

## Abbreviations

It is acceptable to use abbreviations but you must define clearly what you mean by that abbreviation. For example, when a cardiologist writes the abbreviation M.S. they are usually referring to a disorder affecting one of the valves of the heart called mitral stenosis. However, when a neurologist talks about M.S. they usually mean the neurological disorder multiple sclerosis. A cardiologist reading a note written in the patient record by a neurologist can get very confused and vice versa. This is just one example of the kind of confusion that can be created by using abbreviations.

### *How to define abbreviations*

When writing your review articles there are two ways you can define what your abbreviations mean.

One way, and the most common way in the relatively short reviews you are most likely to be writing, is as follows. The first time you use an abbreviation you define what that abbreviation stands for by writing the complete word or phrase and then in brackets after it you write the abbreviation. Look at the example below.

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This review discusses the immunological basis of Multiple Sclerosis (M.S.).

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Once you have done this, at the first occurrence of the word or phrase to be abbreviated, you can use the abbreviation alone from then on.

If, however, you are writing longer works (e.g. a thesis) it is best to write a glossary. When you have finished writing, pick out the abbreviations you have used and list them on a separate page. Beside every abbreviation on this list write what you mean when you use that abbreviation. The glossary is usually placed near the beginning of the thesis so the reader will be aware of its existence and be able to refer to it easily.

### *Some abbreviations don't need to be defined*

There are some abbreviations that are universally understood, such as cm for centimetres. But these are few and far between so if there is any doubt in your mind about an abbreviation, define it or put it in a glossary.

**Key point:** *When you use abbreviations define them.*

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