

chicago manual of style 17th edition abbreviations

The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Abbreviations: A Comprehensive Guide

chicago manual of style 17th edition abbreviations are a cornerstone of clear, concise, and professional writing. Navigating these guidelines can streamline the editorial process and ensure consistency across various academic and professional documents. This article delves deeply into the nuances of Chicago style abbreviations, covering everything from common contractions and Latin phrases to measurement units and specialized terminology. Understanding these rules is crucial for authors, editors, and anyone striving for adherence to one of the most respected style guides in publishing. We will explore the principles behind abbreviation usage, common pitfalls to avoid, and specific examples to illustrate best practices. Whether you are working on a scholarly article, a book manuscript, or a formal report, mastering Chicago style abbreviations will enhance the credibility and readability of your work.

Table of Contents

Understanding the Principles of Chicago Style Abbreviations

Commonly Accepted Abbreviations in Chicago Style

Abbreviations for Units of Measurement

Latin Abbreviations and Their Usage

Specialized Abbreviations in Specific Fields

When to Abbreviate and When to Spell Out

Common Mistakes in Using Chicago Style Abbreviations

Understanding the Principles of Chicago Style Abbreviations

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) 17th edition offers clear guidance on the appropriate use of abbreviations to enhance readability and conciseness. The fundamental principle is to abbreviate only when doing so aids clarity and avoids unnecessary repetition, rather than for the sake of brevity alone. CMOS emphasizes that abbreviations should be readily understood by the intended audience. If an abbreviation is obscure or likely to cause confusion, it is generally better to spell out the term.

CMOS distinguishes between different types of abbreviations, including those that are conventionally used, those specific to certain disciplines, and those that should be avoided. The manual provides extensive lists and guidelines to help writers make informed decisions. Furthermore, consistency is paramount; once a decision is made about how to abbreviate a particular term or phrase, it should be applied uniformly throughout the work.

Commonly Accepted Abbreviations in Chicago Style

Many abbreviations are so common that they are generally accepted without question in most contexts, provided they are used appropriately. These include abbreviations for common units of

time, geographical locations in specific contexts, and frequently used phrases. For instance, "etc." (et cetera) is widely used, but CMOS advises using it sparingly and only when the list is informal or when the meaning is obvious.

Another category of common abbreviations involves well-established acronyms and initialisms. While CMOS often advises spelling out acronyms on first use followed by the abbreviation in parentheses (e.g., National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)), certain widely recognized acronyms may not require this. The key is audience awareness and context.

Commonly Used Terms and Their Abbreviations

When referring to titles preceding names, CMOS permits abbreviations in certain cases, particularly in formal prose. For example, titles like "Dr.," "Mr.," "Mrs.," and "Ms." are standard. However, for academic degrees or professional titles following a name, such as "Ph.D." or "M.D.," Chicago typically prefers to spell them out in full prose or to use them in notes and bibliographies. The style guide also addresses abbreviations for common terms in bibliographies and indexes, where space-saving is often a higher priority.

- Mr.
- Mrs.
- Ms.
- Dr.
- St.
- Ave.
- Blvd.
- Rd.
- Co.
- Inc.

Abbreviations for Titles and Honorifics

The use of abbreviations for titles and honorifics before a name is generally permissible. This includes common titles such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., and Dr. However, CMOS often recommends spelling out these titles in full prose, especially in more formal contexts, to maintain a consistent and elevated tone. The context and intended audience play a significant role in this decision. For instance, in a casual report, abbreviations might be acceptable, but in a scholarly monograph, spelling them out is usually preferred.

Abbreviations for Units of Measurement

Chicago style has specific rules for abbreviating units of measurement. Generally, units of measurement used in conjunction with numbers are abbreviated in scientific and technical contexts, and often in tables and notes. In general prose, however, it is often preferred to spell out the units, especially if they are not very common or if the context is not technical. CMOS provides a comprehensive list of acceptable abbreviations for various units.

The manual distinguishes between metric and non-metric units. For metric units, abbreviations like "m" for meter, "kg" for kilogram, and "L" for liter are standard and often used without periods. For imperial or US customary units, abbreviations like "in." for inch, "ft." for foot, and "lb." for pound are common, though the use of periods in these abbreviations can vary based on context and preference, with CMOS generally advocating for periods unless the abbreviation is the last letter of the word (e.g., "ft. ").

Metric Units

Metric units are typically abbreviated without periods, following international standards. These abbreviations are concise and widely recognized. Examples include 'm' for meter, 'cm' for centimeter, 'km' for kilometer, 'g' for gram, 'kg' for kilogram, 'mg' for milligram, 'L' for liter, 'mL' for milliliter, and 's' for second. These are standard across many scientific and academic disciplines and are expected to be understood by most readers.

Imperial and US Customary Units

Abbreviations for imperial and US customary units often include periods. This convention helps distinguish them from other uses of the letters. Examples include 'in.' for inch, 'ft.' for foot, 'yd.' for yard, 'mi.' for mile, 'oz.' for ounce, 'lb.' for pound, and 'qt.' for quart. The consistent application of these abbreviated forms is key to maintaining a uniform style throughout a document.

Latin Abbreviations and Their Usage

Latin abbreviations are frequently encountered in academic writing, particularly in footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies. Chicago style has specific guidelines for their use, often recommending they be italicized and followed by a period. While many Latin abbreviations are self-explanatory to scholars in certain fields, CMOS advises against their use in general prose where clarity might be compromised.

Some of the most common Latin abbreviations include "i.e." (id est, meaning "that is") and "e.g." (exempli gratia, meaning "for example"). These are generally considered acceptable in most forms of writing, though overuse can lead to a less engaging style. Other less common but still relevant Latin abbreviations may appear in legal or historical texts.

Common Latin Phrases

Several Latin phrases have been adopted into English and are commonly abbreviated. These are primarily used to clarify, explain, or provide examples. CMOS suggests using them judiciously and

ensuring the audience can understand them. The most frequent examples are:

- i.e. (id est) - that is
- e.g. (exempli gratia) - for example
- et al. (et alii) - and others
- etc. (et cetera) - and so forth
- op. cit. (opere citato) - in the work cited
- loc. cit. (loco citato) - in the place cited

Using Latin Abbreviations in Citations

In bibliographies and footnotes, Latin abbreviations are often used for efficiency. Terms like "op. cit." and "loc. cit." are used to refer to previously cited works, though their usage is declining in favor of more direct citations in many style guides, including later editions of Chicago. When employed, consistency and clarity are paramount. It's important to note that the 17th edition of CMOS, like many modern guides, leans towards more explicit references to reduce ambiguity.

Specialized Abbreviations in Specific Fields

Different academic disciplines and professional fields have their own sets of specialized abbreviations. Chicago style acknowledges this and provides guidance on how to handle them. The general rule of thumb is to define any abbreviation that might not be familiar to the general reader or even to specialists outside of a very narrow subfield. This often involves spelling out the term on its first appearance, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses.

For instance, in scientific papers, chemical formulas, medical terms, and technical jargon are often abbreviated. Similarly, in humanities, abbreviations for literary works, historical periods, or organizations might be common within a specific area of study. CMOS emphasizes the importance of consulting field-specific style guides when they exist, as they often provide more detailed conventions.

Scientific and Technical Abbreviations

The scientific and technical fields rely heavily on abbreviations for efficiency and precision. Examples include acronyms for organizations (NASA, CERN), units of measurement (as discussed), chemical elements (H₂O for water), and common scientific concepts (DNA for deoxyribonucleic acid). Chicago style mandates that such abbreviations be defined upon their first use in a document, unless they are universally understood within the field.

Abbreviations in the Humanities

In the humanities, abbreviations can pertain to literary titles, historical documents, or specific schools of thought. For example, in classical studies, Greek and Latin texts are often cited using established abbreviations. In history, specific events or documents might have common acronyms. Authors are encouraged to provide a list of abbreviations if the document contains many specialized terms that might not be readily recognized by all readers.

When to Abbreviate and When to Spell Out

The decision of whether to abbreviate a word or phrase in Chicago style is context-dependent and hinges on the principle of clarity and conciseness for the intended audience. Generally, spell out words and phrases in full prose unless an abbreviation is standard, widely understood, and genuinely improves readability. Over-abbreviation can make a text appear dense and inaccessible.

Consider the nature of your document. A scholarly journal article might tolerate more technical abbreviations than a general-interest magazine. Similarly, the target readership is a crucial factor. If your audience consists of experts in a particular field, you can assume a higher level of familiarity with specialized abbreviations. Conversely, for a broader audience, spelling out terms is usually the safer and more effective approach.

Audience Considerations

Understanding your audience is paramount when deciding whether to use abbreviations. If you are writing for a general readership, it is best to spell out most terms that have standard abbreviations. For example, instead of using "i.e." or "e.g." extensively, it might be clearer to rephrase the sentence. However, for a specialized academic audience, these Latin abbreviations are usually acceptable.

Document Type and Context

The type of document also influences abbreviation choices. In tables, figures, notes, and bibliographies, where space is often limited, abbreviations are more commonly used. In the main body of the text, particularly in prose intended for a broad audience, spelling out terms is generally preferred. For instance, "United States" is spelled out in prose, but can be abbreviated as "U.S." in certain contexts like lists or tables, or when used as an adjective ("U.S. policy").

Common Mistakes in Using Chicago Style Abbreviations

Even with clear guidelines, writers often make mistakes when using abbreviations according to the Chicago Manual of Style. One common error is inconsistent usage; abbreviating a term one way in one section and another way in a different section creates confusion and undermines the professional appearance of the work.

Another frequent mistake is using abbreviations that are not widely recognized without defining them first. This can alienate readers who are not familiar with the specific jargon. Additionally, improper punctuation, such as incorrect placement of periods or the omission of necessary periods, can also be

an issue. Finally, failing to adhere to the specific rules for different types of abbreviations, such as units of measurement or Latin phrases, leads to stylistic inconsistencies.

Inconsistency in Usage

Perhaps the most frequent error is inconsistency. For instance, using "Dr." in one place and "Doctor" in another, or abbreviating "Pennsylvania" as "PA" in one sentence and spelling it out in the next. CMOS emphasizes uniformity, meaning once you decide on a method of abbreviation, you must stick with it throughout the document. This applies to everything from titles to units of measurement.

Failure to Define Obscure Abbreviations

A critical error is assuming your audience understands every abbreviation. If an abbreviation is not standard or universally known, it must be defined on its first use. This typically involves writing out the full term followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. For example, "The study examined the effects of the Human Genome Project (HGP) on genetic research." Failure to do so can render parts of your text incomprehensible.

Punctuation Errors

Punctuation, particularly the use of periods, is a common source of error. For example, some abbreviations require periods (e.g., "St." for Street), while others do not (e.g., "km" for kilometer). Additionally, the placement of periods in relation to closing quotation marks or other punctuation can be tricky. Adhering to CMOS's specific rules for punctuation with abbreviations is essential for accuracy.

FAQ

Q: What is the general rule for using abbreviations in the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: The general rule in CMOS 17th edition is to abbreviate only when it enhances clarity and conciseness, and when the abbreviation is likely to be understood by the intended audience. If an abbreviation is obscure or might cause confusion, it is best to spell out the term. Consistency is also key.

Q: Should I spell out numbers or use numerals in Chicago style, and how does this relate to abbreviations?

A: Chicago style generally prefers spelling out numbers from zero to one hundred and using numerals for numbers 101 and above in most prose. However, for measurements, dates, and statistical data, numerals are typically used regardless of the number. Abbreviations for units of measurement are often used with numerals.

Q: How do I handle abbreviations of organizations or acronyms in my Chicago style document?

A: For organizations or acronyms, it is standard practice in Chicago style to spell out the full name on first mention, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. For example: "The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced new findings." Subsequent mentions can use the abbreviation.

Q: Are there specific rules for abbreviating states and countries in Chicago style?

A: In prose, state and country names are generally spelled out (e.g., California, Germany). However, in lists, tables, or in specific contexts like addresses, abbreviations may be used. For US states, the two-letter postal abbreviations are generally avoided in favor of traditional abbreviations like "Calif." or "Mass." when used in prose.

Q: What is the correct way to abbreviate Latin phrases like "i.e." and "e.g." in Chicago style?

A: Latin abbreviations like "i.e." (id est, meaning "that is") and "e.g." (exempli gratia, meaning "for example") are generally acceptable in Chicago style, particularly in notes and bibliographies, and often in prose if the audience is familiar with them. They should be followed by a period. CMOS recommends using them judiciously.

Q: When should I use periods in abbreviations according to Chicago style?

A: Chicago style generally requires periods in abbreviations for common titles (Mr., Mrs., Dr.), abbreviations of geographical locations (St., Mass., Calif.), and in many units of measurement derived from English words (in., ft., oz., lb.). Many metric abbreviations (km, kg, L) and acronyms (NASA, NATO) do not use periods.

Q: How does Chicago style handle abbreviations in footnotes and bibliographies compared to the main text?

A: In footnotes and bibliographies, Chicago style often allows for more liberal use of abbreviations, especially for commonly understood terms, Latin phrases (e.g., op. cit., et al.), and units of measurement, to save space and maintain consistency with other citation styles. In the main text, the emphasis is more on clarity for the general reader, favoring spelling out terms unless an abbreviation is standard and widely recognized.

Q: What are some common units of measurement that

Chicago style recommends abbreviating?

A: CMOS 17th edition recommends abbreviating common units of measurement, especially when used with numerals. Examples include: m (meter), km (kilometer), g (gram), kg (kilogram), L (liter), mL (milliliter), s (second), min (minute), hr (hour), in. (inch), ft. (foot), yd. (yard), mi. (mile), oz. (ounce), lb. (pound), pt. (pint), qt. (quart), gal. (gallon).

Q: Is there a definitive list of abbreviations in the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: While CMOS 17th edition doesn't contain one single exhaustive list of every possible abbreviation, it provides extensive guidance and lists of commonly used abbreviations within its various sections. Appendix 7 in the manual offers a helpful list of abbreviations for units, technical terms, and other categories.

Q: How should I format abbreviations when they are the last word in a sentence in Chicago style?

A: When an abbreviation appears at the end of a sentence and requires a period, that period also serves as the sentence-ending period. For example: "The measurement was 10 kg." If the abbreviation itself does not take a period (e.g., a metric unit like 'km'), then a period is added at the end of the sentence: "The distance was 5 km."

[Chicago Manual Of Style 17th Edition Abbreviations](#)

Chicago Manual Of Style 17th Edition Abbreviations

Related Articles

- [chicago manual for religious ceremonies](#)
- [chicago citation guide religious scholarship](#)
- [chicago manual block quote guidelines](#)

[Back to Home](#)