Biotext

Using numbers and units

Using numbers and units correctly ensures your content is clear and accurate.

Numerals

Use arabic numerals for all numbers, except at the beginning of a sentence:

There were 6 chairs. but

Six chairs were there.

For large numbers (more than 3 digits), show thousands with a comma:

1,000 100,000

Use *one* for a figure of speech, where the meaning is 'a' rather than a numeric value:

She had one good reason for being cautious. [A good reason] but

Tachyglossus aculeatus is 1 of 4 species of echidna.

Some style guides might spell out numbers from one to nine, and use numerals for 10 and above. One exception is sentences with numbers both less than and more than 10 – use numerals for all:

There were 6 dogs and 11 cats. not

There were six dogs and 11 cats

Use numerals for all percentages, followed by either the % symbol with no space or *per cent*; depending on your style guide and the type of content:

5% or 5 per cent

Units

Use standard metric units. In online content and nontechnical publications, spell out the units at first mention or in each section. For more technical publications, there is no need to spell out units such as kg, t or m.

Unit symbols are always singular (i.e. they are not followed by *s* or treated as plural):

10 mL was added not 10 mLs were added

Always have a nonbreaking space (Shift+Ctrl+Space if using Windows) between the number and the unit:

7 kg not 7kg

For temperatures, use a nonbreaking space between the number and the degree symbol:

26 °C and 78 °F

Always use numerals (not words) for numbers used with a unit symbol:

9 kg not nine kg

Don't use a symbol without a number:

Weight was measured in kilograms.

not Weight was measured in kg.

Between and from

When a span of numbers is preceded by *between*, separate the numbers by *and*:

between 5 and 7 kg not between 5–7 kg

When a span of numbers is preceded by *from*, separate the numbers with *to*:

from 1994 to 1995 not from 1994–95

Formatting

Use en dashes (Alt+0150 on numeric keypad, or Ctrl+- on numeric keypad), not hyphens or slashes, for spans of numbers:

5–7 ha not 5-7 ha

1994–95 not 1994/95 or 1994-95

Indicate a negative number with a minus symbol or an en dash, with no space:

–3.5 –3.2 °C

Use a slash to indicate *per*:

5 t/ha and 7 kg/m^2

Use a hyphen and spell the unit out in full when a number is used as an adjective:

5-hectare area

For all dates, use the form *day month year*:

1 July 2000

Do not include an apostrophe in years:

the 1960s not the 1960's

Numbers in chemistry

Chemical formulas show the number of different atoms in each element in the molecule. Show the number of atoms as a subscript to the right of the element:

CO_2 NH_4 Al_2O_3

'Carbon dioxide equivalent' is a standardised unit for measuring the global warming impact of various greenhouse gases by converting them into an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide. It is represented by the standard chemical formula for carbon dioxide, followed by a dash and lower-case e:

CO_2-e

'Particulate matter' refers to particles of dust resulting from combustion and other processes. Indicate the size of particulate matter by a superscript denoting the particle size in micrometres:

PM_{10} [coarse particulate matter; less than 10 micrometres in diameter]

$PM_{2.5}$ [fine particulate matter; less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter]