

Biomedical Picture of the Day (BPoD) Style Guide for Writers

Writing summaries for BPoD images:

- Choose a **meaningful** title
- Include the **most important information first**
- Take a big-picture perspective
- Write **100 – 150 words** in a single paragraph
- Make your writing **simple** and factual
- Write for a **non-scientist** audience
- Replace **jargon** with normal words. If you need to include jargon:
 - define within the text
 - hyperlink to definition (no more than 3 per paragraph)
- Avoid science-speak (academic style)
- Use familiar reference points or analogies
- Include medical relevance of research, if any
- Touch upon ethical issues, if relevant
- Avoid opening with obvious statements '**This image shows...**'
- Be very sparing with exclamation marks
- Include information about physical and temporal scale
- Avoid needless adjectives – 'this **stunning** image...'
- Avoid needless adverbs – '**Interestingly**...'
- Explain scientific techniques, where relevant
- Explain rather than describe the image in question

General dos and don'ts

The following guidelines are stipulated by the MRC

Shorter words are preferable: use **amid**, **among** and **while** (rather than amidst, amongst or whilst); **first**, **second** etc (rather than firstly, secondly etc); **preventive** (not preventative); **use** (not usage).

Use **italics** for book, newspaper and periodical titles: eg *Nature*, *the Guardian*. If 'The' is part of a publication's formal title, it should be capped and italicised: eg *The Lancet*, *The Times*.

Use full **name** (title, first name, surname) on first mention, then title and surname subsequently. Eg **Dr César Milstein won a Nobel Prize in 1984. Dr Milstein worked at the LMB.** Use standard English titles for non-Anglophone people: eg **Mr Nicolas Sarkozy**. Note **Knights**: **Sir John Chisholm** should subsequently be referred to as **Sir John**, for example.

Investigations of, not investigations into; **report on** matters, not into; **talk to** others, not with them.

Abbreviations

Do not use full stops in abbreviations such as *ie* and *eg*, but try to avoid these abbreviations anyway. Use *that is* or *namely* instead of *ie*, and *for example* or *such as* instead of *eg*. Do not overuse *etc* – if you have more to say, it may be worth saying it.

Use capitals for official titles: *the Prime Minister*; *Professor Max Perutz*. But **job titles** should be in lower case: *eg Sir Leszek Borysiewicz was chief executive of the MRC from 2007 to 2010*; *An eminent scientist was appointed as director of the new MRC unit*.

Use capitals for definite **geographical** locations, regions and areas, as well as countries and cities. More vague but well-recognised areas take capitals (*eg the Middle East*). But it is *eastern Europe* and *south-east Asia*. Note also *sub-Saharan Africa*. Use lower case for words such as *city*, *river* and *state* unless part of the official name: so *Washington state*, but *Salt Lake City*, for example.

Use upper case when referring to the current or a specific past *Government*; use lower case when using *government* generally or as an adjective. *Parliament* has a capital P; *parliamentary* does not. Use capital letters when referring to the *Health Departments* of the four countries in the UK.

Use lower case for the four seasons, namely *spring*, *summer*, *autumn* and *winter*.

Refer to clinical trials using *phase I*, *phase II* and so on, ie upper case Roman numerals (II), rather than lower case Roman (ii) or Arabic (2) numerals.

AIDS – all caps.

century – always lower case *eg 21st century*.

motor neuron disease – lower case (and note spelling of *neuron*).

Dates and Times

Date format: *1 January 2010*. No 'th' after the day and no commas. **Calendar years** should always be written as four digits, *eg 2010*.

Times should be written using the **12-hour clock**, with *am* or *pm* as appropriate. *Eg 8.20am* or *8am*. Note we use a full stop, not a colon, to separate the minutes from the hours as required.

Foreign words and jargon

One scientist's carefully defined, technical term is another person's jargon. Always write in simple, clear English, and ensure you know the meaning of every word and phrase you use. If you can't avoid a word or phrase that verges on jargon, explain what it means as simply as possible and limit your use of it.

Use English rather than Latin or other languages wherever possible: *each year* rather than *per annum*, for example. If it is necessary to use a foreign word or phrase, put it in italics, *eg in vitro*, *in vivo* and *in silico*. Include any accents on foreign words that have not yet been incorporated into English (these words should also be in italics) and always use accents on foreign names and organisations.

For foreign words and phrases that have become anglicised through common use, eg *et al*, *ad hoc*, *vice versa*, *status quo* etc, do not use italics or accents, unless an accent distinguishes meaning from what might otherwise be a homonym: *exposé*, for example.

Hyphens

Hyphens can easily be overused, but are required in the following instances:

- To avoid ambiguity: *fine-tooth comb*
- For adjectives formed of more than one word: *MRC-funded*, *70-year-old patient*
- After prefixes such as *anti-*, *re-* and *pre-*, except for some words in common use, eg *antibiotic*, *rearrange*, *predate*
- To separate identical letters: eg *pre-empt* and *micro-organism*; but note *coordinate* and *cooperate*
- For compass points: *north-east*, *south-western*
- For nouns formed from prepositional verbs: *start-up*, *spin-out*; but note exceptions such as *handout* and *shutdown*
- For some words/phrases that (for now, at least) just take hyphens: *e-health*, *e-science*, *mid-week*, *no-man's-land*, *policy-maker*

One word: *bioterrorism*, *cooperate*, *coordinate*, *dataset*, *email*, *grantholder*, *healthcare*, *lifelong*, *lifetime*, *multidisciplinary*, *online*, *postdoctoral*, *postgraduate*, *wellbeing*.

Separate words: *brain drain*, *life course*, *no one*, *on to*, *peer review*, *side effects*, *stem cell*, *stock market*, *think tank*.

Spell out numbers from *one* to *nine* (and from *first* to *ninth*) and use figures from *10* (*10th*) to *999,999*, using a comma as a thousand separator (ie *3,900*). Then use *1 million*, *35m*, *1.62 billion* and so on.

Spell out *million* and *billion* on first use, then abbreviate to *m* or *bn*. Eg *£1 million* is followed by *£1m* if repeated – note the spacing in each case.

1 billion = 1,000,000,000. This is not the original British definition, but the US definition is now standard.

1,000 billion = *1 trillion* (*tn*); 1,000 trillion = *1 quadrillion* (no abbreviation).

Always use figures for **percentages**, even if the number is less than 10 (eg *3 per cent*). Write out *per cent*, although the % symbol can be used in headlines and graphics.

Never start a sentence with a figure – write the number in words or find a different way to begin.

Ranges: write both numbers in full (whether figures or words) with a hyphen or *to* between them to indicate a range: *pages 134-136*, *£1 million to £2 million* and *four to five days* are correct; “pages 134-6” is not. If the range is from a number less than 10 to a number more than 10, stick to the rule of writing out numbers less than 10 in words, and those more than 10 in figures, even if this creates a mixture in the range (but in this case, do **not** use a hyphen). Eg *from 12 months down to six* or *between three and 10 days*.

Apostrophes: note the apostrophes in *Funders' Forum* (more than one Funder); *Lord Krebs's father gave his name to the Krebs cycle* (even when a name ends in 's', indicate possession with 's); and *its role is critical* (no apostrophe, in order to distinguish *its* from *it's*, which means *it is*).

Use round **brackets** (when required). If the word or phrase in brackets is a continuous part of a longer sentence (*like this*), any punctuation should go outside the brackets. (*If, like this, the parenthesis is a complete sentence or phrase, it should start with a capital and end with punctuation inside the bracket.*)

Introduce **quotes** with a colon: "*And start the quote with a capital letter.*" If a quote is a complete sentence or phrase, final punctuation goes inside the quote marks; if it is a sentence fragment, punctuation goes outside.

He said: "*This research is truly groundbreaking.*"

He described the research as "*truly groundbreaking*".

Use double quotes ("*...*") for speech and in pull quotes; use single quotes ('*...*') in headlines and standfirsts, for quotes within a quote and to indicate 'jargon'.

References

Formal reference style:

Journal article, one author:	Author, A (2010) The importance of medical research. <i>Prestigious Science Journal</i> , vol 1 (6) p134.
Journal article, two or more authors:	Author, A & Writer, X (2010).... Author, A et al (2010)....
Other publications, such as books:	Author, A (2010) <i>The importance of style</i> , London: Stylish Publishing Company.
Publications without a named author:	Medical Research Council (2010) <i>The importance of style</i> , 2nd edition, London: Stylish Publishing Company.

Spelling

In the UK, *licence* is a noun and *license* is a verb. Similarly *practice/practise* and *advise/advise*. So:

- When you *advise* someone, you give them *advice*.
- Once a drug has been *licensed*, it has a *licence*.
- A *practising* doctor *practises* medicine, often in a general *practice*.

Use *-ise* and not '*-ize*' where there is a choice. Eg *organise*, *recognise* and *realise*. Note: there is no choice for *capsize*.

Single 's' in *focused*, *focusing* and *focuses*.

fetus, *fetal*: this spelling is not an Americanism, but the correct way of spelling these words.

haem-, *diarrhoea*, etc: use British spellings.

Down's syndrome

motor neuron disease: note spelling of *neuron* (not *neurone*); all lower case. *type 2 diabetes*