



## One vs 1 Quiz

by Laura King, MA, ELS

**Directions:** Determining whether to use *one* or *1* is often difficult for the editor. The [AMA Manual of Style](#) recommends, “Spell out numbers for generally accepted usage, such as idiomatic expressions. *One* frequently appears in running text without referring to a quantity per se and may appear awkward if expressed as a numeral. When *one* may be replaced by *a* or *a single* without changing the meaning, the word *one* rather than the numeral is usually appropriate.” Applying this guideline, however, can be difficult. In consultation with a small group of [JAMA and Archives Journals](#) editors, the following guidelines are offered to assist the reader in determining whether to use *one* or *1*.

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1. When no other numerals appear in the sentence and no particular emphasis is being placed on counting, use the word *one*.
2. When the emphasis *is* on counting (even if no denominator or other numerals appear in the sentence), use the numeral *1*.
3. When a specific denominator appears in the sentence, use the numeral *1*.

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Edit the following sentences for the correct use of *one* vs *1*. Refer to section [19.2.4](#) of [AMA Manual of Style](#), which provides an explanation of the style rule and usage examples. Remember that even experienced editors may differ on whether *one* or *1* is appropriate for the context. The answers given in this quiz are based on the views of a small group of [JAMA and Archives Journals](#) editors, who recognize that other choices might be defensible.

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1. The ethmoid bone is *one or 1* of the bones that form the medial orbital wall.

**ANSWER:**

The ethmoid bone is one of the bones that form the medial orbital wall.

**Editor's Note:** Because in this sentence the emphasis is not on counting the number of bones, the word *one* is appropriate.

2. There is extensive literature on the discovery of the clinical utility of the deep tendon reflexes on the *one or 1* hand and on the development of 19th-century experimental neurophysiologic concepts and early scientific concepts of reflexology on the other.

**ANSWER:**

There is extensive literature on the discovery of the clinical utility of the deep tendon reflexes on the one hand and on the development of 19th-century experimental neurophysiologic concepts and early scientific concepts of reflexology on the other.

**Editor's Note:** In sentences that use the expression *on the one hand*, always spell out the word *one*.

3. The physician listed only *one or 1* of a number of symptoms the patient was experiencing.

**ANSWER:**

The physician listed only one of a number of symptoms the patient was experiencing.

**Editor's Note:** When *one* derives from a general denominator, such as “a number of,” “of many,” “a collection of,” and so on, the word *one* is appropriate.



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4. Only *one or 1* case of AIDS was reported in 2008 in the urban assisted living center.

**ANSWER:**

Only 1 case of AIDS was reported in 2008 in the urban assisted living center.

**Editor's Note:** In this instance, the emphasis is on counting the number of cases (even though no denominator appears in the sentence); therefore, the numeral should be used.

5. Cystic fibrosis affects *one or 1* in 3000 people.

**ANSWER:**

Cystic fibrosis affects 1 in 3000 people.

**Editor's Note:** Because this example includes a denominator (N = 3000), the numeral is appropriate.

6. In the published article, *one or 1* of the authors revealed that she worked for a pharmaceutical company.

**ANSWER:**

In the published article, one of the authors revealed that she worked for a pharmaceutical company.

**Editor's Note:** Because in this sentence the emphasis is not on counting the number of authors, the word *one* is appropriate. However, if the sentence read, “In the published article, 1 of the authors worked for a pharmaceutical company and 2 other authors owned stock in several pharmaceutical companies,” the numeral would be used because the emphasis *is* on counting. The appearance of other numerals in a sentence usually indicates that the numeral is the preferred option.



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7. We studied 37 patients with multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 who underwent *one or 1* or more surgical procedures from January 1, 1973, to April 30, 2004.

**ANSWER:**

We studied 37 patients with multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 who underwent 1 or more surgical procedures from January 1, 1973, to April 30, 2004.

**Editor's Note:** Because in this sentence the emphasis *is* on counting (ie, the number of surgical procedures), the numeral should be used.

8. Current recommendations for the surgical treatment of multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1–associated hyperparathyroidism include subtotal parathyroidectomy, in which all or part of *one or 1* parathyroid gland is left in the neck.

**ANSWER:**

Current recommendations for the surgical treatment of multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1–associated hyperparathyroidism include subtotal parathyroidectomy, in which all or part of one parathyroid gland is left in the neck.

**Editor's Note:** Because in this sentence the emphasis is not on counting, the word *one* should be used.

9. The frontal bone features 2 foramina, *one or 1* above each orbit or eye socket.

**ANSWER:**

The frontal bone features 2 foramina, 1 above each orbit or eye socket.

**Editor's Note:** Because the 1 in this example derives from the denominator of 2, the numeral is appropriate.

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10. Correction of the aesthetically short nose is one or 1 of the most challenging problems in facial plastic surgery.

**ANSWER:**

Correction of the aesthetically short nose is one of the most challenging problems in facial plastic surgery.

**Editor's Note:** Because in this sentence the emphasis is not on counting the challenging problems, the word *one* is appropriate.

11. The researchers performed a *1- or one-time* assessment of triglyceride levels after initiation of highly active antiretroviral therapy.

**ANSWER:**

The researchers performed a one-time assessment of triglyceride levels after initiation of highly active antiretroviral therapy.

**Editor's Note:** Because use of the numeral would place an unintended emphasis on a precise quantity and *one-time* is usually an idiomatic expression, the word *one* is appropriate.

12. Let us hope that *one or 1* of these days health insurance will be affordable for all Americans.

**ANSWER:**

Let us hope that one of these days health insurance will be affordable for all Americans.

**Editor's Note:** Spell out numbers, including *one*, for generally accepted usage, such as idiomatic expressions.



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