

## Guidance for Authors and Reviewers of BTS Public Statements

As part of its Public Communications Strategy, the British Toxicology Society (BTS) commissions short statements which will be published on the BTS website as Public Statements.

Although the intended primary audience is the general public, we can also expect the statements to be read by BTS members, other scientists, and journalists.

Authors are invited to write a statement because of their expertise on the topic. However, since the statements are published as BTS Public Statements, without author attribution, they are reviewed by members of the Public Communications Steering Team (PCST).

### Guidance for Authors

The statements should be educational and as objective, balanced and scientifically accurate as possible, avoiding jargon and unexplained acronyms. Where there is scientific uncertainty or debate, that should be apparent from the language chosen. Authors are encouraged to include appropriate illustrations such as diagrams, figures, or pictures. The appropriate length of these statements can vary according to the nature and complexity of the topics. In general, they should be no more than 3 A4 pages in length or a maximum count of circa 2000 words in the main text excluding headings, text boxes and illustration legends. Please begin with a brief summary (200 words maximum exclusive of the main text) aimed at non-specialists in the field and written in a way that they can easily understand. The Summary should introduce the topic and summarize the key messages in the statement. If the author feels that is not necessary, please discuss with your PCST contact.

The statements need not be as extensively referenced as would be expected by a scientific journal. However, it is recommended that some key references should be included, perhaps to authoritative reviews that provide more detail and/or support for the main messages. Factual statements taken from a cited review (i.e. secondary publication) should be

referenced therein to an original reliable source. Notwithstanding the above, authors should observe best practice in publication ethics and avoid plagiarism<sup>1</sup>.

All referenced publications should be **open access**. Authors are requested to hyperlink key references directly from the text. For example, you can find [here](#) the BTS Public Statement on Nitrous Oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O): Misuse by Young People and Potential Harms. For the intended audience, this is preferred to the conventional inclusion of authors and year of publication in the text and a reference list at the end of the statement. Please consult your PCST contact for advice if you are unsure of what is intended.

### Guidance for Reviewers

In line with the preceding Guidance for Authors, reviewers are asked to take account of the goal to maintain scientific balance and accuracy of these statements, while making the statements accessible to non-expert readers who may have no scientific training and, in most cases, can be presumed not to be well informed in the specific field of the statement. Recognising that that is a challenge, we ask that authors and reviewers work collaboratively to achieve this goal.

Reviewers are asked to check that references are open access and appropriate, i.e. provide prominent and readily assimilable verification of cited facts. Additionally, reviewers may offer comments, on length, organisation, and clarity of presentation (particularly for an inexpert reader). The PCST may also ask for review by a non-scientist.

### General Procedure

The time for writing and reviewing statements will depend on availability of those involved. However, they should be completed expeditiously as possible, circa 3 months (especially concerning a hot topic). On receipt, the draft statement will be circulated to the PCST to assign a maximum of 2 suitable reviewers. Reviewers will work collaboratively with authors (see above). The revised statement will be circulated to the PCST for final review and formatting for publication on the BTS website. Following publication, the PCST will normally use BTS social media (LinkedIn and Twitter) to publicise statements to a wider audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewers may include a check to avoid anything that may be misinterpreted as plagiarism.

**The following additional guidance may be helpful to some authors:**

**Approach**

Before starting to write and when pausing to review the work, consider:

- What am I trying to accomplish?
- Who is my audience?

Making the statement a 'story' draws in readers and keeps their interest. Try to explain the issues as you would to friends in a coffee shop or over dinner.

**Structure and Writing Style**

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<b>Structure</b>	
	When choosing the title, consider:
	Is it clear?
Title	Is it short?
	Is it catchy (but still makes it clear what the topic is)?
	Does it entice the reader in?
Setting the scene	The first sentence and paragraph should outline the topic and the 'story'.
Transitions	How the 'story' unfolds from one section to the next is important. Consider how each paragraph follows from the last.
Sub-headings	Use subheadings to add structure and assist readers in navigating the statement.
Visual aids	Good clear pictures or diagrams often help readers to understand tricky concepts and can save many words.
Final paragraph	The final paragraph should finish the story and state the take-home message

## Writing Style

Use the 'active voice'

Use the 'active voice' (e.g. "scientists discovered") instead of the passive voice (e.g. 'it was discovered by scientists'). This makes the text easier to read and is particularly important for online readers, who tend to disengage rapidly.

Managing complex terms

Keeping language simple will help readers to navigate statements on new topics. Placing explanation of key complex term/s or concept/s within a text box can help to separate the explanation from the 'story', maintaining flow.

## Further resources

- Cancer research UK; [Writing for a lay audience](#):
- SOT article; [Is that Science News relevant to me](#)
- [BTS Public statements](#)