions for authors for a leading journal in your field. Revise that table to incorporate any needed changes.
3. Exchange drafts of bivariate tables from questions C.1 and C.2 with a peer. Evaluate them using the checklist in chapter 6 and the instructions for authors for their selected journal. Revise according to the feedback you receive.
4. Read through the results section of your paper and identify topics or statistics for which to create additional tables related to some aspect of your research question. Draft them with pencil and paper, including table structure and complete title, labels, and footnotes.