

# Word for Word

## Using terms consistently

Consistent use of terminology avoids confusion and helps readers understand medical and scientific writing. For example, if the first two paragraphs of a research paper are about squamous cell carcinoma of the lung and the term “lung carcinomas” is used in the third paragraph, readers may be unsure whether the new information pertains only to squamous cell carcinoma of the lung or to squamous cell carcinoma plus other lung cancer subtypes (eg, adenocarcinoma, large cell carcinoma).

If a term has a synonym, the author may want to name it when the term is first introduced; however, one term should be used consistently throughout the text.

### Example

Confusing: Thirty percent of the patients in the trial had an adverse effect associated with the drug brianitinib (BT8936). In earlier studies of BT8936, only 8-16% of patients had brianitinib-associated adverse effects.



Better: Thirty percent of the patients in the trial had an adverse effect associated with the drug brianitinib (BT8936). In earlier studies of brianitinib, only 8-16% of patients had an adverse effect associated with this drug.

Furthermore, the terms used in tables and figures should be the same as those used in the text. For example, if the text describes treatment with immune checkpoint inhibitors but a table uses the term “immunotherapy,” readers may be unsure whether the table includes both immune checkpoint inhibitors and other immunotherapy agents.

Many writers struggle with the consistent use of technical terms because they were taught (in classes for nontechnical writing) to use a variety of words to make their writing more interesting. Several techniques can be used to introduce variety into scientific writing, for example, by varying sentence length and order or using different transition words and introductory phrases. But consistent use of scientific terms aids reader understanding and improves the quality of a manuscript.

-- Bryan Tutt

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