

THE EFFECTS OF ACRONYMS ON NON-FIELD SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE COMPREHENSION

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Research reports often contain field-specific acronyms that represent words or terms. The present study examined the extent to which acronyms affect non-field literature comprehension in a read-and-recall experiment. Graduate students in psychology or education (a) read an excerpt from a scientific article about Ebola virus, then (b) completed a reading comprehension assessment. Three excerpt/assessment conditions were analyzed. Acronym/acronym text and assessment materials contained acronyms (e.g., “NHP”). Word/word materials contained no acronyms; they were unabbreviated (e.g., “nonhuman primate”) throughout the text and assessment. Acronym/word materials consisted of text with acronyms and assessment with no acronyms. Bonferroni corrected post-hoc analyses revealed word/word participants ($M = 2.26$; $SD = 1.18$) significantly outperformed acronym/word participants ($M = 1.48$; $SD = .80$), $p = .046$, with a large effect size. Results cannot be attributed to environmental context effects alone; acronyms negatively impacted participants’ non-field text comprehension. Implications for cross-discipline scholarly literature are presented, as are ideas to improve research dissemination for multidisciplinary audiences.