



Writing Centre

How to Write Scientific Names

A *taxon* is a group, of one or more organisms, of equal rank within the hierarchical and phylogenetic organization. Categories of *taxa* include: *species, genus, family, order, class, phylum, kingdom*.

When referring to species, the first part of the name identifies the genus to which the species belongs, while the second part – the specific name or specific epithet – identifies the species within the genus. For example, humans belong to the genus *Homo*, and within this genus to the species *Homo sapien*.

- **Family (and higher):** capitalized only (not italicized) (e.g., Hominidae)
- **Genus:** capitalized and italicized (e.g., *Homo*)
- **Species:** italicized only (not capitalized), but follows genus (e.g., *Homo sapiens*).
- **Variants:** italicized only (not capitalized)

After the first mention, you can abbreviate the genus (e.g., *H. sapiens*).

Scientific names must be provided at least once. If you wish to switch to a common name, put the common name in brackets immediately after the first mention. Refer to the common name from then on. Common names are not capitalized and not italicized.

Correct: *Homo sapiens* (humans) walk upright. Humans like music.

If a taxon is made common, such as Hominidae to "hominid", it is not capitalized or italicized.

Taxon are preferred singular. This may be confusing when taxon end with an "s".

Note: Do not add "s" or "es" to make species plural.

Incorrect: Thousands of *Pinus radiates*...

Correct: Thousands of *Pinus radiate*...

Note: Do not remove "s" to make the sentence sound normal. The word "sapiens" is preferred singular.

Incorrect: Two *Homo sapien* males...

Correct: Two *Homo sapiens* males...

You can refer to unspecified species of a known genus with an abbreviation. Please note that this abbreviation is not italicized.

Singular = sp.

Plural = spp.

Correct: The collection included one *Sphagnum* sp. and several *Pleurozium* spp.