

# *Brain* STYLE GUIDE

## BEFORE YOU START

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Writing is an act of persuasion. You have to convince your reader – one or more of the *Brain* editorial team in the first instance – that your manuscript stands out from the rest. This is not easy. The competition is fiercely intense.

Many manuscripts fail at the first hurdle. They are poorly written. There are spelling mistakes and formatting errors. The scientific or clinical impact seems obscure. In short, the entire article seems altogether dreary. It fails to persuade.

There is no point in submitting such a manuscript to *Brain*. It stands very little chance of getting to review. It is a waste of your time – and ours. We now receive over 80 manuscripts per week. 70% of submissions are rejected straightaway because they are not competitive. They fail to persuade. If you are considering *Brain* for publication, it would be worth your while to have a good look at recent issues of the journal.

**Take time to read some of the papers that have succeeded in the competition for selection.** This will give you an idea of the quality of writing and scientific or clinical significance of the papers we publish. It makes little sense to submit a paper to a journal that you don't read. *Brain* considers:

- Well-designed, statistically powered studies
- Pivotal trial results (negative or positive)
- Novel, insightful approaches to clinical and neuroscientific questions

If English is not your first language, please consider getting feedback on your manuscript from someone who has a high degree of familiarity with writing in English. There are also providers who can help to improve the quality of writing. Oxford University Press (OUP) recommends Enago (<https://www.enago.com/pub/oup/>) for language editing.

Overselling is not recommended. Do not claim priority such as 'This is the first study showing...' or 'To our knowledge this is the only study showing...'. Such statements have no scientific value, could offend authors whose earlier papers on the topic may have been missed and tend to trivialize your results.

Good writing means clear writing. Clarity is crucial to persuading your reader. If you are unclear, they will doubt, misunderstand or even mistrust your arguments. They may become annoyed if something is unclear. In short, the impression you make on the reader can be spoiled by assuming that what you have written is understandable. It often is not, so ask a colleague to read your manuscript to give you their honest opinion.

Read the final draft carefully or get a colleague to do so. A lot may have changed in the text from when you first started writing it. Take care to check the references and their numbering. Try to avoid repeating the same word (e.g. 'study') or construction (e.g. 'They found that .....') in consecutive sentences. It sounds repetitious. Above all, try to make the writing stimulating and clear for the reader.

If unsure on any point of style when writing for *Brain*, consult the following resources:

New Hart's Rules: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/new-harts-rules-9780199570027>

AMA (American Medical Association) Manual: <https://academic.oup.com/amamanualofstyle>

Oxford English Dictionary: <https://www.oed.com/>

OUP house style: <https://academic.oup.com/pages/for-authors/books/the-book-publishing-process/writing-and-content-preparation/house-style>

## ABBREVIATIONS

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- In general, avoid abbreviations unless they are very well known to a general readership (for example, DNA or accepted gene/protein symbols) (see table below). If you must use abbreviations, limit them to as few as possible, and only for repeatedly used words. Ask yourself if the abbreviation makes the paper easier to understand or if readers will need to memorize it to read the rest of the paper. Spell out the abbreviation at first mention and put it in parentheses. In the remainder of the manuscript, please use only the abbreviation.
- Avoid abbreviations in the title or abstract unless gene/protein symbols or commonly accepted:

AIDS	DNA	mRNA
ANOVA	ECG	PBS
ATP	EEG	PCR
CNS	EMG	PET
CSF	GABA	REM
ELISA	GP (doctor)	RNA
cDNA	HIV	tRNA
CT	MRI	

- Define any abbreviations used in Figure or Table legends even if defined elsewhere.

## SPELLING AND GRAMMAR

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- Use sentence case for titles except proper nouns.
- **Use Oxford English spelling throughout.**
- Note many Oxford spellings use ize instead of ise and our team may change these during copy editing.

### Capitalisation

- Capitalise after a colon, or for categorisation such as Experiment, Patient, Day etc.

### Numbers

- Numbers should be spelled out in full if below 10 (including ordinals), at the beginning of sentences, and for fractions less than one.
- Arabic numerals should be used for numbers above nine, for designators (e.g. Case 5, Day 2, etc.), scores, confidence intervals and for units of measure, including time.
- Dates are in order day, month, year. Date style: 1 January 2006

### Commas and punctuation

- Avoid use of the ‘Oxford comma’ (i.e. no comma before ‘and’ in a serial list).
- If using ‘respectively’ this is preceded by a comma
- No comma after e.g. or i.e.
- Use parentheses within square brackets within curly brackets  
{}{{(...)}}{}}

## Hypenation, clauses, en and em dash

- Hyphenation of prefixes should follow *Concise Oxford Dictionary*.
- Use 'that' in restrictive clauses and 'which' in non-restrictive clauses. A non-restrictive clause can be removed from a sentence without changing its meaning, as it adds additional non-essential information.
  - 'The book that has a red cover is mine.' – restrictive clause.
  - 'The book, which has a red cover, is mine.' – non-restrictive clause.
- The en rule (longer than a hyphen; half-length of an em rule) is used as given in *Hart's Rules*, page 79.
- Use the en rule closed up in elements that form a range:

pp. 23–36 1939–45

- For ranges where the symbol is closed up to the number/value (e.g. %, °), repeat the symbol:  
4%–10%, otherwise 2–3 mg
- To express connection or relation between words; it roughly means *to* or *and*:  
Dover–Calais crossing editor–author relationship Mann–Whitney U-test  
or parenthetical phrases, closed up,  
e.g. he was—so he said—a businessman
- Em dash (—) may be used to introduce a phrase at the end of a sentence or to replace an introductory colon. It has a less formal feel than a colon and often implies an afterthought or aside.

## FORMATTING

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- Please ensure you have checked our article types for specific formatting, word count, table, figure and reference requirements.
- All references must be in **AMA** (American Medical Association) style.
- Abstracts may have multiple paragraphs.
- In-text footnotes are not allowed – set these within the text in parentheses.

## Italics

- Italics not permitted for emphasis – change to single quotes.
- Italics may be used for software but not required.
- Restriction enzymes: no italics should be used.
- **Italics** should be used for:
  - Titles of published books
  - Titles of periodicals
  - Latin phrases and species names, e.g. *per se*, *in situ*, *Escherichia coli*, *et al.*
  - Mathematical variables: *t*-test, *P* (note: Roman U in U-test)
  - Exception: no italics in reference list except abbreviated journal names, book titles, and conference proceedings

## Quotes

- If quoted material spans more than five lines of text, have it as a separate paragraph, indented on left-hand side and font size reduced
- Use single quotes, and double quotes for quotes within a quote.

Smith stated ‘the patient remarked “he could see the picture”’
- Use punctuation after closing single quotes if the punctuation is not part of the sentence in quotes
- No ellipses at the start or end of a quote

## Lists

- Short lists can run on in the text, long lists should have each item displayed in a separate paragraph (list style)
- Numbered lists within text should be in the format: (i) followed by no cap and a semicolon after each item; each item follows on: (i); (ii); and (iii)

## Citations

- Avoid repetition of a citation in the same paragraph
- Figure citations should be written Fig. 1, Figs 3–6, Fig. 2A and B, Fig. 3A–C, Fig. 4A(i and ii) and B
- Cite Supplementary material after main text figure citations to avoid ambiguity. Examples:  
Fig. 2A and B and **Supplementary material**  
Figs 5 and 6, Supplementary Fig. 3 and Supplementary Tables 1–7

# WORDING AND WRITING STYLE

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## Significance

- Reserve the term ‘significant’ for statistics.
- Do not use a *P*-value and significant for the same point. Use one or the other.
- Do not state that something is ‘statistically significant’. Explain the significance using *P*-values etc.

## Statistics, equations and scientific terms

- Avoid using ‘the vast majority’. Please replace with (for example) ‘most’.
- For correlations, associations and relationships, do not state ‘positive’, ‘negative’ or ‘inverse’. State what you observe, for example, ‘an increase in ice cream sales with higher levels of sunshine’.
- Reserve the term ‘parameters’ for scientific measurements.
- Subjects are male and female rather than men and women.
- Generic drug names should generally be used. When proprietary brands are used in research, include the brand name in parentheses once in the ‘Materials and methods’ section. No location of the supplier is needed.
- *P* (upper case, italics). Use asterisks to represent statistical significance of *P*-values in figures, tables and their legends and footnotes, e.g. \**P* ≤ 0.05, \*\**P* ≤ 0.01, \*\*\**P* ≤ 0.001.
- Please include simple equations in word format where possible, not in equation format, more complex equations must be in a MathType format.
- Use a multiplication symbol × instead of \*
- Write *F* values in the following format *F*(2,35) =
- Write out exponents as  $6 \times 10^5$  not 6E5

- Use SI units.
- For 95% confidence limits, use a comma to separate the lower and upper values for example (15,28), not (15-28).

## Other points of grammar and writing

- Avoid using the construction ‘and/or’. In nearly all cases there is no change to the meaning if only ‘and’ or ‘or’ is used. If you need to convey the concept of ‘either or both’, stating that is fine.
- Unless someone is a household name (for example Darwin, or Newton) or of known historical importance in the research area, avoid naming authors in the text. For example, do not say, ‘Smith *et al.* reported similar findings’. Instead say ‘Similar findings have been reported’ and then cite Smith *et al.*<sup>52</sup>
- If listing appropriate reviews or other reports, list with author names and the citation after each, or use a generalized statement. For reviews on this topic, see Al-Chalabi *et al.*<sup>4</sup>, Kang *et al.*<sup>17</sup> and Schulz *et al.*<sup>21</sup> OR There are a number of reviews on the use of HPLC.<sup>4,17,21</sup>