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AMA MEDSTYLE STAT!

By Dr. Abel Scribe PhD - Fall 2007

The American Medical Association (AMA) *Manual of Style* begins with this charming observation:

I never cease to be amazed by the general inability of physicians, other health professionals, and scientists to communicate through the written word. Their scholarly and creative ideas and insightful data interpretation of them seem to get lost in the translation from brain to page.^{1(pv)}

--Catherine D. De Angelis, MD, MPH

No brainer? Those needing connective surgery from brain to page might wish to read "The Science of Scientific Writing," by G.D. Gopen and J.A. Swan, from the *American Scientist*, 1990. They argue "if the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader needs." Available at <http://www.americanscientist.org/template/AssetDetail/assetid/23947?fulltext=true&print=yes>

AMA STAT! CONTENTS

AMA-Style Page Format

1. Title & Text Page
2. Structured Abstract
3. Page Parameters
4. Headings (Cap Rule)
5. Tables and Figures
6. Bullets & Lists

General & AMA Conventions

7. Abbreviations & Acronyms
8. Capitalization & Spacing
9. Compound Words
10. Emphasis: Italics/Quotes
11. Numbers & Measurements
12. Quotations
13. Terminology

Research Documentation

14. Text Citations
15. "Versioning"
16. Reference Style Sheet
 - Articles
 - Books & Chapters
 - Papers & References Works
 - Web Sites & CDs

AMA Stat! is a quick reference to using the style of the American Medical Association in research papers—papers drafted for conferences, classes, and seminars. It is based on the most recent 10th edition of the *AMA Manual of Style*, 2007. The latest version and other style resources are available at www.docstyles.com. Freeware Copyright 2007 by Dr. Abel Scribe PhD.

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION STYLE AT 10

The *AMA Manual* remains a heavy tome. The last edition weighed 3.0 pounds (to convert to kilograms multiply by 0.45); the new one comes in at 4.2 pounds!^{1,2} This works out to 1032 pages, more even than the *Chicago Manual of Style*.³ Alas, the rules and instructions for preparing research papers are scattered throughout the volume. *AMA Stat!* seeks to capture the most essential features, neither an easy nor certain task with a text so vast.

Significant changes to the style include the manner of presenting conventional clinical measurements and the "versioning" of references to online sources. Conventional measures now require a conversion factor to SI units (metric system) in the text. The AMA has thoughtfully provided the 18-page table of conversion factors from the *AMA Manual* among the "Instructions for Authors" on their website (AMA spells it *Web site*).⁴ Versioning adds multiple dates to Web references.

Changes readers might notice are the use of 2-letter postal abbreviations for states in references (AMA style had called for old style abbreviations, eg, *Mich.* for Michigan), and the use of lowercase letters in place of symbols in tables (eg, asterisks, daggers, and the like). The old manual allowed numbers other than one to be written out, as in *two-letter* postal abbreviations, but no longer. This simply reflects long-standing practice observed in the pages of *JAMA*, a practice not widely shared by other major journals, such as the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

AMA style merges into minutiae with obscure rules. For example, the abbreviation for *saint* is followed by a period when used in a person's name, St. James, but not when used with the name of a place, St. Louis.^{1(p334)} This suggests a style too obscure at the margins to usefully master, a product of evolutionary diversity exploding through 10 generations, overseen by committee. *AMA Stat!* focuses on main themes, with recourse to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) "Uniform Requirements,"⁵ and *Chicago Manual of Style*³ as circumstances merit.

Dr. Abel Scribe PhD ----- www.docstyles.com

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