Never Guess, Report These Data Appropriately

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Published online: 8 February 2011
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Keywords Data · Writing · Poisoning

“I never guess. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data.”

Sherlock Holmes in *A Scandal in Bohemia*
by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1888)

We advance the science and practice of medical toxicology with rigorous research methodology. The same level of rigor applied to data collection should be applied to our use of the word *data* in our writing. The simple four-letter word *data* is one of the most frequently used words in published medical literature; ironically, *data* is also the most inappropriately modified word in print.

The word *data* is the plural form of the noun *datum*. Therefore, verbs and modifiers used with *data* should be in the plural form even though the word *data* sounds singular. For instance, when specifically referring to data collected during the course of a study, “these data” is correct even

though many incorrectly say or write “this data.” The word “this” should only modify a singular noun (and would be appropriate to use with *datum*), whereas “these” always belongs with the plural *data*. See also the following examples:

Incorrect Every patient randomized to the placebo arm remained asymptomatic and survived, but those randomized to the arsenic arm all developed cardiovascular collapse and died. This data suggests eating arsenic for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is bad for one’s health.

Correct Every patient randomized to the placebo arm remained asymptomatic and survived, but those randomized to the arsenic arm all developed cardiovascular collapse and died. These data suggest eating arsenic for breakfast, lunch, and dinner is bad for one’s health.

In your next submission to JMT, do not make a capital mistake by guessing: pay close attention to your writing and report **these data** correctly.

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