Some Simple Tips and Suggestions for Effective Figures, Tables and Photographs/Illustrations

**General**

- Must be directly relevant to and contribute to the research (questions or hypotheses) being investigated. These are often the most expensive part of the preparation of manuscript for publication.
- Organize the figures, tables, photographs or illustrations such that they help to enhance the story you are trying to tell about your research or scholarly activity.
- Review figures, tables, photographs and illustrations from the current issues of the journal where you plan to send your manuscript.
- Generally write titles and figures in the past tense (but check with journal instruction to authors or look at current publications in the journal).
- Must be designed or organized such that the reader can interpret key points or messages without a detailed description in the text or in the legend.
- Must always check, double check and triple check for accuracy and for clarity. One error may lead readers to wondering about the quality of the other results and your work.
- Must have well constructed titles and legends.
- Font for titles, legends and labeling must be easy to read. San Serif fonts may be easier to read.
- Title must be clear and specific so there is no confusion as to the content.
- Must use the appropriate units of measure.
- What shows up well on a single page may not show up well when reduced in size to fit the manuscript.
- Follow detailed instructions to the authors for the specific journal.
- Optimize the number of figures, tables, photographs and illustrations in your manuscript (particularly if there are page limitations or page charges).
- May be useful to talk with editors prior to submission.
- Have a colleague review the figure, table, photograph or illustration and ask them what the findings they conclude after reviewing the document are. Is it consistent with what you are trying to say in the manuscript?

**Tips and Suggestions for Effective Figures**

- Select the appropriate type of figure based upon the type of data, type of statistical analysis and what will clearly highlight the findings.
- What looks good for an oral presentation may not be effective for a written presentation.
- Line Graphs – Symbols and lines must large enough and clearly differentiate between treatments or groups.
- Line Graphs - May need to try different formats such as on figure with multiple lines or multiple graphs with same figure legends and scales to see what best describe your data.
- Bar Graphs – Should use unique fill for various bar graphs (colored bar graphs may not be effective with black and white printers).
- Example – If you have independent and dependent variables that are numeric – may want to use line graphs or scattergrams.
- Example – If only the dependent variable is numeric – may want a bar graph.
- Example – For proportions – bar graphs or pie charts might be useful.
- Figure legends and scales must be readable and legible.
- Often easier to label the figure and not the figure legend.
- Avoid 3-D or other special effects as they may not work well for a manuscript.
- Define any abbreviations as needed.
### Tips and Suggestions for Effective Figures, Tables and Photographs/Illustrations

#### (Continued)

#### Tips and Suggestions for Effective Tables
- The table must make sense to the reader.
- Decide the best orientation is for the table (vertical versus horizontal) based upon the type of data, type of statistical analysis and what will clearly highlight the findings.
- Use subheadings for columns and rows.
- If the contents of the table can be easily discussed in the text of the manuscript (e.g., table with only a few rows and columns), it may not be needed.
- Avoid excessive lines – generally vertical columns are no needed if there can be sufficient space between the columns.
- Ideally you want to limit each table to one page if possible.

#### Tips and Suggestions for Effective Photographs and Illustrations
- Must get informed consent if required.
- Follow explicitly the directions to the authors as to the required format.
- For photographs indicate what is the “top” of the photograph for the copy editors.
- Include your name and article title in case these become separated from the manuscript.
- Illustrations must be very clear and use good quality art and graphics.
- If using arrows or circles to highlight areas in a photograph, they must be large enough and with sufficient contrast to enable them to be clearly identifiable.

#### References