

Safety Enhanced Design Brief

Effective Table Design

Tables are used exclusively for lists of patients, medications, results, etc.

While tables seem simple, careful design is needed as even small mistakes can have a significant impact on:

- **Patient safety:** e.g. Truncated names will lead to wrong patient selection; column headers scrolling out of view will lead users to read the wrong test result value.
- **Efficiency:** e.g. Users will waste a lot of time scanning and scrolling if no search or sort is provided.

This set of guidelines is just a small sample of the available guidelines for table design.

1 To prevent common errors

- Keep the headers visible at all times (*do not allow them to scroll out of sight*)
- Use multiple lines for long column headers (*do not truncate them*)
- If truncation of a table is unavoidable: Try using multiple lines or tooltips for showing what does not fit in the cell
- Avoid using error-prone abbreviations, and provide a long version in a tooltip (see <http://www.ismp.org/tools/errorproneabbreviations.pdf>)
- Never truncate patient names (see Color Use Brief <https://sbmi.uth.edu/nccd/SED/Briefs/sedb-g01.htm>)

- Use alternating shading of rows in wide tables (*every 1 or 2 rows to help track rows across columns*)

2 To improve task efficiency

- Place the most important columns on the left
- Group together columns (or rows) that are used together

3 To help users find data

- Make the important information stand out (<https://sbmi.uth.edu/nccd/SED/Briefs/sedb-g01.htm>)
- Use light white space between the rows (*instead of heavy gridlines*)
- Use a different style for headers

Patient	Test	Order Date	Review By	
Evans, Anna	MRI / F	Mar 3, 2011	Mar 10, 2011	1:12 AM
Parker, Amy	MRI / P	Mar 2, 2011	Mar 9, 2011	11:42 PM

4 To make information readable

- Allow user to adjust font size and adjust the table layout accordingly
- Provide tooltips for icons, headers, or abbreviations when pointer is over them
- Avoid leaving any hanging zeros (e.g. 5.0 vs 5)
- Align numeric values to the right while keeping all other values left-aligned

- Align both the time and the date in a date column (*double alignment*)

Mar 10, 2011	1:12 AM
Mar 9, 2011	11:42 PM

Result Due	Status
February 21, 2011 2:22 PM	Sample drawn and sent

The outside facility should complete the processing of the test and send the results back on this date. (You may change this value)

5 To keep the table compact

- Avoid horizontal scrolling if at all possible (*or indicate that there are more columns*)
- Reduce white space by calculating the initial width of each column from the data in that column
- Allow resizing of columns (*but calculate a minimum and maximum*)
- Only the last column should be stretched to fill horizontal space
- Allow enough space between columns to separate them (*but not more*)

Patient	Test	More >>>
Hayes, Robert	MRI	
Kraft, Amber	Blood (BMP)	
Masterson, Jane	TSH	

6 For large tables

- Provide search functionality
- Permit re-sorting of tables with a click on the column header (*show sort icons and choose the default sorting carefully*)

7 To indicate editable columns

- Change the mouse pointer when the user moves over an editable field, and add an icon in the column header (e.g. a pen icon)

Patient	Test
Morris, Monica	TSH
Parker, Amy	MRI
Peterson, Audrey	Blood (BMP)