



# AHOP Style Guide

---

First edition - October 2021

## Contents

Introduction.....	2
AHOP House Style.....	2
Spelling.....	2
Acronyms.....	2
Capital letters .....	2
Dates.....	3
Figures .....	3
Headings.....	3
Hyphenation.....	3
Lists .....	4
Names: Member States, countries and organizations .....	5
Numbers .....	5
Punctuation.....	5
References .....	5

## Introduction

The AHOP Style Guide is an abridged version of the full WHO editorial style manual and draws on the abridged style guides used by WHO Africa Regional Office (AFRO) and the European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies where relevant. It aims to ensure correctness, consistency, impartiality, and credibility across AHOP outputs, both electronic and print, and offers guidance on avoiding the most common stylistic errors.

This guide is a living document and will be adapted as further decisions are made on AHOP style across the various outputs. It is intended to be used alongside the full [WHO Style Guide](#). For further details on any of the issues covered in this summary, and for information on topics not covered here, please see the full WHO guide.

## AHOP House Style

### Spelling

British rather than American spelling is preferred. The general rule is to follow the spelling listed in the latest edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. There are, however, a number of exceptions.

Some commonly referenced examples and exceptions:

- ize: World Health Organization, mobilize, generalize, characterize, organize, realize
- ise: surprise, advertise, advise, practise
- yse: analyse, catalyse, dialyse
- our: harbour, honour, colour, neighbour, behaviour

For more detailed information and further exceptions, see the Spelling chapter in the WHO Style Guide.

### Acronyms

Here are some rules for maximizing the correctness of acronym use:

1. Always capitalize an acronym; only capitalize the initial letters in the original name if it is a proper name.

SSA	sub-Saharan Africa	PHC	primary health care
PSSA	Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa	NIS	newly independent states

2. Always introduce an acronym the first time you use it. Always use the acronym afterwards, even in headings and illustrations, and maintain its number.

The burden of sexually transmitted infections (STI) is growing in the country; **STI pose** a formidable threat to health.

Use internationally agreed names for things such as diseases, medicines and technology; it prevents the appearance of bias and promotes maximum comprehension.

### Capital letters

A few rules for maximizing the correctness of capitalization practice:

1. When in doubt about the correct, formal name of something, do not use capital letters in the name.

2. Capitalize the initial letters in proper names: specific or individual things. Once you have capitalized something, always capitalize it, every time you use it.
3. No matter how important an idea, a procedure or a structure is to you, capitalize only proper nouns (e.g. universal health coverage (UHC) remains lower case). Using capitals to add importance to a word is incorrect.

## Dates

Write dates in the following order, with no commas: day, month (spell out in full), year. Avoid beginning a sentence with a year.

The meeting was held on 12 September 2020.

Two thousand twenty was the first year in which data on participants were gathered.

*becomes*  
Data on participants were first gathered in 2020.

## Figures

Figures should be kept as simple as possible, with brief titles. Figures that contain too much information can confuse rather than clarify issues.

- Graphs should have their axes clearly labelled with the relevant units of measurement included in parentheses. The abbreviation “Fig.” may be used in the figure title.
- The abbreviation “Fig.” may also be used in the text to refer to a specific figure; however, it should not be used when referring to a generic figure.

This trend is illustrated in Fig. 1.

The figure below illustrates this trend.

- Figures must agree with, and be referred to, in the body of the text and should appear in the order in which they are cited.

## Headings

Headings ensure the consistency of and provide clarity in a publication by indicating the hierarchy and structure. When preparing a draft for publication, keep a record of the font type and size used for each level of heading.

- Where possible, limit the number of heading levels to three (i.e. **3**, 3.1, 3.1.1)
- Use initial capital letters for the first word of the heading and for any of the exceptions noted under “Capitalization”.

## Hyphenation

Hyphens are used to connect words that are more closely linked to each other than to the surrounding syntax and to avoid ambiguity. There are no hard and fast rules about their use. Certain conventions exist, but if there is a choice it is better to introduce hyphens only to avoid ambiguity.

- Do not hyphenate “second largest”, “third lowest”, etc.
- Do not hyphenate “health care” (but make sure it’s two words and not “healthcare”)
- Do not hyphenate “one third” or “three quarters”
- Do not hyphenate: socioeconomic, gatekeeping, coordination, inpatient, outpatient, binge drinking, eHealth, rollout.

- Do hyphenate: evidence-based when it is used as an adjective (e.g. evidence-based medicine) but not when it's used as a noun (e.g. the evidence base)
- Do hyphenate: mid-1990s, mid-1980s

See the WHO Style Guide for further examples.

## Lists

Lists draw the reader's eye to particularly important text and should be used sparingly to maximize their impact. To increase clarity and add emphasis, items in a list should be set apart by bullets. The formatting and punctuation of a list depends on the nature of the items.

### *Format A*

If each item comprises less than a complete sentence, the list is actually a single large sentence. In this case, use a colon to start the list, begin each bulleted item with a lower-case letter, and place a full stop at the end of the last item.

The various components of the microscope can be classified into four systems:

- the support system
- the magnification system
- the illumination system
- the adjustment system.

### *Format B*

If some of the bulleted items are longer than one line, end each bulleted item with a semicolon and place a full stop at the end of the final bulleted item.

The disadvantages of wide-mesh mosquito nets are:

- the nets offer no protection once the insecticide has lost its activity;
- wide-mesh nets are more easily torn than standard nets;
- they are not yet commercially available (but can be made out of curtain or other wide-mesh netting material).

### *Format C*

If the items in the list comprise one or more complete sentences, each sentence should begin with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

Fuerstein has written a seminal work on participatory evaluation, and suggests that a participatory evaluation in the development context include certain steps.

- All those involved in a programme decide jointly to use a participatory approach. They decide exactly what the objectives of the evaluation are. This can turn out to be far harder than originally thought.
- When agreement is reached, a small group of coordinators is elected to plan and organize the details.
- The best methods for attaining the objectives are chosen. The capabilities of the people involved and the available time and other resources will influence this choice.

## Names: Member States, countries and organizations

Always use the agreed country names for Member States – not member nations – and groups or regions of countries. It is worth consulting the full WHO Style Guide (Section 8) for further guidance on country names and specific details for the African region.

Always give the spelling, capitalization and punctuation of the names of partner organizations as they give them, such as:

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)  
University of Addis Ababa – College of Health Sciences (CHS AAU)  
University of Nigeria – Health Policy Research Group (HPRG)  
KEMRI Wellcome Trust (KEMRI)  
University of Rwanda – School of Public Health (URSPH)  
Institut Pasteur de Dakar (IPD)  
European Observatory on Health Systems & Policies  
London School of Economics **and** Political Science (LSE)

## Numbers

In general, when writing numbers in text in publications:

- Spell out whole numbers that are less than 10 and use figures for 10 or more.
- If a sentence begins with a number, spell it out or rewrite the sentence:  
Fifteen of the 75 samples tested positive.  
*becomes*  
Of the 75 samples tested, 15 were positive.
- Use non-breaking spaces, not commas, for large numbers (10 000; 100 000; 1 000 000)
- Use full stops for decimal points (1.5 kg, 19.7%)
- Include a space between the a number and its unit (1.5 kg)
- Use numerals alone in cases such as times of the day, currencies, measurements, ages and dates.  
08:30    US\$ 1 879 421.72    10 ml    the group aged 15–49 years    26 November 2012
- Currency units should be placed in front of the number and be consistent, i.e. decide whether to use USD or \$

## Punctuation

Punctuation eases reading and clarifies meaning. Well-written text should require only the minimum of punctuation. Please see the WHO Style Guide for extensive guidance on the correct usage of various punctuation marks along with examples and common mistakes.

## References

A reference list should contain only those unrestricted works cited in the text as sources of data or information. References should be kept to a minimum. Suggested limits on the number of references to include are provided in the guidance documents for individual AHOP outputs (e.g. Policy Briefs recommend no more than 30-50). It is important that AHOP provides readers with accurate and consistent links to additional information on a topic. The suggested referencing style for AHOP is Harvard.

The Harvard system shows the author and date in the body of the text. This may be done in one of two ways:

Ballance, Ewart & Fitzsimmons (2001) have reported...

It has been reported (Ballance, Ewart & Fitzsimmons, 2001; Allsopp, 2002) that...

The WHO Style Guide offers further guidance and examples for citing sources and formatting references using the Harvard system.