

“A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Preface

The style used by AFS publications has evolved over many years, reflecting developments both in the fisheries profession and in English usage. Although the Publications Department maintains detailed information on style points, no simple, comprehensive guide has been available until now.

This guide is intended to serve several different groups of users, namely, (1) authors, (2) science editors, and (3) copy editors and others who are responsible for putting manuscripts into final form. As a result of this diverse audience, not all of the information that the guide contains will be of interest to all users. For instance, it includes some sections on grammar, punctuation, and spelling that will be “old hat” to copy editors but that may be useful to authors; in the same vein, it explains several scientific concepts with which copy editors will probably be unfamiliar.

Every effort has been made to enable users to obtain the information they want with a minimum of time and effort. The sections have been kept short, with numerous headings; style points are presented in terms of simple rules; and the examples that are given deal with situations that are encountered frequently. In many cases, it may be possible to resolve a style question simply by looking at the examples.

To facilitate locating all of the information on a particular topic, a number of cross-references are provided. There is also some intentional redundancy in the presentation. For instance, the fact that gene names are italicized is noted both in the chapter on symbols and in the chapter on the use of italics.

Although most of the guide is devoted to specific style points, the introduction offers a few pointers as to the general style of writing for which authors and copy editors should aim. This, it is hoped, will make editing more pleasant and productive for both parties.

Given the vast number of style questions that can arise, no guide can really be complete. For points that aren't covered, users should contact the Journals Department at 301-897-8616 or journals@fisheries.org.

Finally, in the interest of making this guide as useful as possible and keeping it up-to-date, users are encouraged to offer suggestions for future editions.

This guide was prepared by Robert Nicholson, the technical editor for AFS journals, under the supervision of Charles Moseley and Aaron Lerner. Beth Beard, Lllan Fowler, Tracy Klein, and Debby Lehman also made valuable contributions.

Introduction

Like other scientific publications, AFS publications adhere to certain standards regarding content, format, usage, and writing style, the purposes of which are to facilitate comprehension by readers and to present the author's research in an appropriately professional way. Authors and copy editors share the responsibility for meeting these standards.

Authors' Responsibilities

Authors (and, by extension, reviewers and science editors) are responsible for ensuring that the information presented is complete and correct and that the presentation generally conforms to the guidelines for AFS publications.

Concise guides for authors are available for *Fisheries* (January issues), the four AFS journals (first issues of each year), and AFS books (obtainable from book editors or the AFS Web site [www.fisheries.org]). More detailed information is available in the following volume: J. Hunter, editor. 1990. Writing for fishery journals. American Fisheries Society, Bethesda, Maryland.¹

Authors are encouraged to contact the Journals Department (301-897-8616 or journals@fisheries.org) about any style questions they have, either before submitting their papers or before finalizing their revisions.

Copy Editors' Responsibilities

Almost without exception, the papers that are accepted for publication are appropriate in content, tone, and general presentation. The copy editor's task is thus limited to ensuring that the writing is correct, clear, and reasonably smooth.

Correctness.—In this context, the term “correct” primarily means that published papers conform to the rules of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so forth of standard American English as well as to the specific style conventions of AFS publications. However, copy editors should also be on the lookout for any (apparent) misstatements, particularly discrepancies among the values given in the abstract, text, tables, and figures.

Clarity.—Clarity, of course, is one of the main requirements of good writing, and copy editors should make a point of altering statements that are ambiguous or otherwise unclear:

Blood was taken ~~while fish were anesthetized~~ by means of heparinized needles inserted into the caudal vasculature while fish were anesthetized. [ambiguous]

¹ Note that some of the information in this volume may have been superceded by that in the present guide.

Each fish received an intraperitoneal injection with ~~0.1 mL of one of the two vaccines either 0.1 mL of Furogen 2 or 0.1 mL of sterile 0.9% NaCl (control)~~ as per the instructions for healthy salmonids. ~~Control fish were vaccinated with an injection of 0.1 mL of sterile 0.9% NaCl.~~ [unclear]

Care should be taken, however, not to alter expressions that are technical terms or customary usage within the fisheries profession. For example, the statement

We fin-clipped the fish for later identification.

is acceptable even though

We clipped the fins of the fish for later identification.

would be preferable in nontechnical publications. When in doubt, copy editors should query proposed changes rather than simply making them.

Smoothness.—The goal here is ease of comprehension, not highly elegant prose. Therefore, copy editors should focus on eliminating expressions that are verbose or awkward, that lack parallelism, and that are not idiomatic:

The oxytetracycline (OTC) working solution was used to prepare duplicate tubes of Mueller–Hinton broth containing twofold dilutions of OTC. The ~~duplicate tubes containing the OTC dilutions~~ were then inoculated with the bacterial suspension. [verbose]

Our results also suggest that the genistein levels in this study ~~may be~~ were too low to ~~exert~~ produce a classic dose–response effect ~~due to the nature of the~~ because genistein is ~~as~~ a weak estrogen mimic. [awkward]

We recorded the reactions of the rainbow trout but not those of the brown trout. [lacks parallelism]

We designed the experiment to ~~answer~~ address this issue. [unidiomatic]

Changes that are purely stylistic should be avoided, however. For instance,

This approach places the emphasis on. . . .

is acceptable even though

This approach emphasizes. . . .

might be preferred on stylistic grounds.