

Word for Word

Tendency or trend?

The words *trend* and *tendency* both refer to a general pattern of movement or development in a particular direction. *Trend* and *tendency* can often be used as synonyms, but they have slightly different connotations. These subtle differences can be especially important in biomedical writing, where using precise language is important.

A *trend* is a pattern that is observed to develop over time.¹ *Trend* can also refer to the overall direction of such a pattern despite an irregular or winding course.²



Example: We measured trends in cancer mortality among residents of Texas from 2000 to 2018.

Example: The general downward trend in tobacco use over the past 25 years was less pronounced among teenagers.

Trend (or the related terms *trendy* and *trending*) can also refer to a current fashion or style.¹

Example: The hashtag #endcancer is trending on Twitter.

The noun *tendency* and the related verb *tend* usually imply that the movement is the result of an innate quality, a preference or bias, or even "an impelling force."²

Example: Melanoma has a tendency to metastasize to the brain and lungs.

Example: Patients tend to prefer treatments that have minimal side effects.

In biomedical writing, neither *trend* nor *tendency* should be used to describe a *P* value that falls just above the preset threshold for statistical significance.³⁻⁷

Incorrect: The improved overall survival rate in the patients who received the new drug trended toward significance ($P = 0.06$).

Incorrect: The improved overall survival rate in the patients who received the new drug showed a tendency toward significance ($P = 0.06$).

Correct: The difference in the overall survival rates of the treatment and placebo groups was not statistically significant ($P = 0.06$).

Correct: We were unable to demonstrate a significant difference between the groups ($P = 0.06$).

Correct: Although we saw some evidence of an improved overall survival rate in patients who received the new drug, the difference between the groups did not meet the threshold for statistical significance ($P = 0.06$).

References

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