Copy Talk

Monthly tips on style and quality

May 2016

Gaffe of the Month

The Average North American consumes more than 400 Africans.

And *this* is why it's good to have slides reviewed...

HAVE PATIENCE (NOT SUBJECTS)

You may wonder why we always change *subjects* to *patients* or *participants/volunteers*. Per the *AMA Manual of Style*, *subject* may be considered an impersonal or derogatory description. Indeed, the first definition for *subject* in the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary* is "one that is placed under authority or control." Therefore, if the people in question have a disability or disease, they are called *patients* in study descriptions. If the people comprise a control group without the target disability or disease or are healthy volunteers, they are called *participants*.

Speaking of disability and disease, patients are more than just the condition they are experiencing. Avoid labeling patients with the disease; eg, use *patients with diabetes* instead of *diabetics* and *patient with NSCLC* instead of *NSCLC patient*. Avoid using emotional terminology and any words that suggest helplessness (eg, *child with muscular dystrophy* rather than *child suffering from muscular dystrophy*). Avoid euphemistic expressions such as *special* or *challenged*.

DESPERATELY SEEKING SYMBOLS

Because browsing the symbol menu can be frustrating at times, you may want to try using character codes. Type a symbol's code into the character code field at the bottom of the Symbol dialog box to call it up, and then just click Insert.

Symbol	Do Not Use	Character Code
≤	underlined <	2264
≥	underlined >	2265
±	+/-	00B1
×	lowercase x	00D7
— (em dash)	-- (2 hyphens)	2014
– (en dash)		2013
− (minus sign)	- (hyphen)	2212
≈	~	2248
°	superscript o	00B0
•	bolded period	0149
α	alpha	03B1
β	beta	03B2
γ	gamma	03B3

Another option is to use established keyboard shortcuts for symbols or create your own. Microsoft Office 2007/2013 comes with default keyboard shortcuts for all of the symbols. You can find these shortcuts near the bottom of the Symbol dialog box. You can use these shortcuts without needing to open the symbol menu.

Alternatively, to avoid the use of Microsoft's rather cumbersome default keyboard shortcuts, you can create key combinations you'll easily remember by assigning new combinations in the symbol menu using the following steps:

1. Open the symbol menu

2. Choose the symbol for which you want to create a shortcut. Click that symbol once, and then click Shortcut Key

3. Put the cursor in the "Press new shortcut key:" field, and perform the shortcut you wish to create (eg, Ctrl + 8; Shift + Ctrl + \; Alt + b)

4. Click Assign

AS A REMINDER

In titles and headings, all verbs—including those containing only 2 letters—should be capitalized, as should words of 4 or more letters.

Examples

RA *Is* a Polyarticular Inflammatory Disease *That Has* a Destructive Effect on Joints

IL-6 *Is* a Pleiotropic Cytokine *With* Multiple Sources and Targets

And finally...

JUST FOR LAUGHS

"I wasn't chewing it. I was editing it."

Hope you're enjoying *Copy Talk*. Send us your critiques, compliments, and questions at sue.landry@nucleuscentral.com