

ECIL Writing Guidelines: English Language Usage

ECIL abstracts and papers must be written in English. This can be a challenging task, particularly for some non-native English language speakers. In addition, even native English speakers may use varying writing styles, depending on preferences in a particular country or discipline. ECIL's English language Editorial Board offers this list of guidelines to aid editors and readers and asks that you check your proposal and paper for each of the following points before submitting. We have included several examples below showing possible revisions for common stylistic improvements.

1. Consistency

Throughout your proposal or paper, be consistent in spelling, punctuation, writing style, and citations or referencing.

2. Spelling, punctuation and capitalization

- Choose British (U.K.) or American (U.S.) English spelling (such as colour or color, realise or realize, behaviour or behavior), and use it consistently throughout your text.
- Use the same punctuation style throughout, including placing quotation marks within **(U.K.)** or outside **(U.S.)** of punctuation at the ends of sentences.
- Spell out these symbols: # (use "number"); + (use "plus"); & (use "and").
- Be consistent in capitalizing throughout the text.
- Include a comma before the word "and" in the last of a series of three or more items.
 - Example of missing comma: "Many forms of active learning increase engagement, including role-playing, think-pair-share and the pause procedure."
 - Improved example: "Many forms of active learning increase engagement, including role-playing, think-pair-share, and the pause procedure."

3. Use of Acronyms

- Spell out each acronym in full the first time you use it, followed by the acronym in parentheses, even if it seems to be universally known, such as ICT (Information Communication Technologies).
- Be aware of the fact that an acronym used widely in your culture may have a different meaning to some readers. For example some of us know 'Sails' to be a USA information literacy test, but note the following:

"Sails makes it easy to build custom, enterprise-grade Node.js apps. It is designed to emulate the familiar MVC pattern of frameworks." [Source: <http://sailsjs.org/#/>]

4. Grammar

- Avoid the passive tense.
 - Example of passive tense: "The focus group was attended by fourteen undergraduate Economics graduate students."
 - Improved example: "Fourteen Economics graduate students attended the focus group session."
- Write full sentences, but avoid run-on sentences. Break very long sentences into two or more complete sentences, or, use a semi-colon (;) to connect them.
 - Example of a run-on sentence: "He also recommends a positive rather than a negative approach, for example, instead of a sign that reads 'No loud noise' or 'Shh,' Kupersmith recommends using a sign that says 'Quiet please'."

- Improved (or Alternative) example: He also recommends a positive rather than a negative approach. Instead of a sign that reads 'No loud noise' or 'Shh,' Kupersmith recommends using a sign that says 'Quiet please'."
- When reporting findings, use the past tense as the study has been concluded.
- When citing what an author has said, use the past tense, as authors can change their minds.
- Avoid the term 'etc.' because people may imagine very different extra things to add to your list. Instead, please list important elements, or reword the sentence to indicate that you are listing examples or the most important examples.
 - Example: "Hands-on instruction benefits undergraduates, graduate students, etc."
 - Improved example: "Hands-on instruction benefits many people, including undergraduates, graduate students, and library staff."
- Avoid contractions in formal writing. For instance, use "do not" instead of "don't."
- Use 'who' to refer to a person, rather than 'that' or 'which.'
 - Example: "Students that kept self-reflective information researching journals scored higher on post-tests than those which did not."
 - Improved example: "Students who kept self-reflective information researching journals scored higher on post-tests than those who did not."
- Avoid "e.g." and "i.e." in formal writing, except within parentheses with a comma after "e.g." or "i.e." For "e.g." in the text of an abstract or paper use either "for example" or "such as," or "including."
 - Example: "Assessment results indicate the need for intensive information literacy instruction for health care workers, e.g., nurses."
 - Improved example: "Assessment results indicate the need for intensive information literacy instruction for health care workers, including nurses."
 - Acceptable example within parentheses: "College students are the subjects of numerous studies of library behavior (e.g., Keefer, 1993; Mellon, 1986)."

5. List of Points

When including a series of four or more items in a sentence, format them as a numbered or bulleted list, in order to make each point stand out clearly for the reader.

- Example: "One survey question aimed to gather data on how librarians decide on the need for instruction in trustworthiness of information, and offered the following response choices: formal needs assessment; informal outreach; user request; reference queries; N/A - we do not do this; Other."
- Improved example: "One survey question aimed to gather data on how librarians decide on the need for instruction in trustworthiness of information, and offered the following response choices:
 - formal needs assessment
 - informal outreach
 - user request
 - reference queries
 - N/A - we do not do this
 - Other"

6. Quotations

- Use three dots to indicate when you have left out a section of a quotation. If you need to add a word into the quote for clarity, put the word in brackets.

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- Place short quotations within quotation marks (" ") and indent entire longer quotes.
- If you are quoting a source that uses gendered language do not change the quote. You can add in brackets [sic] to signify that you do not endorse the out of date gender bias. In the example below, use of the male gender was common in 1959 but would not be appropriate today.
Example: "Huxley (1959, p. 13) suggested that it means the 'process by which the prototype human stock became (and is still becoming) ... to realise more and more of his [sic] possibilities'."

7. Numbers – words or figures?

- Always spell out numbers when beginning a sentence.
- In graphs, charts, tables, rankings and lists use figures.
- Insert a comma rather than a period for thousands and tens of thousands, for example: 1,000 and 10,000.

8. Reporting statistics

- Use one or two decimal places for quoting correlations or reliability coefficients.
- Use the percent sign (%) in the text and in graphs and tables.