

## **ACP news Style Guide - Julian Burton**

This guide builds upon and replaces that produced by Dr Mike Harris in 2005. As well as guiding authors, this will assist in editing and proof-reading, in particular to remind the editor of what he decided on previously regarding any given question. *ACP news* generally follows the house styles adopted by the *Journal of Clinical Pathology* and the *British Medical Journal*. However, its more informal approach inevitably means a more relaxed attitude towards deviation from guidelines.

### **Journal titles**

The format of the title of this publication has changed. *ACP news* is now normally written with *ACP* in upper case and *news* in lower case. There is a space between *ACP* and *news*. When referring to the Association *ACP* appears in upper case. In common with the titles of all journals, books, films, TV programmes and what pass for newspapers in the British press, it is printed in italics. Government reports and papers are also italicised, but acts of Parliament are not.

### **Authors**

Authors are generally referred to by first and last names at the start of their articles, e.g., “Henry Jekyll” or “Edward Hyde”. For doctors a more formal approach is taken within the body of an article, e.g., “Dr Henry Jekyll is ...” Authors’ qualifications are not normally given as this may seem like showing off and they may have more than the editor.

### **Abbreviations**

Abbreviations may be used without explanation if their meaning would be clear to the readership, such as “NHS”, “RCPath” or “*BMJ*”, also “USA”, “EU” and “UK”, and obviously “ACP”. However, please bear in mind that whilst other abbreviations or acronyms may be familiar to you and others in your field, they may not be so to the wider readership, who will therefore not have a clue what you are on about. In such cases the convention of spelling names out in full the first time they are used, with the abbreviation in brackets, should apply.

### **Punctuation and grammar**

Avoid excessive capitalisation. Titles such as “consultant”, “professor”, or “president”, will normally be given lower case, as are “government” and “department”; this prevents them from thinking they are too important. However, you should capitalise bodies such as the “Department of Health”. The ACP may be referred to as the “Association” and the RCPath as the “College”. However, when used non-specifically do not capitalise, e.g., “royal colleges”. When in doubt do not capitalise, unless it looks wrong not to do so. At the end of the day it is not worth getting too bogged down in this as the readership are unlikely to notice, unlike a misused apostrophe which will probably attract correspondence in the letters section for a number of subsequent issues.

Try where possible to use “he or she”, not “s/he” which looks ugly. If no alternative is possible, the non-gender specific “they” can be used as both singular and plural. (English does not have any other satisfactory non-gender specific third person singular, apart from “it”, which might appear rude.)

Do not over-use commas. These should be placed where needed for clarification, or where they mark a natural pause in speech. The same applies to hyphenation, which should be used for words preceded by non- and followed by -like, as well as

compound words like think-tank, or where the meaning may otherwise be ambiguous, such as little-used car as opposed to little used-car. Do not hyphenate no one (not never, no how).

Double or single dashes should mainly be used as an alternative to brackets, and not as a substitute for a comma, semicolon or colon, which is just lazy. Similarly, the ellipsis, i.e., “...” (bet you didn’t know that is what it is called), should not be over-used. Where it is used, it should always be three dots, whether in the middle or at the end of a sentence. Some pedants would say four dots if it also includes a full stop, but the editor thinks this is excessively anally-retentive.

Punctuation is in some respects a matter of individual style, however, the current editor prefers the use of semicolons and colons to link phrases, rather than several very short sentences, although over-long sentences should also be avoided. Exclamation marks should be used sparingly and normally should be single (no “!!!”, and especially no “!?!?!?”). Question marks should only follow a direct question, not otherwise, so “Can you help?” but “I wondered whether you could help.”

Double quotation marks are normally used for all purposes, single quotes being reserved for quotes within quotes. In quoted speech the comma, full stop, or other final punctuation mark normally comes before the closing quotation marks, however, this is not so if a quote that is not direct speech falls at the end of a phrase or sentence.

Foreign terms, including Latin, should mostly appear in italics. Terms such as *ad hoc* are italicised. The exceptions are Latin phrases which have effectively become anglicised, such as *in situ* or *in vitro*, which are not hyphenated. Latin medical terms are similarly not italicised. Some medical terminology evolves and the most up-to-date form should be used wherever possible, for example Down syndrome rather than Down’s syndrome.

For numbers, single figures are normally written, e.g., one, two three. Double figures are given as numerals, e.g., 10, 11, 12. Roman numerals, such as I, II, III, should be avoided. The exception to this would be if it might look odd to do so.

Editorial interjections will normally be italicised and appear in square brackets. [*Like this – Ed.*] They are best kept to a complete and separate sentence.

The abbreviations “e.g.”, “i.e.” and “etc” should be avoided where possible and phrases like “for example” are preferred. Often “etc” at the end of a list is superfluous. When used they should appear with full stops between the letters and are usually followed by a comma or full stop (e.g., etc.).

Always use the English spelling rather than the American, for example organise not organize and capitalise not capitalize. An exception to this might be where the editor uses “Americanize”; here he is being ironic. Also avoid American terms and say “biscuits” rather than “cookies”, eat “crisps” not “potato chips” and wear “trousers” not “pants”. This is particularly a problem with curettings found on US websites and, although an argument might be made for keeping to the original form, the editor would prefer it if these were translated into proper English.

A developing mammal after the embryonic stage and prior to birth is a fetus, rather than a foetus.

Where possible, language should be kept simple. Inflated words and phrases should be avoided. Thus, pay is preferred to remuneration and improve is preferred to affect in a positive way.

Paragraphs should not be over-long as this tires the reader, however, one sentence paragraphs should be mostly reserved for children's books. Variation in both paragraph and sentence length makes a piece more interesting and this is felt to be no bad thing.

### **Article and author titles**

In the titles of articles on the cover the nouns are normally capitalised; unsurprisingly this is called "title case". The title on the article itself should be in sentence case and this is how it will also appear on the contents page. Authors are normally referred to by name only at the beginning of an article (such as Joe Soap) and with title in the body of an article (Dr Joe Soap – note no full stop after Dr). Authors' qualifications are not given as they may have more than the editor.

### **References**

*Acp News* is a professional rather than an academic publication and references should be kept to a minimum. Articles typically have six or fewer references and a list of recommended or further reading is preferred. Where given references should be in the Vancouver style and will appear in the text in superscript, with spaces between numbers, without commas (for example,<sup>5 6 7</sup>) When the title of a talk or paper is given in full in the body of the text this should be in plain text and in double quotation marks, but not normally preceded by a comma or colon.

### **Submitting Text**

Submissions should ideally be received as Word documents in Times New Roman font, 12 point, single line-spaced and left-aligned. A single space should follow all commas, semicolons, colons and full-stops. Do not use a double space after full stops, as this is a relic from the days of typewriters and is unnecessary in a word-processed document. Articles in any other format will normally be converted to the above before they are checked and sent to the printers. Where possible, avoid bullet-points and other formatting, as these are anyway lost in the strange and mystical process of conversion from a Word document in Windows to Quark Express on a Mac, as used almost universally by the printing industry for reasons clear to itself, but to no one else.

Most pieces, whether articles or reports, will be returned to the author after editing, in order that they may carry out a final proof-read and correct any errors the editor may have unintentionally introduced. When correcting an article, authors should do so by modifying the text, but they should not use the "track changes" option in Word as this also causes problems when the files are converted onto a Macintosh at the printers and can turn the most carefully edited and proof-read article into total gobbledygook.

### **Submitting images**

All submitted articles should be accompanied by a mug shot of the author(s). Images that illustrate the submission are welcomed. Images should be sent as uncompressed JPEG or TIFF files, or similar universally readable format. Pictures and other figures are preferred as separate files. Please do not embed images in Microsoft Word documents or Microsoft PowerPoint as this results in file compression and reduced image quality when published. Images should be in colour and of a high quality (mug shots that accompany an article need to be at least 200Kb). Figures and tables

will be referred to as such in the text (in lower case). When there is more than one, these will be referred to as figure 1, figure 2, etc. If images are sent as photographic prints, authors should indicate whether or not these are to be returned.

**Further information**

For further reading see the BMJ's house style advice at:

<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/advice/stylebook/basics.shtml>

Or refer to *Eats Shoots and Leaves* by Lynne Truss and *The Economist Style Guide*.

In instances where no clear guidance exists, the editor will make something up under the guise of “editorial policy”. His decision is final.