Census of Marine Life: Writing Style Guidelines

Resources

• Preferred dictionary: Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., 2003 [available through Amazon or most bookstores worldwide that carry books in English]
• Online dictionary: Merriam-Webster Online Search http://www.merriam-webster.com/ (free version with advertisements) or http://www.merriam-webster.com/store/products/software/ik/index.htm for a downloadable version for PC or Mac, available for 15-day free trial or $19.95 US
• Online style guide: The Chicago Manual of Style http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/contents.html available for 30-day free trial or ~$30 US online subscription

Abbreviations and acronyms
In general, avoid using abbreviations, especially if they would occur only rarely in the text. Introduce abbreviations in parentheses after spelling out the first occurrence; for example, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Avoid Latin abbreviations in text except et al. in reference citations.
and so forth – not etc.
for example – not e.g.
that is – not i.e.

Census of Marine Life: Spell out first reference, then use “the Census.” Avoid using the acronym CoML.

Census of Marine Life Project Areas, Project Names and Project Acronyms:

- Abyssal Plains
- Antarctic Ocean
- Arctic Ocean
- Continental Margins
- Continental Shelves
- Coral Reefs
- Information System
- Microbes
- Mid-ocean Ridges
- Near Shore
- Oceans Future
- Oceans Past
- Regional Ecosystems
- Seamounts
- Top Predators
- Vents and Seeps
- Zooplankton

Commas
Use a comma before “and” in a series of three or more items.

Compound words, hyphens, prefixes
Consult Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary for accepted spelling of compound words. Acceptance is determined by convention and sometimes appears idiosyncratic. Rely on Webster’s for spelling of permanent compounds, such as seafloor [noun] and saltwater [adjective], and for hyphenated compounds, such as life-form.
and mid-ocean. If a compound noun does not appear in the dictionary, it is generally best to spell it as two words. Following is a list of compounds as they appear in Webster’s and a few exceptions to Webster’s that may arise in Census publications.

**Compound words:**

Webster’s
- deep-sea (adj.) – relating to the deeper parts of the sea <deep-sea diving, in the deep sea>
- deepwater (adj.) <deepwater port>
- life-form
- mid-ocean
- ocean-going (adj.) <ocean-going vessel>
- saltwater (adj.) – relating to salt water <saltwater species>
- seabed
- seafloor
- seamount
- seawater
- shrimp-like

Census exceptions to Webster’s
- barcode, barcoding
- midsea
- midwater
- seagrass

**Hyphens:** Use hyphens to join two or more consecutive words that make up a single modifier of a word that follows. In general, a hyphen is not used when these consecutive words appear after the word they modify. Do not hyphenate compounds with adverbs ending in ly. Section 7.90 in The Chicago Manual of Style (7.87 in online version) is an excellent guide to hyphenation for compounds and prefixes.

- tube-building worms
- well-known effect
- deep-dwelling species
- 10,000-square-kilometer tract
- commercially fished species

**Prefixes:** In general, do not use a hyphen with simple prefixes. See extensive but nonexclusive lists of preferred spellings in Webster’s at anti-, co-, counter, hyper-, inter-, mis, multi-, non-, out-, over-, past-, pre-, re-, sub-, ultra-, and un-:

- multicellular, multiyear
- noncommercial, nonmigratory
- overexploitation, overfish
- recolonization, reexploration
- unicellular, but single-celled and one-celled

**Dates**
Plurals require no apostrophe; for example, 1970s and 1980s.

Use B.C. and A.D. (with periods) rather than B.C.E. or B.P. and C.E.

**Italics**
Use italics for names of ships and submersibles (but not abbreviations designating type of vessel), titles of books and journals, and genus, species, and subspecies names (but not designations following such names). Use roman type (not italics) for names of research programs, titles of chapters and journal articles, and taxonomic divisions higher than genus.

- Alvin, RV Polarstern, USCGC Healy
- Hyperoodon spp.
- International Polar Year (IPY)
- seed shrimps (class Ostracoda)
Numbers
Spell out fractions and numbers one through nine, then use numerals. In a sentence containing numbers both larger and smaller than 10, use numerals for all things of one kind. Use commas in numbers of four or more digits [except addresses, dates, and page numbers]. Spell out million and billion. Use numerals with percent and units of measure. Treat days, weeks, months, and years as parts of a calendar rather than units of time.
  two humpback and nine blue whales
  2 humpback, 9 blue, and 21 minke whales
  We sighted 2 humpback, 9 blue, and 21 minke whales in four hours.
  5,000 tons, 51,000 tons
  four-week cruise, one month, 30 days
  two-thirds full
  1 million
  2 percent
  4 liters (about 1 gallon)

Percent - Spell out the word “percent” in text but not usually in tables or within parentheses (for example, 10%).

Currency: Use the dollar (or currency) sign with numerals; for example, $3,500, $5 million.

Spelling and capitalization
  the Census, Census projects
  Figure 2, Table 5
  hot spots – not hotspots
  octopuses – not octopi
  sulfide – not sulphide
  under way (adv.) <work is under way>
  mollusk – not mollusc *
  harbor – not harbour *
  color – not colour *
  *Depending on the outlet for your publication, there are times when the British rather than American English spellings of certain words are more appropriate, so please follow your publication’s guidelines when deciding on whether to use British or American spelling for words such as mollusk, harbor, and color.

Units
Use SI units generally, followed if necessary by equivalents in parentheses. For example:
  2 to 3 centimeters (about 1 inch)
  1,500 meters (5,000 feet)

Wired words
  email
  the Internet
  listserv
  online
  Web site, Web page, Web-based, the Web

Word processing
Insert page numbers.

Use indents and tabs, not the space bar, to align text, especially in tables.

Do not insert extra returns between paragraphs.

Do not use automatic hyphenation.