

Style in Writing

Malcolm A. Fernando

**Board of Study in Community Medicine
Postgraduate Institute of Medicine
University of Colombo
2005**



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Style in Writing
1. Scientific writing

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FOREWORD

“What’s your point?”

When we write, we attempt to communicate a point of view, a story, a description or analysis. How best this can be done in a clear, and readable way depends on the content, organization, vocabulary, expression and style.

Professor Malcolm Fernando has referred to a definition of style by Pearce (1966) “Style may also be defined in more specific terms as custom followed in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, printing arrangements and display- house style”.

This book on “Style in Writing” is the third book in a series by Professor Malcolm Fernando, the first two being “Guideline for the preparation of a Thesis/Dissertation” and “A research instrument: The Questionnaire”.

The book is organized and presented in a lucid, interesting and informative way. The information given will be invaluable to beginners such as postgraduates, their supervisors and even veteran

writers. The simple conventions of writing prose often elude many of us.

The PGIM is grateful to Professor Malcolm Fernando for having authored yet another PGIM publication.

Professor Lalitha Mendis
Director
Postgraduate Institute of Medicine
University of Colombo.

June 2005

Preface and Acknowledgements

In an earlier publication (2002) – “Guidelines for preparation of a theses/dissertation”, ⁽¹⁾ the Order of Elements with relevant discussions under each element were given. In a second booklet (2003) “ A research instrument – The Questionnaire” ², I dealt with the preparation for, and construction of a questionnaire. In this publication I will deal with “Style in writing.”

I confess that I am neither a grammarian nor a good writer. However, I undertook the hazardous and arduous task to help, especially those reading for postgraduate degrees to write their theses, dissertations and case books. It may also serve as a reference book for others.

It has been stated that “English is so rich and complex that vigilance and self discipline are needed for success in writing it correctly” ³

I thank Prof. Colvin Guneratne for making corrections and useful comments.

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Finally, I thank the Board of Study in Community Medicine and Professor Lalitha Mendis, Director, Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, Colombo for its publication.

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1. STYLE

The word 'style' has many meanings. They include an implement used in ancient times for writing on wax covered tablets, manner of writing or doing, manner of behaviour – life style, fashion, dress style, hair style, manner of execution of a work of art, painting style and 'house style' for journals.

There are many definitions of style in writing English prose. The one which is most relevant to this book is by Pearce (1996). "Style may also be defined in more specific terms as custom followed in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, printing arrangements and display – house style" ⁴.

In this publication, I will exclude spelling and printing, but include other aspects of writing well. [see Table of Contents]

NOTE: I have prefixed the examples given with:
S for sentence,
RS for revised or corrected sentence and
C for comments.

2. GUIDELINES FOR STYLE IN WRITING

The most important requirement for style is *clarity*. Say what you have to say clearly, precisely, concisely and unambiguously in an orderly manner. Use the correct punctuation marks to enhance clarity (*see*, Punctuation) .

Word

- Use short and uncomplicated words in preference to complicated long ones.
eg: obfuscation - means bewilderment (also long) or confusion. Use confusion (*see* Appendix)
- Use a right word in the right place and not a right word in a wrong place.
S “Thousands *demand* in Nepal for National Government” (Headlines in a newspaper).
RS “Thousands in Nepal *demand* a National Government”.
- Use adverbs and adjectives to make the meaning more precise. However, use them sparingly to avoid verbosity and pomposity (*see* – verbosity)
- Avoid the use of a participle at the start of a sentence – avoid using “danglers”.
(*see* – participle)
- Avoid using contracted words, such as *don't*, *can't*, *wouldn't*, in scientific writing.
- Avoid vague qualifiers such as *very*, *quite*, *several* etc. (*see* Appendix).

Phrase and Clause

A phrase is a group of words that is used as an adjective, an adverb or a noun and which does not contain a subject and a predicate.

Avoid phrases that are verbose and parts of it redundant.

(see phrases in Appendix)

A clause is a group of words which contain a finite verb and forms part of a compound, complex and compound – complex sentence.

(see - Punctuation – clause under comma).

Sentence

A sentence may be defined as a group of elements such as words, phrases, clauses to express a single thought. It has a subject and a predicate.

There are four types – simple, compound, complex and compound complex (see Punctuation under comma).

- Use simple, compound or complex sentences avoiding the compound-complex as far as possible. If long sentences are used there is the chance of not arranging the words to show their connection and relation, in a grammatical manner.
- Use the active voice in preference to the passive.

S₁ He kicked his sister. (active voice)

S₂ His sister was kicked by him. (passive voice)

- Most sentences require the use of prepositions and indefinite articles (*a* and

an); neither omit them where necessary nor introduce them where they are not required. (see Prepositions and Articles)

- Avoid translation of Sinhala to English (“Singlish”) Think in English and write in English!
- Avoid using a numerical to begin a sentence – it should be spelled out.

S One hundred and fifty men and 250 women were employed.

In general, a number described in one or two words is spelled out while those requiring three or more words are given as numerals, unless it is the first word in the sentence.

eg: One not 1, twenty six not 26 but 150 or 1100.

Paragraph

In as much as a sentence deals with one thought a paragraph is a group of related sentences, dealing with a theme or argument. It is a sub division in writing. Make the paragraph short; if necessary use two or more paragraphs to develop the theme.

Usually, a paragraph is demarcated by indentation of the first word or by leaving a ‘line space’ between one paragraph and the next.

C Avoid one line paragraphs.

Quotation

If borrowed thoughts, writings or speech are quoted, obey rules governing Intellectual and Property Rights (see Quotation marks).

Capitalization

Use capitalization and full capitals where necessary. Do not use capitals indiscriminately or omit them where they are required. (see capitalization).

Italics

Use italics to separate a word, phrase, sentence or even a paragraph from material which is in Roman type – mainly for emphasis. Avoid over-use of italics. (see italics)

Abbreviations

In medical writing, some well known abbreviation may be used – such as ECG, CT, AIDS, but in general spell out the abbreviation in the first instance.

Do not use the ampersand ‘&’ for ‘and’.

Idioms

Idiomatic language does not conform to logical or grammatical language.

eg: Down in the dumps; know the ropes; out on a limb, and throw in the towel.

Avoid idioms in scientific writing.

3. PUNCTUATION

Historically, the Greeks and Romans neither used punctuation nor spacing between words, in their writings. By the 9th century AD the comma was used to indicate a short pause. Later the semicolon, colon and the period (Full Stop) were used, in different shapes and sizes ⁵.

There are several punctuation marks (described below). The question is, when and where to use them in written English prose. A pragmatic way of deciding this, is to read aloud the draft of your presentation, (without punctuation marks) and check for pauses and emphasis to make the sentences clear and unambiguous. There are some definite rules for their use, but some are arbitrarily applied, governed by the judgement and style of the writer.

The shortest pause is for the comma and the longest is for the period (Full stop). The modern tendency is to use “close” punctuation, which means to use them only where they are absolutely necessary for clarity.

3.1 PERIOD OR FULLSTOP (.)

A period or full stop is used to close a declarative or imperative sentence.

S₁ They discussed the problem.

S₂ Go away.

S₃ Wait here.

C The question mark or an exclamation point may also be used to close a sentence.

Vertical list

Use a period after the numeral or letter in a vertical list and not after the item.

S₁ We have to get the following:

- | | | | | |
|----|--------|----|----|--------|
| 1. | Desks | | a. | Desks |
| 2. | Chairs | OR | b. | Chairs |
| 3. | Tables | | c. | Tables |

If however these items are included in a paragraph; use parentheses to enclose the numeral or letter

S₂ We have to get (1) desks (2) chairs and (3) tables for the occasion

If in the vertical list, the items are complete sentences use a semicolon after each item. (*see - Semicolon*)

Parentheses

When an independent sentence is enclosed within parentheses (round brackets), the period is inside the bracket; but when the parenthesis is at the end of a sentence the period is outside the bracket. (*see - Parentheses*)

Headings

Do *not* use a period after chapter heading, sub-headings and column headings of tables. Also periods are usually omitted after legends (titles) for tables and figures.

Abbreviations

The modern tendency is to omit the period from abbreviations which are in capital letters:

SLBC, SLT, USA, BBC etc.

S₁ A large part of the income of the SLBC is from advertisements.

S₂ We visited the USA in December, last year.
(see - abbreviations).

Decimal fractions

eg: 10.5 metres, 12.3 litres.

Dates

27.7.2003 - it could also be 2003.7.27. This is not recommended in scientific writing. Use 27 July 2003.

Time

10.15 am or 10.15 in the morning.

After initials of a person.

S Mr. AML. Perera visited us last week.

C₁ May use a period after an initial or if more than one, after the last.

C₂ In a reference list, if it is a single author use a period after the last initial, but if it is by several authors, they are separated by commas, and a period is used after the name (last initial) of the last author.

eg: David JR, Goldenring J, Lubin BH.
Nutritional Vitamin B 12 deficiency in infants...

Communication

Periods or dots are used for e-mail and web site addresses

eg: E-mail: pr.manager@slt.lk
Website: www.spc.lk

Ellipses

They are a series of periods or dots to indicate omitted material in quotations (see under Quotation marks).

3.2 COMMA (,)

The comma, which is frequently used, denotes a short pause (shortest of all pause marks) in the continuity of thought or sentence structure. There are some rules for its use, however, the views expressed are divergent. A pragmatic rule is to use the comma when a slight pause is indicated, to make the sentence unambiguous and meaningful. Err on the side of using fewer commas than more. It is the commonest punctuation mark used within a sentence.

Clause

Clause is a group of words which contains a finite verb and forms part of a compound or complex sentence.

There are two main types (1) independent (2) dependent .

An *independent* (main, principal) clause is one which can stand by itself and make some sense, but when it is attached to a dependent clause it makes more sense.

A *dependent* clause (subordinate) is dependent on a main clause and on its own does not make sense.

C Clauses are usually introduced by having a conjunction in- between, such as *if, because, before* etc.

Sentence

A sentence is a complete expression of a single thought. Its elements are words, phrases, clauses put together in a grammatical manner. It also contains a subject and a predicate.

There are four kinds of sentences:

- (1) A *simple* sentence has one main clause and no subordinate clauses.

S₁ The child cries most of the time.

S₂ He played cricket.

S₃ The finance company moved to Colombo.

- (2) A *compound* sentence has two or more main clauses and no subordinate clause. They are joined by a conjunction such as *but, why, where, and, for*. A comma is usually placed before the conjunction.

S₁ The finance company was moved to Colombo, and the chairman bought a house nearby.

S₂ I played the piano and my wife sang.

C If the sentence is short (as in S₂) and the clauses are closely related, the comma may be omitted.

- (3) A *complex* sentence has a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses.

S₁ The company was moved to Colombo *where a building was ready*.

C₁ The subordinate clause is in italics

S₂ We wondered, where *he had gone* and why *he had not returned*.

C₂ The subordinate clauses are in italics.

(4) A compound *complex* sentence has two or more main clauses and one or more subordinate clauses.

S The company, *which has been in Kandy*, was moved to Colombo, and the chairman of the company bought a house nearby.

C In the above sentence the subordinate clause is in italics.

Separating clauses

A *relative* clause is a subordinate clause which has the function of an adjective. It is introduced by a relative pronoun such as *who, whom, whose, which* and *that*

There are two principal types: (1) defining (or restrictive) (2) commenting (or non-restrictive)

“Defining relative clauses are not parenthetical, and do not need commas. Their function is to define (ie restrict) nouns or other clauses”⁶. A commenting (describing) clause requires a comma before it.

S₁ Students *in the rear seats* are disturbing the class

S₂ The President, *who is the authority under the constitution*, will not agree with the proposal.

C The clauses are in italics. In S₁ the clause is defining and a comma is not required while in S₂ the clause comments on the president, therefore a comma is necessary

Separating words in a series of three or more items

S₁ She bought vegetables, fruits, eggs and jam.

- C₁ Use commas to separate the items, except after the one but the last item in the series.
- S₂ She bought vegetables, fruits, eggs and jam, but forgot rice.
- S₃ She bought everything but forgot to buy rice.
- C₂ If both clauses in the sentence are short the comma may be omitted.
- S₄ She bought vegetables, fruits, eggs etc.
- C₃ If a series ends with etc, *do not use* ‘and’ before etc, since et-cetera (Latin) means “and the rest”.
- C₄ In S₄ etc is followed by a period.
- S₅ She bought vegetables, fruits, eggs etc, from the super-market.
- C₅ If however, etc is written within a sentence use a comma after etc.

Separating introductory parenthetical words and phrases

Parenthetical words or phrases require a comma to separate these from the rest of the sentence.

eg: *nevertheless, therefore, however, whether, on the other hand, generally speaking*

- S₁ Nevertheless, he continued his journey.
- S₂ On the other hand, he made amends for his mistake.
- C₁ If it is a short sentence the comma may be omitted.
- S₃ However he may be right.
- S₄ The members of the committee, generally speaking, were for the proposal.
- C₂ The phrase ‘generally speaking’ may be enclosed within parentheses, or set off within two dashes (*see parentheses and Dash*).

Separate a quotation

He stated, "The universe revolves round the sun".

Subordinate clause preceding the main clause.

S *Although we thought about it*, we made the wrong decision.

C Subordinate clause is given in italics.

Separate words in direct address

S₁ Ladies, what can I get you to drink?

S₂ Mary, go and milk the cow.

S₃ Sir, please grant me a day's leave.

After interjection

S₁ Well, after much thought, I decided to sit the examination.

S₂ This, indeed, was what I wanted.

Exclamatory sentence

S₁ Oh, what a dreadful accident!

S₂ Oh, how clever!

S₃ O mighty Lord!

C A comma is not used after vocative O as in S₃.

Separating antithetical phrases

Antithesis means contrast of ideas marked by parallelism of contracted words. A comma is required between them.

S Marry in haste, repent at leisure.

Wrong use of comma

S Students, *who do not follow the rules*, will be punished.

C The clause (in italics) is a defining relative clause, - omit both commas.

Other uses of the comma

1. A comma may be used after such expressions as that is, *i.e namely viz,* and for example *e.g,* If the break or pause is more than for a comma, then a semicolon or dash may be used.

2. Title, address
 - (a) The Hon. R. Premadasa, former president was assassinated on 1 May 1993
 - (b) State Pharmaceuticals Corporation
75, Baron Jayatillake Mawatha,
Colombo 01

3. Dates
Write as follows: (1) Tuesday, 22 July 2003 or
(2) 22 July 2003
Do not use 22/7/2003 in formal writing

4. Digits
If the numeral has five or more digits use a space instead of a comma to comply with the SI convention.
eg: 35 500, 335 500
C Note the use of the space
Note: Ditto marks (") should not be used in formal scientific writing.

3.3 APOSTROPHE (')

The apostrophe (a comma placed above) is usually used to indicate the possessive case of a noun or a pronoun.

S₁ John's house is on the hill.

S₂ The team's captain retired.

If a noun ends with s, x or z the apostrophe only is used but it may be followed by's. This is controversial.

eg James' car
Robert Knox' book
Fernandez' play

C In words of one syllable the final "s" may be added as in James 's' car, but in names of three or more syllables as in 'Fernandez's' the final 's' is omitted.

Contracted words

The apostrophe is used to indicate a missing letter in the contracted word. It is placed where the letter or letters are omitted.

eg Don't, wouldn't, can't, it's.

C: Contracted words should preferably not be used in scientific writing although it is permitted in spoken English and often used by the media and some writers of books and essays.

Missing numbers

It may be used in place of missing century number.

eg: In the '80 s and '90 s

It is *not* used at the end of decades

eg: 1980s, 1990s

Apostrophe omitted

The apostrophe is omitted to replace letters in shortened words, since they are in common use.

eg: 'tel' or 'phone' for telephone

'flu' for influenza

Pronouns

Some pronouns that do not have a possessive case such as:

him, his, her, your, do not require an apostrophe

Some require an apostrophe, such as *anybody, somebody, one*

S₁ Anybody's vehicle may be used.

S₂ He was discussing somebody's misdeeds

S₃ One's eyebrows are removed.

Wrong non-use

Omission of the apostrophe which is required

eg: childrens shoes

Womens lingerie

C Use an apostrophe before 's' eg: children's and women's

Wrong use

The apostrophe used where it is not necessary

eg: Beware of the dog's

C Omit the apostrophe.

Plurals and possessives

Brother-in-law - plural is brothers-in-law

Possessive is brother-in-law's

3.4 SEMICOLON (;)

The semicolon is a pause mark which is longer than for a comma, but shorter than for the colon or period.

Separate clauses

The semicolon is used to separate clauses of a compound sentence, where a conjunction has *not* been used between them.

S₁ Let us eat, drink and be merry; tomorrow we will die.

S₂ The boys are tired; they are also hungry.

S₃ John was a good friend; he is no more.

C A dash could also be used in place of the semicolon.

Before some conjunctions

Some conjunctions are considered as adverbs, they should be preceded by a semicolon.

eg: *then, however, hence, therefore*

S John is flying to the UK tomorrow; however, he has not booked hotel accommodation.

Listing

A vertical list of items, in the form of sentences require a semicolon after each item and the last item is followed by a period.

(see the quotation from “Population Reports” given later, under multiple punctuation)

Before some expressions

A semicolon is used before some expressions if the break in continuity is to be more than for a comma.

That is (ie) for example (eg) namely (viz)

S Come to watch the cricket match; that is if you are not busy.

References

In listing references, the semicolon is used after the year of publication and before the volume number.

.... 1999; **45** : 15-21

3.5 COLON (:)

The colon is a punctuation mark which is more definitive than a semicolon. It is most used between two elements to emphasize, clarify or amplify what has gone before.

To separate elements

- S₁ I am not a beggar: it is the first time I have asked for help.
- S₂ The price of fuel is high: it has doubled in the last three months.
- C The colon is often used in the print media for emphasis.

To introduce a list; vertical or in a sentence

- S₁ The laboratory tests ordered were as follows:
1. Fasting blood sugar
 2. Lipid profile
 3. ESR
- S₂ The campers' needs are: tent, tools, stove, cooking utensils, firewood and personal items.
- S₃ I asked my wife to bring two apples, a bunch of grapes (200 gm) and a grape fruit.
- C S₃ runs smoothly, therefore omit the colon after 'bring'

To separate/sharpen antitheses

- S₁ A consultant should examine the patient: a senior registrar may also do so in the absence of the consultant.
- S₂ “All told, the colon is nowhere near death; it is alive and kicking”⁷.

To introduce a long quotation

Witness: Sir, I was not at the scene of the crime on that day, I was at ...”

Title of a book

A research instrument: The Questionnaire

Footnotes

If a table, figure or diagram of another author is reproduced in your document, a footnote should be made

SOURCE: give the reference here

- C The word source may be in small capitals followed by a colon

Time and ratios

- S₁ The flight was at 13:30 hours
- S₂ The bonus given was 1:5 (one share for every five held)

Reference list

To separate volume from page number in a journal article

Eg: 2000; **45**: 154

3.6 HYPHEN (-)

The hyphen is a short horizontal line (shorter than the dash) used for clarification and to join two

words to form a compound word. It is also used to indicate that part of the word is to be continued in the next line (end of line break).

For clarification

S₁ I had to re-mark (re-assess) the answer scripts and to give remarks (if necessary) in the appropriate column in the marks sheet.

S₂ The candidate asked for a re-count of votes polled. I can recount this incident that occurred.

C The same words are used in S₁ and S₂; one with a hyphen for clarification and the other without.

For emphasis

S The decision made was ill-timed, ill-chosen and ill-considered.

Prefix to proper noun

S Britain was pro-American in the war with Iraq.

Dates, telephone numbers, abbreviations

Dates: pre-1914, Post -1946

Tel: 011-2933308

Abb: pro-SLBC, anti-WHO

First element in a compound word ending with i and the second beginning with i

eg: Anti-inflammatory, anti-immunizations

After ex

eg ex-wife, ex-Prime Minister

'Self' is prefixed

- S₁ He was in self-imposed exile for many years.
S₂ They got a self-administered behavioural training using a self-help booklet.

Double hyphen

- eg Father-in-law, Attorney-at-law, Do-it-yourself kit
The plural is fathers-in-law and *not* father-in-laws. *but*
Father-in-law's house.

Second element ending with ed

- S₁ He is my gray-haired daddy.
S₂ Susie is a long-legged athlete.

Fractions

- S He ate one-third of the cake.

Numerical phrases

- S₁ He was given a four-year contract.
S₂ He was given a ten-year grace period to settle his debt.

Compound numerals

Compound numerals from 21 to 99 if written in full require a hyphen but not if they are – one hundred or two thousand.

- S₁ He used thirty-five litres of fuel.
S₂ He travelled two hundred kilometres to reach his destination.

Notes: The modern tendency is to omit the hyphen for most compound words.

eg. antenatal, prenatal, antibiotic, antibody, antiserum antisocial. *Err* on omitting the hyphen rather than using it incorrectly. However, if it is to emphasise a compound word, the hyphen may be used.

S₁ He is a pre-eminent scientist.

C Sometimes the hyphen is used to avoid ambiguity.

S₂ He is a well-known writer.

If an end-of-a-line word cannot be completed, place a hyphen and complete the word in the next line. It is best that this be a syllabic one.

eg: pos-sible *not* possib-le
sepa-rate *not* sep-arate

Neither use the first letter of the word at end of line, nor continue with the last letter of the word in the next line.

However, this may not be possible due to computerized type setting.

3.7 DASH (–)

There are different kinds of dashes depending on its length (*en*, *em*, *em2*, *em3*). The commonly used is the “em-dash”, which is a horizontal line similar to the hyphen, but it is twice its length. A dash or a pair of them denotes a break in thought causing a change in structure of the sentence, often for emphasis. It may also be used in place of a colon or a parentheses.

A single word

S He left the country forever.

C The pause is longer than for a comma

A phrase

S I have an extra ticket for the show — you may not want it.

Omission of a part of the word

S₁ He is a b ___ fool

C The word is 'bloody'. It may be slang but a familiar one.

S₂ The two of them are b ___ pals.

C The word is "bosom" but not understood, hence, do not use the dash to denote the missing part.

A pair of dashes (double dash)

S₁ I ran fast — as fast as I could — but lost the race.

S₂ The President — had been awake all night in vain, for the reply from the Prime Minister — came early for breakfast.

Sudden change of subject

S₁ I am cooking — who is at the door?

S₂ You can come with me to the party — better not, the host dislikes you.

To summarize what has been stated

S. Violence, corruption, poverty — these are the problems in our country.

Before viz ie. eg

C If the break in continuity is more than the comma, use the dash.

S We identified the errors — viz grammar and spelling.

Dates and Space

- S₁ The field survey was conducted May 1 — 14, 2003
- C It may also be stated as:
The survey was conducted from May 1 to 14, 2003
- S₂ The Colombo — Matara train left the Fort railway station, one hour late.

Grouping in a table

An en dash is used between two numerals constituting a group, both numerals being inclusive.

Age in years = 0-4, 5-9, 10-14,

Height in cm = 50-54, 55-59, 60-64

- C an *en* dash is longer than a hyphen but shorter than an *em* dash
- hyphen, – *en* dash, — *em* dash (twice the length of a hyphen)
It is difficult to type an *en* dash, therefore, the *em* dash may be used (or use the *insert special* feature in your word processor).

• Multiple punctuation

I quote below a paragraph describing the findings of a large study published in “Population Reports” where a comma, apostrophe, colon, hyphen, semicolon and a period have been made.

“A 2000 study by the Latin American Centre for Perinatology and Human Development reinforces the DHS findings about children using data for over 450,000 women. It also provides some of the best evidence yet that spacing births further apart improves mother’s health. Among the findings: Compared with women who give birth at 9 to14-

month intervals, women who have their babies at 27 to 32-month intervals are;

- 1.3 times more likely to avoid anaemia;
- 1.7 times more likely to avoid third trimester bleeding; and
- 2.5 times more likely to survive child birth”⁸.

C I leave it to the readers to make their own comments.

3.8 OBLIQUE/SLASH/SOLIDUS/VIRGULE

The oblique is a diagonal line. It has many uses.

Separate calendar year

S The budget for 2002/2003 shows a large deficit

Separate alternatives

Dear Sir/Madam

Mr/Mrs/Rev/Dr

Use as *per*

S₁ He drove the care at a speed of 120 km/h

S₂ The haemoglobin concentration was 9.0g/dl

Not used as *per*

“When used to mean *per* the virgule should not be used if a prepositional phrase comes between the two elements ⁽⁵³⁾, when neither element contains a specific numeral quantity⁽⁵⁴⁾ or in non-technical expressions ⁽⁵⁵⁾.

53. The solution contained 51 m.mol/l of sodium.
(Reword as: ... a sodium concentration of 51m.mol/l)

54. The flow rate was given in mililitre/minute
(Reword as ... given in mililitre per minute)

55. The vacation leave allowed is 10 days/year
(Reword as ... is 10 days per year)

Or better still as: annual vacation leave allowed is 10 days).”⁹

Abbreviations and house numbers

Mr. R. Cook
C/0 J.A.Fernando
38/6 Havelock Road
Colombo 5

Formulae

A formula may be written separating the numerator from the denominator, in the same line (to save space) by using the oblique.

OR = ad/bc

Avoid

Avoid he/she, true/false, right/wrong. is/are
Construct the sentence to avoid using the oblique
eg: Indicate whether the statements are true or false.

3.9 QUESTION MARK (?)

The question mark, (also referred to as a ‘query’ or an interrogation point) is placed at the end of a question or an interrogative sentence, in place of the period (full stop).

It is used either in a question where an answer is expected, as in a questionnaire or in an interrogative sentence where an answer is not expected.

Answer expected

S₁ What was your age at the last birthday?

S₂ How many questionnaire forms have you completed?

Answer not expected

S₁ What is this country coming to?

S₂ She does not like him, does she?

C S₂ is referred to as a ‘question tag’ It contains an interrogative phrase. “does she”, but the question is not meant to be answered.

Directly interrogative within a sentence

“A question mark should be used at the end of a directly interrogative element which is part of a sentence ” ¹⁰

S He asked himself how can I pay these bills?
Holding a pile of unpaid bills.

Non-interrogative

Do not use a question mark when the question is not interrogatory.

S He thought intently before making a decision, he asked himself whether it is risky.

Indirect question

A question mark is not required

S The supervisor asked him, whether he could come to her house for further discussions.

3.10 EXCLAMATION MARK (!)

An exclamation mark may follow a word, phrase or sentence expressing surprise, enthusiasm or strong emotion.

A word or phrase

Oh!

Help!

What a disaster!

Let me go!

A sentence

S₁ Is she not a beauty!

S₂ He built a large house. We thought he was bankrupt!

C The exclamation mark replaces the period.

Use the exclamation mark sparingly.

4.11 QUOTATION MARKS (‘ ’) (“ ”)

Quotation marks are also referred to as ‘inverted commas’ or ‘quotes’. There are two types – double (“ ”) and single (‘ ’). They may be used to enclose words, direct speech, written matter obtained from other sources, titles of books, newspapers, magazines, plays, films and works of art.

The rule governing an enclosure within quotation marks is that it should be verbatim. The rule is the same for direct speech. The exact words used should be reproduced. If written material is quoted this should be meticulously reproduced: capitalization, punctuation marks etc., should be as in the original (although some may be inappropriate). It is however possible for the writer to interpolate.

Direct speech

Words and phrases

Words such as *yes, no, why, when, there* used in direct speech are enclosed within double quotation marks

- S₁ “Why” she asked.
- S₂ She asked herself, “why?”
- C The comma after herself in S₂ is not required.
- S₃ “Correct” and “just” are not synonymous.
- S₄ I suggest that you state “not applicable” in the space provided.

Sentences

- S₁ “Do not write in this way” the supervisor said “write in the way I told you earlier.”
- S₂ “What are you doing?” asked James. “Get away for goodness sake!” shouted Jill.
- C₁ If it is a question or an exclamation, use the relevant punctuation mark before the closing quotation mark.
- S₃ “I know that it is wrong” he said “but will continue”.
- S₄ She said “I came back to my country and I am not going back, He dislikes our neighbours.”
- C₂ In S₃ the second part does not begin with a capital, but in S₄ it is a complete sentence, therefore use capital H for *he*.
- C₃ If a quotation is placed within one which is in double quotes, then this is given in single quotes and *vice versa*.
- S₅ “I do not know what his problem was” his friend said “All he said was ‘I am ill’ and turned away.”

Indirect speech

If what was said is paraphrased and not the exact statement, then it may not be enclosed within quotation marks.

- S₁ Dr. Smith has indicated that it may not be possible to give the exact time of death.
- S₂ Dr. Atukorale is of the view that the incidence of coronary heart disease is less among vegetarians than among meat eaters.

Books, newspapers, films, plays etc.

- S₁ Have you read the book “Wuthering Heights”?
- S₂ Charith asked Mary “Have you seen the film ‘Catch me if you can’ Mary replied, “Yes, however, I would have preferred to have stayed at home and read the “Sunday Times”⁷.
- C Note the three quotation marks at the end of S₂.

Irony

A word used more in irony may be enclosed within quotation marks.

- S The “debate” in parliament ended as usual with a “free-for-all”

A letter

If an entire letter written by one to another is reproduced, use open quotes before the salutation (Dear Sir) and close quotes after the signature.

Interpolation

1. If in the quotation, a word is wrongly used or the spelling is wrong, the writer may indicate them by placing the Latin word *sic* in italics and within a square bracket, at the appropriate place. The word *sic*, means *so, this, in this manner*.
2. If you wish to add an explanatory word or phrase to clarify the meaning of the quotation, you may do so at a suitable point in italics. This should be followed by (italics mine).
3. I give below a statement said to have been made by Prime Minister Tony Blair, reported by Francis Elliott and Collin Brown in *The Telegraph*, reproduced by *The Island* of Monday 29 September 2000 p.13.

He said “The wrong thing we could do at the moment is back off and back away [on domestic issues] ...”

C The explanatory phrase is enclosed within a square bracket at the appropriate place but is not in italic type.

Ellipses

If a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph of a quotation is omitted, this is indicated by ellipsis points or dots (also called suspension points) placed in the same line, similar to periods.

This omission is indicated by three spaced dots placed at the beginning, within or after the quotation. If the dots are placed after a completed sentence the period is placed as usual, followed by three spaced dots. If the sentence ends with a question or exclamation mark (which takes the place of the period) these are followed by three dots.

“...whether his criticism is right or wrong, shall I give in? ... [and] shall I be ridiculed for the rest of my life! ... I would rather be dead.”

3.12. PARENTHESES

Brackets were formerly described as simple (round brackets) square [], and double { } brackets. A pair of round brackets were said to enclose information referred to as “parenthetical” and the pair was called parentheses.

The comma, dash and parentheses are closely related and may be interchanged. If such parenthetical elements have a close, logical relationship to the sentence, a comma should be used, if however, the elements are remotely related, then a dash or parentheses should be used.

Parentheses may enclose a word, phrase or a sentence. Those enclosed are explanatory or supplementary in nature and their removal may not affect the main purpose of the sentence.

A word

Generally it is an alternative or explanatory of the preceding word or sentence.

S He did not have the gumption (nerve) to challenge Joe’s statement.

A phrase, clause, or sentence

- S₁ We had brunch (no breakfast, but early lunch) on the day following the day-night cricket match.
- S₂ I would like (as who would not) to be rich.
- S₃ He was determined (we do not know why) to solve the problem by himself.
- S₄ He insisted that I rewrite the paragraph (I had met this situation before.) which was not grammatical.
- C₁ If the sentence within parentheses is a complete one the period is placed within (as in S₄)
- S₅ We agreed to visit him at his home (we had no idea where he lived).
- C₂ In (S₅) where the parentheses end the sentence the period is outside the parentheses, since the sentence is incomplete.

Abbreviations

An abbreviation given after the full term is within parentheses.

Medical Officer of Health (MOH)

C Subsequently the abbreviation may be used without the parentheses.

References in text

(a) Harvard system

S₁ It was shown (Fernando, 1989) that . . .

S₂ Fernando (1989) has shown that . . .

(b) Vancouver system

A superscript is used (which is the number given in the reference list) If this is not possible the number (small size) is given within parenthesis (12) in the same line.

Numerals

S₁ The difference in the mean height between males and females was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

S₂ Of the 156 (80 males) the prevalence of hookworm infestation was higher for males than for females.

Tables and Figures

In the text after the findings are given, indicate the relevant table or figure number in parentheses.

Eg. (Table 5) or (Fig. 8)

Dates, Periods

S₁ Fernando (1994) stated that “. . .”

S₂ Robert Louis Stevenson (1854-90) wrote *Treasure Island*.

S₃ Sir Alexander Fleming (1881-1995) discovered penicillin.

S₄ William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is a well-known English writer.

Square bracket []

It is used for interpolation in a quotation

S₁ John proposing the toast said “James is three score and ten [70] today, *ad multos annos* [for many more years]”

[] within a ()

The square bracket may be used as a parentheses within a parentheses

S (Christopher Marlowe [1564-93] was a contemporary of Shakespeare).

4. CAPITALIZATION

By capitalization is meant that the first letter of a word is in capitals; when all the letters of a word are in capitals, it is referred to as “full capitals”

Sentence

The first word of a complete sentence begins with a capital letter

S₁ I went home.

S₂ We watched the cricket match.

Name of person

The first name, initials and surnames are capitalized (initial letter is a capital)

William M. Fernando or W.M. Fernando

Place name, name of continent, country, province, and state

Cities and other topographical names are capitalized.

Continents: Africa, America, Asia

Countries : Sri Lanka, England, Australia

Provinces: Northern, Eastern, Central

Districts: Colombo, Gampaha, Hambantota

States: Massachusetta, California, Maharashtra

Cities: Colombo, New York, London, Mumbai

Other: Names of rivers, mountains, deserts, oceans, lakes, canals etc.

Ethnic Group

The names of ethnic and tribal groups are capitalized. Sinhalese, Tamil, Moor, Burgher, Arab, Maori.

Religion

Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Shintoism

Revered person

Buddha, God, Christ, Prophet Mohammed, Saint Joseph etc.

Religious writings and sacred works

Bible (but biblical) Bhagvad Gita, Quran (Koran), Tripitaka

Religious event

Poson Poya, Wesak, Christmas, Easter Sunday, Milad-Un-Nabi (Holy Prophet's Birthday), Thai Pongal

National and International events

National Heroes Day, Sinhala and Tamil New Year, New Years Day, Independence Day, National Day.

Professional

Professional, civil, military and religious titles are capitalized, when they immediately precede a personal name as part of the name.

Professor Dulitha Fernando

Professor Emeritus Kingsley de Silva

C Not capitalized if the statement is:-

The professor emeritus stated that . . .

Civil

Prince Charles

President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunge

C But:- the president of Sri Lanka stated . . .

General Ratwatte

Colonel Nugawela

C If full name is used, the titles may be abbreviated

Gen. Anuruddha Ratwatte

Col. Alan Nugawela

Religious Leaders

Pope John Paul II.

Bishop Rt. Rev. Vianney Fernando

But:- The pope blessed the congregation

Honorific Titles

Her Majesty, Excellency, Your Honour

His Eminence

Book, journal, newspaper and thesis

Titles of books, journals, newspapers, theses and dissertations take various forms depending on the house style of the editor/s, publisher and that of the writer.

Books

In general, the first word and other important words of the title are capitalized excluding prepositions such as *at, in, on, with reference to, in accordance with, articles a, an, the,* and coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, or,* are in lower case, unless they are the first words of the title. The tendency is to use full capitals where the title is short.

Only the first word

“The human face”

First word and others

(1) Paediatric Priorities in the Developing World

- (2) The Chicago Manual of Style
- (3) On Wings of Eagles
- (4) Epidemiologic Methods

Full capitals

Some titles are in full capitals

- (1) WAR AND PEACE
- (2) THE DOCTOR'S DILEMMA
- (3) A TEXT BOOK OF THE PRACTICE OF MEDICINE

In Italics

e.g. *Guide to Dental Health*

Within quotation marks

“Desert for the summer”
or ‘Desert for the summer’

Journals

Journal titles may be given in full or an abbreviated form. If it is the latter, they should conform to those given in the ‘Index Medicus’

The house style in Sri Lanka is to give the complete title of the journal. The important words are capitalized.

e.g. Ceylon Medical Journal *not* CMJ

British Medical Journal *not* Brit.Med.J or
BMJ

Newspapers and associated magazines

The names of newspapers and associated magazines and the sections therein take different styles. They may be in full capitals, or capitalized.

Thesis/Dissertation

The house style or accepted style for theses and dissertations submitted to the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, Colombo, Sri Lanka is prescribed¹. The title of a thesis is in general of some length since it should be comprehensive, self explanatory and clear. A shortened title is given on the spine of a bound thesis. Hence they are capitalized and not in full capitals.

The word 'chapter' may be given in full capitals (small) and chapter heading and important sub headings may be in full capitals.

Eg: INTRODUCTION, METHODS, DISCUSSION etc.

Acronym

Full capitals are used for some acronyms. [see – acronyms under abbreviation]

Headlines, headings

The editors/sub-editors of newspapers and their associated magazines (mid week, Week end) have flexibility in presentation. This is permitted because eye catching headlines and headings attract readers, and are also space saving techniques which permit more news to be given.

- eg:
- (1) "Terrified postal officer hides from MP in toilet" (Ref: THE SUNDAY TIMES, August 31, 2003)
 - (2) "Lack of direct airlink with China blow to tourism" (Ref: Sunday Observer August 31, 2003)
 - (3) "Historical Pitakotte Ambalama in danger" (Ref: 'The Island, Saturday 6 September 2003')

C The language and incomplete sentence used are sometimes referred to a 'headlines'

Name of institution, university, organization, association, department

These are capitalized but the prepositions and articles are in lower case.

eg: Postgraduate Institute of Medicine

University of Peradeniya

World Health Organization

Automobile Association

Department of Community Medicine [see Abbreviations]

Disease, syndrome, diagnostic procedure, anatomical part

In general, those well known are lower cased except the diseases and syndromes that contain a name of a person as part of its name begins with a capital letter.

eg: brucellosis, influenza, rabies, viral hepatitis

- Parkinson's disease, Hodgkin's disease, Meniere's syndrome, Alzheimer's disease
- finger-nose test, Mantoux test
- femur, tibia, liver, heart

Organisms

Streptococcus viridans but streptococcal infection

Trichinella spiralis but infection with trichinae

Necator americanus but hookworm infestation

Ascaris lumbricoides but roundworm infestation

Pharmaceuticals

In medical writing, the generic name should be used; these are in lowercase, however, if the

proprietary (trade or brand) name is also given after the generic name in the first instance, should be capitalized and enclosed within parentheses.

Generic name	Proprietary
1. aspirin	Disprin(Soluable) Astric (enteric coated)
2. atorvastatin	Atocor
3. diazepam	Vallium
4. mebendazole	Deworm
5. paracetamol	Paracetol, Panadol

S He took one tablet of diazepam at bed time

Year, month and day

The word year, month of the year and day of the week are capitalized

Year 2003

January, February . . . December

Monday, Tuesday . . . Sunday

Table and illustration

The title or legend for a table or an illustration is capitalized.

eg: The Prevalence of *Ascaris lumbricoides* among children 1- 15 years in the Hindagala Project, by age and sex

C The place, country where the research was conducted is capitalized. The word table (followed by the number in Arabic numerals) is above or at the left margin of the title. It is usually capitalized, but may be in full capitals. The presentation should be consistent throughout the document

The first vertical column referred to as the *stub* and other columns should have suitable headings which are capitalized. It is permitted to use abbreviations for “cell headings” but should be placed under the heading within parentheses.

eg: height(cm), weight(kg)

If the vertical columns are numbered, they should be in Arabic numerals within parentheses. If in vertical columns the total or average (mean) is used, these should be capitalized, and placed two spaces to the right of the last item.

5. ITALICS

Italic type is where the letters are sloped or slanted to the left. It is used for many purposes. It's main use is to differentiate a word, phrase, sentence or paragraph from the main text which is in Roman type.

Emphasis

A word or phrase may be italicized for emphasis in the first instance and thereafter it may be in Roman type.

S₁ We expect students to participate *actively* in the discussions.

S₂ Is he *still* ill?

Titles of books, newspapers, films, works of art

S₁ Have you read *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoi?

S₂ He told *The Island* that he was not guilty of the crime.

S₃ Have you seen the film *Titanic*?

S₄ Have you seen the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre in Paris?

C It is permitted to replace the italics with Roman letters and be enclosed within quotation marks.

Names of ships and trains

Italics may be used for names of ships and trains

S₁ We travelled from New York to London on *The Queen Elizabeth II*.

S₂ The *Ruhunu Kumari* is late today.

C In S₂ the name of the train is in Sinhalese and adapted to English prose

Cross reference

Italic type is used for cross references.

eg:(*see* or *see also* under Quotation Marks)

Photographs and illustrations

Italics may be used to describe direction in legends for photographs, illustrations etc.

eg: Seated *left to right* (give names)

or *Top, bottom, above, below*

Key to symbols

The key to symbols used in a figure or other illustration, to describe what they stand for; is given in italics.

Genus and species

The genus and species names (especially in Latin) of plants, animals, insects and organisms are italicised. The genus is capitalized and the species is lowercased.

eg: *Hibiscus rosa sinensis*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Anopheles eulicifacies*, *Plasmodium vivax*, *P. falciparum*.

In a foreign language

A word or phrase in a foreign language (not English) which has been adopted in the English language is usually italicized. A passage of two or more sentences in a foreign language is usually *not* italicised, but set in Roman type. Some examples in French and Latin are listed:

French

1. *Bete noir* - (Fr = black beast): it is a problem
2. *fait accompli* : a thing done and past arguing against
3. *Petite*:- usually refers to a small daintily built woman.
4. *Vis-a-vis*:- either of two persons or things facing or situated opposite each other
5. *Volte face*: complete change of front in an argument or opinion.

Latin

6. *ad hoc*: arranged for the purpose; special(ly).
7. *Ad infinitum*: without limit, for ever
8. *De facto*: by right or not, in fact
9. *inter alia*:- among other things (may be in Roman)
10. *in vivo*: in a living organism
11. *in vitro*: in an artificial container
12. *ipso facto*: by that very fact
13. *non sequitur*: (L = it does not follow) illogical inference; paradoxical result
14. *pari passu*: simultaneously and equally
15. *prima facie*: at first sight; (based) on first information
16. *quid pro quo* (L= something for nothing) compensation; return made; consideration
17. *sine qua non* (L= without which is not) indispensable condition or qualification
18. *status quo*: unchanged position, previous position
19. *vice versa*: with reverse relation
20. *vita*: life

- C It is said that 'familiar' words, and phrases in a foreign language are in Roman type.
eg et al, idem, ibid, fait accompli, vis-à-vis:
The question is 'familiar' to the writer or reader? If in doubt check an English dictionary.

Tables and figures (Ref 1)

Legends for tables, usually placed above the table are in Roman type; while those placed below the figure, may be in italics.

Journal names

The names of journals (which should be given in full) in the reference list, may be given in italics.

eg: *Ceylon Medical Journal*
Lancet

- C Whichever system is used, the same should be used throughout the document.

6. VERBOSITY

Verbosity is the use of more words specially adverbs and adjectives than are necessary to convey the meaning.

S On examination of Table 2 it will be seen that the prevalence of endemic goitre is higher among females than males.

RS The prevalence of endemic goitre was higher among females than males (Table 2)

I give below, a statement from a local newspaper.

“From several years back, interested, affected, frustrated, jealous and disgusted persons have been misusing the media and abusing their positions, desperately to stymie and stultify my efforts and achievements endeavouring.”

C This passage is verbose and ‘smacks’ of pomposity. However, this is an outburst of an angry person. (*see also* phrases in appendix).

7. FOOTNOTES

Footnotes to tables or illustrations may be source notes and notes on specific parts of a table or illustration.

Source notes

A table or illustration which is borrowed from the work of another author should be acknowledged below the table or illustration, stating that it is reproduced with the consent or courtesy of the author or publisher.

eg: Source: Author (given in the natural order with the first name or initials followed by the surname) title of table or the work (which may be given in italics) followed by publication factors.

C The word 'source' may be capitalized, in full capitals (small) or in italics.

Specific notes

In addition to the source note, specific notes (if any) may be given below the source note. The specific part should be indicated by placing simple letters of the alphabet such as *a*, *b*, *c* at the required spot and the note to be headed with the relevant notation. However, if this may cause confusion, accepted symbols in the given order may be used, such as:

* (asterisk or star) ↓ (dagger) ↓ ↓ (double dagger)

§ (section mark) // (parallel) # (number sign)

Probability notes

If a table contains numerals for which probability is required, this may be given in the last vertical

column. However, they may also be marked by an asterisk (1,2 or 3) and a note given below the table, such as :

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Cross references

These are used to refer the reader to other parts of the same document.

eg: [*see* – state relevant section or give the page number]

Comments

1. If a statement in the body of the text, needs a clarification or explanation, place a ‘footnote mark’ and give it as a note at the bottom of the page using the same footnote mark.
2. If a statement or finding of another person (obtained verbally) is to be given in the text, this may be done, however, at the end of such a statement indicate this by (personal communication). Place a foot note at the bottom of the page giving the name of such person and how obtained (telephone, letter or face to face) and the date. The accepted style is not to place it in the reference list.
3. If something is given in the text taken from an unpublished work but which has been accepted for publication, state (in press) after such a statement. This reference may be given in the reference list.

C If a note is required the word “Note” is capitalized or given in small capitals, followed by a colon.

8. ABBREVIATIONS

An abbreviation is a shortened incomplete form (contraction) of a word used mainly as a space saving technique encouraged by journal editors. The modern tendency is to omit full stops (periods) after the abbreviation. However, this may cause some confusion, at times.

Full stop omitted

Those involving capital letters as abbreviations such as: BBC, SLBC, USA, SLMA

If the first and last letters of a word are used as an abbreviation, a comma may be used after it.

eg: Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Rd, St,

If more than one person is addressed an oblique is used in between.

eg: Mr/Mrs/Messers

Full stop used

If the abbreviation contains the first few letters of a word, the full stop is used

eg Prof. (Professor) Rev. (Reverend) Ven. (Venerable)

Hon. (Honourable) Sec. (Secretary) Min. (Minister)

C These titles are spelled out if they are preceded by “the”

eg: the Right Reverend Vierney Fernando
The Honourable Ranil Wickramasinghe

Institution, organization, association

1. Postgraduate Institute of Medicine - PGIM

C The word ‘of’ is omitted

2. Memorandum of Understanding – MoU
- C In place of the word ‘of’ a simple ‘o’ is used.
3. World Health Organization – WHO
4. United Nations Organization – UNO
5. Automobile Association – AA

C The abbreviations used may be known by some and not by others. Therefore, give the full name at the first mention along with the abbreviation within parentheses. Such abbreviations are usually in full capitals without a full stop after it. If used subsequently the abbreviation alone may be used without the parentheses. (see capitalization)

Companies

eg: John Keells Co
Brown & Co
Central Finance Co

C In the straight text the full name of the company is given but, limited (Ltd) Private (Pvt), Incorporated (Inc) is usually dropped.

Academic, professional and honorary degrees

- M.B.B.S – Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
- D.L.M – Diploma in Legal Medicine
- M.Sc – Master of Science
- M.D – (Medicinal Doctor) Doctor of Medicine
- Ph.D – (Philosophic Doctor) Doctor of Philosophy
- F.R.C.P – Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians
- F.C.C.P – Fellow of the College of Community Physicians

Acronym

An acronym, is formed using the initial letters of the full name, but unlike an abbreviation, it is pronounced as a word. Some are given in full capitals while others are not.

- OPEC - (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries)
- UNESCO - (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization)
- SAARC - (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)

Not full capitals

Aids - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

C However, it is often given in full capitals (AIDS), and pronounced as such, so also SARS of recent origin.

Equipment

Some type of equipment is in lower case (Not in capitals) but pronounced as such

eg: laser – (light amplification by simulated emission of radiation)

Designations of time

Accepted abbreviations in chronology are usually given in small capitals

- BC - (Before Christ)
- AD - (L. anno domine) = Year of the Lord
- AM - (L. ante meridiem) = before noon
- PM - (L. post meridiem) = after noon

C The above abbreviations may be used in the text.

Standard units of time

Year (yr) month (mo) hour (h or hr) minute (min)
second (s or sec)

C Do *not* use in the running text

Months and days

Jan. Feb. Mar. Apr. May June July Aug. Sept.
Oct. Nov. Dec
Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.

C The abbreviations are followed by a full stop, but not after May, June and July (not abbreviated). These should *not* be used in the text but may be used in tabular material.

Write as: Sunday 31 August 2003
OR 31 Aug.2003

This conforms with the SI (Système international d'unités)

Sex

M (Male)

F (Female)

C Do *not* use the symbols ♂ and ♀ for M and F in scientific writing

Signs

+ = Positive

- = Negative

Do *not* use +ve and -ve

Weights and Measures

I give below some commonly used abbreviations for weights and measures, in medical and technical writing.

Weights		Measures			
		Volume		Length	
ng	nanogram	min	minim	cm	centimetre
µg	microgram	ml	millilitre	m	metre
mg	milligram	l	litre	km	kilometre
g	gram	dl	decilitre		
kg	kilogram				

C₁ In general the SI units are written in lower case except

°C = degrees Celsius, and some using the proper name A=ampere, J=joule, V=volt

C₂ Periods are not used following SI units.

Note: The abbreviation is the same for singular or plural.

In foreign languages

Some abbreviations derived from foreign languages are used in English writing.

Latin

et.al (et alie) = and others

etc (et cetera) = and so on, and the rest

eg (exempli gratia) = for example

i.e (id est) = that is

NB (Nota Bene) = take careful note

viz.(videllcet) = namely

French

RSVP (Responde Sil Vous Placet) Please reply

In Science

Some abbreviations used in writing research material

SD or sd = Standard Deviation

SE or se = Standard Error

DOF or dof = Degrees of Freedom

OR = Odds Ratio

R.R = Relative Risk

AR = Attributable Risk

Some others are given as symbols [see symbols]

9. SYMBOLS

A symbol may be defined as a thing standing for or representing something else, especially a material thing taken to represent an immaterial or abstract thing such as an idea or quality; written character conventionally standing for some object, process etc.

Symbols may represent many things such as: an inscribed form (a plus sign) a pictorial form, an object such as a trophy, a bird, a tree (the Na tree as a symbol of Sri Lanka) an animal (the elephant for the United National Party).

In the written language they are markings that represent sounds, words or ideas. Some of the common symbols are listed:

/	=	per
#	=	number
%	=	percentage
@	=	at
£	=	pound
\$	=	dollar
©	=	copyright
+	=	plus
-	=	minus
±	=	plus or minus
α	=	proportional to
∞	=	infinity
➤	=	greater than
≥	=	equal to or greater than
<	=	less than
≤	=	equal to or less than
∑	=	sum of

$\sqrt{\quad}$	=	square root
\bar{x}	=	arithmetic mean
σ	=	standard deviation of a population
S or SD	=	standard deviation of a sample
n	=	number in sample
r	=	correlation coefficient
p	=	probability
z	=	normal deviate
t	=	t-test
°	=	degree

In Greek

Some letters of the Greek alphabet are also used as symbols.

α	=	alpha
β	=	beta
γ	=	gamma
Δ	=	delta
κ	=	kappa
π	=	pie
μ	=	mu
χ	=	chi
ρ	=	rho
σ	=	sigma

When symbols are used in formulae, they should be explained

eg $\chi^2 = \frac{\sum(O - E)^2}{E}$

\sum	=	sum of
O	=	observed value
E	=	expected value

10. PARTICIPLE

A participle is a verbal adjective. It is often used to introduce a phrase which is attached to a subject mentioned later in the sentence.

S₁ *Crying* she fell asleep.

C₁ 'Crying' is the participle and 'she' is the subject.

S₂ *Standing on the top floor of the skyscraper* vehicles down below looked like crawling ants.

C₂ The participle phrase (in italics) is not followed with a subject, hence it is misplaced and referred to as a "*dangling participle*".

RS₂ *Standing on the top floor of the skyscraper* *he* observed that the vehicles down below looked like crawling ants.

Another error is that the participle is related to the wrong subject.

S₃ *Painting the picture*, some of the paint fell on his clothes

RS₃ *Painting the picture* *he* noticed that some of the paint fell on his clothes.

A further error is using a participle phrase as a sentence.

eg: *Assuring you of our best attention at all times*

C This is commonly used to end business letters. It has no verb, hence it is not a sentence

11. PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word or phrase which relates two elements of a sentence, clause or phrase together. They generally precede nouns and pronouns which they 'govern'. They are usually short words such as 'at', 'in', 'to' 'before' 'after'

S₁ The dog is *in* the kennel.

S₂ I went *to* see him *in* his office.

Some complex prepositions have two or three words such as,

ahead of, apart from, with reference to, in accordance with

S₃ I wish to state that *apart from* you, I have no other good friends.

S₄ The team played *in accordance with* the instructions given by the coach.

C The right preposition should neither be used in the wrong place nor a wrong preposition in the right place.

S₁ The death of a young coconut palm attacked by the Red Weevil means the loss money.

C₁ The preposition *of* is omitted between loss and money

S₂ I left home *under* the circumstance.

C₂ The correct preposition to use is *in* not *under*

A preposition should not precede a pair of inclusive numbers, which are joined by an *en dash*

eg: Age group in years 5-9: *from* 2000-2002

C The preposition *from* should not be used

The beginning and ending numbers of a series may be indicated by a pair of prepositions (from/to) and the dash is omitted

Eg: from 5 to 10 (up to 10, does not include 10) or from 2000 to 2002

12. ARTICLES

A and An

These are indefinite articles which are often used in writing and in speech

A

The form *a* is used before a word with a consonant sound

- S₁ We had *a* year of good fortunes.
- S₂ There is *a* horse in the garden.
- S₃ There is *a* house that I built.

An

In general, *an* is used before a word beginning with a vowel (a, e, i, o, u) sound.

- S₁ *An* apple a day keeps the doctor away.
- S₂ This is *an* excellent thesis.
- S₃ There was *an* unprecedented number of people at the meeting.

Exceptions

Use *a* before a vowel if the sound or pronunciation is, *u, eu, uy*

- S₁ This is a united group
- S₂ This is a usual occurrence.
- S₃ He is a European.
- S₄ My friend is a Eurasian.

a and an

Either article may be used with the words beginning with a *h*

If h is sounded use a

S₁ There is a house on the hill.

S₂ This is a huge rock fortress.

If *h* is unsounded or silent use *an*

S₁ He is *an* honest man.

S₂ He is *an* heir to the estate of his parents.

S₃ This is *an* hour for silent reflection.

13. APPENDIX

USE OF WORDS AND PHRASES

A few hints on the use and misuse of words and phrases and on redundancy.

WORDS

1. About and approximately
If the word 'approximately' is used, it suggests some *calculation*, if not use 'about'.
S It is about twenty feet long.

2. Achieve
Achieve implies *successful* completion and not merely completion.
S We achieved taking 150 questionnaires within two weeks.
R.S. We completed taking . . .

3. Adopt, adapt and adept
S₁ In this survey I will adopt the same methods and materials as in the previous one.
S₂ The instrument was adapted for use in the field.
S₃ He is in adept person for the job (proficient).

4. (a) Advice and advise
Advice is a *noun* and advise is a *verb*
S₁ He sought advice from his father before taking action.
S₂ He was advised to walk three kilometers each day.

- (b) Adviser and advisor
Adviser is a *noun* and advisor is an *adjective*
S₃ His adviser (counsellor) left the country.
S₄ He is the political advisor to the President.

5. Affect and effect
Affect is a *verb* and effect is both a *noun* and *verb*.
S₁ Undernutrition in the early years of childhood could affect the development of the brain.
S₂ The disappointment could affect his career.
S₃ The drug has no effect on his condition.
S₄ The changes he effected were beneficial.

6. Because
S The reason for leaving home was because he was beaten by his father.
C The word *because* used in this sentence is *redundant* since a reason is being offered.
Use '*that*' in place of *because*

7. Both
S Both parents as well as their son met the principal of the school.

C Do not follow both with ‘*as well as*’ use the word ‘*and*’ instead .

8. ‘Compared with’ and ‘compared to’

S Any poet could be *compared with* Shakespeare but few could be *compared to* him.

C ‘Compared with’ refers to both similarities and differences while ‘compared to’ indicates their similarities.

9. Comprise and consist

Comprise means, to contain, to include, consists of, composed of.

S₁ The sample will comprise respondents from urban, rural and estate sectors.

C₁ Do not use *of* following comprise.

S₂ The mixture consists of sand and cement.

C₂ Use ‘*consists in*’ for a definition or statement of identity

S₃ The process *consists in* mixing the ingredients in specified quantities

10. ‘Due to’ and ‘owing to’

Due to means caused by and owing to means because of

S₁ The complications were due to the incorrect dose of the drug.

S₂ Owing to the political crisis the peace process was halted.

C ‘Owing to’ could have been used in both sentences but ‘due to’ only in the first.

11. Encountered
 S During the survey we encountered many difficulties.
 C *Encountered* is commonly used for 'observed'. Use a simpler word such as *observed* or *met with*.
12. Facilitate
 S The field officer was facilitated in his work by the M.O.H
 C This is a wrong use of the word. It is work of the field officer that was facilitated and *not* the field officer.
 RS. The work of the field officer was facilitated by the M.O.H
13. Infer and Imply
 Infer means to *deduce* while imply means to *suggest* or *insinuate*
 S From the prevalence rates we can *infer* that male drivers have more road accidents than female drivers, however, this does not *imply* that females are better drivers than males.
14. 'Like' and 'as if'
 'Like' is incorrectly used as a substitute for 'as if'
 S₁ I do not *like* her behaviour. (right)
 S₂ He behaves *like* he was the boss. (wrong)
 RS He behaves *as if* he was the boss. (right)
15. More or less
 This term is often incorrectly used.

- S₁ The wall is more or less vertical.
S₂ It was found that this observation was *more or less correct*.
C What is more vertical and more correct?

16. Over

In cricket, the word *over* is a technical term for six legitimate balls bowled. You can jump over a hurdle or go over the hill.

- S₁ He is *over* 50 years old.
S₂ The well is *over* 100 feet deep.
Use, *more than* in place of *over*.

17 Partially and partly

Partially means 'to a limited extent' and 'partly' means 'in part'.

- S₁ The area is partially covered by forest.
S₂ The match was lost, partly because of the errors made by the captain.

18. Portion and part

S₁ The majority of persons living in the northern *portion*

of the country are Tamils (wrong)

C Use *part* instead of *portion*.

S₂ I will give you a portion of the profits (right)

C₂ Portion implies a share.

19. Quite

This word is often used indiscriminately. It means absolutely or to the utmost extent.

S₁ The stones are quite round.

- C₁ This means that they are absolutely round. If not so, use the word *nearly*.
- S₂ The age distribution of the two groups are quite comparable.
- C₂ Use 'nearly' or 'almost'

20. Somewhat

S My signature is somewhat altered.

C If it is altered the word 'somewhat' is not necessary. If you wish to specify the degree of alteration use; slightly, partly or completely instead of 'somewhat'.

PHRASES

Some phrases often used in writing , have one or more unnecessary or redundant words. You may prefer to use a single or a couple of words instead – especially in an article for a refereed journal.

Phrase	Prefer
1. are of the same opinion	agree
2. as far as our own observations are concerned, they show	our observations show
3. at some future date	later
4. at the present moment in time	now
5. bright green in colour	bright green
6. considerable amount of work	much work
7. due to the fact that	because
8. during the time that	while
9. goes under the name of	is called
10.in a considerable number of cases	often
11.in view of the fact that	since, because
12.it may however be noted that	nevertheless, but
13.it must be borne in mind	[omit]
14.it is interesting to note that	[omit]
15.owing to the fact that	because
16.pertaining to	on, about
17.prior to	before
18.small numbers of	few
19.subsequent to	after
20.the surgery having been performed	after surgery
21.there is little doubt that this is	this is probably
22.two equal halves	halves
23.with reference to	about
24.under the circumstances	Use 'in' not 'under'

Note: Some of these examples are taken from MO' Connor and FP Woodford 1978 – (Ref 3.)

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