



Cochrane Style Guide

Basics

Updated September 2009

Cochrane Style Guide *Basics* is a collection of essential house style guidelines for authors of Cochrane Protocols and Reviews. The full Cochrane Style Guide can be accessed for free at www.cochrane.org/style/csg.htm.

General points

1. **Active and passive voice:** The active voice (eg “two authors extracted data”) is preferable to the passive voice (“data were extracted by two authors”).
2. **Cochrane style for commonly used terms:**
 - Handsearching (*not* hand searching)
 - Website (*not* web site)
 - P value (*not* p-value)
 - fixed-effect model (*not* fixed effects model)
 - random-effects model (*not* random effects model)
 - subgroup (*not* sub-group)
 - follow up (verb) and follow-up (noun or adjective)
 - The Cochrane Collaboration
 - *The Cochrane Library* (italic)
 - the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CENTRAL)
 - Review Manager 5 (*not* version 5.0 or Review Manager 5.0.1)
3. **Numbers:** Spell out numbers less than 10 in full, unless used with units (eg 5 mL) or in a list with other numbers (eg 6, 12, and 24 months). Write the number out in full if it is at the start of a sentence.
4. **Dates:** Spell months out in full to avoid confusion between different regional date formats (May 2000; 1 May 2000), and express decades as, for example, 1960s (no apostrophe).
5. **Pharmaceutical drugs:** Use the recommended International Non-proprietary Name (rINN) for all pharmaceutical drugs (and put the specific brand name in brackets if needed).
6. **Databases:** MEDLINE (*not* Medline); EMBASE (*not* Embase); OLDMEDLINE (*not* Oldmedline); PsycLIT (*not* Psychlit); PsycINFO (*not* Psychinfo); CINAHL (*not* CINHAL or Cinahl).

Abbreviations and symbols

7. Use abbreviations and acronyms only if they are widely known and not using them could make reading tedious. Write in full in the first instance and follow it immediately by the abbreviated version or acronym in brackets; for example, “We contacted the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO provided the relevant information.”
8. Be consistent with punctuation, use e.g. or eg (and use the same style for ‘ie’).
9. Standard unit abbreviations need not be defined (eg mL and mg).
10. Symbols (eg + - / < > =) should be used in text only if the descriptive version is cumbersome or inappropriate. Use one space either side of the symbol (eg > 100 participants). There should be no space either side of / (eg 10/51).

Grammar, spelling, and punctuation

11. The general rule is future tense for protocols and past tense for reviews.
12. Insert one space between a number and the unit (eg 0.4 mg).

13. Be consistent when using words that differ throughout the English language, eg randomised and randomized.

Presentation of data

14. There are different ways to present summary statistics in the text.

- risk ratio (RR) was 0.14 (95% confidence interval (CI) 0.08 to 0.24) (Use this option if the RR and CI have not been abbreviated earlier in the text.)
- mean difference 1.11 hours (95% CI 0.98 to 1.20)
- (RR 1.02, 95% CI 0.87 to 1.19)

15. Present results with two decimal places (eg P value = 0.05) unless the number is very small (eg P value = 0.005).

References

16. Inserting references into Review Manager:

- **Study/reference identifier:** Use the last name of the first author and the year of publication as the study/reference identifier where possible (eg Baldini 2004).
- **Authors:** List only the first six authors of any reference, and use “et al” after the sixth author if there are more than six authors; for example, Abera G, Takahashi N, Thugwane J, Roba F, Hwang Y-C, Yegorova V, et al. The comma before “et al” is optional, but be consistent in its use.
- **Punctuation:** No full stops at the end of each line, such as after the authors or article title.
- **Article title:** The first letter of the first word of the article title should be in upper case; all other words should be lower-case unless they are proper names (trade names, country names, etc) or require an upper-case letter.
- **Article title:** Include the English translation of a journal article title if it is provided by the journal or database. If an English translation is not available, only enter the original title.
- **Journal title:** Enter the *full* journal title using title case (ie each word starts with an upper-case letter).
- **Journal title:** Include the English translation of a journal title if it is provided by the journal or database. Place the English title in square brackets after the original journal title.
- **Page number style:** 324-6 is correct (*not* 324-326 or 324-26).

17. Using references in the text:

- Study/reference identifiers can be used as part of a sentence (eg “Jones 2001 was included in the analysis.”).
- Study/reference identifiers that support a statement in a sentence should be listed in round brackets inside the full stop at the end of the sentence or within the closest punctuation; for example, “Two trials included data (Kamau 2001; Tomescu 2006).”
- As shown in the example above, if two or more references are used to support a statement, list the references in alphabetical order and then by year of publication, separating each with a semicolon.

How to cite

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Website

www.cochrane.org/style/csg-basics.htm

Feedback and suggestions for improvement

The Cochrane Style Guide Working Group welcomes feedback and suggestions for improvement; email Harriet MacLehose, co-ordinator (hmaclehose@cochrane.org).