

# AMA Manual of Style

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## Eponyms

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Print Publication Year: 2007 Published Online: 2009  
ISBN: 9780195176339 eISBN: 9780195382846  
Item type: chapter

Publisher: Oxford University Press  
DOI: 10.1093/jama/9780195176339.003.0016

Eponyms are names or phrases derived from or including the name of a person or place. These terms are used in a descriptive or adjectival sense<sup>1</sup> in medical and scientific writing to describe entities such as diseases, syndromes, signs, tests, methods, and procedures. These eponymous terms should be distinguished from true possessives (eg, Homer's Iliad). Medical eponyms are numerous (a website devoted to medical eponyms lists more than 7000), are frequently used in medical publications, and are treated in dictionaries of eponyms covering general medicine<sup>3</sup> and some specialties, eg, neurology. Eponyms historically have indicated the name of the describer or presumptive discoverer of the disease (eg, Alzheimer disease) or sign (eg, Murphy sign), the name of a person or kindred found to have the disease described (eg, Christmas disease), or, when based on the name of a place (technically, toponyms), the geographic location in which the disease was found to occur (eg, Lyme disease)...

## Eponymous vs Noneponymous Terms

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Print Publication Year: 2007 Published Online: 2009  
ISBN: eISBN:  
Item type: section

Publisher: Oxford University Press  
DOI: 10.1093/jama/9780195176339.021.242

Use of eponyms in the biomedical literature should be considered with regard to their usefulness in transmitting medical information. Although some eponyms are evanescent, many are permanently integrated into the body of medical knowledge. Eponyms have a degree of historical and cultural value and sometimes become well known. In the converse of historical value, it has been argued that certain eponyms should not be used because the named individual was involved in war crimes. In any case, many eponyms can be replaced with a noneponymous term consisting of a descriptive word or phrase that applies to the same disease, condition,

# Nonpossessive Form

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Print Publication Year: 2007 Published Online: 2009

Publisher: Oxford University Press

ISBN: eISBN:

DOI: 10.1093/jama/9780195176339.021.243

Item type: section

There is some continuing debate over the use of the possessive form for eponyms, but a transition toward the nonpossessive form has taken place. A major step toward preference for the nonpossessive form occurred when the National Down Syndrome Society advocated the use of Down syndrome, rather than Down's syndrome, arguing that the syndrome does not actually belong to anyone. The previous (ninth) edition of this manual, the seventh edition of the Council of Science Editors style manual, the Dictionary of Medical Eponyms, and the 27th edition of Stedman's Medical Dictionary recommend and use the nonpossessive form for eponymous terms.