

How to Write Latin Names of Species

Binomial Nomenclature

The Latin names for individual species are written using a system termed "binomial nomenclature" that was developed originally by Linnaeus. Quite literally, each species is identified by a combination of "two names": its *genus name* and its *specific epithet*. A familiar example is that of human beings, *Homo sapiens*. Usually the Latin name is followed by the last name of the person who first gave the name to the species in non-italicized text.

Simple Rules for Writing Latin Names in Papers

Here are some simple rules to follow when writing Latin names in your paper:

- The full name (e.g., *Homo sapiens*) should be written out in the Title, the first time it is used in the Abstract, and the first time it is used in the body of the paper. Thereafter the name should be abbreviated as the first letter of the genus name (capitalized) and the complete specific epithet (e.g., *H. sapiens*)
- The genus name is ALWAYS capitalized (e.g., *Homo*)
- The specific epithet is NEVER capitalized (e.g., *sapiens*)
- The entire name is always italicized in print (*Homo sapiens*); if italics are not possible, the alternative is to underline both names.
- If the name of the person who named the species is available, use it. (*Homo sapiens* Linnaeus; *Rana catesbeiana* Shaw, etc)

Use of common names for species

Most species that we encounter routinely are also given a common name which is usually somewhat less cumbersome than the Latin name. If you need to mention the species name many times in your paper you may find it better to use the common name. A problem with common names is that a species which has a wide geographic range may be called by different common names depending on where you are. Further, some species may have different common names depending on their particular stage of life or size.

- You may use the common name in a paper so long as the Latin name is given with it initially (e.g., in Title, Abstract, and first mention in Introduction) and you clarify which common name you are using for that species.
- When in doubt, use the Latin name.