Guide to Writing Articles in English

Although guidelines for the preparation of typescripts cannot ensure the writing of good papers, they can be of considerable service in improving and clarifying an article, and in aiding editors, publishers, and readers. The points discussed briefly below are those that have arisen most frequently in typescripts submitted in English. They are presented here primarily, but by no means exclusively, for those whose maternal language is not English.

General. The format of the journal should be observed carefully and the ‘Instructions to Authors’ should be followed. All pages should be numbered and each illustration should have the author’s name on the back.

Titles. The title of the article should be kept brief, although not by means of piling up modifying nouns (see below). The species should be indicated in the title, e.g., ultrastructure of the pancreas of the mouse.

Double spacing. All material for the printer, including Abstract, References, and Legends, should be typed in double spacing.

Hyphens. In typing manuscripts, a line should not end in a hyphen. This is particularly important in an international journal, where not all the personnel may know English well and hence uncertainty may arise as to whether to retain or to omit a hyphen.

Hyphens should be used, however, within the text where appropriate. For example, a hyphen should be inserted in electron-dense particles, PAS-positive material, critical point-dried, lipid-filled cells, wide-field view. A hyphen is of aid where vowels might otherwise clash, as in gastro-epiploic, and particularly where the contiguous vowels are the same, as in spheno-occipital. A hyphen in such constructions as 23-25 g means ‘to’, never ‘and’. Thus ‘between 23-25 g’ is incorrect and should read ‘between 23 and 25 g’.

Modifying nouns. The unnecessary use of a series of nouns to modify another noun should be avoided. Heart muscle is acceptable (although cardiac muscle would be nicer), heart muscle organelles may perhaps be barely tolerable, but ‘rat tail tendon fibroblast proliferation’ is simply not English.

Adjectives and adverbs. Adjectives should be used where available and appropriate. For example, embryonic (not embryo) growth, dural (not dura) layer, pancreatic (not pancreas) disease. Adjectives have to agree with their nouns, as in fossa ovalis but foramen ovale, ramus communicantes but rami communicantes. Adverbs should be used where appropriate, e.g., the nucleus stained more darkly (not darker).

Singular and plural. Singular nouns, such as glia and calvaria, require singular verbs. Plural nouns, such as data, diverticula (diverticulae is not the plural), and media require plural verbs. Latin plurals need to be watched. For example, the plural of conceptus, fetus, hiatus, meatus, and sinus is similar to the singular in Latin, although in English the forms conceptuses, fetuses, hiatuses, meatuses, and sinuses are commonly and acceptably used.

Genitive (possessive) case. The genitive case is necessary in such terms as tensor fasciae latae and cavum septi pellucidi. A Greek genitive that calls for particular care is duc-tus epididymidis (with extra syllable -id-).
Capital letters. It should be noted that all nouns in German begin with a capital (upper case) letter. This is important in citing the titles of German articles under References. For example, ‘Geschichte und Bibliographie der anatomischen Abbildung’.

Accents and diacritical marks. It cannot be stressed too strongly to writers of English that accents are an essential part of many languages and must be inserted (by hand if necessary) in both proper names and other words that are frequently found in lists of References. Thus Brödel, von Kölliker, Labbé, Müller, etc. Similarly, ‘Considerations sur les localisations cérébrales’.

Frequently it is found that resume is grudgingly given one accent when in point of fact it needs two. Moreover, not all accents are of the acute type. Thus: artère, vertèbre (but colonne vertébrale); tête, crane. The safest procedure is to use a good dictionary.

Terminology. The latest edition of the Nomina anato-mica, Nomina anatomica veterinaria, or Nomina anàomica Avium should be used wherever possible. Where appropriate, Latin terms (e.g., plexus brachialis) should be translated into English (brachial plexus). Certain terms, however, are practically never translated (e.g., femur, telencephalon, foramen magnum, substantia nigra, corpus luteum).

Eponyms are now avoided in anatomical nomenclature. Thus parotid (instead of Stensen’s) duct, renal (instead of Malpighian) corpuscle, mesonephric (instead of Wolffian) duct, lateral sulcus (instead of Sylvian fissure).

A glance at any of the official anatomical terminologies, past or present, will show that the term ‘para-sagittal’ is nowhere to be found. The reason is that, exactly as anything parallel to the coronal suture is coronal, similarly anything parallel to the sagittal suture is simply sagittal. ‘Parasagittal’ is as redundant as would be ‘paracorona’. Median plane is generally better than midline. Extremity for limb is to be discouraged. Acidophil is preferable to acidophilic. Words better avoided are ‘sacrificed’ and ‘feel’ (as in ‘The authors feel that...’). Other undesirable usages include ‘process’ where prepare would suffice, ‘surgery’ where operation is intended, ‘pathology’ where abnormalities or pathological conditions are meant, and X-ray for X-ray film.

Magnifications. A ‘magnification of 40’ or ‘× 40’ illustrates the correct form. The ‘×’ or ‘times’ is already implied in the word magnification, so that ‘magnified 40 ×’ should not be used.

Symbols. The correct symbol for ‘micron’ (micrometre) is µm. Other common units of measurement and their symbols can be found in appropriate reference works. Arabic are preferable to Roman numerals in practically all instances, e.g., stage 23 (not horizon xxiii).

References. It is again to be stressed that References should be double-spaced. Except for very rare and special reasons, elementary textbooks of the kind written for beginning students should not be cited. The bibliography should consist primarily of authoritative investigations based on first-hand research.

Attention to the above points will help to expedite the publication of articles written in English.

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