




NOMENCLATURE

Open Access



Setting scientific names at all taxonomic ranks in italics facilitates their quick recognition in scientific papers

Marco Thines^{1,2*} , Takayuki Aoki³, Pedro W. Crous⁴, Kevin D. Hyde⁵, Robert Lücking⁶, Elaine Malosso⁷, Tom W. May⁸, Andrew N. Miller⁹, Scott A. Redhead¹⁰, Andrey M. Yurkov¹¹ and David L. Hawksworth^{12,13,14}

Abstract

It is common practice in scientific journals to print genus and species names in italics. This is not only historical as species names were traditionally derived from Greek or Latin. Importantly, it also facilitates the rapid recognition of genus and species names when skimming through manuscripts. However, names above the genus level are not always italicized, except in some journals which have adopted this practice for all scientific names. Since scientific names treated under the various Codes of nomenclature are without exception treated as Latin, there is no reason why names above genus level should be handled differently, particularly as higher taxon names are becoming increasingly relevant in systematic and evolutionary studies and their italicization would aid the unambiguous recognition of formal scientific names distinguishing them from colloquial names. Several leading mycological and botanical journals have already adopted italics for names of all taxa regardless of rank over recent decades, as is the practice in the *International Code of Nomenclature for algae, fungi, and plants*, and we hereby recommend that this practice be taken up broadly in scientific journals and textbooks.

Keywords: Format of names of taxa, Italics, Publication standards, Scientific names, Scientific practice

BACKGROUND

The International Commission on the Taxonomy of Fungi (ICTF) is an international body devoted to its mission of promoting fungal taxonomy by facilitating the development of high scientific standards (Sigler and Hawksworth 1987; Seifert and Rossman 2010; Hawksworth 2015). The ICTF occasionally provides recommendations on publication and scientific standards related to fungal taxonomy, to promote them in the scientific community. Here, we encourage journals to adopt italics for formal scientific names at all ranks to facilitate rapid and unambiguous recognition of formal scientific

names governed under nomenclatural Codes within publications, as compared to informal names such as those sometimes used to differentiate clades.

For more than a century it has been common practice in most scientific journals to italicize scientific genus and species names, since regardless of their etymology, these names are Latinised (ICNafp Art. 23; Turland et al. 2018). To highlight text in languages deviating from the main manuscript language, it was common practice to use italics, and very often, whole sentences or expressions were taken from other languages to retain their original content and meaning. This practice declined over time and in most disciplines, only a few foreign (mostly Latinized) language expressions continue to be used, such as *de novo*, *et al.*, and *in vitro*. As these expressions are frequently employed, many journals no longer implement italics for them. Similarly, Latin-derived names that are treated as naturalized words,

* Correspondence: m.thines@thines-lab.eu; marco.thines@senckenberg.de

¹Department of Biological Sciences, Goethe University, Institute of Ecology Evolution and Diversity, Max-von-Laue-Str. 13, 60439 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

²Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre (BiK-F), Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



© The Author(s). 2020 **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.