

Organizing Data – Do’s and Don’ts

Data Do’s

- ✓ Save final data in non-proprietary file types
- ✓ Use consistent file organization
- ✓ Use descriptive, understandable, and short file names
- ✓ Document data as you collect data

Tabular Data – Do’s

- ✓ Include a header row
- ✓ Use understandable, consistent names in header row
- ✓ Define header row names in a ReadMe worksheet or file
- ✓ In Excel, 1 worksheet = 1 table
- ✓ Use consistent name for header row for columns reporting the same variable
- ✓ Define units as part of header information or in ReadMe worksheet or file
- ✓ Use standard formats for reporting the same variable within cells (e.g., date, time, temperature)
- ✓ Use consistent missing value notation
- ✓ Define missing value notation in ReadMe worksheet or file

Data Don’ts

- ✗ Save final data in proprietary file types
- ✗ Use inconsistent file organization
- ✗ Use lengthy and non-descriptive file names
- ✗ Document data after it has been collected

Tabular Data – Don’ts

- ✗ Use unexplained names in header row
- ✗ Use the same header row name for columns reporting different variables
- ✗ Embed figures, graphs, or charts in worksheets
- ✗ Embed formulas, especially those that reference external files
- ✗ Report units in data cells
- ✗ Use common delimiters (tabs, commas) within the data itself
- ✗ Use special characters
- ✗ Use formatting or color coding to convey information about the data
- ✗ Use blank cells for missing values