

Ask Athena: Disputed Territories, Plain Language Summaries, and Reference Style

Ask Athena is *Science Editor's* advice column for your most challenging publishing and editing questions. Submit your questions to scienceeditor@councilscienceeditors.org.

Ask Athena: Maps With Disputed Territories

Dear Athena,

We have recently seen an uptick in maps that feature disputed territories in our manuscript submissions. We follow the UN Country Designations and maps, and we try not to publish maps with disputed territories, but our journal specialists do not formally check/QC for these at submission. We have been relying on editors and reviewers to point these out and then ask for updated maps. However, as we are running into this more, we find that we miss some this way. I was wondering what other journals do? Do you enforce the use of certain maps or borders? When and how do you check for it? We're also mindful of the workload of our editorial staff, so any workflow suggestions/examples to do this in an efficient manner are much appreciated.

—Don't Want to Start an International Incident

Dear International Incident,

To answer this important question, Athena turned to Jessica LaPointe, Managing Copy Editor, American Meteorological Society, for her insights:

"This is an issue we've been dealing with for some time at the American Meteorological Society (AMS). In 2018, the AMS Council made the following policy statement:

At Ask Athena, we recognize that there are often a variety of opinions and options when faced with sticky situations, especially those that do not have an obvious answer. We do our best to provide sound guidance but appreciate that others may have a different view. In the spirit of open communication, we would love to hear your thoughts and answers on the questions we cover in the column. Email us at scienceeditor@councilscienceeditors.org.

Answers to Ask Athena questions are a group effort by members of the CSE Education Committee.



The American Meteorological Society remains neutral with respect to land-based political borders and names or references to land-based locations in AMS journals. However, no borders or territorial boundaries should be shown over oceans and adjacent seas, gulfs, or other oceanic water bodies on figures in AMS publications (<https://www.ametsoc.org/index.cfm/ams/publications/author-information/formatting-and-manuscript-components/ams-style-for-geography-and-oceanography-terms/>)

Currently, we query the author in the proofs, citing the policy above and requesting the author submit new figures, if needed. This does involve some staff resources as it relies on the technical editors noticing the lines in the figures and adding the author query. To save staff time, it could potentially be addressed earlier during peer review or with some kind of disclaimer, as in Springer Nature. How best to handle this is an ongoing question in the AMS publications workflow."

Thanks for the assist, Jessica! Athena also did a quick search of some of the major publishers' websites and found many have very similar statements published on their websites (see below for a handful of examples). Journals, societies, and publishers would be wise to have similar

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policies stated clearly on their websites, no matter the internal process for monitoring adherence to the policies.

- **Elsevier.** “Elsevier remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.” (<https://www.elsevier.com/legal/elsevier-website-terms-and-conditions>)
- **Frontiers.** “Frontiers Media SA remains neutral with regards to published territorial descriptions, maps, and author affiliations. All territorial claims are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, the publisher, the editors, or reviewers.” (<https://www.frontiersin.org/guidelines/policies-and-publication-ethics#open-access-and-copyright>)
- **Wiley.** “We ask authors to be cognizant of the fact that the legal status of countries and regions are often disputed and to be mindful of the messages you may be sending to readers when selecting maps that cover such territories. Wiley recognizes that the global community includes diverse opinions on many issues, and we believe the best way to reflect these diverse views is to be neutral on any jurisdictional claims as a publisher and to defer to author and editor discretion. However, please flag any maps showing disputed territories and/or discuss any concerns with your managing editor or primary Wiley contact.” (<https://authorservices.wiley.com/asset/book-author-documents.html/Permissions-Guidelines-for-Authors.pdf>)
- **Springer.** “Political Neutrality Policy: Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations. We do not take political positions and should not support political parties or endorse political candidates.

We achieve this by being politically neutral (which includes not donating to political parties or endorsing politically-driven boycotts) while respecting the editorial independence of the media in respect of our content. This means that, while editorial content in Springer Nature publications might sometimes take a political position, it should not be seen as a reflection or otherwise of the company’s position. Editorial content is not influenced by the company and vice versa” (<https://www.springernature.com/gp/policies/book-publishing-policies>).

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Ask Athena: Can a Plain Language Summary Be an Acceptable Secondary Publication?

Dear Athena,
Our publisher’s permissions office recently received a request from an author to publish a plain language summary

of their article that we had published. This publication would appear in another journal.

The article we published is copyrighted by our society publisher, so we are uncomfortable having this published in another journal. The author cited that plain language summaries of publications are beneficial to the public, and they would ensure the original publication was cited. Is there any guidance in this area? Plain language summaries of publications are new to us.

—Plain Jane

Dear Plain Jane,

Your question is a good one. Journals have been publishing plain language summaries for years, and principles on developing them are available, but we can understand that having this publication in another journal may seem like a new idea.

Plain language summaries (or PLS) are summaries of articles written in easy-to-understand, nontechnical language. They are typically short and may accompany the article at the time of publication, and some may include graphical summaries for visual learning. Other plain language summaries are standalone, peer-reviewed articles that may be published alongside or after publication of the original article. These are sometimes called plain language summaries of publications (or PLSP).

According to the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors,¹ a plain language summary would be an acceptable secondary publication, as long as the following criteria are met:

1. The authors have received approval from the editors of both journals (the editor concerned with secondary publication must have access to the primary version).
2. The priority of the primary publication is respected by a publication timeline negotiated by both editors with the authors.
3. The paper for secondary publication is intended for a different group of readers; an abbreviated version could be sufficient.
4. The secondary version faithfully reflects the authors, data, and interpretations of the primary version.
5. The secondary version informs readers, peers, and documenting agencies that the paper has been published in whole or in part elsewhere, and the secondary version cites the primary reference.
6. The title of the secondary publication should indicate that it is a secondary publication (complete or abridged republication or translation) of a primary publication.

CSE’s *Scientific Style and Format’s* section on redundant publication² also describes when this publication may be justifiable:

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Significant findings published in the journal of one specialty or profession warrant republication in the journal of another specialty or profession to reach an audience that otherwise might not readily have access to the findings; here, too, the journal editors and publishers of both publications should be informed of, and agree to, the redundancy.

Plain language summaries can indeed be beneficial to a general audience. They are accessible to the public and link back to the original article. They promote dissemination of the information from your (obviously) important article to a wider audience than your journal may typically have, which may pull more readers back to your journal. For more discussion on PLS, Emilie Gunn's recent *Science Editor* article on the topic³ may be of interest.

In the end, the decision to approve secondary publication is up to the publishers in collaboration with the authors of the original article. Publishers should also clearly outline if or when such secondary publication is acceptable in their policies.

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References and Links

1. <https://www.icmje.org/icmje-recommendations.pdf>
2. Redundant publication. In: *Scientific style and format: the CSE manual for authors, editors, and publishers*. 8th ed. University of Chicago Press; 2014:16.
3. Gunn E. Give it to me straight: plain language summaries and their role in scholarly journals. *Sci Ed*. 2024;47:12-13. <https://doi.org/10.36591/SE-4701-09>.

Ask Athena: Reference Style and The CSE Manual

Dear Athena,

In a cover letter that was returned to our editorial office with a manuscript revision, the corresponding author expressed displeasure at having to ensure that reference citations were formatted according to our style, specifically about the number of authors listed. We follow the rule in the eighth edition of *Scientific Style and Format*, which is to include up to the first 10 authors, and if there are more than 10 authors, include all 10 followed by "et al." This is clearly outlined in our journal requirements online, which the authors agree to follow when their manuscript is submitted.

This is not the first time an author has expressed such displeasure with this style point. It does seem excessive to list the first 10 authors, and I'm finding that other style manuals require fewer author names in references. Our

editorial office is considering other style formats that might ease this author burden for future papers. Any suggestions?

—Ruffled by References

Dear Ruffled,

It can certainly be frustrating for authors to meet different formatting requirements for different journals. It's possible this author does not use (or is not aware of) EndNotes or other reference management tools that are designed to simplify and expedite the process of compiling reference lists.

In your particular case, your journal instructions are available to the author, and the author agreed to follow your journal formatting rules when they submitted their manuscript. On the other hand, many journal production teams incorporate their own software tools to accurately and expeditiously format references during the copyediting process. It is entirely up to your editorial office and production resources whether this is an issue worth pushing for.

That said, rules change and style manuals are updated. As it happens, in the recently released ninth edition of *The CSE Manual* (the successor to the eighth edition of *Scientific Style and Format*), the "number of authors" rule has been updated—largely for the same reason that has been irking your authors until now. Athena asked Peter J Olson, ELS, Freelance Manuscript Editing Coordinator at the JAMA Network and one of the four editors of Chapter 29 ("References"), for details on this update.

The new rule is to cite only up to the first 5 authors, and for references with 6 or more authors, the list is truncated to the first author followed by "et al." This update was modeled after reference styles adopted by some of the more prominent journals in the scholarly publishing industry—most notably Science and The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)—and is intended to promote efficient and concise citation of references, particularly in online and mobile platforms. The truncation to a single author when there are more than 5 authors also avoids the somewhat awkward situation of relegating a sixth author to "et al." status in a reference that is merely 1 author name over the limit.

With this change in mind—and assuming you want to follow the most current CSE style—you will find yourself facing the decision of how and when your journal should transition to the new reference format. In all likelihood, this decision will be influenced by your journal's size, workflow,

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and/or frequency. If you have a small journal that publishes infrequently, it may not be all that labor-intensive to make a clean shift from one issue to the next, since you will probably have a relatively small number of articles that need to be retrofitted for consistency. On the other hand, if you have a voluminous journal with a high frequency, and you'd rather not go through the trouble of reediting multiple reference lists, it may be just as well to allow an issue (or 2, or 3) to have a mix of the "before and after" reference styles from article to article and simply accept it as a minor and temporary casualty of the transition. If you take the latter approach, you could consider proactively

addressing the short-term inconsistency by publishing an editor's note in the first issue that incorporates the new style; doing so could help minimize your readers' confusion while also letting them know that you haven't abandoned your editorial standards.

Thank you, Peter, for the details of this change. We at Ask Athena are excited about the recent release of the ninth edition of *The CSE Manual*.

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