

General Guidelines

Types of Tabular Data

Editable in ArcGIS:

1. Microsoft Access (.mdb)
Note: 2007 version (.accdb) is not compatible with ArcGIS
2. Geodatabase table (.gdb)

Read-only in ArcGIS:

1. Excel .xls (1997-2003) recommended
.xlsx (2007-2013) not recommended
2. Delimited text files (.txt, .csv)

Formatting Field Names in Header Row

1. Must only contain alphanumeric characters and underscores (no spaces or special characters)
2. Must start with a letter
3. Must be 64 characters or less

Formatting Field Data (Non-Header Data Records)

Non-header entries allow more flexibility in formatting than the headers. For example, it is permissible to use spaces and start with a number.

1. Cells must be fully expanded and “visible” to the eye in Excel for ArcGIS to read.
2. Cells must contain the actual text or numeric values
(e.g. no special formatting or formulas, such as “=B4*C3 – 20”)

Joining Tables

One to one: The identifier is unique in both the source table and the join table (e.g. object ID).

Many to One: The source table may have multiple fields containing the same identifier (e.g. many trees are live oaks at Rice). The join table only has one field for each identifier (e.g. there is only one live oak species).

Guidelines for Joining Tables

1. Tables are joined by a common field that contains identical information in both tables.
2. The headers do not need to be identical, but must comply with general tabular data formatting guidelines.
3. The common field must be of the same type in both tables (e.g. integer, string, Boolean, or date).
4. The common field in the outside table should contain unique values.

Troubleshooting Joins

You will recognize that your join was unsuccessful if the joined fields only contain the value 'null'. If there are some 'nulls,' it may indicate that there were no matches for that particular entry, which is often to be expected. If you are receiving more 'nulls' than expected, check that the following is true:

1. The values stored in the join field are exactly the same including punctuation, capitalization, and spacing (*common problems include leading and trailing spaces*).
2. All words (including number representations) are left justified, and number values are right justified. *The type of data must be identical between the two data sets.*
3. The columns are physically wide enough to fit all of the information in Excel.
4. If none of the previous fixes work, save the file in another tabular format (like .dbf) and retry.