

Word for Word

Limiting the Use of Abbreviations

When a multiword term is used throughout an article, its expanded form is typically used on the first occurrence, followed by the abbreviated form in parentheses.

Example:

For this condition, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are typically prescribed. Although NSAIDs are effective for . . .

Abbreviations such as *NSAIDs* are very useful in scientific publications, especially when the term is used repeatedly, because they save space and are less distracting than reading the expanded term throughout the article. However, using too many different abbreviations can be



confusing to readers, especially to those whose first language is not English or who are unfamiliar with your specialty or discipline.

One way to limit the use of abbreviations is to use the expanded form of the term unless the term is used multiple times. The actual number of times that the term should appear before it is abbreviated is often determined by the style preferences of the journal publishing the article, but at least five uses per article is a good rule of thumb. Be sure to check the author instructions of your target journal to find the journal's recommendations for the use of abbreviations.

Another way to avoid overuse of abbreviations is to use only standard abbreviations, not abbreviations that you invent yourself. In addition, we

suggest that you avoid abbreviating shorter terms, such as *lung cancer*.

Lastly, abbreviations that may introduce errors or adversely affect patients' health should not be used. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (<http://www.ismp.org>) publishes advice on avoiding certain abbreviations, especially for drug names, that can be confused and endanger patients.

Bibliography

AMA Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors, 10th ed. Abbreviations. <https://www.amamanualofstyle.com/view/10.1093/jama/9780195176339.001.0001/med-9780195176339-chapter-14?rskey=ee0WY3&result=4>. Accessed November 20, 2019.

Institute for Safe Medication Practices. List of Error-Prone Abbreviations. <https://www.ismp.org/recommendations/error-prone-abbreviations-list>. Accessed November 20, 2019.

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