
The *Information Research* style manual.
An alphabetical list of terms and punctuation marks and their use in the journal

Use English (sometimes referred to as British English, UK English or International English—since it is generally used throughout the Commonwealth) not American English. For a list of the differences see [Karen Bond's list](#). Words commonly used in the information field are treated at the appropriate place in the manual. In the case of newly coined words, we generally wait until they are to be found in the Oxford English Dictionary.

The main authority used in compiling this list is The Oxford guide to style. I have chosen terms that either cause problems or that are of particular interest to a journal like Information Research.

For more guidance, see: Ritter, R. The Oxford guide to style. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Another Style Guide is available electronically, and the guidance given there is generally acceptable.

"/" see: [oblique stroke](#)

"#" see: [hash sign](#)

abbreviations and acronyms: use only commonly understood abbreviations and acronyms such as 'UK', 'USA', 'UNESCO', etc. In general, avoid inventing abbreviations: the space they save is irrelevant for an electronic journal and they tend to interrupt the flow of an argument or discussion for the reader.

Remember that Information Research is a multi-disciplinary journal and what is a common abbreviation in one field may be unknown in another. Thus, use 'information retrieval' not 'IR', 'library and information studies (or science)' not 'LIS', 'decision support system' not 'DSS', etc.

Never begin a sentence with a common abbreviation such as, "e.g." - instead, use the full form, "For example, ..."

A further reason for avoiding invented initialisms and acronyms is that authors tend to sprinkle them throughout their texts too freely: this is readily seen when the text is cleaned up and the number of repetitions becomes obvious and tedious. They are, in effect, a lazy author's tool: instead of thinking how best to express concepts and relationships in good English, the abbreviations are used as a 'shorthand' means of expression. Consider this from a book I reviewed:

The resulting model... comprised three main levels of KSAOs: Taskwork-related KSAOs, teamwork-related KSAOs, and telecooperation-related KSAOs.

This is quite unnecessary repetition and could have been reduced to: *'The resulting model embodied three levels of personal characteristics related to tasks, teamwork and tele-cooperation'*.

abstract: author abstracts are generally used by abstracting services and serve as one of the main sources for information retrieval. It is important, therefore, to provide a full, informative, 'structured' abstract of 150 to 200 words. When writing the abstract, see the recommended structure in Instructions for Authors, noting that alternative structures are permissible.

amount: see [number and amount](#)

around: currently one of the most debased words, resulting in nonsense such as 'based around' or 'centred around'. Nothing can be 'based' around anything - it must be based 'upon' something; nothing can be 'centred' around anything - it must be centred 'on'. Avoid 'around' unless no other word will suffice. Especially avoid 'issues around...' use alternatives such as 'issues relating to...', 'issues arising out of...' - almost anything else is preferable to avoid pandering to linguistic barbarism.

article vs. paper: an article, in the sense of a published document, generally means something published in a trade journal or a popular magazine. Use *paper* for scientific documents published in journals and in conference proceedings. Hence, *scientific paper* not *scientific article*

behaviors or behaviours: another barbarism - avoid this usage: the plural is rarely justified, since behaviour is an 'uncountable' or mass noun, i.e., a kind of collective noun, signifying the set of acts, actions and activities related to some field of human action. Thus, when someone writes, 'The respondent reported engaging in different kinds of information behaviours.' they probably mean that the person engaged in a variety of different information-related activities. Thus, Ellis's behavioural characteristics in information seeking, such as chaining and browsing are sometimes described as different 'information behaviours' - they aren't; they are simply some of the actions within a person's information behaviour. Similarly, to speak of various actions undertaken when working with World Wide Web pages, such as viewing pages, scrolling, etc., etc. as 'behaviours' is simply jargon - we need precision in research and the use of 'behaviours' does not enable us properly to break down the totality of information behaviour into its component elements.

bibliometry: this appears to be a relatively new coinage, which has not yet found its way into the Oxford English Dictionary; consequently 'bibliometrics' is preferred.

capital letters: avoid capital letters in the titles of papers, in headings and sub-headings, table and figure captions, and in the titles listed in the reference list. However, they should be used in the names of journals and conferences, and for proper names.

center: use 'centre', except in HTML coding, in direct quotation or in citing titles of papers that use this spelling. Similarly, 'centred' not 'centered'

centric: avoid: use customer-centred, not customer-centric; user-centred not user-centric

chi-square: incorrect, use chi-squared. For preference, and especially in the results of statistical tests, use the symbolic form: χ^2

colloquialisms and slang: avoid. A popular slang term in the IT and business worlds is savvy - use knowledgeable

colon: in English, only the full stop results in a following initial capital. Do not follow the colon with a full stop except when reporting speech, introducing a quotation, or posing a question. Do not use capital letters to introduce list items that follow a colon. For example:

- The following factors were explored in the study:
 - ethnicity,
 - educational level,
 - age, and

- country of residence.

contractions (don't, won't, etc.): see [don't](#)

dash (–) or (—): dashes are often used in informal writing, but are generally out of place in academic writing. The two forms, referred to as the n-dash and the m-dash (to indicate the amount of space they use) are often used indiscriminantly. The guidance of the Oxford style manual is to use the n-dash (–) only between numbers and dates, e.g., 1850–1859. Usually, the m-dash (—) is being used instead of a comma, which is rather pointless, so the guidance is to use whatever other punctuation symbol is most appropriate, i.e., a comma, semi-colon or colon. Sometimes, it may be more appropriate to use parentheses to enclose a clause.

data: always plural - the singular is 'datum'. Hence, 'the data were analysed...' not 'the data was analysed...'

decimal marker: use the stop (.) not the comma (,). Thus 10.5 not 10,5

don't, won't, can't and other contractions: always use the full form - never use contractions other than when they occur in quotations.

due to: grammarians debate the proper use of due to almost without end. The simplest solution is generally to use owing to, or more simply, because of, unless you are absolutely sure that due to is correct. Try replacing due to with caused by or attributable to - if the sentence then reads clumsily or fails to make sense, replace due to with because.

Here's a nice explanation from the Columbia Journalism Review:

"Making Due — One synonym for 'due' is 'attributable', and that was the rough idea the writer had in mind in this sentence: 'The last such blip occurred in 1990 due to fears that the Gulf War would cut oil supplies'. But we wouldn't say the 'blip occurred attributable to fears', would we? The writer wanted 'because of' or 'as a result of'. With 'due to', some form of the verb 'to be', or verbs that function like it, is usually needed. 'The power failure was due to a lightning strike' would be okay. So would, 'Their exhaustion seemed due to the humidity rather than the heat'. Or, for fans of the polysyllabic, attributable to it."

due to the fact that: unnecessary wordiness—use 'because'.

e.g. — exempli gratia: abbreviation of "for example": two words are abbreviated, therefore, two stops are needed, not, "eg." Do not use at the beginning of a sentence; use the full form instead. Use a comma after the abbreviation: "e.g.,"

ellipsis: use simply ... as the mark of elision, or ellipsis, do not use [...], which is commonly used in the non-English-speaking world. Do not use at the beginning of a quotation.

endeavour: use 'endeavour'.

et al, a priori, in situ, and other Latin terms or abbreviations: give the following in italic: *a priori, in situ*, and similar Latin phrases. The APA Style Manual, 7th edition, does not recommend that 'et al.' should be italicised. Note that the 'al' of 'et al.' is an abbreviation of 'alia' and, consequently, needs a full stop.

favourite: use American spelling only when referring specifically to the bookmark feature of Internet Explorer; otherwise use 'favourite'.

fill out: use either the English, 'fill in', or, preferably, 'complete'.

forum: plural, 'forums'. The *Oxford Manual of Style* suggests that the Latin plural, 'fora', should only be used in the context of legal matters and Roman history, archaeology, etc.

gender: use *sex* when referring to male/female categories in data analysis. "Gender identifies the relations between women and men. Gender relations vary from place to place and over time; they often change in response to altering circumstances. (Sex, by contrast, identifies the biological difference between women and men, which does not change.)" http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/files/glossary_g.htm

hash sign ('#'): in the USA this sign is used as the abbreviation for 'number' but it is not an internationally recognized sign. In *Information Research* the abbreviation for number is 'No.'

he and she: the journal adopts a simple solution to the problem of representing the sexes equally in a text, without using more words than is necessary. It has adopted the composite word: 's/he'. Unfortunately, no such simple solution exists for 'his or her'; although the plural forms 'they' and 'their' are now commonly used in speech, and accepted by the APA Style Manual, 7th edition. Thus, instead of, 'A student may spend 30% of his or her study time in the university library' one can say, 'A student may spend 30% of their study time in the university library': if you wish to be grammatically correct, you could use the plural: 'Students may spend 30% of their study time in the university library'.

in order to: generally unnecessarily wordy; simply use, *to*

in the event that: unnecessarily wordy, use, *if*

Internet, intranet and extranet: capitalize the first letter of Internet - no capital letter for the other two.

inverted commas: see [quotation marks](#)

Latin terms: see [et al.](#)

Mac, Mc and M': note that these different forms of the prefix to Scottish and Irish surnames are all filed in a reference list as though they were spelt 'Mac'. Both *Mc* and *M'* are simply abbreviations of *Mac*

mark of elision: use simply ... as the mark of elision, or ellipsis, do not use [...], which is commonly used in the non-English-speaking world. Do not use at the beginning of a quotation.

media: always plural - the singular is 'medium'

methodology and method: these words are often used as synonyms: they are not—they mean quite different things. Paraphrasing P. Sullivan and J.E. Potter (1997). *Operating spaces: writing technologies and critical research practices*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex – *methods* are the means we use to investigate the phenomena of interest, while a *methodology* consists of the theory, philosophy, aims and values that guide the choice and use of methods. It is equally important, in a research paper, to explain the methodology as well as to describe the methods used.

number and amount: for some strange reason authors have begun to use 'amount' when 'number' is appropriate. 'Amount' is used of quantities; e.g., 'the amount of sugar in my coffee', not, for example, 'the amount of respondents', when 'the number of respondents' is correct.

numbers: spell out numbers from zero to ninety-nine, except in reporting the results of statistical analysis and in naming tables and figures. Thus:

The sample consisted of seventy-five students taking an introductory information technology course.

But: *The data show that a majority of male respondents (23 or 77%) used the internet daily, while a minority of female respondents (6 or 20%) reported this level of use.* When reporting percentages or other values of less than one, use a zero in front of the number. For example: 0.15% not .15%, $\beta = 0.026$, $p = 0.07$, not $\beta = .026$, $p = .07$. Also, 'Table 5' not 'Table five'. Do not use the hash sign (#) as the abbreviation for 'Number', use 'No.'

oblique stroke - "/": avoid the use of this symbol, except in direct quotation or in the form 'and/or'. When used to join two words the symbol is ambiguous, since it may mean 'A and B', 'A or B', 'the ratio of A to B', or 'from A to B'. Instead, use whatever full form you actually intend.

online: no hyphen needed.

per: in contexts such as 'once per day', use 'a' or 'an' instead: thus, 'three times a week'.

per cent: use as shown, not 'percent'. However, use, 'percentage'. Do not use numbers at the beginning of a sentence when reporting percentages, i.e., 'Fifty-five per cent of respondents...' not '55% of respondents...'

Whether to use a singular or plural verb after 'per cent' is sometimes difficult to determine: we follow the [Oxford Learners' Dictionaries](#) recommendation, i.e.,

"If a percentage is used with an uncountable or a singular noun, the verb is generally singular: In 1955, only sixteen per cent of the revenue was derived from the progressive rate of taxation.

If the noun is singular but represents a group of people, the verb may be singular or plural: Twelve per cent of the population works (or work) in agriculture.

If the noun is plural, the verb is plural: Forty-five per cent of the respondents were female."

prior: when referring to an earlier paper by the same researcher(s), 'prior' is appropriate, i.e., 'Prior research (Smith, 2017) shows...'; but when referring to earlier research more generally use 'previous' or 'earlier'.

prior to: use 'before'.

program: use *only* for *computer* programs; otherwise, use *programme*, e.g., training programme, study programme. An exception is where 'Program' is part of an activity's formal name, e.g., *New York State Community Program*

quotation: quotations may be *in-line*, that is, embedded in the text of a paragraph, or *indented* as a block quotation. Use the indented block quotation only if the extract is forty words or more, or approximately four lines of text. An exception is made when quoting the comments of, for example, interview respondents when, for clarity, a quotation of any length may be given as a block quotation.

quotation marks: use single quotation marks for quotations, reserving double quotation marks for quotations within quotations. For example:

As Wilson (1999) notes: 'If we accept this proposition, we will naturally ask, "What is the cause of the uncertainty?" A generalised answer is, "a problem":...'

Do **not** use quotation marks around terms which you regard as unusual or to which, for some other reason, you wish to draw attention; instead, use italics. For example: Schutz's notion of *typification*, not, Schutz's notion of "typification" or 'typification'. In general avoid over-using this device—in many cases it is unnecessary and only serves to break up the reading of the text.

Placing relative to other punctuation. American practice is straightforward but leads to ambiguities: in all cases, commas and full-stops are placed inside the end quotation mark, *whether or not they are part of the quotation*. Therefore, avoid this practice and only place a comma or full-stop within the quotation marks when it genuinely belongs there, i.e., when it is part of the original quotation. In all other circumstances, place the comma or full-stop (or other punctuation) outside the end quotation mark. This example from the *Oxford Manual of Style* demonstrates the difference:

US practice: Can you verify that John said, 'There is only one key to the room?'

IR practice: Can you verify that John said, 'There is only one key to the room'?

As may be seen, the US practice introduces an ambiguity in that it is made to appear that John is asking a question about the key, rather than making a positive statement about the key.

This example illustrates another point - use only one kind of full-stop at the end of a quotation, i.e., because the question mark ends the statement, a full-stop at the end of the quotation is not necessary.

rigor: use *rigour*; but *note*: rigorous

she and he: see [he and she](#)

slang: see [colloquialisms and slang](#)

spelling: the journal uses English spelling, not American spelling - a list of the common differences is shown below.

US Spelling	UK Spelling	US Spelling	UK Spelling
acknowledgment	acknowledgement	favorite	favourite
aging	ageing	fiber	fibre
among	among, amongst	fulfill	fulfil
analog	analogue	generalize	generalise
analyze	analyse	harmonize	harmonise
authorize	authorise	labor	labour
behavior	behaviour	learned	learnt or learned
caliber	calibre	license	licence (noun)
canceled	cancelled	license	license (verb)
catalog	catalogue	modeled	modelled
center	centre	program, TV	programme
color	colour	program, computer	program
criticize	criticise	realize	realise
defense	defence	recognize	recognise
dialog	dialogue	rigor	rigour
emphasize	emphasise	toward	towards
aesthetics	aesthetics	vigor	vigour
favor	favour	visualize	visualise

stakeholder(s): avoid this rather meaningless word. Even the UK Local Government Association has recommended that it [should be barred](#) from documents intended for the public; that list is worth looking at to see the other words. *Stakeholder* means the person who holds the money when two (or more) people make a wager on some event or other. Now it is generally used either because the author cannot think of any other way of expressing 'interested parties', or because they want to hide what they really mean, although this is more likely to occur in government documents and press releases, rather than in scholarly writing, or because they have picked up the word and find it easier to use than to figure out what they actually want to say. Apart from 'interested party' you could think of using 'participant' or, in the appropriate circumstances, 'sponsor' or 'patron'. More generally, 'actors' can be used when describing social interactions and, often, the word or an alternative is not needed at all: for example, instead of 'other stakeholders', 'others' will serve perfectly well.

that: see who and that

use and usage: these are not synonyms, 'usage' is not a fancier way of saying 'use' and should be avoided unless you are writing about language, e.g., 'common English usage...'

via: use 'by', 'through' or other English word as appropriate

Web: capitalize the initial letter

Website: capitalize the initial letter and one word, not two.

who and that: 'who' is used of persons; 'that' is used of objects and animals. 'The respondents who answered...' not 'The respondents that answered...'; 'The dog that bit me...' not 'The dog who bit me...'

wordiness: avoid excessive wordiness. For example, use 'to' instead of 'in order to', 'how' instead of 'the way in which', etc. Wordiness can also show itself in unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, e.g., 'critically evaluate' - how else would one evaluate, other than critically? Hence, 'evaluate' serves perfectly well.
