

chicago style examples for abbreviations

Mastering Chicago Style: A Comprehensive Guide to Abbreviations and Their Correct Usage

chicago style examples for abbreviations are crucial for academic and professional writing, ensuring clarity, conciseness, and adherence to established scholarly standards. This comprehensive guide delves into the intricacies of the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) concerning abbreviations, providing practical examples and clear explanations for various contexts. We will explore general principles, common abbreviations for specific categories like time, measurement, and academic degrees, and how to navigate the nuances of when to abbreviate and when not to. Understanding these guidelines will significantly enhance the professionalism and readability of your written work, making your arguments more impactful and your prose more polished.

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General Principles of Abbreviation in Chicago Style

The Chicago Manual of Style, in its latest edition, provides a robust framework for the consistent and effective use of abbreviations. The primary goal is always clarity. If an abbreviation is likely to be unfamiliar to your audience or could lead to ambiguity, it is generally best to spell out the full term, especially on its first mention. However, when abbreviations are standard, widely understood, and contribute to brevity without sacrificing comprehension, their use is encouraged. CMOS emphasizes consulting dictionaries and style guides for definitive rulings on specific terms.

A key principle is consistency within your document. Once you decide on a style for a particular abbreviation, maintain it throughout. For example, if you choose to abbreviate "Street" as "St." in an address, continue to use "St." for all subsequent instances. This also applies to the decision of whether to use periods in abbreviations (e.g., "U.S.A." vs. "USA"). While CMOS often favors periods in abbreviations of acronyms and initialisms, exceptions exist, and the manual provides guidance on these cases. Proofreading for consistency is paramount.

Abbreviations for Time and Dates

Correctly abbreviating time and dates is essential for precise communication, particularly in historical or scientific contexts. Chicago style offers specific recommendations to ensure these are universally understood. For common time units, such as hours, minutes, and seconds, standard abbreviations are

generally accepted.

Common Time Abbreviations

- **a.m.** (ante meridiem) and **p.m.** (post meridiem) are used for time before and after noon, respectively. CMOS prefers these with periods.
- **hr.** for hour, **min.** for minute, and **sec.** for second are acceptable when space is limited or in technical contexts.
- **c.** or **ca.** (circa) is used to indicate an approximate date.
- **B.C.** (before Christ) and **A.D.** (Anno Domini) are the preferred forms for dating before and after the traditional year of Christ's birth.
- **B.C.E.** (before the Common Era) and **C.E.** (Common Era) are widely accepted alternatives to B.C. and A.D., particularly in academic settings seeking neutrality.

When writing out dates in full, such as "December 7, 1941," abbreviations are generally avoided. However, in tables, footnotes, or parenthetical citations where space is a constraint, these abbreviations become invaluable. It is important to note that CMOS suggests using periods in most abbreviations, including a.m. and p.m., but there are evolving conventions, so always check the latest edition or context-specific guidelines.

Abbreviations for Units of Measurement

Abbreviations for units of measurement are frequently used in scientific, technical, and statistical writing to save space and improve readability. Chicago style generally aligns with the use of standard international abbreviations, particularly those derived from the International System of Units (SI).

Standard Measurement Abbreviations

- **in.** for inch
- **ft.** for foot
- **yd.** for yard
- **mi.** for mile
- **oz.** for ounce

- **lb.** for pound
- **gal.** for gallon
- **qt.** for quart
- **pt.** for pint
- **kg** for kilogram
- **m** for meter
- **cm** for centimeter
- **mm** for millimeter

In most cases, when referring to these units in prose, it is advisable to spell them out on first mention, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses if the abbreviation will be used frequently. For instance: "The length of the sample was measured in meters (m)." In tables and charts, abbreviations are almost always preferred. CMOS also notes that in contexts where abbreviations are common, such as scientific journals, the use of periods may be omitted for units like "m" and "kg" (e.g., "10 kg" instead of "10 kg.>").

Abbreviations for Academic Degrees and Titles

When referring to academic degrees and professional titles, Chicago style provides specific guidelines to ensure clarity and respect. Generally, full degrees are spelled out in the text, especially when introducing an individual for the first time. However, in contexts like bibliographies, resumes, or formal lists, abbreviations are common and expected.

Common Academic Degree Abbreviations

- **Ph.D.** for Doctor of Philosophy
- **M.A.** for Master of Arts
- **M.S.** or **M.Sc.** for Master of Science
- **B.A.** for Bachelor of Arts
- **B.S.** or **B.Sc.** for Bachelor of Science
- **Ed.D.** for Doctor of Education

- **J.D.** for Juris Doctor
- **M.D.** for Doctor of Medicine

For titles, such as Dr., Prof., Rev., or Hon., Chicago style typically recommends spelling them out when they appear before a person's name in formal prose (e.g., "Doctor Smith"). However, in parenthetical references or when space is limited, abbreviations may be used. The use of periods in these abbreviations is standard. It is crucial to remember that context dictates the most appropriate approach; in a formal biography, spelling out is preferred, while in a brief list of contributors, abbreviations are more suitable.

Geographical Abbreviations

Geographical abbreviations are common in addresses, citations, and lists. Chicago style offers guidance on the use of standard abbreviations for states, countries, and common geographical terms to maintain consistency and avoid confusion.

State and Country Abbreviations

- Most U.S. states have standard postal abbreviations (e.g., **IL** for Illinois, **CA** for California), which are acceptable in addresses and tables. However, in running text, it is generally preferred to spell out state names.
- For countries, standard abbreviations are less common in prose but may be used in specific contexts like bibliographies or statistical data. The United Nations and other international bodies provide recognized abbreviations.
- Common geographical terms like **St.** (Street), **Ave.** (Avenue), **Rd.** (Road), **Blvd.** (Boulevard), **Co.** (County), and **N.**, **S.**, **E.**, **W.** (North, South, East, West) are routinely abbreviated, especially within addresses.

When using abbreviations for geographical terms in prose, it is often best to spell them out on first mention to ensure clarity for all readers. For instance, "He lived on Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Illinois." If the term is repeated frequently, then the abbreviation can be introduced and used subsequently. The use of periods in these abbreviations, such as "Ave." and "St.," is generally standard in Chicago style.

Latin Abbreviations and Their Usage

Latin abbreviations, often found in scholarly and legal writing, have specific conventions. Chicago

style advises their judicious use, ensuring they are understood by the intended audience. Their conciseness can be beneficial, but overuse can hinder comprehension.

Common Latin Abbreviations

- **et al.** (et alii): and others (used in citations when there are multiple authors)
- **ibid.** (ibidem): in the same place (used in footnotes/endnotes to refer to the immediately preceding citation)
- **id.** (idem): the same (used when referring to the same author as the previous citation)
- **op. cit.** (opera citato): in the work cited (used to refer to a work previously cited but not the immediately preceding one)
- **loc. cit.** (loco citato): in the place cited (used to refer to the same passage as a previous citation)
- **i.e.** (id est): that is (used to clarify or rephrase something)
- **e.g.** (exempli gratia): for example (used to introduce examples)

It is important to note that the use of *ibid.*, *id.*, *op. cit.*, and *loc. cit.* is becoming less common in favor of shorter, more direct citation methods, especially with the advent of digital publishing and the Chicago Manual of Style's support for author-date citation systems. However, they remain relevant in certain humanities disciplines. CMOS generally prefers periods in these Latin abbreviations. When in doubt about their appropriateness or meaning, it is always best to spell out the Latin phrase or its English equivalent.

When to Abbreviate and When Not To

The decision to abbreviate or spell out a term in Chicago style hinges on several factors, primarily clarity, audience, and context. General guidelines exist, but common sense and adherence to the specific requirements of your publication or field are paramount.

In running prose, spell out terms that are not universally recognized or could lead to confusion. For instance, while "street" is often abbreviated as "St." in addresses, in a descriptive paragraph, "The old stone street was uneven" might be clearer than "The old stone St. was uneven." Similarly, obscure or technical acronyms should always be spelled out on their first use, with the abbreviation provided in parentheses for subsequent reference. For example, "The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) launched the mission."

Abbreviations are generally more acceptable and expected in:

- Footnotes and endnotes
- Bibliographies and works cited pages
- Tables and figures
- Parenthetical citations
- Addresses and formal listings
- When space is severely limited

Conversely, avoid abbreviations in:

- Titles and headings
- The main body of prose unless the abbreviation is extremely common (e.g., Mr., Mrs., Dr. before a name) or has been explicitly defined
- When the abbreviation might be misread or misunderstood

Ultimately, the goal is to facilitate understanding, not to create ambiguity. If there is any doubt, spelling out the term is usually the safer and more professional choice.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Navigating the rules for Chicago style abbreviations can be complex, and certain common mistakes can detract from the professionalism of your writing. Awareness of these pitfalls can help you avoid them.

One frequent error is inconsistency. If you decide to abbreviate a term, ensure you use that abbreviation consistently throughout your document. Another pitfall is over-abbreviating, leading to a dense and difficult-to-read text. Readers should not have to constantly consult a glossary or guess the meaning of abbreviations.

Key Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Inconsistent use of periods:** Forgetting or incorrectly adding periods to abbreviations (e.g., "USA" instead of "U.S.A." or vice versa, depending on the established convention for that specific abbreviation).
- **Abbreviating unfamiliar terms:** Using abbreviations for terms that your audience may not

recognize without prior definition.

- **Overuse of abbreviations:** Employing abbreviations excessively, even when spelling out the term would be clearer and more natural.
- **Confusing similar abbreviations:** Mixing up abbreviations with similar forms (e.g., "et al." vs. "etc.").
- **Failing to define acronyms:** Not spelling out acronyms on their first mention in the text.

To avoid these issues, meticulous proofreading is essential. Read your work aloud to catch awkward phrasing caused by abbreviations. Refer to the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or a reliable style guide for specific questions. When in doubt, err on the side of clarity by spelling out terms.

FAQ

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

A: Chicago style generally prefers periods in most abbreviations, especially those derived from Latin (like a.m., p.m., i.e., e.g.) and initialisms formed from the first letters of words (like U.S.A., Ph.D.). However, for some units of measurement and international acronyms, periods may be omitted, especially in technical contexts. It is always best to consult the specific guidelines for each type of abbreviation or the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Q: Is it acceptable to abbreviate common words like "street" or "avenue" in the main body of my text?

A: In running prose, it is generally recommended to spell out terms like "street" and "avenue" for clarity, especially on their first mention. Abbreviations are more appropriate in addresses, tables, footnotes, and bibliographies where space is limited and the context makes the meaning clear.

Q: What is the correct way to abbreviate "and others" in a citation according to Chicago style?

A: The standard Latin abbreviation for "and others" in citations is "et al." This is typically used when referring to a work with three or more authors, after the first author's name. For example: "Smith et al., 2020."

Q: Should I spell out academic degrees or use abbreviations

like Ph.D.?

A: In the main text when introducing a person, it is often best to spell out the degree (e.g., "Dr. Eleanor Vance, who holds a doctorate in history..."). However, in bibliographies, footnotes, endnotes, or resumes, abbreviations like "Ph.D.," "M.A.," and "B.S." are standard and preferred.

Q: Are there any exceptions to the rule of defining acronyms on their first use?

A: The primary exception involves acronyms that are extremely common and universally recognized by virtually all readers, such as NASA, FBI, or NATO. However, even with these, if there's any chance of ambiguity or if you are writing for a very specialized audience that might not be familiar with it, it's still safer to define it. When in doubt, define.

Q: How does Chicago style handle abbreviations for geographical locations like states?

A: For U.S. states, Chicago style generally prefers to spell them out in running text (e.g., "Illinois," "California"). The standard two-letter postal abbreviations (e.g., IL, CA) are typically reserved for addresses, tables, and other contexts where space is at a premium and clarity is maintained.

Q: When using abbreviations for time, such as a.m. and p.m., should they be lowercase or uppercase?

A: According to Chicago style, the preferred forms for time abbreviations are lowercase with periods: a.m. and p.m. (ante meridiem and post meridiem).

Q: Is "etc." always followed by a comma in Chicago style?

A: Yes, when "etc." (et cetera) introduces the last item in a series, it is typically followed by a comma, similar to how you would use a comma after the last item in a series if it were a full phrase. For example: "He packed shirts, pants, socks, etc., for the trip."

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