STOP Abbreviation Abuse

Are you sick and tired (SAT) of learning, memorizing, reading, and using (LMRU) a bunch of abbreviations (BOA)? When we read even the shortest document, say, a *CDC Today* announcement promoting a blood drive, food donation, or new class, we're forced to decipher (FTD) yet another abbreviation. It's almost as if we make them up as we go (MTUAWG)!

The general rule of abbreviations is to spell out the term at first use in a document and place the abbreviation in parentheses immediately afterward. Easy enough, right? Of course, it can get a little tricky. Here are some guidelines for navigating the abbreviations minefield as a writer:

1. **Try to limit abbreviations to 5 or fewer per document.** No one enjoys wading through alphabet soup. If you have too many, spell out the ones you use only once or twice (see #6 below).

2. **Very familiar abbreviations don't count.** You don't always need to spell out things like CDC, FBI, or ZIP code. Some terms are so familiar that people read them like words.

3. **Use only standard abbreviations.** In other words, don't do what we're doing here (DDWIDH).

4. **If you introduce an abbreviation, use it.** Keep track of what you've introduced—don't use the long form again once you've given the abbreviation. Once is enough (OIE). Except . . .

5. **You *should* reintroduce abbreviations in longer documents.** If your document has several sections or chapters, give the abbreviation in each major element as a courtesy to your readers.

6. **If you mention the term only once or twice, it doesn't need an abbreviation.** Just spell it out.

7. **Use nicknames.** Abbreviations are mostly for the writer's convenience (MFTWC). Who wants to type "Centers for Disease Control and Prevention" every time they refer to **the agency**? Wait . . . did you catch that? We used a nickname: "the agency." Try to use nicknames (also called short forms), like "the committee" and "the report," more often.

8. **Not all abbreviations are capitalized.** Acronyms and initialisms usually are, but there are exceptions, like i.e., e.g., and PhD. Department of Defense, for example, can be abbreviated as

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Types of Abbreviations

"Regular" abbreviations are shortened versions of a word, like Inc. or info.

Acronyms are abbreviations that use the first letters or syllables of a phrase and are pronounced as a word, like NASA and AIDS.

Initialisms are abbreviations that are pronounced letter by letter, like CDC and FBI.

either DOD or DoD. Just double-check before you write and be consistent throughout your document.

That is all (TIA). Now, have a nice day (HAND)!