

AMA Manual of Style

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Diction

Stacy Christiansen

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Diction, or word choice, is important for any writing to be understood by its intended audience. In scientific writing, concrete and specific language is preferred over the abstract and general. | Homonyms are words that sound alike but are spelled differently and have different meanings. They are easily confused, and computer spell-check programs are unable to differentiate them. Common examples include affect/effect, accept/except, altar/alter, assistance/assistants, cite/site/sight, council/counsel, its/it's, patience/patients, peace/piece, peak/peek/pique, pleural/plural, principal/principle, and your/you're. (See also , Correct and Preferred Usage, Correct and Preferred Usage of Common Words and Phrases.) | Some language is best avoided in material written

Homonyms

Stacy Christiansen

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Clichés

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Clichés are worn-out expressions (sleep like a log, dead as a doornail, first and foremost, crystal clear). At one time they were clever metaphors, but overuse has left them lifeless, unable to conjure in the reader’s mind the original image. Avoid clichés like the plague. |

Idioms, Colloquialisms, and Slang

Stacy Christiansen

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Some language is best avoided in material written for a professional or academic audience. Idioms are fixed expressions that cannot be understood literally (kick the bucket, on a roll, put up with, pay attention). In addition, some may have multiple meanings that can be understood only in context (pass out, stand for). Idioms are not governed by any rules and each stands on its own. Be wary of using idioms, particularly for audiences that include readers whose first language is not English. Colloquialisms (or casualisms) are characteristic of informal, casual communication (ain't, anyways, cold turkey, flat line, OK, shell-shocked, tax

Euphemisms

Stacy Christiansen

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Euphemisms (from the Greek eu, “good,” and pHEME, “voice”) are indirect terms used to express something unpleasant. Although such language is often necessary in social situations (“He passed away.”), directness is better in scientific writing (“The patient died.”). (See also , Correct and Preferred Usage, Jargon.) |