

IRCOBI | HOUSE STYLE GUIDE FOR AUTHORS AND EDITORS

Version 2024

The following instructions and examples should be followed by authors to prepare their manuscripts.

Abbreviations and acronyms

Abbreviations and acronyms should be written in full at first mention, followed by the abbreviation/acronym in parentheses to define them; the abbreviation/acronym should be used thereafter, in subsequent mentions.

In some cases it may be appropriate to write out the term in full again; for example, where the term has not appeared in several pages or sections.

Full stops *are* used in the following abbreviations, e.g., i.e., etc.

In general, however, full stops should not be used with acronyms or abbreviations, e.g. IRCOBI, *not* I.R.C.O.B.I.

Full stops are not used in the following abbreviations: *Dr, Mr, Mrs, am, pm, km*

Age

An individual is in their ‘twenties’ not ‘20s’, though they would be ‘24 years old’.

AIS injury scale

No space before the number, e.g. AIS1.

American usage

In general, British rather than American conventions of usage and spelling should be used. For example, *-ise* rather than *-ize* in words such as *emphasise*; *-ogue* rather than *-og* in words such as *catalogue*; single rather than double *l* in words such as *instal, fulfil; meet* rather than *meet with; transport* rather than *transportation*. Note: American usage is standard in some specialised contexts (e.g. *program* in computing).

Ampersand

Unless used as part of a company’s name (e.g. Procter & Gamble) ampersands should be avoided.

Capitalisation

Initial capital letters make a word or words specific in their reference: distinguishing, for instance, between *the white house* (a house painted white) and *the White House* (the official residence of the President of the United States). Thus, titles should be in initial capitals when referring to specific individuals or institutions (i.e. proper nouns) but lower case when used generically.

The following always take initial capital letters:

- Titles of government departments (e.g. *the Department of Agriculture*)

President

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- Titles of courtesy, honour and rank (e.g. *President, Professor*)
- Titles of books and other publications, poems or songs

When organisations, government departments, official bodies and office-holders are referred to by anything other than their precise title, lower case should be used. For example, the *Minister for Health and Children*, but the *health minister*.

Lower case should be used for compass points (*east, west, north, south*), except when part of a name or recognised geographical or political group (e.g. *North Korea, the West Midlands*).

Colon

A colon separates two clauses that are logically related, fulfilling the same function as words such as *namely, that is, as, for example, because, as follows* and *therefore*. It is principally used:

- when the preceding part of the sentence is complete in both sense and construction, and the following part naturally arises from it in sense, though not in construction (e.g. *The fishmonger sold fish of all shapes and sizes: I should like to be a fishmonger*);
- to lead from introduction to main theme (e.g. *The question is one of universal interest: what is the secret of a long and happy life?*); from cause to effect (e.g. *It started to rain: the match was abandoned*); and from a general statement to an example (e.g. *Dublin has some excellent restaurants: Mint in Ranelagh has one Michelin star*);
- to introduce a list of items, especially after such expressions as *for example*, and *including*;
- before a quotation a colon may be used instead of a comma to give the quotation added emphasis (e.g. *He asked a simple question: "Who was first?"*)

Comma

The comma is the least emphatic of the separating marks in the English language. It is used in a wide range of ways to structure sentences and clarify meaning. For example:

- To separate clauses within a sentence
- Between adjectives that qualify a noun in the same way
- When a sentence or phrase would mean something completely different without a comma (e.g. *Mozart's 40th symphony, in G minor* as opposed to *Mozart's 40th symphony in G minor*)
- To separate items in a list of more than two items. It is not generally necessary to use a comma after *and* or *or* before the last item unless this helps to clarify the sense and avoid ambiguity (e.g. *The membership of this group included James Watt (the steam engine pioneer), Joseph Priestley, who discovered oxygen, and Matthew Boulton*)
- To mark the beginning and end of a parenthetical word or phrase (e.g. *Professor J K Heath, Head of the School of Biosciences, was appointed in August 2001*)
- Before a quotation, although a colon can be used for an increased weight of
- sentence break (see note on **Colon**)
- In numbers of four or more figures

Dates

Dates should be written in the following ways: "Tuesday, 1 February 2012" or "1 February 2012" or "1 February".

Periods of years are expressed as 2005–2008, unless the dates involve changes of century, when they are written in full (see note on **Numerals**).

Decades

Decades are expressed as 1990s (not 1990's or '90s) or eighties (not eightie's).

E-mail addresses Lower case letters throughout in all e-mail addresses. Express e-mail with a hyphen, capitalising the initial letter at the beginning of a sentence.

e.g.

Non-italics, with points, and preceded by comma.

Ellipsis (omission of words)

An ellipsis is three full stops (...) used to mark the omission of words. When used at the end of an incomplete sentence a fourth full stop is not required.

Emphasis added

When emphasis is added to a quote or citation, such as a bold or underscored word or phrase, this should be noted by the parenthetical phrase '(emphasis added)' after the citation. Only a change in emphasis should be noted, i.e. you should never include the phrase '(emphasis in original)' as it is to be assumed that the citation has been presented as original unless otherwise stated.

En rules

An en rule (longer than a hyphen) should be used in the following ways:

- As a parenthetical dash in informal contexts to replace a colon (*see note on **Colon***)
- To express a more profound break in sentence structure than commas and to draw more attention to the enclosed phrase than brackets (e.g. *Managing your finances is a vital – and sometimes difficult – aspect of student life*)

In these instances the en rule should be spaced.

An unspaced en rule should be used:

- In ranges of numbers, dates or days of the week (e.g. *pages 13–25, 1939–45, Monday–Friday*), where it stands for the word *to*
- To join words that have equal importance in phrases such as *Labour–Liberal alliance, cost–benefit analysis, on–off switch*, where it stands for the word *and*

et al.

Used in book or article reference when there are more than 2 authors, and the first author is cited, e.g. Johnson *et al.* It is italicised, with a fullstop after 'al'

etc.

Non-italics, with points, and preceded and succeeded by comma.

First, but Secondly, Thirdly ...

Fractions

Give them in numerals, e.g. $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{2}{5}$.

However, spell out at start of sentence, and hyphenate, e.g. one-third, three-quarters, etc.

Gender

Pronouns should be gender neutral. Write as “he or she”, “his and her” and **not** “he/she”, “his/her”.

Where possible avoid masculine/feminine descriptors completely.

Government

Capital G, when referring to specific government, e.g. ‘the Irish Government’, or ‘the Government’ when referring to same. Otherwise, lower case.

Headings

SEE TEMPLATE PAPERS – LONG AND SHORT

Hyphen

Hyphens are used:

- To join two or more words to form a compound expression (e.g. *punch-drunk*), and in phrases to clarify the unification of the sense (e.g. *a blood-red hand*, *a well-known man*)
- To join a prefix to a proper name or date (e.g. *anti-Darwinian*, *mid-1980s*)
- To separate a prefix from the main word to avoid confusion with another word (e.g. *recover*)
- To separate two similar consonant or vowel sounds in a word, as an aid to understanding (e.g. *co-operation*, *bio-organic*)
- To prevent misunderstanding by linking words (e.g. *a little-used car*, as opposed to *a little used car*)
- To represent a common second element in all but the last word of a list (e.g. *short and long-term*).
- In fractions (see note on **Numerals**)
- in a sequence of non-inclusive numbers (e.g. *ISBN 0-123-45678-9*)

i.e.

Non-italics, with points, and preceded by comma.

Italics

Italics are used:

- As a method of emphasising or distinguishing words (e.g. The weather was *so cold* last winter)
- For the titles of books, newspapers, magazines and other publications
- For the titles of plays, films, TV and radio series, and CDs
- For the titles of paintings, sculptures and other works of art
- For the individual names of ships, trains, aircraft, spacecraft, and other means of transport
- For foreign words or phrases that are not naturalised (e.g. *arriviste*)

Words to be italicised: *inter alia*,

Words and phrases *not* to be italicised: ad hoc, bona fide,

Names

In text, it is F. A. Author – space between initials and fullstop after each initial. For references see template paper.

NB Not N.B. or *NB*

Numerals/Time

We use words for numbers from one to nine (inclusive); all other numerals from 10 onwards are given as figures.

Figures are also used for decimal fractions, percentages, and in sets linking more than two numerals where some are higher and some lower than ten (e.g. *Deaths from this cause in the past three years were 14, 9 and 6*). However, do not start a sentence with a figure; write the number in words instead (e.g. *Eighty-six places will be available on this programme in 2006*).

In statistical material, fractions are written numerically (e.g. $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{3}{4}$).

50th percentile or 50th %ile.

The following are expressed in figures only:

- Dates (e.g. Tuesday, 1 February)
- Degrees of heat (e.g. It is 32°C in the shade)
- Money (e.g. €5.50, £25)
- Races (both distance and time)
- Scores in games and matches
- Specific gravity
- Statistics
- Time of day, when followed by am or pm
- Numbers of votes
- Weights when abbreviated units, such as grams or kilograms, are given
- Page numbers: in the main text page ranges should be expressed as *pages 21–30*; in footnotes and in references as pp. 21–30)

Note: million and billion are spelt out as words (except for formulas), whether referring to people, objects or sums of money (e.g. five million people, five million donations, €5 million).

ongoing (Note: no hyphen)

Parentheses

Parentheses (round brackets) are used:

- As a means of definition, explanation, reference, or translation – e.g. *Parentheses (round brackets), Machtpolitik (power politics)*
- To supply ancillary information such as abbreviations, references, cross-references and variants – e.g. *Animal Biology (see page 230), Times Literary Supplement (TLS)*
- When using reference figures or letters within text, such as *(a), (b), (c)*

- In normal running text, try to avoid brackets within brackets: where this is inevitable, double parentheses are preferable to square brackets.

Percentages

All percentages should be written as figures followed by % (this includes percentages from 1 to 9, e.g. 5%)

PMHS

post-mortem human subject/s (not specimens or surrogates).

Possessive case

When using the possessive case, the apostrophe must be used with proper and common nouns. In singular or plural nouns that end in a letter other than *s*, the apostrophe must precede the added *s* (e.g. *the Queen's Jubilee, the children's toys*). In plural nouns that end in *s*, the apostrophe must follow the *s* (e.g. *the students' essays*). In singular words ending in *s*, the possessive case normally takes a second *s* after the apostrophe (e.g. *James's*), in line with their pronunciation. However when the final *s* is silent in speech, it is generally omitted (e.g. *for goodness' sake*).

Question mark

This should follow every question where a separate answer is required.

A question mark may also be placed before a word or date whose accuracy is doubted (e.g. *Leonardo da Vinci, ?1452–1519*).

A question mark is not required after an indirect question.

Ratios

The colon in a ratio has no space before or after.

3:2

References

SEE TEMPLATE PAPERS – LONG AND SHORT

Tables

SEE TEMPLATE PAPERS – LONG AND SHORT

Time of day

The time of day is always written as figures, using the 24-hour clock.

vs. (versus)

This takes a fullstop.

Web

Takes a capital when referring to the World Wide Web.

Websites

Website is always written as one word in lower case.