



Uni-edit 英文寫作秘訣 015

何時需要定義 acronym?

難度：中階

現今，閱讀任何學術文件時沒有遇到 acronyms 是不可能的。其目的是要使論文更容易被閱讀，並為新創的概念創造新的術語。然而，隨著時間的推移，越來越多的學者擔心 acronyms 正在妨礙溝通，而非協助溝通。

那何時應該為定義新詞採用 acronyms，又何時不應使用呢？

僅使用 Acronym，而無全詞

Case #1: “眾所周知”的 Acronyms

您能否立即了解“light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation”(光受激鐳射放大)所描述的技術？還有“self-contained underwater breathing apparatus”(自給式水下呼吸器)呢？

有些術語已被廣泛使用，因此沒有必要對它們進行定義：事實上，定義它們還可能讓人感到困惑！哪一個更容易理解：上面的語言，還是日常用語“laser”(light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation)和“scuba”(self-contained underwater breathing apparatus)？

好的經驗法則是，如您在工作場所、實驗室或教室以外聽到有人大聲使用 acronym，那麼你可以不用特別定義它。例如，不是只有分子生物學家知道 DNA 是什麼，也不是只有數學家才知道 3D 是什麼，且並非只有國際關係專家才知道 UN 是什麼。

Case #2: Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms

但是，對於“眾所周知”的 acronym，並沒有絕對一致共識。例如，有機化學家快速知道 DMSO(二甲基亞砜)是什麼、機械工程師不須看 EMF(電動勢)兩次才了解其意義。但有機化學家很少需要測量或量化電動勢，而機械工程師也很少涉及低毒性溶劑二甲基亞砜：因此，以普遍的意義來說，要稱這兩個縮詞是“眾所周知”似乎並不合理。

查看您預計投稿的目標期刊是否提供“List of Standard Abbreviations”、“List of Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms”等等。例如如果您要投稿 *Journal of Organic Chemistry*，您需參考該期刊的 [Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms](#) 找出“DMSO”可直接適用。

與您的研究相關領域中，您也可以養成習慣看看其他作者如何處理字首縮詞，如果您發現至少五人以上使用 acronym 時並不加以定義，那麼您可以安心地使用。記住這些作者也是你的主要的讀者：如果您在研討會遇見的人且使用 acronym，這樣雙方互談時就可輕易了解。

使用 Acronym 定義全稱

Case #1: 不常見或不熟悉之概念(對讀者而言)

這會是最常見的學術寫作情況：因為過於普遍，一些作者被(錯誤地)教導成這是絕對的規則。如果縮寫詞非列於標準列表中，那麼在論文第一次使用 acronym 時，應附加 acronym 的全稱，特別是作為句子主詞時。

- [The Profile of Mood States \(POMS\) is a commonly used measure of psychological distress.](#)
- [In an earlier paper, an acoustic wave propagator \(AWP\) was proposed to describe the time-domain evolution of mechanical waves in various media.](#)

即使您認為您的讀者會認識這個 acronym，標示全稱仍有相當的作用，原因如下：

- 避免混淆，特別是當縮寫詞不是句子的主要重點時。
- 節省空間，字首縮詞僅會被計算成一個字。此外，對於有字數限制的 Figures 及 Tables 很實用。
- 吸引學識淵博的讀者，有些研究人員搜尋資料時喜歡採用字首縮詞，而非全稱：使用字首縮詞將確保您的研究在搜尋結果呈現時排列前面。

Case #2: 自創的 Acronyms

有時，當您要表達您論文中的重要概念，或提出一個新的概念時，你會希望創造自己的 acronyms。

自創 acronyms 也很常見於“Results”段落(例如 A 組、C 組)，尤其是當您想要比較不同分組結果，也是用有限攻堅的 Tables 及 Figures。

例：[Leukemia recurrence rates in patients treated with imatinib+steroid therapy \(I+S\) were compared with those of patients treated with imatinib monotherapy \(IM\), and with the conventional treatment \(CT\).](#)

您不會在其他白血病化療治療文獻找到上述的 acronyms。係因為結論主要致力於比較這三個群組，因此如果您創建標籤來標記比較對象，讀者可以更輕鬆地理解您的資料。

僅使用全稱

Case #1: 僅出現一次

即使某個特定的 acronym 是存在的，但只會被使用一次時，則不一定需要採用 acronym。

[This paper proposes a novel finite-difference time-domain \(FDTD\) technique to solve multiphysics problems. In the past, researchers have developed the finite-element time-domain \(FETD\) and boundary-element time-domain \(BETD\) numerical methods to find solutions to these equations, but these will not be discussed here.](#)

此案例中的“FETD”及“BETD”的 acronym，於論文中不會再出現，因此沒必要去定義。

END OF TIP

Uni-edit English Writing Tip 015

When do I have to define my acronyms?

Difficulty: Intermediate

These days, it's almost impossible to read an academic paper without encountering acronyms. The intention is to make papers easier to read, and to create new lingo for new concepts. However, as time goes by, more scholars are worrying that acronyms are impeding communication, rather than helping it.

So, when should you introduce acronyms to define a full term, when shouldn't you?

Use the Acronym without the Full Term

Case #1: "Well-known" Acronyms

Do you immediately understand the technology described by "light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation"? What about "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus"?

Some terms have become so widespread, that it is unnecessary to define them: in fact, defining them might be confusing! Which was easier to understand: the language above, or the everyday words "laser" and "scuba"?

A good rule of thumb is if you have heard an acronym spoken aloud by people outside your workplace, laboratory, or classroom, you can probably use the acronym without defining it. For example, not only molecular biologists know what DNA is, not only mathematicians know what 3D is, and not only international relations experts know what the UN is.

Case #2: Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms

However, there's no absolute consensus on what constitutes a "well-known" acronym. For example, organic chemists immediately know what DMSO is, while mechanical engineers wouldn't look twice at EMF. But the former rarely need to measure or quantify *electromotive force*, and the latter rarely deal with the low-toxicity solvent *dimethyl sulfoxide*: so, it seems unreasonable to say either is "well known" in a universal sense.

Check if your target journal provides a "List of Standard Abbreviations", "List of Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms", etc. For example, if you were looking to publish in the *Journal of Organic Chemistry*, you could consult their [Standard Abbreviations and Acronyms](#) and find out that "DMSO" can be used without abbreviation.

Within your field, it is also good practice to see what other authors are doing. If you can find more than five that use an acronym without defining the term, then it is probably safe to do so yourself. Remember, they are also your primary audience: if you met at a conference, and just used the acronym, you would understand each other perfectly.

Define the Term and Use the Acronym

Case #1: Uncommon or Perhaps Unfamiliar Concepts (to your Readers)

This is the most common case in academic writing: it is so common, some writers are (mistakenly) taught it as an absolute rule. If an acronym isn't in a standard list, you should probably define it the first time you use it in your paper, especially if the acronym is the grammatical subject of the sentence.

- The Profile of Mood States (POMS) is a commonly used measure of psychological distress.
- In an earlier paper, an acoustic wave propagator (AWP) was proposed to describe the time-domain evolution of mechanical waves in various media.

Even if you expect your readers to know the acronym, it can be useful for several reasons.

- To avoid confusion. This is especially true if the meaning of the acronym is not the main focus of the sentence.
- To save space. An acronym counts as one word for the purpose of word counts. In addition, it is useful in Figures and Tables where space is often limited.
- To attract knowledgeable readers. Sometimes researchers will search databases using the acronym rather than the real term: using the acronym ensures your research will appear and rank highly in their search results.

Case #2: Your Own Acronyms

Sometimes you'll want to create your own acronyms. You might do this for an important concept to your paper, or a new one you are proposing.

It is also common in the Results section, when you want to compare groups. (e.g. A group, C group). This is fine, especially in tables and figures where space is limited.

Example: Leukemia recurrence rates in patients treated with imatinib+steroid therapy (I+S) were compared with those of patients treated with imatinib monotherapy (IM), and with the conventional treatment (CT).

You won't find these acronyms in the literature on chemotherapy for leukemia. However, since the Results section is devoted to comparing these three groups, readers can more easily understand your data if you create labels to mark the objects of comparison.

Use the Full Term Only

Case #1: Only Used Once

Even if an acronym is possible, you don't have to use it. If you use a term for which an acronym is possible only once in a paper, you don't need to provide an acronym.

This paper proposes a novel finite-difference time-domain (FDTD) technique to solve multiphysics problems. In the past, researchers have developed the finite-element time-domain (FETD) and boundary-element time-domain (BETD) numerical methods to find solutions to these equations, but these will not be discussed here.

In this case, the acronyms "FETD" and "BETD" are not used again in the paper, so it is unnecessary to define them.

END OF TIP