

ICIMOD

ICIMOD STYLE GUIDE

Developed by the **ICIMOD Editorial Team**
to support clear, concise, and consistent writing

2026



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International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

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About the Style Guide

The editorial team developed this Style Guide to support clear, consistent, and reader-focused writing across the outputs of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). It reflects editorial experience, taking on board recurring style questions, and aims to provide practical guidance rather than rigid rules. While it largely draws on the APA Publication Manual (Seventh Edition), the guide adapts conventions to suit ICIMOD's institutional voice, audiences, and publishing contexts. As a living document, it will continue to evolve as our writing practices and communication needs change.

This guide is not a grammar textbook. Instead, it helps resolve common style conflicts and supports informed choices when multiple options exist. By following it, we can ensure consistency in language, tone, and formatting across all ICIMOD outputs, from research reports and policy briefs to social media posts and event materials. At ICIMOD, we prioritise clarity of thought, consistency within a document, and alignment with the Style Guide, in that order. Clear writing reflects clear thinking, and consistent style strengthens ICIMOD's professional voice across platforms.

Acknowledgement

Mahmud Al Haq Patwary, Editorial Officer, ICIMOD, spearheaded the revision and revamp of this Style Guide. This document builds on the work of former members of the ICIMOD Editorial Team, whose contributions laid the foundation for its development. Gillian Summers, Senior Editor, ICIMOD, provided guidance and editorial oversight during the revision of this guide.

Feedback and stewardship

ICIMOD colleagues are encouraged to read the guide in full and share suggestions, questions, or corrections with the Editorial Team to support its continued improvement.



How does this guide work?

Updates

This is a living document. The Editorial Team revises and expands it as new style questions and usage cases emerge, in order to keep pace with evolving language trends. Updated versions will be shared periodically to ensure that our writing evolves with our needs and remains consistent across all ICIMOD communications.

Primary style guide

Our in-house style guide largely follows the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), Seventh Edition, which is well-suited for academic and research writing in the social and behavioural sciences. However, we have adapted and expanded it to better fit ICIMOD's audiences, outputs, and regional context.

Contentious points

When ICIMOD-specific conventions differ from the APA manual, this guide takes precedence. For stylistic questions not covered here, refer to the latest edition of the APA Publication Manual as the default reference.

These guidelines are designed to standardise our writing while allowing flexibility and editorial judgment. In every ICIMOD publication, we value:

1. Clarity of thought and presentation
2. Consistency within the document
3. Alignment with the ICIMOD style guide

The Editorial Officer, in consultation with the Senior Editor, provides clarification on style, usage, and consistency issues when needed. Final editorial decisions rest with the Senior Editor.



ICIMOD speak

This section defines stylistic choices unique to ICIMOD. These conventions are based on editorial experience with common inconsistencies in our publications and aim to simplify and unify how we write about ICIMOD and its work.

Internal spellings

Use official spellings of ICIMOD-specific terms and proper nouns (such as names of units, programmes, and centres) as listed in the latest version of the ICIMOD Strategy, Medium-Term Action Plan, and Nomenclature: ICIMOD Portfolio.

For terms not covered there or where British English offers multiple valid options, choose the form that is most widely used in current academic or institutional literature. Quick tools like Google Scholar or Google Ngram can help check usage trends.

For example:

- Use cryospheric change (more common) instead of cryosphere change.
- Use climate change, not climatic change (by convention).

Regional Member Countries

As ICIMOD's eight Regional Member Countries are a defined and permanent group, use title case when writing Regional Member Countries (RMCs). After the first mention, the abbreviation RMCs may be used alone.

HI-programmes/projects

Programme and project names beginning with 'HI' are always written with a hyphen for consistency with ICIMOD's official naming convention. Examples: HI-AWARE, HI-CAS, HI-GRID, HI-REAP, HI-RISK, etc. The hyphen ensures uniformity and recognisability across our Himalayan (HI) initiatives.

Tone and usage

At ICIMOD, we aim for writing that is clear, confident, and inclusive. Use plain and active language that speaks directly to readers, avoiding jargon whenever possible. Keep sentences concise and choose familiar words over complex ones.

When describing communities, places, or people, use respectful and neutral language that reflects ICIMOD's values of collaboration and equity. Good writing is not only correct – it is kind, clear, and considerate.



Mechanics of style

Style refers to guidelines for ensuring clear, consistent communication and presentation in written works. When you follow style guidelines, you avoid inconsistencies among and within publications. Style guidelines often overlap with general good writing practices.

British English spelling

ICIMOD uses British English spellings. The first spelling given in the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries is the reference unless specified elsewhere.



Oxford Learner's
Dictionaries

British English spellings use constructions such as:

- ‘-ise’ and ‘-isa’ (realise, organisation)
- ‘-yse’ (analyse, catalyse)
- ‘-our’ (favour, colour)
- ‘-ll-’ (travelled, fuelling)
- ‘-t’ (dreamt, leapt, learnt)
- ‘-ence’ (defence, licence)
- ‘-l’ (enrol, fulfil, skilful)
- Programme** (except when referring to a computer program)

Do not change the spelling when quoting directly from a written source or referring to a proper noun.

Commonly mistaken words

Follow British English spellings throughout ICIMOD publications.

Use this ✓	Not this ✗	Notes
annexe	annex	<i>Annexe</i> is the British noun form
tonne	ton / metric ton	Use <i>tonne</i> for the metric unit
programme	program	<i>Program</i> only in computing contexts
centre	center	British spelling
licence (noun)	license (noun)	<i>Licence</i> is the noun
license (verb)	licence (verb)	<i>License</i> is the verb
learnt	learned	British English

Latin words

At ICIMOD, we generally avoid using Latin words and their abbreviations, such as *etc.*, *et al.*, *cf.*, *inter alia*, *ibid.*, and *viz.*, because they can make writing ambiguous, overly formal, or hard to follow.

Instead, we prefer clear, plain English alternatives that improve readability and help our message come across clearly.

There are exceptions:

- **e.g.** and **i.e.** are widely used and accepted, so they are fine to use.
- Some Latin terms without good alternatives, like per cent, are also acceptable.
- And, of course, Latin words can be used when writing purely scientific or academic papers, where they are expected.

Here's a short list of common Latin terms and their plain English alternatives for your convenience:

Latin Abbreviation	Full Form / Pronunciation	Plain English Alternative(s)
e.g.	exempli gratia (ee-jee)	<i>for example</i>
i.e.	id est (id est)	that is / in other words
etc.	et cetera (et set-er-uh)	<i>and so on / and others</i>
et al.	et alii (et al-ee)	and others (usually people)
cf.	confer (kawn-fer)	<i>compare</i>
inter alia	inter al-ee-a	<i>among other things</i>
ibid.	ibidem (ib-i-dem)	in the same place/source
viz.	videlicet (vid-eh-li-set)	namely / that is to say
per cent	per centum	percent
versus	versus	against / compared to
sic	sic	thus / as written (used for accuracy)

No comma after 'e.g.' and 'i.e.': There is no comma after 'e.g.' or 'i.e.'

- ✓ Our programme focuses on several key areas, e.g. water and climate.
- ✗ Our programme focuses on several key areas, e.g., water and climate.

Contractions

- ✔ Use contractions (like we're, it's, don't) only in **informal content** (some social media posts or promotional materials).
- ✘ **Avoid contractions to maintain a professional tone in formal content** such as the website, reports, or general audience publications.

Point of view in different communications

FIRST-PERSON VOICE

Use first-person pronouns ('we', 'our') to represent ICIMOD. This fosters a unified voice – a 'One ICIMOD' feel that reflects our collective mission and values.

Use '**we**' and '**our**' when:

- referring to ICIMOD as an organisation
- representing your unit as part of ICIMOD

THIRD-PERSON VOICE

For formal communications and knowledge products, use third-person voice to denote ICIMOD and its programmes and avoid contractions.

Use third-person voice when:

- writing formal or external-facing publications
- distinguishing ICIMOD's role in multi-partner collaborations
- clarifying the responsibilities of individual ICIMOD units or partner organisations

Capitalising 'I' in Indigenous

- The '**I**' in Indigenous is always capitalised when referring to humans (not for plants, animals, etc.).
- Use '**Indigenous people**' (lowercase 'people') when referring to Indigenous peoples in a general, collective sense.
- Use '**Indigenous Peoples**' (capitalised 'Peoples') when referring to distinct, specific groups or nations of Indigenous communities.

Capitalising **'Indigenous'** and **'Peoples'** is a mark of respect, recognising the identities and cultures of specific communities. Examples:

- Collaborative climate action plans that integrate **Indigenous** perspectives show promising results.
- The conference included representatives from various **Indigenous Peoples** across Asia.
- The conference included representatives from various **Indigenous Peoples, Dalit activists** and **Janajati leaders**.
- Cultural exchanges between **Janajati** communities of Nepal and **Indigenous Peoples** from neighbouring countries strengthened mutual understanding.
- Access to education remains a critical challenge for many **Indigenous people**, particularly among marginalised **Dalit** and **Janajati** populations.
- The training aimed to build climate adaptation skills among **Indigenous people** and **Dalit** women entrepreneurs.

This distinction helps ensure respect and clarity in communication.

Local over Anglicised

Use local noun forms, not Anglicised ones. At ICIMOD, we use local forms of proper nouns wherever possible, instead of their Anglicised versions.

✔ **Use:** Himalaya, Nepali, Pamir

✘ **Avoid:** Himalayas, Nepalese, Pamirs

This helps reflect respect for local contexts and usage.

Himalayan is fine as an adjective (e.g. Himalayan region) – it is widely accepted and sounds more natural than alternatives like Himalaya region.

Approximate location

Always add the approximate location of any place, town, village to give readers a sense of where it is situated within the country, e.g. the Himalayan village of Mundu in Langtang Valley, north-central Nepal.

Honorifics

Titles like Dr, Mr, Prof, and Ms that often sneak into our writing. At ICIMOD, we keep it simple and consistent.

- Avoid using honorifics in general writing.
- Instead, where possible, include the person's full designation and affiliation with their name (e.g. Director General of ICIMOD, Pema Gyamtsho). This helps avoid confusion and perceived hierarchy.

Using honorifics inconsistently can create imbalances in tone or recognition. Providing clear designations is both respectful and informative.

Exceptions? Yes, but only in specific contexts:

- High-level events or formal documents where titles are expected (e.g. Lyonpo, His Excellency, Shree)
- Signatories on certificates or plaques
- When someone specifically requests a title be used

Note: Always check with individuals on their preferred form of address for use of 'Ms', 'Miss', or 'Mrs'.

Portmanteau

Portmanteaus – words formed by blending two existing words, like motel (motor + hotel), Brexit (Britain + exit), or webinar (web + seminar).

At ICIMOD, we **avoid inventing new portmanteaus** because

- they can sound forced or informal
- their meanings might not be immediately clear
- they risk being misunderstood (e.g. home + hotel = homotel, meeting + nightmare = meetmare, talk + marathon = talkathon)

Unless widely recognised, it's best to use clear, established terms instead of combining words for creativity's sake.

Collective nouns

In British English, collective nouns (like team, committee, government, staff, family, research group) can be either singular or plural, depending on how the group is being viewed:

- ✓ The research team are conducting the study.
(The team members are acting individually.)
- ✓ The research team is submitting its final report.
(The team acting as one unit.)

At ICIMOD, we follow British English, and **the plural form is often preferred** when the group's members are performing separate actions.

(FYI, in American English, collective nouns are almost always singular.)

Date format

Use **DD/MM/YYYY** (Day-Month-Year date format: the day comes first, followed by the month, and then the year):

- 22/09/2026
- 22 Sep 2026
- 22 September 2026
- Friday, 22 Sep 2026
- Friday, 22 September 2026

There is no comma between the month and the year (e.g. 22 September 2026 – not 22 September, 2026 or September 22, 2026). There is no 'st', 'nd', 'rd', or 'th' after the day.

Capitalisation

TITLES OF WRITTEN WORKS

Use sentence case for titles of events and all written works (books, journal articles, reports, webpages), even if title case was used in the original work.

- ✓ The Hindu Kush Himalaya assessment
- ✓ Springs and springshed management in the Godavari landscape, Nepal
- ✓ Report on integrated basin management in the Koshi basin

HEADINGS WITHIN WRITTEN WORKS

Use sentence case in all headings and sub-headings within any written work.

- ✔ **Introduction**
Objectives and methodology
Findings, discussion, and conclusion

- ✘ **Introduction**
Objectives and Methodology
Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion

PROPER NOUNS

Use title case for proper nouns:

- ✔ Names of journals (e.g. The Review of Political Economy)
- ✔ Names of magazines (e.g. National Geographic)
- ✔ Formal apps and systems (e.g. Geokrishi Farm)
- ✔ Early Warning System, High Impact Weather Assessment Toolkit)
- ✔ Eras (e.g. the Great Depression)
- ✔ Widely recognised marginalised groups (e.g. Dalit, Lepcha)
- ✔ Regularly held landmark events (e.g. Kailash Confluence, Yak Fair)

When referring to the planet, 'Earth' is capitalised (e.g. Earth observation).

COMMON TECHNICAL TERMS

In general, do not capitalise the names of theories, concepts, hypotheses, principles, models, and statistical procedures.

theory of change (ToC)
gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)
disaster risk reduction (DRR)
greenhouse gas (GHG)
impact pathway
regression analysis
factor analysis

Do not use capitals for the general form of groups (forest user group, village development committee, the government). However, such terms are capitalised if they are attached to proper nouns (Bokum Forest User Group, Tilakpur Village Development Committee).

REPEATED REFERENCES TO PROPER NOUNS

When a specific proper noun is shortened on second use (and thereafter), there is no need to capitalise the noun. Examples:

- The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is an intergovernmental organisation. The **centre** works across the HKH.
- The Head of Human Resources will be tasked with managing periodic staff refresher training. The **head** will also oversee staff performance evaluations.

JOB TITLES

- ✓ Capitalise a job title when it comes before or immediately after a name:
Mohammad Ashraf, President, attended the programme as the chief guest.
President Mohammad Ashraf attended the programme as the chief guest.
- ✗ Do not capitalise when referring to a title in the general sense:
The president of the organisation attended the programme as the chief guest.

At ICIMOD, job titles are an exception. For example:

- ✓ The meeting was led by the Director General.
We also make exceptions for the highest ranks in government and royalty, such as the Prime Minister or the King.

Remember: Titles are not the same as occupations.

Do not capitalise occupations before names:

- ✓ The idea was presented by entrepreneur Pete Mitchell.
- ✗ The idea was presented by Entrepreneur Pete Mitchell.

ICIMOD STRUCTURE

A category of ICIMOD division or unit is capitalised only when it appears along with the proper name. For example:

... approved by the Strategic Group: Regional Action and Global Advocacy ...
... placed under the SRPBD Unit ...
... among ICIMOD's HI-CAS Project ...

But when used in the general form:

... approved by the climate and environmental risks programme ...
... placed under any unit ...
... among ICIMOD's projects ...

GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

Use upper case for nouns that are part of well-defined natural regions or geographic bodies.

- Hindu Kush Himalayan Region
- Indian Himalayan Region
- Far-Eastern Himalayan Landscape
- Karnali River
- Upper Indus Basin
- Tsho Rolpa Lake
- Imja Glacier
- Bhasan Island

Capitalise officially recognised administrative units and human-made boundaries or structures.

- Kathmandu District
- Shan State
- Punjab Province
- Kavre Municipality
- Hussainabad Village
- Namdapha National Park

When listing multiple proper nouns, use lower case for the noun that follows.

- Kathmandu and Lalitpur districts
- Shan and Kachin states

DIRECTION-DENOTING TERMS

Direction words such as north, south, east, west, and their variants (northern, western, southeastern, etc.) are not capitalised when they simply describe direction or location:

- ICIMOD works in southeastern Bangladesh. (I.e. the southeastern part of Bangladesh, a location, not a geographic entity/administrative unit.)
- Glaciers in the southern Himalaya are retreating faster.

Capitalise these words only when they form part of a recognised or formal proper noun:

- Sudurpashchim Province, Nepal (sudurpashchim means far west, but in this case it's a proper noun, not a direction)
- West Bengal State, India
- Dhaka North City Corporation, Bangladesh
- Northwest Yunnan Province, China
- Upper Sagaing Region, Myanmar
- South Waziristan District, Pakistan
- North Zone, Afghanistan

CAPITALISING AFTER A COLON

✘ Do not capitalise if what follows the colon is a phrase or part of the same sentence.

- There are two members in the regional committee: the secretary and the treasurer.

✔ Capitalise if what follows the colon is a subtitle or a complete sentence.

- Closing the STEM gender gap: Training Women in GIT.
- Energy poverty impacts marginalised groups in a particular way: Their vulnerabilities are exacerbated by the lack of access to clean cooking facilities.

If the part after the colon can stand alone as a sentence, capitalise it. If it can't, keep it lower case.

CAPITALISATION OF DEGREE NAMES

- Capitalise the full name of a degree when used formally, for example, Master of Science (MSc).
- Use lowercase and the possessive form when referring to degrees generally, for example, He has a master's degree, not masters degree.

Abbreviations

To maximise clarity, use abbreviations sparingly. Also consider readers' familiarity with the abbreviation before using it. Although abbreviations can be useful for long, technical terms in scholarly writing, communication is often garbled rather than clarified if an abbreviation is unfamiliar to readers.

In general, use an abbreviation if (a) it is conventional and readers are likely to be more familiar with the abbreviation than with the complete form, and (b) considerable space can be saved and cumbersome repetition avoided.

- **Do not create new abbreviations.** Use universally recognised abbreviations which aid readability.
- **Define on first use:** Abbreviations must be defined (or explained) upon first use. After you define an abbreviation, use only the abbreviation. Do not alternate between spelling out the term and abbreviating it.

Some kinds of abbreviations do not require definition or explanation because they are so common that readers are likely to be familiar with them. For example, the abbreviations UNFCCC, IPCC, HKH, ToC, COP, etc., may be familiar to some specific audiences in our scientific or policy community. They may not require definition upon first use. **These are considered on a case-by-case basis, depending on the audience and the type of publication.**

- **Three times rule.** Avoid both the overuse and underuse of abbreviations. If you abbreviate a term, use the abbreviation at least three times in a paper.
- Don't capitalise the spelt-out form of an abbreviation unless it's a proper noun.
 - ✔ gender equality and social inclusion (GESI)
 - ✔ Koshi Basin Initiative (KBI)
- Do not use periods with abbreviations.
 - BMD, not B.M.D.
 - PhD, not Ph.D.

- Abbreviations have no full stop if they end with the last letter of the term being abbreviated:
 - Mister → Mr
 - Missus → Mrs
 - Doctor → Dr
- When they are cut in the middle, a full stop is used:
 - Professor → Prof.
 - et cetera → etc.

DEFINITE ARTICLE

The definite article ('the') is necessary before abbreviations that are not pronounced as words (e.g. the KSLCDI, the SCU, the HUC).

However, 'the' should not precede acronyms, which are pronounced as words (e.g. Himalica, REEECH, HI-LIFE).

DOUBLE PARENTHESES

When the full version of a term first appears in parenthetical text, place the abbreviation in square brackets after it (i.e. Koshi DRR Knowledge Hub [KDKH]).

IN TITLES AND HEADINGS

As far as possible, avoid abbreviations in titles. The intended audience is a good gauge to assess whether an abbreviation is suitable in a title. For example, the title can include the abbreviation 'HKH' if the audience is well versed with the region. Similarly, using 'GIS' or 'STEM' in the title might be suitable for readers from a purely technical background.

ACROSS SECTIONS IN A MANUSCRIPT

In headings, use only the full form of a term or name on first use (without its abbreviation or acronym). Then, use both the full form plus its abbreviation or acronym in brackets when the term next appears in the body of the text. Use abbreviations in headings only if the abbreviations have been previously elaborated in the text and/or if they are listed as terms in the glossary of the particular document.

An abstract or executive summary functions as an independent section where abbreviations are used only if they appear at least three times within the section. If tables and figures are likely to be reproduced externally consider using the full form of abbreviations.

The Oxford comma

Use the Oxford comma. The Oxford comma, also known as the serial comma, series comma, or Harvard comma, is the comma placed before the final ‘and’ or ‘or’ in a series of three or more items. For example:

- I like apples, bananas, and oranges.

The Oxford comma enhances clarity and avoids ambiguity, adding a touch of formality to writing. An example of missing the Oxford comma leading to confusion:

- She took a photograph of her parents, Beyoncé and Elon Musk.


Without the Oxford comma, it suggests that the photographer’s parents are Beyoncé and Elon Musk. With the Oxford comma:

- She took a photograph of her parents, Beyoncé, and Elon Musk.

The sentence clarifies that the photographer took a photo of four people. In rare cases, and depending on the context, editors may omit the Oxford comma.

COMMAS WITH MORE THAN TWO ITEMS IN A LIST

Reiterating the point above under the ‘Oxford comma’, lists with two or more items should be separated by commas, not by semicolons.

 **Incorrect:** I like dragon fruit; papaya; and mango.

 **Correct:** I like dragon fruit, papaya, and mango.

If one or more items in the series already contain a comma, use semicolons between the items instead of commas.

- Working Group I deals with the physical science basis of climate change; Working Group II with impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability; and Working Group III with mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

En dash

At ICIMOD, we use the ‘en dash’ (not the ‘em dash’) and ‘hyphen’.

- Em dash ❌
- En dash ✔️
- Hyphen ✔️

Before diving into the world of joining or separating words and ideas, here’s a quick explanation of the three marks to help you spot them easily.

Em dash (—): About the length of a capital ‘M’. It is used to set off parenthetical information or create a pause in a sentence.

En dash (–): About half the length of an em dash, or the length of a capital ‘N’. It is used to indicate ranges or to denote relationships.

At ICIMOD, we use an en dash (–) with spaces on either side instead of the em dash.

- Policies crafted at the national level – without input from local or Indigenous communities – often fail to address on-the-ground realities.
- Efforts to reduce disaster risk – when disconnected from long-term development planning – often lead to short-lived gains.

Hyphen (-): Shorter than both em and en dashes. It is used to join words together, create compound words, or indicate a broken syllable. For example, decision-making behaviour, remote-sensing analysis.

NUMBER AND DATE RANGES

- Use an en dash without spaces on either side to denote a range.
Around 20–30 households were part of the scoping study.
The new strategy (2023–2030) is currently under review.
- Keep in mind that if a number or date range is introduced with ‘from’, the word ‘to’ should be used instead of an en dash to keep the construction parallel.
 - ❌ **Incorrect:** He served as president of the network from 1994–1999.
 - ✔️ **Correct:** He served as president of the network from 1994 to 1999.
- When a range is introduced with ‘between’, the word ‘and’ should be used.
 - ❌ **Incorrect:** Given the pandemic, we were unable to conduct field activities between June–October last year.
 - ✔️ **Correct:** Given the pandemic, we were unable to conduct field activities between June and October last year.

RELATIONSHIPS

The en dash can also be used between words to represent conflict, connection, or direction.

- We need South–South cooperation and learning to build climate-resilient solutions.
- The UNECE–ICIMOD workshop has been postponed.
- The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor could open up many trade opportunities for Gilgit-Baltistan’s organic products.

How do you type an en dash?

- Ctrl + hyphen on the number pad (the bottom-left corner and the top-right corner keys of a full keyboard) – in MS Word only, not in documents open in a browser
- To put an en dash within a sentence, ‘space hyphen space any letter space’ to type an en dash
- Alt code: Alt + 0150 on the numeric keypad
- Insert it from the symbol list (Insert > Symbol > More Symbols... >)
- Copy-paste it from another document
- For Mac users, Option + hyphen

Hyphens

COMPOUND WORDS

When two words are used together to yield a new meaning, a compound word is formed. The most important principle in the use of hyphens for compound words is to prevent misreading.

If a **compound adjective appears before a noun, use a hyphen**. This is an important rule to remove ambiguity. For example, ‘**250-year-old trees**’ clearly refers to trees that are 250 years old, while ‘250 year old trees’ could refer to 250 trees that are all one year old. Other examples:

decision-making behaviour
remote-sensing analysis
RP-level outcome

However, if the **compound adjective appears after the noun, a hyphen is usually unnecessary**:

behaviour related to decision making
analysis using remote sensing
outcome at the RP level

Some compound words are so widely used that they form one single word (e.g. caregiver, notebook, sometimes).

When adverbs ending in ‘-ly’ combine with another word, the resulting compound is not hyphenated (e.g. newly formed, largely relevant).

Prefixes and suffixes

Words with prefixes and suffixes are usually written without a hyphen in APA Style. For example, nonsignificant, overqualified, predetermined, reevaluate.

PREFIXES (MULTI-, CO-, ETC.)

- Write prefixes closed (without a hyphen) in most cases, for example, multilateral, multinational, coauthor, cosupervised.
- Use a hyphen only when it improves readability or avoids ambiguity, especially before a capital letter or a numeral, for example, co-author of the HI-CAS report, multi-country study.
- Avoid spacing errors such as co -authored or leading hyphens such as -supervised.

Numbers

In general, use words to express numbers zero through nine, and use numerals to express numbers 10 and above.

- There were five villages within the springshed area.
- The study had 40 participants.
- Students were in the third, sixth, eighth, 10th, and 12th grades.

However, there are exceptions to this general guideline for number usage. Express numbers in the following cases, even numbers 10 and above:

Case	Example
Numbers that begin a sentence, title, or heading. When possible, reword the sentence to avoid beginning with a number.	Fifty percent of the beneficiaries received the relief funds, and the other 50% were part of an action research project. Thirty community members, including 15 women, underwent training as para-hydrologists.
Common fractions	one-third of the population

Always use numerals to express numbers in the following cases, even numbers zero through nine:

Case	Example
Numbers that immediately precede a unit of measurement	5-inch thick snow, 3 cm
Statistical or mathematical functions	multiplied by 6
Fractions or decimals (except common fractions)	1/3, 3.14
Percentages	50%–60%
Ratios	6:1 ratio
Times and dates (including approximations of time)	30 s, 10 min, 3 hr, 2 days, about 6 years ago, 3 decades, 12:30 a.m.
Ages	5 years old, 18-year-old adults
Scores and points on a scale	scored 6 on a 7-point scale
Exact sum of money	PKR 10

Also use numerals to write numbers that denote a specific place in a numbered series when the number comes after the noun (e.g. Step 1). The noun before the number is also capitalised. This guideline applies to parts of books and tables as well (e.g. Chapter 1).

Quotation marks

SINGLE QUOTATION MARKS

British English uses single quotes for initial quotations, then double quotes for quotations within the initial quotation. Always use single quotation marks when it is not a direct quote.

Case	Example
To emphasise or highlight a scientific or technical term (first usage)	This seasonally freezing and thawing layer is called the ‘active layer’.
First use of a word or phrase as an ironic comment, slang, or an invented or coined expression	They justified it as ‘normal’ behaviour in that context.
Around the title of a periodical, article, or book chapter, when the title is used in the text	The article on ‘Low-cost strategies to improve municipal solid waste management in developing countries’ covers households in Bharatpur, Nepal and Sylhet, Bangladesh.
Around the title of a specific event	They launched a campaign during ‘World Environment Day’.

DOUBLE QUOTATION MARKS

- only for direct quotations or verbatim speech
- for quotation within quotation

Place the punctuation outside the quotation marks unless the quotation is also a complete sentence or the punctuation is part of the quotation. Examples:

- He stated, ‘In many ways, “**Panchayat samitis**” avoided democratisation.’
- They formed the ‘**Panchayat samitis**’.
- He said, ‘**This is how they formed the “Panchayat samitis”**’
- ‘**This is how they formed the “Panchayat samitis”**’, said the president.

Italics

Italics help highlight **Latin names, titles, terms in a language other than the main language of the document, and scientific names** so readers can easily spot special or unfamiliar words. Here’s a quick guide on when to use, or not, italics:

Use italics for the following cases:

Case	Example
Titles of books, reports, webpages, and other stand-alone works	<i>Addressing the climate crisis: Local action in theory and practice, 2022</i>
Titles of periodicals and periodical volume numbers (but not the comma between them)	<i>Journal of Poverty, 112, 841–853.</i>
First use of words, phrases, or abbreviations from another language when readers may not be familiar with them; however, if the term appears in the Oxford Learner’s dictionary, do not italicise it.	<i>Naike</i> <i>Dzongkhag</i> <i>Bam-e-Dunya</i>
Latin genus, species, subspecies, and variety names of plants and animals	<i>Homo sapiens</i> <i>Panthera tigris</i>

Do not use italics for the following cases:

Case	Example
Titles of book series	the IPCC assessments
Words, phrases, and abbreviations of foreign origin that appear in the <i>Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries</i>	inter alia a priori per se ad lib et al. etc. e.g.

- Italics should be used sparingly to maintain readability.
- Italicise a term from another language only on first use.

Remember: The goal is to make your writing clear and professional without confusing the reader.

Lists

Numbering: Do not number listed items, unless they must be referred to by number in the subsequent text.

Instead of

Three tools are required:

- spade
- hoe
- watering can.

it is better to write:

- ✓ Three tools are required: a spade, a hoe, and a watering can.

PARALLELISM

When writing a list, ensure all items are syntactically and conceptually parallel. For example, all items might be nouns, or all items might be phrases that begin with a verb.

Incorrect logic: We trained 235 women, including three professors, 24 lecturers, 10 teachers, and 10 lesson plans.

Conceptual consistency – ‘Lesson plans’ is not conceptually part of this list (all other items are groups of people).

Incorrect syntax: Across the HKH, we need to retain our traditional architecture, use locally available timber and stones, and innovating with proper plumbing, insulation, and wiring.

Syntactical consistency – The present tense of verbs is needed for each item in this list.

LISTED ITEMS THAT ARE COMPLETE SENTENCES

If bulleted items are complete sentences, begin each item with a capital letter and finish it with a period or other appropriate punctuation. For example, ICIMOD publications follow these general principles:

- All ICIMOD publications must follow British English spelling.
- Use inclusive and respectful language when referring to communities.
- Figures and tables should be numbered sequentially.

LISTED ITEMS THAT ARE WORDS OR PHRASES

If bulleted items are words or phrases (but not complete sentences), begin each item with a lowercase letter (except words such as proper nouns) and without end punctuation. For example, ICIMOD's publications include:

- research reports
- explainers
- convening papers

LISTED ITEMS THAT ARE A MIX OF THE TWO

Try to ensure that all items are either complete sentences or words/phrases. If this is not possible, follow the individual rules for items that are complete sentences. For example, while writing for ICIMOD, apply the rules consistently:

- Use British English spelling throughout ICIMOD publications.
- clear and concise language
- sequential figures and tables

Scientific names

- Do not use capitals for the vernacular names of plants and animals (e.g. oak, sal, tiger, tejpat, blue sheep) unless part of the name is a proper noun (e.g. Bengal tiger).
- Use italics for the Latin genus, species, subspecies, and variety names of plants and animals.
- Divisions higher than genus (phylum, class, order, family) are capitalised but not italicised.

Sapria himalayana of the family Rafflesiaceae

The genus *Rhododendron* of the Ericaceae family

Popular species of the genus *Cyclamen* include *C. coum* and *C. persicum*;

Cyclamen spp.; *Buxus microphylla* var. *Japonica*; the Mishmi takin
(*Budorcas taxicolor taxicolor*)

- The authority (name of the person who proposed the name) is not italicised (*Quercus alba* L.). This can usually be omitted, except in taxonomic studies.

Time format

Please use a consistent time format (12h or 24h) throughout a document.

- At ICIMOD, we prefer the 24-hour clock with a colon to separate the hour and minutes, e.g. 14:30–16:30, eliminating ambiguity regarding morning or evening. This is especially important in critical sectors like the military, aviation, and medicine, where precision is vital.
- The main benefits of the 12-hour (am/pm) clock are its intuitive connection to the natural day-night cycle, ease of use for those familiar with it (most people are raised with the 12-hour system), widespread cultural adoption, and simpler readability (less math/thinking).
 - ✔ When writing in 12h format, use lowercase am/pm with a space between the number(s) and the letters, e.g. 9:15 am–3:15 pm.
 - ✔ Do not include am/pm/hours (e.g. 14:30 pm, 17:30 hours) in the 24h format.
 - ✔ For online and multi country events, mention times in all relevant time zones of locations and sort alphabetically by city. For example,

Webinar on **‘Writing that is coherent, consistent, and makes sense’**

Speakers: Charles Dickens, George Orwell, and Thomas Hardy

Date: Friday, 22 September 2025 | **Duration:** 1 hour

Time:

Beijing, China – 5:15 pm

Dhaka, Bangladesh – 3:15 pm

Islamabad, Pakistan – 2:15 pm

Kabul, Afghanistan – 1:45 pm

Kathmandu, Nepal – 3:00 pm

Naypyidaw, Myanmar – 3:45 pm

New Delhi, India – 2:45 pm

Thimphu, Bhutan – 3:15 pm

Symbols

Always use the percentage symbol (%) in relation to numbers and ‘percentage’ in text.

- Around 40% of the region is food insecure.
- The total percentage of educated household heads indicates the need for greater participatory decision making.

Units

- Symbols for the International System of Units (SI) should be used in all publications, e.g. second (s), metre (m), kilogram (kg).
- Other units, e.g. ‘ropani’, ‘mu’, ‘pathi’, ‘mana’, must be explained based on the context and accompanied by an SI unit equivalent given in brackets.
- Local systems of units can be described in more detail in a glossary as necessary.
- Elevation should be expressed in metres above sea level (masl).
- Ensure that units are used consistently, e.g. do not use both hectares (ha) and square kilometres (km²) in the same document.

When using ‘lakh’ or ‘crore’, these terms must be accompanied by figures in brackets that are understood internationally, e.g. 3.5 lakh (350,000).

Currency

Always use standard three-letter ISO currency codes: AFN (Afghan afghani), BDT (Bangladeshi taka), BTN (Bhutanese ngultrum), CNY (Chinese yuan), EUR (euro), GBP (pound sterling), INR (Indian rupee), MMK (Myanmar kyat), NPR (Nepali rupee), PKR (Pakistani rupee), USD (United States dollar). Spell out in text at the first mention. When spelling out currencies, do not capitalise.

For all currency values, equivalents should be provided in USD.

Alphabetical order

When listing names, places, or references, always sort alphabetically to make content easier to scan and more professional.

✔ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan

✘ Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bhutan, India, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar

If items begin with the same letter, sort by the next letter (e.g. Bangladesh, Bhutan).

Alphabetical order avoids bias (e.g. favouring one country or partner by putting it first) and helps readers quickly find what they are looking for.

We often see documents where one country is listed first and then the other countries alphabetically; as a regional organisation, we should avoid this and ensure all member countries are treated equally. This small step reflects our shared regional spirit.

EXCEPTIONS

In rare cases, you may use a different order, but **the logic must be stated clearly**.

For example:

- **Geography:** When listing ICIMOD member countries by geography, you could write: 'From east to west, ICIMOD's eight Regional Member Countries are Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.' [Logic: from east to west].
- **Climate:** When comparing rainfall, you might say: 'Ranked by average annual rainfall, Bangladesh (2,200 mm) receives the highest, followed by Bhutan (1,800 mm), Nepal (1,500 mm), and Afghanistan (300 mm) with the lowest.' [Logic: ranked by average annual rainfall].
- **Data presentation:** When presenting by population, you could write: 'Based on population size, India (1.45 billion) comes first, followed by China (1.40 billion), Pakistan (251 million), and Bhutan (791,000).' [Logic: based on population size].

You must always **mention the logic explicitly** in the text, so readers understand why the order differs from alphabetical.

And vs Ampersand

In formal writing, we use **'and'** – not **'&'**.

The ampersand (&) is a symbol that originated from the Latin word *et*, meaning 'and'. While you might see it in logos, branding, or shorthand (e.g. R&D, M&E), it is not suitable for formal narrative text.

Use **'and'** in full sentences, formal document titles, narrative content, body text, headings, and subheadings.

Use **'&'** only when it is part of a company name or brand (e.g. Barnes & Noble, Procter & Gamble), or we are following a standard abbreviation (e.g. M&E, R&D).

Please note, formal sentences should not start with 'And'.

Tenses

Use the present tense only for the current situation and general statements. Most research results should be reported in the past. Note the difference between the following:

- Government and civil society organisations find it a big challenge to address the dire situation of the many Indigenous communities of the country.
- The survey showed that government and civil society organisations found it a big challenge to address the dire situation of the many Indigenous communities of the country.

Meetings are reported in the past tense. However, couched within the past, continuing or general facts are reported in the present:

- The committee noted that the budget was fully spent.
- The organising committee agreed to invite a Thai representative to the meeting even though Thailand is outside the HKH region.

Be as consistent as possible in your use of tenses.

Tables, figures, and maps

Every figure and table should have a purpose and form an essential part of the information you are trying to convey.

Do not repeat in the text all the information provided in a table or graph; select the main points to highlight.

Every figure and table must be referred to in the main text.

Include the source(s) of the image and/or the data on which the table, figure, or map is based.

Write titles in the form ‘Figure 1: The growth of trees’ and ‘Table 1: National output’. Titles appear above tables and below figures and maps.

TABLES

- In general, figures should be rounded up or down to one (or two) decimal places.
- Information of the same type and with the same unit should appear in columns, not rows.

FIGURES AND MAPS

- Ensure that all graphs in a series referring to similar things are drawn to the same scale so that they can be compared directly.
- Always provide a legend for maps, and in the legend or text refer to the particular classification system used to define the categories given in the legend. Make sure the scale and orientation are clearly indicated.

Caption and credit

At ICIMOD, all images and figures must be accompanied by a caption and credit. Captions are important as they provide context for the image, and the credit properly acknowledges the photographer or source.

ICIMOD style for captions

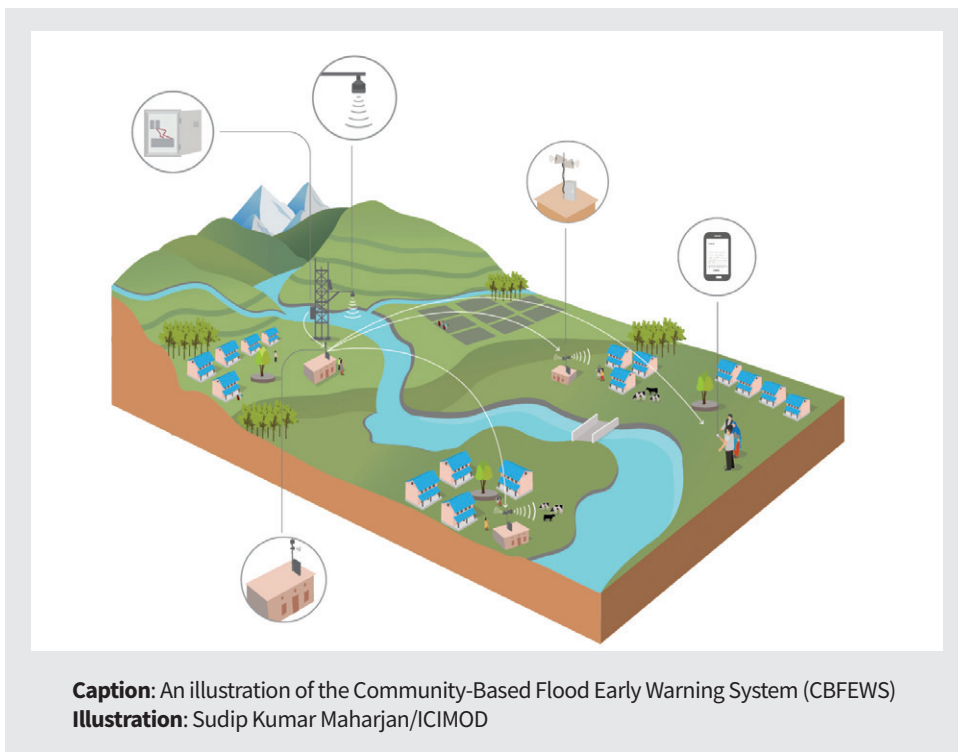
Caption: Brief, clear description of the image | **Photo:** Name of photographer/Organisation

Caption: Brief, clear description of the image/figure | **Source:** Name of the Organisation



Caption: The watershed of the upper Karnali River in Humla, western Nepal, is believed to be older than the Himalaya.

Photo: Jitendra Raj Bajracharya/ICIMOD



WHY DO WE DO THIS

1. **Accessibility:** Adding the word ‘Caption’ ensures clarity for readers using screen readers. Without it, visually impaired readers might confuse the caption with the main body text. It also paints a picture in words to improve the user experience of people with different abilities.
2. **Proper credit:** Always include the name of the photographer, videographer, illustrator, or organisation to acknowledge their work.
3. **Clarity:** A short, descriptive caption helps all readers understand the relevance of the image quickly.
4. **Accuracy:** Audiences are sometimes likely to pay more attention to photo/image caption/credit than longer blocks of text. This is in part because of format – the extra space around an image means that a reader’s eye may fall more naturally on the caption/credit. In this respect, it is even more crucial that captions are written accurately and that image creators are credited appropriately.

TIPS FOR WRITING A CAPTION:

- Keep a caption short and precise. One or two sentences are usually enough.
- Include relevant location and date where appropriate (for context).

Hyperlinks

In general, we hyperlink only when it adds value for the reader, e.g. linking to a source document, report, relevant webpage, or a partner's website. We avoid over-hyperlinking. The idea is to keep it purposeful, not distracting. After all, we do not want to 'lose' our audience to another document, article, or site; we should encourage them to read to the end of our content.

When you do use hyperlinks, only link to reliable sources. The endnote style is also acceptable for more formal forms of online publications, such as articles and news pieces.

- Be mindful not to divert the reader away from your piece. Ideally, you want them to stay and finish reading. For blogs, news articles, etc., it often works better to place all relevant links at the end, similar to references in a report.
- If there is a scientific term, explain it briefly in the text rather than hyperlinking.
- Usually, the name of an organisation, report, or project is the appropriate text to hyperlink, rather than a full sentence.
- Only when necessary, hyperlink the full name (including the acronym/ abbreviation) at the first mention. This provides readers with a clear and easy reference point.

Referencing

Formal writing requires references as per the APA Style, which is in-text citations with matching end-list references. These websites present some useful information on the APA Style referencing:

Google Scholar's citation function also provides the APA format reference for any publication, although not always reliably. Just type in the title on [Google Scholar](#), click on 'Cite', and copy the APA format.



APA Style
(seventh edition):
[Common reference examples guide](#)



Purdue OWL
APA formatting and style guide



Mendeley APA
format citation guide



APA Style
(seventh edition):
Reference guide for journal articles,
books, and edited chapters

About ICIMOD

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region stretches 3,500 km across Asia, spanning eight countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. Encompassing high-altitude mountain ranges, mid-hills, and plains, the zone is vital for the food, water, and energy security of up to two billion people and is a habitat for countless irreplaceable species. It is also acutely fragile and vulnerable to the impacts of the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), based in Kathmandu, Nepal, is an international knowledge organisation focused on the HKH region, working since 1983 to deliver greener, more inclusive, and climate-resilient development. Our work is guided by our [Strategy 2030](#), [Medium-Term Action Plan V \(2023–2026\)](#) and the associated Results Framework, and our various [policies](#). Learn more on our [website](#).

(Please use the standard ‘About ICIMOD’ text where needed.)

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