

# Style A-Z

This is a guide to *Public Health Research & Practice* house style to assist you in preparing your manuscript. We ask authors to pay particular attention to the accuracy and formatting of references. Reference style can be found on page 12.

## Spelling, language and house style

In general, spelling follows *The Macquarie Dictionary*, with 'ise' spelling. Capitalisation, hyphenation, punctuation and abbreviations should be uniform throughout. See 'Standard and Preferred Spelling' in this document.

For any style items not included in this document, please refer to the *Australian Style manual for authors, editors and printers* (6th edition).

The journal is accessible to a broad readership and therefore favours jargon-free articles.

All submissions should use non-discriminatory language.

- Spell out all states at first mention and thereafter use initialisms for NSW, ACT, NT, SA and WA.

Months of the year:

- Spell out in text and graph headings
- Abbreviate on graph axes.

Countries:

- US and UK: no need to spell out
- Britain is preferable to UK unless you specifically want to include Northern Ireland.

*Also see Shortened forms*

## A

### Abbreviations

General principles:

- In titles: acceptable but minimise
- In Abstracts: acceptable but minimise
- In text: use sparingly and only for common, repeated words. Spell the word(s) first followed by the abbreviation in brackets and use the abbreviation thereafter.
- Do not use full stops with either initialisms (NSW, ABC) or acronyms (WHO, TAFE)
- Do not italicise

Abbreviating states/territories:

- Abbreviations are acceptable in graphs, tables, figures, headings and author affiliations

### Aboriginal

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are generally referred to as Aboriginal in line with NSW Health policy that notes: 'Aboriginal' is generally used in preference to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in recognition of the fact that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW.

If a distinction for clarity must be made, e.g. if the article does not relate to NSW, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or Indigenous (with a capital I) are acceptable usage. Never use the initialism ATSI. Appropriate use of terminology for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples follows the advice of *Communicating positively: a guide to appropriate Aboriginal terminology* (NSW Health, 2004) <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal/Publications/pub-terminology.pdf>

### About/on

Information **about**, NOT information **on**. 'On' is used for placing physical objects on top of each

other. But people are told 'about' information or an event. They receive information 'about' the performance of their public hospital system.

### Acknowledgement

Include the second 'e'

### Acronyms and initialisms

- It is acceptable to begin sentences with common acronyms or initialisms such as NSW
- Don't use full stops between letters e.g. NSW not N.S.W.
- Use capital letters
- If the acronym or initialism is not well known it needs to be spelt out in the first instance.
- When to use A or An: Make a decision based on the sound of the first letter of the initialism/acronym. Use 'an' when the first letter is a vowel sound (whether it is a vowel or not).

e.g. *An ASIO document; An RACGP guideline*  
*A NSW policy; A UNESCO committee*

### Active voice

Use the active voice: *Doctors treated Jack* not *Jack was treated by doctors*.

### Acts of Parliament

Italicise, upper case:

*Public Health Amendment (Vaccination of Children Attending Child Care Facilities) Act 2013*

### Ampersand (&)

Don't use unless it is part of a name/official title

### Apostrophe

- For singular common nouns use before the 's' e.g. the government's report
- For plural common nouns use after the 's' e.g. the Local Health Networks' policies

- For plural common nouns that don't end in an 's' the apostrophe sits before the 's' to denote the possessive e.g. women's health
- Six weeks' time, three months' earnings, one month's time generally take apostrophes. Many people are phasing this use of apostrophes out but it is still common usage and as such can still be used in Sax Institute publications
- Do not use an apostrophe with plural shortened forms e.g. MPs, GPs, a man in his 20s (see shortened forms section)
- Do use to denote the short form of a decade: the '70s
- For possessives that end in 's', generally use 's e.g. The Jones's house, unless to do so would make an ugly sound on reading e.g. Menzies' papers not Menzies's paper.

### At/about

Choose one or the other, but don't use both, e.g. *"It starts at 10 am"* or *"It starts about 10 am"*, not *"It starts at about 10 am"*. It's either at 10am OR about 10am – it can't be both.

### Spelling (A)

acknowledgement

The Act (when referring to legislation)

affect means to influence; effect means to bring about or accomplish (verb) affect has a narrow psychological meaning; effect means the result of an action (noun)

ageing (not aging; this is an exception to a general rule: paging, imaging)

airborne (also foodborne, waterborne, etc, exceptions are vector-borne and mosquito-borne)

among (not amongst)

analyse

antiviral

Australian Government

## B

### Bacteria

Bacteria should always be in italics when referring to their taxonomic names (e.g. *Staphylococcus aureus*) or abbreviated taxonomic names (*S. aureus*). However, if they are generic and plural, then they are in roman with no initial cap (staphylococci, streptococci). Family names of bacteria (e.g. *Enterobacteriaceae*) should be italicised.

### Birthweight

One word. Low birthweight is **not** hyphenated when used as a noun but **should** be hyphenated when used as a compound adjective i.e. low-birthweight baby.

### Bullet points/numbering

- Don't use semi colons or commas at the end of each bullet point. Use a full stop at the end of the last bullet point
- Cap the first letter of the first word in each bullet point (whether they comprise full sentences or part sentences)
- Avoid using the definite (the) and indefinite (a) articles at the beginning of every sentence in a bullet point list. Long lists of 'A, an, the' are not visually appealing to the reader
- If the list has a definite order, numbering may be required in preference to bullets
- Numbered lists within text should be formatted with the number first and close bracket second, followed by a semi-colon, e.g. *Including: 1) general practitioner training; 2) coordinated aftercare; 3) school-based mental health literacy programs.*
- If the sentences are longer and there are several bullet points, a return between them is appropriate to break up the text. If the list is shorter, with fewer words, no return is necessary
- Don't use bullet points to try to make a long-winded paragraph look more succinct. Bullet

points should be used judiciously; too many of them create confusion and clutter.

### Spelling (B)

bioassay  
Bill (legislation)  
biobank  
birthing, avoid this use – prefer giving birth, childbirth)  
birthweight (as above)  
bottle-feed  
breastfeed

## C

### Capitals

- Avoid too many capitals. They arrest the eye and slow down reading
- Paper titles should be in sentence case (only the first word and proper nouns are capped)
- In general, cap an organisation or institution but lower case its divisions, subsidiaries or committees, e.g. Sydney University's faculty of medicine. Stand-alone institutes e.g. the Sax Institute, the Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, are capped, even if they are located at universities
- Shortened titles for organisations and institutions: cap the title even when it is not the full title e.g. the NSW Health Department ... the Department, the Sax Institute ... the Institute, the University of Sydney ... the University
- Maintain lower case for organisations whose official title is lower case, e.g. beyondblue and headspace – except where they begin a sentence
- Official position titles within organisations should be capitalised e.g. Chief Executive, Director of Nursing
- Don't cap generic organisations, institutions, or job descriptions such as university, institute, nurse, cardiovascular surgeon, researcher

- Other general descriptions that should not be capitalised include states and territories. E.g. *NSW, Victoria, ACT and the NT were involved in the plan. The states and territories signed a memorandum of understanding on the issue.*

## Commas

The Oxford comma

Also known as the 'serial comma', the 'Oxford comma' is an optional comma before the word 'and' at the end of a list: *We sell books, videos, and magazines.*

Do not use the Oxford comma **except** in cases where it is necessary to avoid ambiguity.

An Oxford comma is **not** needed in the following examples:

*The colours were red, white and blue.*

*Socioeconomic status, education and lifestyle factors have a major influence on health and wellbeing.*

The following examples, taken from sources including *the Style Guide for Authors Editors and Printers 6th edition*, show how sentences can be ambiguous or unwieldy without the Oxford comma:

*These items are available in black and white, red and yellow and blue and green.*

*Among those interviewed were his two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall.*

### A note on commas

In some cases comma usage comes down to personal preference. But incorrect usage can change the meaning of a sentence and there are several rules to observe:

- Use between long **coordinate clauses** but not short coordinate clauses. (A coordinate clause is one that is equal in weight and separated by a conjunction). An example of a short coordinate clause where the comma is unnecessary:

*The NSW results were significant and they represented an improvement on the previous year. A long coordinate clause example: NSW achieved*

*higher performance rankings than all other countries surveyed on blood pressure monitoring, but its performance on diabetes-related hospital admissions was much lower.*

Note the comma before the conjunction

- Use commas with **non-defining clauses** or phrases. These are clauses/phrases that are incidental, not integral, to the sentence. Don't use commas with defining clauses (**See That/which**)
- Use to do the job of parentheses: John, normally a well-behaved child, did not behave yesterday. The words between the commas represent a non-defining clause
- Use in place of 'and' in a list of words
- Use to clarify meaning. For example, His brother George was best man, means the bridegroom has more than one brother. His brother, George, was best man, means the bridegroom has only one brother and his name is George
- Expressions such as however and for example are always followed by a comma if they begin a sentence and are separated by commas within a sentence: However, not all states achieved the same results. ALSO: If, however, all the Local Health Networks are consulted, they are likely to deliver by the deadline
- Where a phrase contains numerals immediately followed by more numerals, a comma is needed to separate them: In 2010, 5000 patients reported mistakes in their care.

### Compare to/compare with

'Compare to' is used to point out resemblances between things or liken one thing to another, e.g. *She compared him to his predecessor.*

'Compare with' is used to put things next to each other and examine the extent of their similarities and differences, e.g. *The report compared NSW with Australia and 10 other countries.*

### Compass points

Are lower case and compound – e.g. southeastern – unless used as a proper noun e.g. South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

### Confidence intervals

Use a space in '95% CI' (not '95%CI').

- Separate the upper and lower confidence limits with a comma:
  - 95% CI 1.06, 1.31
- If the 95% CI is reported alongside another measure, separate the measures with a semicolon to avoid confusion with the comma in the 95% CI:
  - The odds ratio was significantly higher (OR 1.18; 95% CI 1.06, 1.31).
- Do not use an '=' after '95% CI':
  - 95% CI 1.5, 1.6      NOT 95% CI = 1.5, 1.6

### Conjunctions

It is acceptable to begin a sentence with a conjunction (and, but, however).

### Contractions

In general, avoid contractions: don't aren't etc.

### Spelling (C)

casemix

CD4 count

Chief Health Officer

child care (noun)

child-care (adj)

coexisting

comorbidity

comprise (typically means consist of. Comprised of is therefore incorrect)

compare: Compare to means liken one thing to another. Compare with is used in an examination for similarity or difference.

## D

### Data measures

Do not use an '=' symbol when reporting data measures:

- OR 1.18, not OR = 1.18
- Kappa 0.78, not Kappa = 0.78
- median 2, range 0–48, not median = 2, range = 0–48

### Dates

- The order is day, month, year (avoid the US style of month, day, year). Use numerals for dates/times, e.g. 5 days, 2 months, 1 hour.
- No punctuation is needed, e.g. *The organisation began the trial on Monday 23 February 2012*
- In written text, use numerals for the day of the month and year. Do not use numerals for the month itself (e.g. . 23/2/2009).
- Use words rather than numerals for the day of the month when beginning a sentence with a date, e.g. The first of December 2010 was his preferred date.
- Use c. (circa) to express uncertainty of date
- Decades are presented with four digits: 1950s (not 50s or 50's)
- Financial year is presented as XXXX–YY
- Calendar year is presented as XXXX–YYYY (e.g. grant funding for the financial year 1989–90; data was collected for the 2-year period 1989–1990).

### Dictionary

We use the Macquarie Dictionary, which pays particular attention to Australian English usage.

### Different from/different to

Either of these is fine to use

### Double negative

Avoid using double negatives e.g. *He was not very often on time.*

Instead say: *He was usually late.*

### Spelling (D)

data and media are the plural forms of datum and medium and should be used with a plural verb (e.g. *data are, media were*)

decision maker

diarrhoea

disc (all senses)

Dr

## E

### Each/every

These are not synonymous. Each means every one of two or more people or items, regarded and identified separately; it highlights individuality. Every refers to all the individual members of a group or collection of items.

### Either or

neither nor

### Ellipsis points ...

Ellipsis points denote omitted material. Spaces should be placed either side of ellipsis points, but not between them. *e.g. The health ministers agreed ... that elective surgery targets would be deferred until 2013.*

Where a sentence ends with ellipsis points, there is a space before them and no full stop after them.

*e.g. The health ministers agreed elective surgery targets would be deferred ...*

### em rule/en rule

These are the two main types of dashes. An em rule is the width of a capital M and an en rule is the width of a lower case e. These are distinct from the hyphen. The spacing between en rules depends on how many words are being linked. If the rule is linking two words, no space is needed but if there is more than one word either side of the rule, use a space. In word, em/en rules can be found in the Insert menu under 'symbol'. Journal style is to use en rules for all of the below:

- Signifying an abrupt change in the direction of a sentence
- Introducing an amplification or explanation within a sentence
- Setting apart parenthetical elements in a sentence if you don't wish to use parentheses

- Showing spans of figures, time and distance *e.g. 75–79 Macquarie St*
- Use instead of a hyphen with prefixes and compound adjectives when the link is with more than one word *e.g. the Sydney – Hunter Valley clinical trial; non–English speaking countries*
- Showing an association between words that retain their separate identities *e.g. Commonwealth–state agreement, Hardy–Weinberg equilibrium*
- Use for chemicals that are closely bonded but have not become a new compound *e.g. HRP–antibody.*

### Enquire/inquire

Enquire/enquiry refers to a request for information

Inquire/inquiry refers to a more formal investigation such as the Garling Inquiry.

### Equations

- Use a nonbreaking space before and after all mathematical operators (*e.g. +, −, =, >, <, ≤, ±*) within an equation, apart from a slash (which has no spaces either side):
  - $1 + 2 = 3$      $p < 0.05$      $25 \pm 5$
- However, this only applies when the symbol is being used as an operator; expressions of numbers that include such symbols have the symbol closed up to the number:
  - $>20-3$      $<12$  months     $\leq 65$  years

### Spelling (E)

elite (not élite)

email (not e-mail) No hyphen BUT: e-tag, e-zine, e-research and e-health are all hyphenated (see hyphens)

## F

### Fewer/less

Less refers to quantity – use with singular mass nouns *e.g. less unemployment*



Fewer refers to number – use with plural count nouns *e.g. fewer positions*

More is used with both: *more unemployment, more positions*

'Less than' is often used, however, in relation to percentages: *Less than 50% of people said they were happy with their care.*

### Forward slash/solidus

Avoid using a solidus between words; instead, use a word or en rule. Exceptions include and/or (but use as little as possible).

There is no space between the words on either side of the solidus, *e.g. Bankstown/Lidcombe Hospital NOT Bankstown / Lidcombe Hospital*

Also, **do not** use a solidus:

- with units of measurement when spelt out *e.g. 60 kilometres per hour (not kilometres/hour)*
- to mean 'to' *e.g. the 2012–13 financial year not the 2012/13 financial year*
- to join words that have separate identities *e.g. Sydney–Perth trip not Sydney/Perth trip.*

### Footnotes

Avoid footnotes in the body of the paper. Instead, put the material at the end of the paragraph or in brackets, or cut it altogether.

Footnotes in tables should use lower case superscript letters.

### Full-time, part-time

Hyphenated when used adjectivally, otherwise no hyphen, *e.g. He was a full-time student BUT The student studied full time.*

### Spelling (F)

faecal

Figure 4 (not Fig. 4)

focused/focusing

fetus (noun); fetal (adj): now accepted and preferred Australian spelling

follow-up (noun); to follow up (verb)

foodborne

formulas (not formulae)

## G

### Spelling (G)

genitourinary

Gram-negative (initial cap and hyphen)

## H

### He or she/they

There are differing views on this but it is becoming more acceptable to use the plural pronoun **they** rather than the clunky **he or she** – even when the subject is singular. Sometimes it is possible to make the subject plural to avoid the problem but '**they**' is acceptable where that is not possible.

### Hyperlinks

Please include full URLs in your manuscript. These will be embedded in the text online but spelled out in full and made a live link in the PDF version of your article.

### Hyphens

Here are some quick rules.

Word breaks at the end of a line of text are not hyphenated: push the word to the next line.

Hyphens only apply when grammatically needed

- Generally en rules, not hyphens, are used with numerical ranges. But don't use 'to' i.e. 40 to 50 years (see E for an explanation of en rules and em rules)
- Not generally needed with suffixes except those such as -up and -odd *e.g. 30-odd, build-up*

- Generally, hyphens are NOT needed with prefixes (pre, non, multi, dis, bi, sub, de, etc.). There are a couple of exceptions to this including:
  - Where the meaning is unclear (*e.g. re-form and reform mean different things*)
  - To avoid doubled-up vowels (*e.g. pre-eminent not preeminent*). Two exceptions to this are coordinate and cooperate, which are accepted now without hyphens.
- Exclude hyphenation in standardised phrases for specific disciplines *e.g.* foodborne, airborne, waterborne

### Hangings hyphens

These are often used to link two or more words to another shared word or number. Generally best avoided but, if used, maintain the hyphens in phrases as follows: *low- and high-risk patients; full- and part-time positions; drug- and alcohol-affected patients.*

### Hyphen use with compound words

Here are some rules (source: Style Guide for Authors Editors and Printers 6<sup>th</sup> edition)

**Where a compound adjective is formed by an adjective + adjective OR noun + adjective, a hyphen is used except in the case of set phrases**  
*e.g. A bitter-sweet decision, a high-income earner*

*BUT a stock exchange report, a tax office ruling, a High Court decision, a 'do or die' moment* (these are set phrases and therefore don't need hyphenation)

**Compound adjectives formed by an adverb ending in -ly + participle or adjective don't need a hyphen**

*e.g. Clinically recommended targets*

Compound adjectives formed by an adverb (not ending in -ly) + participle or adjective need a hyphen

*e.g. A high-performing health system*

**Compound adjectives involving numbers are hyphenated**

*e.g. A 10-week delay, a three-year-old boy*

### Hyphens and prefixes

Don't use hyphens with prefixes except before an initialism (*e.g. anti-MMR*) or before a proper noun (*e.g. non-Indigenous*)

### Spelling (H)

hand washing

healthcare (but mental health care; primary health care)

HIV = human immunodeficiency virus; HIV disease; HIV infection; HIV-seropositive man

HIV/AIDS (this term no longer in use)

homemaker, homemaking

### Italics

- Titles of publications: use italics except in referencing (Vancouver style does not italicise references. See References)
- Foreign words or phrases not commonly used in English should be italicised
- Common phrases such as vice versa, bona fide, per annum, et cetera and et al do not need to be italicised. If in doubt, check whether the dictionary italicises the term. If it doesn't appear in the dictionary, italicise it
- Use for emphasis or change in tone
- Use for scientific names at genus, species and subspecies level
- Legislation and legal cases, works of art, films and most musical compositions need to be italicised.
- Do not italicise the names of programs, strategies, initiatives and projects.

### Spelling (I)

ice cream

ill-advised

ill health

Immunoglobulin M (IgM)

impact or impact on (to affect or to influence is preferable, or to have an impact on)



Indigenous (cap when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples)

input

inquire see enquire

internet (lower case)

in situ (not italicised)

in vitro (not italicised)

-ise not -ize

## J

**Judgement**, not judgment

## L

### Last/past

The word 'last' is often misused for 'past'.

'Last' refers to the thing that literally comes last or latest in a sequence – e.g. *the last president; last year; the last straw*.

'Past' refers to something that has gone before – for example, *the past few years not the last few years*.

Commonly used phrases containing last that delete 'the' (last year, last month, last week) are fine.

### Learnt

Is preferred past tense of learn, BUT a learned gentleman.

**Licence** – noun

**License** – verb

### Like/such as/as if

Do not substitute 'such as' with 'like': *Patients gave factors such as room cleanliness a high rating. NOT Patients gave factors like room cleanliness a high rating.*

Do not substitute 'as if' with 'like': *He felt as if he'd been hit by a bus. NOT He felt like he'd been hit by a bus.*

### Lifestyle

Use 'lifestyle-related' when referring to disease, e.g. 'lifestyle-related chronic conditions'. Do not use lifestyle on its own, e.g. 'lifestyle disease', in this context

### Line breaks

Our text is left justified so all two-letter words at the end of a line should bump to the next line wherever possible.

### Spelling (L)

layout

Legionnaires' disease

live-born (noun)

Local Health District (always capitalise)

## M

### Mathematical signs

- In an operational role, a space is placed on either side of the mathematical sign (e.g.  $50 \times 2$ ,  $1.2 \pm 0.5$ )
- Use plus or minus signs without a space when they indicate positive or negative value (e.g.  $+340$ ,  $-25$ ,  $10^{-5}$ )
- Use an en rule for a minus sign (not a hyphen)
- Use the symbol  $\times$  rather than the letter x as the multiplication symbol
- When using a colon to present a ratio, do not use spaces (e.g.  $1:60$  not  $1 : 60$ )

### Per cent

- Use the % symbol:
- Directly after the numeral, without a space

- In sentences, present as a numeral and % symbol (e.g. 9% of participants)
- In table and figure titles and headings (do not repeat % for each item of data).

### Medicine/medication

Medication is used adjectivally (medication chart, medication management, medication errors) and medicine is used as a noun (discharge medicines, prescribed medicines, complementary medicines).

### More than/over

Only use over when referring to height, e.g. *The wall was over 200 metres high.*

For age, use older than or younger than instead of over or under, e.g. *120 people aged older than 50 were interviewed for the study.*

In other instances use more than unless you are using a phrase such as 'just over' as of course 'just more than' would be incorrect.

### Multiple risk

Do not use 'multi-risk' as an abbreviation for this compound adjective; do not hyphenate

### Spelling (M)

make-up

marketplace

meta-analysis

method (methodology means the science of method or body of methods used in a field)

micro-organism

mL (and L)

mosquito-borne

Murray Valley encephalitis virus (MVEV)

multicentre

multilevel

multilocus sequence typing (MLST)

## N

### None

When the meaning is obviously 'not one' it takes a singular verb: *None of the Triage 1 patients has left the building.*

However, none can also be used with the plural. This is a less formal, but grammatically correct approach e.g. *none of them are prepared to commit any funds to public reporting is as correct as none of them is prepared to commit any funds to public reporting.*

In this case 'them' could refer to individual organisations such as State Governments or a group of individuals.

### Non-English speaking

Hyphenate Non-English

### Nouns

- Can be used adjectivally: government reports show NOT the government's reports show (the latter example is grammatically correct but using the noun adjectivally eliminates the need for unnecessary apostrophes)
- Collective nouns generally take singular verbs: e.g. *the Institute is, the Government has, the team is*
- Some collective nouns can take plural verbs when it's clear you are referring to the individual members of the collective group e.g. *staff are, people are.*

### Numbers

- Spell out numbers under 10 and use numerals for 10 and above. The exceptions to this rule are:
  - Where the number accompanies a % sign or a symbol (5%, 8 °C, 50 kg etc.) – note the space between the number and the degree symbol is correct

- When used with dates/times, e.g. 1 hour, 5 days
  - When describing a related series of numbers in a list. In this case numerals should apply. e.g. There were 20 clinicians gastroenterologists, 5 psychiatrists, 2 nurses and 1 GP
  - When part of an official title (e.g. District Group 1 and 2 hospitals)
  - When writing fractions under one. These are usually spelt out and hyphenated unless preceded by a, or an (two-thirds, three-quarters, one-half, one-third BUT, an eighth).
- When starting a sentence, numbers should be spelt out regardless of their value (e.g. Ten per cent of patients said they had problems accessing care). While we often try to avoid this sentence construction, there may be occasions where it is appropriate. For example, to help alter the rhythm of a paragraph containing several figures, which can sound dull if repeatedly worded the same
  - Use a space, not commas, to separate numbers with more than four digits (e.g. 4250 (*not* 4,250); 67 800 (*not* 67,800)). However, for tables insert spaces in four-digit numbers (e.g. 4 250) so that numbers align
  - Present large numbers in index form (e.g.  $3.5 \times 10^6$ )
  - Always use a zero before a *decimal* point, even for *p* values.
  - Present logarithmic expressions in the format:  $\log_1(x)$ ,  $\log_e(x)$  or  $\ln(x)$ .
  - Write 'approximately', do not use the symbol  $\sim$
  - Insert a space between numerals and units (e.g. 2 h, 85 cm)
  - With percentage and degree symbols, or centrifugal force in '*g*', do *not* insert a space: (e.g. 25%, 25°C, 2000*g*)

#### Numbers/% symbol at the end of sentences:

Try to avoid ending a sentence with a numeral. Usual practice is to spelling out a numeral when it ends a sentence but this might not be practical in publications that are heavily reliant on numbers. Therefore, a numeral followed by a full stop is acceptable, depending on the context. The main issue is to keep consistency within the document.

Similarly, it is not common to see a percentage sign at the end of a sentence followed by a full stop (e.g. 5%). Usually, the percentage sign is spelt out before a full stop (5 per cent. OR a range of 5%–10 per cent.).

#### Number spans

- Use an unspaced en rule, not a hyphen
- Do not repeat units (e.g. 1.5–2.0 mL, 5–10-year-olds, 5–10 years of age)
- In text, repeat all preceding numerals (e.g. 523–568)
- Do not use an en rule with the words *from* or *between* (e.g. clinics see 30-50 people a day or between 30 and 50 people per day)
- Use all digits for street numbers and reference numbers (e.g. 156–164 Chalmers Street; in several studies.<sup>20–27</sup>)

#### Time

The 12 hour clock with abbreviations am and pm is preferred (e.g. 9 am)

#### Age

Age ranges are hyphenated (e.g. The word 'years' does not need to be repeated if age is unambiguous (e.g. adults older than 60)

'older than X' means past the Xth birthday (e.g. aged older than 20 years = past the 20<sup>th</sup> birthday (not necessarily 21 yet); older than 16 and younger than 60 = from day of 16<sup>th</sup> birthday until day of the 60<sup>th</sup> birthday)

#### Spelling (N)

n (for number in a sample or portion of the total – abbreviation of 'number', or 'numero')

N (abbreviation for total number – abbreviation of 'number', or 'numero')

nationwide

non-attendance

non-English-speaking (adj)



#### Old English

Don't use **amongst** or **whilst** – use **among** and **while**

### Spelling (O)

overreacted

overtake, overtook

## P

### *p* values

Use lower case and italic for *p*

- Always use a 0 before the decimal point in a *p* value:
  - $p < 0.01$                       NOT  $p < .01$
- Separate *p* values from other measures using a comma, unless there is a comma in a related measure within parentheses, then use a semicolon:
  - Recurrence rates were higher in group 1 (4.8% vs 2.7% per year,  $p < 0.001$ ).
  - There was no significant difference in this proportion when results were stratified by sex (48.6% in men, 48.9% in women;  $p = 0.8$ ).

### Parentheses

- Use round parentheses as a general rule
- Use square brackets to indicate author edits to quotes:
  - "An association between higher levels of [PFC] exposure ..."
- Avoid using double parentheses
- When double parentheses are necessary, use square parentheses within round parentheses.

### Past not last

The past decade, NOT the last decade (hopefully there will be more decades to follow). However, commonly used phrases containing last that delete 'the' (last year, last month, last week) are fine.

### Per cent

Use % symbol not per cent spelt out BUT percentage of adults.

### Pharmaceuticals

Use generic, not proprietary, names (e.g. rofecoxib, not Vioxx) unless absolutely necessary, e.g. for a paper about pharmaceutical marketing.

### Postnominals

These are honorifics and initialisms indicating a rank or qualifications that are placed after someone's name e.g. *AM, OBE, FRACGP*.

They do not have full stops and where there is more than one they are separated by commas.

It is not normally necessary to include postnominals that refer to academic qualifications in published material or correspondence.

### Publications

Italicise, sentence case:

*Australian drinking water guidelines*

### Spelling (P)

*p* (*p* value) – cite exact *p* value

per diem)

phage typed

policy maker, policy making

post: if 'post' means 'after', change to 'after'

post-marketing surveillance

postmodernism

postmortem

postpartum

poststructuralism

post-traumatic

PPNG is penicillinase-producing *Neisseria gonorrhoeae* (prefer 'penicillin-resistant gonorrhoea')

pre-exist

preventive (not preventative)

prior to: avoid this use – prefer before

program (all senses)

Professor (not Prof)

## Q

### Quarters

In the October to December quarter/during the October to December quarter' are interchangeable. Don't use 'between October and December' if referring to a specific quarter because this is too vague in terms of referring to the dates used for the quarter.

For publications where specific dates in the month are not an issue, 'Between' is fine.

e.g. 'Between July 2009 and June 2010'

### Quotation marks

When using quotations in running text, apply double quotation marks. A quote within a quote uses single quotation marks.

For longer quotes, pull quote from text and italicise but don't use quote marks. When using quote marks around a single word or small group of words for emphasis, use single quote marks and do not italicise. Using single quote marks in this way should be done sparingly. If you wish to introduce a new concept, e.g. 'staged procedures', using single quote marks is fine in the first instance but the quote marks can be dropped thereafter.

## R

### References

*Public Health Research & Practice* uses the Vancouver referencing system.

Authors are responsible for checking the authenticity and accuracy of references, and for including all references in their own work. Special care should be taken to see that every reference in the text is included in the list of references and vice versa, and that there is consistency in the spelling of authors' names and the citation of dates throughout the paper.

Each citation should be marked in the text with a superscript number. The reference list should be presented in numerical order at the end of the manuscript.

Guidance on Vancouver referencing is published by the US National Institutes of Medicine:

*Citing Medicine* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition  
[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK7256/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK7256/)

Avoid citing personal communication unless it provides essential information not available from a public source. In this case, the name of the person and date of communication should be cited in parentheses in the text. Personal communications should not appear in the reference list. Authors should obtain written permission and confirmation of accuracy from the source of a personal communication.

Specific referencing points are outlined below:

### In-text identifiers

Identifiers should be placed *before* all punctuation marks except for those that end a sentence e.g.

*Hospitalisation rates have increased in recent years<sup>1,2</sup>, although NSW has fewer hospitalisations than Australia as a whole AND*

*Hospitalisation rates have increased in recent years across NSW.<sup>1,2</sup>*

### Titles for periodicals

Titles are not italicised in references (although they are italicised in text). Abbreviate journal titles

according to the National Library of Medicine ([http://www.nlm.nih.gov/tsd/serials/terms\\_cond.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/tsd/serials/terms_cond.html)). Names of journals not listed should be given in full.

### Elements of a citation (in order)

#### For books

- Author
- Title
- If relevant (series title, volume, edition, editor etc.)
- Place of publication
- Publisher
- Year
- Page numbers

#### For journal articles

- Author
- Title
- Abbreviated journal title
- Year
- Volume number
- Issue number
- Page numbers

### Journal articles and other publications

- For all journal articles, the following style is used: Williams FM, Cherkas L, Spector T. A common genetic factor underlies hypertension and other cardiovascular disorders. *BMC Cardiovasc Disord*. 2004;4:20.
- **Always include links to referenced documents if they are available** online, other than journal articles, along with the citation date:

Community Preventive Services Task Force (US). The community guide: increasing appropriate vaccination. Washington: US Department of Health and Human Services; 2014 Jun [cited 2012 Sep 1]. Available from: [www.thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/index.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/index.html)

- Do not use <http://> if the URL includes [www](http://www) as it is not needed.
- Start the URL with [www](http://www) if possible
- No full stops at the end of a URL, even when it ends a sentence
- When a webpage has been disabled or removed but it is still necessary to reference

it, insert (URL no longer active) at the end of the reference:

Davies A. Pregnant women who smoke are easy targets for the morality police. *Sydney Morning Herald*; 2013 Feb 7 [cited 2015 Nov 26]. [www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/pregnant-women-who-smoke-are-easy-targets-for-the-morality-police-20130206-2dyx5.html#ixzz2KN6AyeWZ](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/pregnant-women-who-smoke-are-easy-targets-for-the-morality-police-20130206-2dyx5.html#ixzz2KN6AyeWZ) (URL no longer active).

### Punctuation

The principle elements of the citation are separated by full stops. No spacing between the year, vol, issue no. elements.

e.g. Braverman P, Gruskin S. Poverty, equity, human rights and health. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*. 2003;81(7):539–45.

### Note:

- En rule used between page numbers
- Second page number is not referred to in full.

### Authors

Authors' initials follow their surname with no punctuation between the initials and the surname.

List the first six authors and then use et al. (same for the number of editors).

### Reports, policies, etc (unpublished)

Use single quotation marks and sentence case, except in references (don't use quotation marks):

'Maternity – timing of elective or prelabour caesarean section'

### Spelling (R)

reabsorb  
readjust  
re-erect  
re-establish



# S

## Shortened forms

**Use** full stops with:

Abbreviated words such as i.e., etc. et al. and e.g.  
Latin shortened forms are not italicised (see Italics)

**Do not use** full stops with:

Contractions such as Dr, Mr, Mrs

Initialisms such as NSW, ACT, GP, US

Initials e.g. Mr JT Brown

Acronyms e.g. TAFE, ATSIC

Note: Most shortened forms take a plural by adding s. Do not add 's. E.g. GPs not GP's

## Significant

In numerically based reports, only use if statistically significant

## Spacing

Units of measurement should appear with a space.

45 °C

5 pm, 10 am

3 km

44 BC

9 am

\$1 million

500 kg

## Note:

Also, please note, only **ONE** space, not two, between a full stop and the next sentence.

## Split infinitives

Let your ear be the guide.

Avoiding a split infinitive at all costs can sometimes be at the expense of clarity. It can also make a sentence sound overly formal. On the other hand, many split infinitives dilute the power of the verb.

Consider the following examples:

*We ought to pursue this goal with all our energies*  
*NOT we ought to with all our energies pursue this goal.*  
*The latter, where the infinitive has been split, is a clumsy construction*

*She failed to completely empty the glass sounds more definite and is tighter than she failed to empty the glass completely, even though the former splits the infinitive and the latter does not.*

## States/territories

Use lower case for "states" and "territories" if referring to them in the plural. Capitalise them when referring to a specific state e.g. *The State Government*.

For abbreviating states and territories see A.

## Statistics

- chi-square test;  $\chi^2 = 21.7$
- CI (confidence interval)
- d.f. (degrees of freedom); 4 d.f. not d.f. = 4
- Fisher's exact test
- Student's *t* test
- *N* (for total number in trial/study)
- *n* (for number in sample, portion of the total)
- *p* value (note: must be preceded by zero and decimal point; *p* cannot = 0.000)
- % symbol in column or axis headings (rather than repeating % with each value)
- SD (standard deviation)
- SE (standard error)

## Surgeons

Often take the honorific Ms, Mrs or Mr. But not all surgeons use this convention. Check directly with the surgeon to ascertain preference.

## Spelling (S)

side-effects

since, while: best used to indicate time, not as substitutes for 'because', 'as', 'although' or 'whereas'

socio-economic

stakeholder

state-wide (hyphenate)

stillbirth, stillborn

subsp (subspecies – roman)

subtype

## T

### Tense

Try to keep tense consistent where possible and only change tense in a document when meaning requires. "Shifting tenses is like shifting gears, it should be done smoothly and only when necessary".

Past events are in past tense, but general statements of fact can be expressed in present tense and this can occur within the same sentence.

Example:

*Patients who attend emergency departments can do so for a variety of reasons, including X, Y and Z (general statement of fact that applies to all quarters). During the October to December 2010 quarter, 500,000 patients attended emergency departments in NSW (statement refers to a past period and therefore needs to be in past tense).*

### That/which

Generally:

Use **that** with defining clauses (those that define or limit the subject).

*The bike that is broken is in the shed (of the bikes on the property, the one that is broken is in the shed)*

Use **which** with non-defining clauses (without the clause, the sentence would still make sense).

*The bike, which is broken, is in the shed (only one bike; it's broken and it's in the shed)*

Sometimes, when the meaning of the sentence is not affected, either **that** or **which** is appropriate. However if confused, use the above as a guide. Another good rule of thumb to follow is that **which** is usually preceded by a comma, whereas **that** is not.

**That** is overused and can often be omitted altogether: *'The Premier said she would retire next week'* sounds better than *'The Premier said that she would retire next week'*. Don't omit **that** if this is going to change the meaning of the sentence.

### Titles

#### Also see P for postnominals

Otherwise, 'The Honourable' is usually shortened to The Hon. or the Hon. depending on whether or not it begins a sentence.

Spell out Professor and Associate Professor, A/Professor should be avoided unless you have no other choice.

### Terminology

Use language that does not depersonalise the subject. For example:

- Do not refer to people as 'cases'
- Use 'men and women' not 'males and females', unless referring to animals or children as well as adults
- Use 'elderly people' and 'young people' not 'the elderly', or 'the young'
- People described in a category should first be referred to as people, before the category being discussed is identified (e.g. 'people with a disability' **not** 'disabled people', 'people with diabetes' **not** 'diabetics', 'people with HIV infection' **not** 'people infected with HIV' **or** 'HIV sufferers', 'people with HCV infection' **not** 'people infected with hepatitis C').

For NSW Ministry of Health, use the terms as follows:

- NSW Health = Generic term for NSW Ministry of Health, local health districts, public health units, NSW Ambulance service, The Children's Hospital at Westmead and others
- NSW Ministry of Health = Specifically refers to head office in North Sydney

## Spelling (T)

Targeted

Time frame (two words)

to suicide (avoid; prefer 'to commit suicide')

territory (but Australian Capital Territory)

type 2 diabetes

# U

## Units of measurement, symbols and abbreviations

- Use the *International System of Units (SI)* ([http://www.bipm.org/en/si/si\\_brochure/](http://www.bipm.org/en/si/si_brochure/)) unless there is a particular problem associated with its adoption. If SI units are not used, indicate the relationship between the units given and the official units.
- In text, use full words when referring to measurements in general, and symbols when referring to a specific measurement (e.g. several millilitres, but 2.4 mL *not* 2.4 litres).
- NOTE: centrifuge speeds should be given with temperature, and in g not rpm
- Use µg not mcg
- Write 'approximately': *do not* use the symbol ~
- Include a space between measurement and unit e.g. 56 mm *not* 56mm
- No space should be used within geographic coordinates e.g. 30°15'S, 25°75'E
- Negative exponents are preferred for measurement units e.g. ms
- Do not separate symbols with full points e.g. m kg s A *not* m.kg.s
- A solidus is acceptable for complex expressions e.g. µg/100 mL, 20 mg/day
- 'Per' is acceptable when units are spelt out e.g. several kilometres per hour

- Do not use a double solidus
- Write dosage regimens in full e.g. three times daily (*not* tds); twice a day (*not* bid); before eating (*not* AC)
- Do not use medical note shorthand e.g. date of birth or birth date (*not* DOB); body weight (*not* BW)

## Use NOT utilise

In general, we should use 'use' because utilise is leaning towards jargon. However, there are times when utilise might be more appropriate. For example, it is probably better to say hospitals 'utilise' staff rather than 'use' them – which could have a double meaning. So, while 'use' is preferable, judgement will come into a decision on what word to use.

## UNSW Sydney

Formerly University of NSW

## Spelling (U)

United Kingdom (UK)

United States of America (US)

# V

## Viruses

Virus names are italicised only when used formally (i.e. in the context of taxonomy, e.g. "*Hendra virus*, formerly known as *equine morbillivirus*") but not informally (i.e. when talking about an infection, diagnostic test, e.g. "Hendra virus infection in a pet dog"). The genus, e.g. *Henipavirus* and family, e.g. *Paramyxoviridae* should always be italicised.

## Spelling (V)

vaccine-preventable diseases

vector-borne

## W

### Web addresses

No full stops @ end of sentence; no https

**Wellbeing** – one word

### Who/whom

Use of the pronoun 'who' changes form depending on whether it relates to the subject or the object of a verb or preposition.

**Who** is used when it relates to the **subject**

*e.g. The guests who arrived late missed the best part of the meeting.*

'Guests' are the subject of both the main clause (the guests missed the best part of the meeting) and the subclause (the guests arrived late)

**Whom** is used when it relates to the **object** and is more often used after prepositions.

*e.g. The guests, whom the CEO invited, arrived late and missed the best part of the meeting.*

Guests are the object in this case because the subject of the verb 'invited' in the first clause is the CEO.

### After prepositions:

*e.g. To whom are you speaking?*

Of course it would be more natural to say Who are you speaking to? Grammatically it is correct to say 'Whom are you speaking to?' But no-one speaks or writes like this now and it is acceptable to replace who with whom in cases like this.

*Another e.g. The Sax Institute speakers, all of whom are internationally recognised, will be a highlight of the conference.*

If you are having trouble determining between subject and object, try to remember that whom is

most often used after prepositions and, in many cases, sentences can be rewritten to avoid the old-fashioned sounding 'whom' altogether.

### Spelling (W)

waterborne

website

wellbeing

whole-of-government (adj)

workplace

workshop

World Health Organization (WHO) =  
Organisation Mondiale de la Santé (OMS)

WHO (not 'the WHO')

## X

X-ray

## Z

z value