



ACRONYMS

AVOID ACRONYMS IF YOU CAN

A report sprinkled with acronyms can be hard to read, even if the reader knows what they all mean. If a term is short and is only used two or three times, it is probably best to spell it out and avoid using the acronym.

THE RULE

If you decide to use an acronym, spell it out the first time you use it. Here's an example:

On February 21, 2001, the National Research Council
(NRC) will hold a conference on that technology.

EXCEPTIONS

Depending on your audience, there may be a handful of acronyms that need not be spelled out on first use. An obvious example is "U.S.A.", an acronym that just about everyone understands. If in doubt, however, it is always best to spell out the acronym on first use.

JUST USING IT ONCE?

If you use a term just once in a document, do not add the acronym in parenthesis — unless the acronym is used more commonly than the term itself.

POSSESSIVES

It is awkward when a possessive occurs in a term the first time it is used. Here's an example:

On February 21, 2001, the National Research Council's (NRC) Thermal Technology Centre will hold a conference on that technology.

You can get around it this way:

On February 21, 2001, the Thermal Technology Centre of the National Research Council (NRC) will hold a conference on that technology.