

Extreme Site Makeover: Tables Edition



Lauren Lentini | NOV 12 2019

Once upon a time, tables were the darlings of the internet world. You used them for everything, not just tabular data. Does anyone remember layout tables?

The world wide web moved on, and now, tables aren't even that good for tabular data anymore. Who wants to look at a bunch of tiny table cells on their cell phone? The responsive website is making tables more of a headache than they're worth.

So, what's a webmaster to do?

In this blog, we've taken five real-life examples of tables being used on websites and we've given them makeovers! Follow along, and you'll find out how to look critically at your tables and decide whether that's the best way to present the data to your site visitors -- especially mobile visitors.

Keep in mind that we haven't gotten rid of any of the data in these examples, or used fancy coding tricks. All of these makeovers were done in Composer, and you can [check them out here](#).

Example 1: Too Much Information

This school offers a lot of summer programs, and with this table they're offering a LOT of information about those programs! It's overwhelming just to look at on a computer, and impossible to swipe through if you're on a phone. You might think the tabular layout is convenient to compare the different elements of each program, but with such wide rows, you're not even getting that benefit.



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Program	Ages	2020 Dates	Arts	Sports	Courses	Prices
Summer Program (TSP)	14-18	June 27- July 23 July 26 - August 15	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an Additional Language (EAL) EAL Academic Writing Italian French Musical Theater Digital Photography Architecture & Design (session 1) Lean Startup Masterclass (session 1) Fashion & Textile Design (session 2) IB Preparation Course (session 2) Italian Cooking - <i>La Cucina Italiana</i> (session 2) Milan Academy Scuola Calcio soccer Olimpia Milano Basketball Crossfit Fine Art Portfolio (new for 2019) 	Session 1: Boarding: 8,200 Day: 5,000 (7 days per week) Session 2: Boarding: 6,700 Day: 4,100 (7 days per week)
Middle School Program (MSP)	11-13	June 27- July 23 July 26 - August 15	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an Additional Language (EAL) EAL Academic Writing English French Italian Musical Theater Digital Photography Milan Academy Scuola Calcio soccer Olimpia Milano Basketball Tennis Academy Golf Club 	Session 1: Boarding: 8,200 Day: 5,000 (7 days per week) Session 2: Boarding: 6,700 Day: 4,100 (7 days per week)
Le Château des Enfants (CDE)	7-10	June 27-	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an Additional Language (EAL) French 	Session 1: Boarding: 8,200

What are we going to do with it? Flip it!

Summer Program (TSP)	
Ages	14-18
2020 Dates	June 27-July 23 July 26 - August 15
Arts	✓
Sports	✓
Courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> English as an Additional Language (EAL) EAL Academic Writing Italian French Musical Theater Digital Photography Architecture & Design (session 1) Lean Startup Masterclass (session 1) Fashion & Textile Design (session 2) IB Preparation Course (session 2) Italian Cooking - La Cucina Italiana (session 2) Milan Academy Scuola Calcio soccer Olimpia Milano Basketball Crossfit Fine Art Portfolio (new for 2019)
Prices	Session 1 Boarding: 8,200 Day: 5,000 (7 days per week)
	Session 2 Boarding: 6,700 Day: 4,100 (7 days per week)
Middle School Program (MSP)	
Ages	11-13
2020 Dates	June 27-July 23 July 26 - August 15
Arts	✓

That's right, we've left the data in a table. Tables aren't always the wrong idea! But this way, you can tell what you're looking at for each program, and the table is narrow enough to be easily viewable on a mobile device. The consistent formatting of the rows makes it easy to compare the programs, even if the information isn't right next to each other.

Example 2: Over-formatted

Here's information every student needs to know -- what time do classes start? And, even more importantly, when does lunch start? Or the pep rally? As vital as it is, putting that data in a table may not be the best way to format it.

Regular Bell Schedule	
Period 0	6:21 - 7:15 (54)
Period 1	7:20 - 8:14 (54)
Period 2	8:19 - 9:19 (60)
Period 3	9:24 - 10:18 (54)
Period 4	10:23 - 11:48 (85)
	A Lunch 10:18 - 10:48
	B Lunch 10:48 - 11:18
	C Lunch 11:18 - 11:48
Period 5	11:53 - 12:47 (54)
Period 6	12:52 - 1:46 (54)
Period 7	1:51 - 2:45 (54)

Pep Rally Bell Schedule	
Period 0	6:21 - 7:15 (54)
Period 1	7:20 - 8:10 (50)
Period 2	8:15 - 9:10 (55)
Period 3	9:15 - 10:05 (50)
Period 4	10:10 - 11:35 (85)
	A Lunch 10:05 - 10:35
	B Lunch 10:35 - 11:05
	C Lunch 11:05 - 11:35
Period 5	11:40 - 12:20 (40)
Period 6	12:25 - 1:05 (40)
Period 7	1:10 - 1:50 (40)
Band & Football Released	1:50
Band Marches	2:05
Seniors Follow Band	About 2:07

In this case, a simple bulleted list format actually makes the information easier to understand.

REGULAR BELL SCHEDULE	PEP RALLY BELL SCHEDULE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Period 0: 6:21 - 7:15 (54)Period 1: 7:20 - 8:14 (54)Period 2: 8:19 - 9:19 (60)Period 3: 9:24 - 10:18 (54)Period 4: 10:23 - 11:48 (85)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">A Lunch: 10:18 - 10:48B Lunch: 10:48 - 11:18C Lunch: 11:18 - 11:48	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Period 5: 11:53 - 12:47 (54)Period 6: 12:52 - 1:46 (54)Period 7: 1:51 - 2:45 (54)	

Additionally, we've used tabs to separate the regular schedule from the pep rally schedule. This minimizes scrolling on smaller devices and just offers a cleaner look.

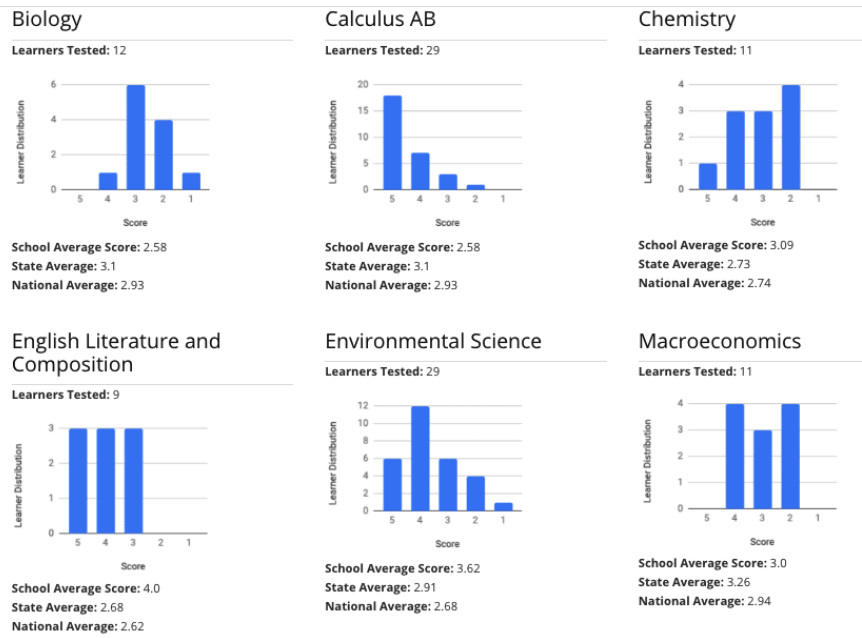
Example 3: Hard to read

The trouble with this table isn't just that it's not responsive; rather, this table is so jam-packed with information that it's hard to understand at all. The headers and the data rows are all mixed up!

AP Test Results

Biology									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
12	Learner Distribution	0	1	6	4	1	2.58	3.10	2.93
Calculus AB									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
29	Learner Distribution	18	7	3	1	0	4.45	3.06	2.97
Chemistry									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
11	Learner Distribution	1	3	3	4	0	3.09	2.73	2.74
English Literature and Composition									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
9	Learner Distribution	3	3	3	0	0	4.0	2.68	2.62
Environmental Science									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
29	Learner Distribution	6	12	6	4	1	3.62	2.91	2.68
Macroeconomics									
Learners Tested	Score	5	4	3	2	1	School Average Score	State Average	National Average
11	Learner Distribution	0	4	3	4	0	3.0	3.26	2.94

To make over this table, we had to ask ourselves how to make the data meaningful, as well as how to make it accessible for mobile users. So we graphed it!



These graphs were made in Google Sheets, although you could easily accomplish it in any spreadsheet program. Now you can tell at a glance how those scores were distributed for each subject, and it's just more appealing to look at. We've also used three-column layout elements that will collapse on mobile devices, so it looks good on a big screen or a small one. (Pro tip: We used multiple layout elements for each row, so that when it collapses, the subjects will stay in alphabetical order.)

To keep the information in the graphs accessible for all users, we added the values into the alt text. This works for such simple data as we have here, but you'd want to consider including a summary of the table in the main text if you use this trick for a more complex data array.

Example 4: Unappetizing cafeteria menu

After all this table transitioning, who's ready for lunch? Unfortunately, this grid is so hard to read you don't know what you're going to eat today.

October 2019

Oct 1-4	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Milk Served With Every Meal	Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice	Nutri Grain Bar Fruit Juice	Breakfast Pizza Fruit Juice	Pancakes, Juice, Fruit
Lunch		Chef's Salad Chick Peas Celery Cherry Tomatoes Garlic Bread Fruit	Deli Sandwich Carrots Cauliflower Fruit Chips	Fish Sticks Smiles Roll Salad Fruit	Chicken Burger Cucumbers Celery Banana Chips
Oct. 7-11	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Cereal Toast Juice Fruit	Toast Yogurt Fruit Juice	Benefit Bar Fruit Juice	Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice	Waffle Fruit Juice
Lunch	Deli Sandwich Cucumbers Carrots Oranges Chips	Beef Taco Corn Black Beans Fruit	Corn Dog Salad Cucumbers Fruit	Chicken Salad Broccoli Chick Peas Cauliflower Fruit	Cheese Lasagna Salad Corn Garlic Bread Grapes
Oct. 14-18	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Breakfast	Cereal Toast Fruit Juice	Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice	Nutri Grain Bar Fruit Juice	Toast Egg Patty Juice Fruit	Pancakes Fruit Juice
Lunch	Ham/Cheese Melt Carrots Celery Salad Fruit	Beef Taco Black Beans, Corn Fruit	Taco Soup Cauliflower Carrots Fruit Pretzel	Chef's Salad Broccoli Carrots Fruit Garlic Bread	Cheeseburger Smiles Cucumbers Celery Grapples

It looks like someone has tried to make a calendar out of a regular table, but why reinvent the wheel? Let's just use a Calendar element!

Month	Week	Day	< OCTOBER 2019 >						
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT/SUN				
	30	1	2	3	4	5			
	● Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice ● Chef's Salad Chick Peas Celery Cherry Tomatoes Garlic Bread Fruit	● Nutri Grain Bar Fruit Juice ● Deli Sandwich Carrots Cauliflower Fruit Chips	● Breakfast Pizza Fruit Juice ● Fish Sticks Smiles Roll Salad Fruit	● Pancakes Juice Fruit ● Chicken Burger Cucumbers Celery Banana Chips		6			
● Cereal Toast Juice Fruit ● Deli Sandwich Cucumbers Carrots Oranges Chips	7	8	9	10	11	12			
	● Toast Yogurt Fruit Juice ● Beef Taco Corn Black Beans Fruit	● Benefit Bar Fruit Juice ● Corn Dog Salad Cucumbers Fruit	● Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice ● Chicken Salad Broccoli Chick Peas Cauliflower Fruit	● Waffle Fruit Juice ● Cheese Lasagna Salad Corn Garlic Bread Grapes		13			
● Cereal Toast Fruit Juice ● Ham/Cheese Melt Carrots Celery Salad Fruit	14	15	16	17	18	19			
	● Bagel Cream Cheese Fruit Juice ● Beef Taco Black Beans Corn Fruit	● Nutri Grain Bar Fruit Juice ● Taco Soup Cauliflower Carrots Fruit Pretzel	● Toast Egg Patty Juice Fruit ● Chef's Salad Broccoli Carrots Fruit Garlic Bread	● Pancakes Fruit Juice ● Cheeseburger Smiles Cucumbers Celery Grapples		20			

With a calendar, not only is the data easier to read and mobile-responsive, you can also take advantage of all the other features Calendar Manager and the Composer Calendar element have to offer. We've added color keys to differentiate between lunch and breakfast. You can switch between month, week, and day views to drill down to just the information you want. You could even let users subscribe to the lunch calendar on their own calendar app, so they know right away whether they're packing or buying.

Example 5: Wall of text

To wrap things up, we present you with another wall of text, this time with a lot of unnecessary white space. The biggest problem with this table is that the URLs in the last column are much too wide, and they're squeezing out all the other columns.

High School Guidance Office Scholarship Listings

October 23, 2019

Scholarship Name	Due Date	Criteria	Amount	For More Info
Bird Island - Hawk Creek Mutual Insurance Company	December 1st	The student must be a senior enrolled in a school in their territory, there are agricultural and non-agricultural scholarship available.	5 @ \$1,000	Scholarship
Profile in Courage Essay Contest	January 17, 2020	Write an original and creative essay that demonstrates an understanding of political courage as described by JFK in <i>Profiles in Courage</i> . Essay's must be a minimum of 700 words. US high school students in grades 9-12 are eligible.	1st place is \$10,000 with 12 more awards	for specific details go to: JFKLibrary.org/essaycontest
Prudential Spirit of Community Award	November 5, 2019	Celebrate youth volunteers the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards helps	Varies \$1,000 to \$5,000 for finalist	http://spirit.prudential.com

So the first thing we did was replace all those URLs with hyperlinks. If you can't think of any text you want to write for your hyperlink, you can always type out the name of the file. So do as we say not as we do in the screenshot below. Instead of "Link" it is better to list "Bird Island Scholarship Form."



After: Condensed accordions

High School Guidance Office Scholarship Listings

— Bird Island - Hawk Creek Mutual Insurance Company

Due date: December 1st

Amount: 5 @ \$1,000

The student must be a senior enrolled in a school in their territory, there are agricultural and non-agricultural scholarship available.

[Link](#)

+ Profile in Courage Essay Contest

+ Prudential Spirit of Community Award

+ Coca Cola Scholars Program

+ Horatio Alger Scholarship

+ Jack Kent Cooke Foundation

+ St. Cloud Rox Foundation

+ Voice of Democracy Scholarship

With that taken care of, we were still left with a table that doesn't really need to be a table. Tables do take up less room when you have a lot of similar information to present, but if you don't need to directly compare it, there are often better ways to save space. Like an accordion! In this case, we've created accordion panels for each scholarship, so visitors can focus in on just what they want to see.

Conclusion

That's our show! Er, blog. We hope that you've learned a thing or two about alternative ways to present tabular data, and that you'll keep this exercise in mind the next time someone hands you a bunch of rows and columns to put up on your site.

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