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## Ergonomic vs. Ergonomics: acknowledging the etymology

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When certain influential ergonomics practitioners and researchers received their initial training, they were clearly and firmly instructed that correct usage is 'ergonomics' as a noun. With regard to 'ergonomic', some tutors could be unsympathetic if a student used this as the adjective form, advising it to be both wrong and inappropriate. At least in part, this position was probably a reaction to growing misuse of 'ergonomic' to describe and promote products and services revealing little evidence of any meaningful engagement with ergonomics.

This particular stance on terminology has found its way to this journal, with advice in the Ergonomics' instructions to authors stating: "The term 'ergonomics' should be used instead of 'ergonomic' throughout a paper, this being the Journal's preferred style." This has resulted in some authors being asked to modify manuscripts, replacing 'ergonomic' with 'ergonomics'. The journal has not always been consistent with this practice, however, and there have been recent instances where papers have been published retaining the term (e.g. Dixon & Theberge 2011; O'Sullivan et al 2012; Weiler et al 2012).

Whatever one's views on the niceties of terminology in our field, and by all accounts this has been a periodic matter of lively debate, it is clear that usage of the term 'ergonomic' as an adjective is well established. Indeed, when the issue was raised amongst the editors, several confessed to being regular users. We also have the contradiction that even in the early 1960's Ergonomics was publishing 'ergonomic' entitled papers (e.g. Page 1960). Recognising this inconsistency, we have decided to revisit and clarify the journal's position on 'ergonomic'.

Looking to other disciplines for guidance on correct usage proves unfruitful. For example, correct and commonly understood terms are 'economics' and 'economic', but 'physics' and 'physic' have quite different meanings (with 'physic' used occasionally to relate to medical issues). 'Human factors' is not frequently used as an adjective but is consistently used as a noun in its plural form. It is common to ask the rhetorical question when presenting to those unfamiliar with the field 'what is human factors?', with few qualms relating to the English usage. Without noting any contradiction, the answer might very well refer the audience to Vicente's book 'The Human Factor' (Vicente 2003).

'Ergonomic' is able to sit within conventional English sentence structure quite naturally. For example, it seems appropriate to refer to an ergonomic chair, providing it has been designed well, according to ergonomics principles. In some cases the distinction between the adjective and noun can be significant. An ergonomics tool would be quite different to an ergonomic tool, where the former (noun) refers to a technique, but the latter (adjective) refers to a product. Of course an alternative method of referring to such a tool product might be to retain the noun form and state, for example, 'a tool designed using ergonomics principals'. 'Ergonomic' is a convenient shorthand against this.

The journal *Ergonomics*, through its contributors and editors, builds an archive of peer reviewed research in the field that inevitably reflects the context of the time of publication. Consensus amongst the current editors is that restricting the use of the term 'ergonomic' as an adjective does not reflect contemporary usage and *Ergonomics* will now be more flexible in accepting 'ergonomic' as an adjective, notwithstanding an expectation to justify the claim. We continue to regard 'ergonomics' as the correct noun. As a result of this, the journal's instructions to authors have been updated to implement an improved fit to our user group, our authors and readers, making *Ergonomics* just that little bit more ergonomic.

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