UNEP Publications Reference Series
Guidelines for Editors

Overview

The impact of research and synthesis can be diminished seriously or even dismissed by a report that is riddled with spelling mistakes, inconsistent punctuation or a narrative flow that is difficult to follow.

It is an editor's responsibility to ensure that a publication follows the United Nations spelling as well as UNEP style and citation conventions. Editors also ensure that they are familiar with the type of content and intended target audiences, that the tone of the publication is consistent throughout, that the narrative flow is solid and that complex concepts are explained clearly for the intended target audiences.

Types of editing

Depending on the quality of the manuscript, the editor will need to assess what is needed to get the publication up to UNEP standards.

In a proofread, the editor corrects spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. This is the lightest form of editing and does not account for stylistic or phrasing issues.

A copy-edit goes beyond this and includes correcting grammar, spelling, punctuation and other mechanics of style; checking for consistency of mechanics and consistency of facts and citations throughout the publication. An editor will also ensure the in text references match the end text references and that the UN style is maintained. If agreed with the Publication Coordinator, copy editing may also include checking citations for completeness and style, developing a list of acronyms, formatting headings and the table of contents.

A structural edit involves deep editing with content revisions to ensure ideas are expressed fluently and accurately. This extensive edit often requires direct coordination with authors. A structural edit also includes copy editing.

Language and style

Language and style conventions for UNEP publications follow the United Nations Editorial Manual. While outlining all language and style rules is outside of the scope of this document, some common conventions are noted here.

Abbreviations and acronyms | In general, the use of abbreviations and acronyms should be avoided. When they are used, spell them out in full on the first occurrence, followed by the acronym or abbreviation in parentheses, then use the acronym in subsequent occurrence.

Comma usage | The final comma before "and" (i.e., Oxford or serial comma) is not normally used in United Nations documents. Commas are placed outside of quotations marks (see Quotations").

Numbers | Numbers are expressed in words when they are i) under 10, ii) in simple fractions, and iii) at the beginning of the sentence. Numbers expressed in figures include percentages, ages, temperature, sums of money, measures and weight, ratios and map scales, and compound fractions.

Quotations |Quoted words, sentences and paragraphs are enclosed within double quotation marks. Single quotation marks are used to enclose quotations within quotations. In general, final punctuation is placed outside the quotation marks.

Spelling | The Concise Oxford English Dictionary is the current authority for spelling in the United Nations.

Citations and references

UNEP publications primarily use the Harvard Referencing system In some instances the keyed referencing style can be used. More information can be found in the UNEP 2022 Publications Guidelines.