



Style Guide for Abstract Authors

Overview

A clear, consistent writing style is key to presenting the Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) professionally and conveying complex information.

For most grammar and style questions, AACI refers to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. For spelling, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* is recommended.

Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviating words the audience won't understand immediately. Common abbreviations should be followed by a period, with a few exceptions.

In charts, graphs, and fact sheets, AACI abbreviates states with their two-letter postal code after the first mention. (This includes *DC* for *District of Columbia*.) We also write academic degrees (*MD*, *MBA*, *PhD*) without periods.

Acronyms and Initialisms

Spell out the full name on first reference, followed by the acronym or initialism in parentheses. Use the acronym or initialism after that.

Ex. The Association of American Cancer Institutes (AACI) comprises 102 premier academic and freestanding cancer centers in North America. AACI's mission is to accelerate progress against cancer.

To make an acronym or initialism plural, just add *s* (no apostrophe). This also applies to four-digit years.

Ex. Satellite sites' SOPs are set by the IRB of the main cancer center.

When referring to the country, use *United States* on first mention and shorten to *U.S.* (with periods) in subsequent mentions.

Capitalization

After a Colon

Don't capitalize the word after a colon unless it is a proper noun or part of a title.

- **Ex.** Centers use two main methods to determine if a trial should be opened: a feasibility decision tree and a data pathway.

Titles, Headings, and Subheadings

Titles of books are always in title case, with the first letter of important words (everything but articles, conjunctions, and prepositions) capitalized. Generally, words of four letters or more (*From*, *With*) begin with a capital letter. The same capitalization rules apply to headings and subheadings.

Job Titles

Job titles are capitalized only when preceding the name of a specific person; otherwise, they're lowercase.

NCI Designation

When used as a complete title, all words begin with a capital letter in *NCI-Designated Cancer Center* and *NCI-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center*. Phrases referring to NCI designation are written in sentence case.

Ex. An NCI-Designated Comprehensive Cancer Center, Mayo Clinic Cancer Center gives patients access to hundreds of clinical trials.

Ex. Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey achieved comprehensive cancer center status in 2002.

Centers that have not received NCI designation are described as “not NCI-designated,” not “emerging” or “non-NCI-designated.”

Formatting

Titles of books, movies, magazines, journals, and newspapers should be in italics, except on social media.

Ex. Siddhartha Mukherjee is the author of *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*.

A part or section of a larger work is put in double quotation marks. (This includes book chapters and magazine or journal articles.)

Ex. “Hodgkin lymphoma: A review and update on recent progress” was first published in the December 1, 2017 edition of *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*.

Always use a single space between sentences.

Lists

Do not use periods after list items, even if they form complete sentences. Don’t use semicolons or *and* after list items. Lists can be organized by bullets or numbers; just be consistent with bullet style and indents.

Ex. Challenges:

- Definition of a satellite site
- Structure and role of staff
- Subject management

Names and Credentials

Include all academic credentials and suffixes without periods, followed by a comma, after the first mention of a name. Use last name only for people on second reference, or *Dr. Last Name* for those who hold that distinction.

Ex. Randall F. Holcombe, MD, MBA, has been director of the University of Hawai’i Cancer Center since 2016. Dr. Holcombe led the center through major milestones including NCI re-designation and CCSG renewal.

Numbers

Write out numbers one through nine and use numerals for 10 and up, except in percentages and hard data. If a list of items includes numbers under and above 10, just make the list consistent.

Write out numbers at the start of a sentence.

Ex. Twenty cancer center leaders completed AACI’s survey.

Dates

On first mention, write the full date (Friday, February 14, 2020). On subsequent mentions, only the month and day need to be written (February 14).

Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers, which describe a numerical position, should always be written out.

Correct: The first, second, and third place posters will be displayed at the meeting.

Incorrect: The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place posters will be displayed at the meeting.

Percentages

Use the numeric form for percentages but write out the word at the start of a sentence. When preceded by a numeral or a word, the word *percent*—not the percent sign (%)—should always be used in narrative text. The percent sign is acceptable in charts, graphs, and tables.

Times and Time Zones

Times should be written out with the minutes appearing after a colon. Write *am* and *pm* in lowercase, no periods, with a space after the time: 9:00 am/9:00 pm

Time ranges can be separated by a hyphen (no spaces) but should include *to* in narrative text.

Ex. 9:00-10:00 am

Ex. The meeting is scheduled from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm.

When writing out the time zone, only capitalize proper nouns. After the first mention, an abbreviation should appear after the time.

Ex. 10:30 am Pacific time

Ex. 2:00 pm ET

Punctuation

Ampersands

Avoid using ampersands (&) in narrative text. Ampersands may be used in charts or tables, or as part of a company name, professional title, or a publication title.

Apostrophes

Only use an apostrophe when you need to form the possessive of the word — not the plural. The exception to this is *its*. If the word is a plural ending in *s*, just add an apostrophe to form the possessive; names ending in *s* are made possessive with an apostrophe followed by *s*.

Ex. Byers received her PhD from the University of Kansas's School of Social Welfare.

When abbreviating years, place the apostrophe before the last two digits, not before the *s*.

Correct: '80s

Incorrect: 80's

Commas

Use the serial (Oxford) comma before *and* or *or* in lists.

Ex. AACI *Update* has enjoyed steady growth in readership, published news items, and the number of cancer centers submitting stories.

Dashes and Hyphens

Em dashes (—) are used to indicate added emphasis, a pause, or a change of thought. Use em dashes with no spaces for setting off text or emphasizing a point in a sentence.

Ex. Case Comprehensive Cancer Center is working to drive down smoking rates for people who have been diagnosed with cancer, focusing on communities—as in Cleveland—with higher incidences of smoking-related cancers.

Use hyphens in numeric ranges but use *to* when including a numeric range in a sentence.

Ex. Our staff meetings usually run from 9:00 to 10:00 am.

Ex. 9:00-10:00 am

Note: There is no hyphen in *CAR T*, but there is in *CAR T-cell therapy*.

Semicolons

Semicolons can be used to link two related independent clauses (complete sentences), or to list items separated by a comma.

Ex. We have succeeded by reinvesting net clinical revenues in the recruitment of faculty and staff; the development of research, clinical, and community outreach programs; and training and education.

Quotes

When citing an article or talk, use double quotation marks with single quotation marks inside.

Ex. “My talk, ‘Oligometastasis from Conception to Treatment,’ will be published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* this fall,” said Dr. Weichselbaum.

Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks.

Ex. “Cancer centers are an enormous force for good and collectively have worked to lower cancer incidence and mortality rates for over four decades,” said Dr. Jensen.

Colons, semicolons, and dashes always go outside quotation marks.

Word Choice

Between vs. Among

Use *between* with two people or things and *among* with three or more people or things. *Amongst* and *among* can be used interchangeably, but *among* is preferred for its simplicity.

Effect vs. Affect

To *affect* means to produce a change or influence something; the word is typically used as a verb.

Ex. AACI offers viewpoints on public policy and legislative activities that affect cancer research and care.

An *effect* is a change that has occurred; the word is typically used as a noun.

Ex. Academic cancer centers provide complex cancer care and educate the next generation of investigators and clinicians while having a positive effect on the economy.

Insure, Ensure, and Assure

To *insure* means to protect against financial loss.

Ex. You are insured against theft.

To *ensure* means to make certain or to confirm.

Ex. To ensure the continued broad appeal of *AACI Update*, AACI has developed submission guidelines.

To *assure* means to promise.

Ex. I can assure you that your valuables are safely locked away.

Which vs. That

Which is part of a nonrestrictive clause, which is preceded or set off by commas. Since this clause is not essential, it can be taken out without changing the meaning of the sentence.

Ex. Patients may not be able to seek care at their center of choice, which is generally within close proximity to their home.

That is part of a restrictive clause, which is not set off by commas. Since this clause is essential to sentence meaning, it can't be removed.

Ex. It is important for AACI's GR Forum to closely follow NIH appropriations and issues that directly impact AACI cancer centers.

If the *which* in the sentence sounds odd with a comma in front of it, you probably need to be using *that*.

Word List

advisor	health care	Pap smear/Pap test
African American (n.)	how to (followed by v.)	Phase I (0, II, III, IV)
African-American (adj.)	how-to (n.)	clinical trial
Asian American (n.)	how-tos (plural n.)	policymaker(s)
Asian-American (adj.)	Indigenous	reuse
Big Data	infographic	retweet
Black (when describing race)	investigator-initiated trial	SEO
Bristol Myers Squibb	internet	smartphone
call(s) to action (CTA)	The Joint Commission	sneak peek (n.)
CAR T-cell therapy	Latinx	start-up (when referring to clinical trial start-up)
CAR T	LGBTQ+ or Sexual and Gender Minority (SGM)	startup (when referring to a startup company)
carepath	listserv	they (plural/singular n.)
chimeric antigen receptor T-cell (CAR T) therapy	long-term (adj.)	transdisciplinary
copay	longterm (n.)	web
email	multidisciplinary	webpage
follow up (v.)	nonprofit	website
follow-up (adj.)	onboarding	well-being
freestanding (adj.)	ongoing	white
	online	whitepaper(s)

When in doubt, refer to [Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary](#).

A Note on Inclusive Language

AACI communications strive to reflect the diversity of the cancer community and the general public. Inclusive language encompasses various facets of an individual, from [ability/disability](#) and [age](#), to [gender identity](#) and [race](#).

Did you know that the singular use of *they* is now widely accepted in place of *he or she*, *transgender* is correct (while *transgendered* is not)? Did you know *African American* should only be hyphenated when used as an adjective?

According to the *National Institutes of Health (NIH) Sexual & Gender Minority (SGM) Research Office*, "SGM populations include individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer, and/or intersex. These populations also encompass those who do not self-identify with one of these terms but whose sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or reproductive development is characterized by non-binary constructs of sexual orientation, gender, and/or sex." AACI is moving toward the use of SGM when referring to these populations, though LGBTQ+ is still widely used and acceptable.

To learn more, please visit the [Conscious Style Guide](#).