

Dangerous Abbreviations, Acronyms and Symbols

<i>Dangerous Abbreviation</i>	<i>Potential Problem</i>	<i>Preferred Term</i>
U (for unit)	Mistaken as zero, four, or cc.	Write “unit”
IU (for international unit)	Mistaken as “IV” (intravenous) or “10” (ten)	Write “international unit”
Q.D., Q.O.D. (Latin abbreviations for once daily and every other day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mistaken for each other. ▪ period after the “Q” can be mistaken for “I” ▪ “O” can be mistaken for “I” 	Write “daily” and “every other day”
Trailing zero (X.0 mg), or lack of leading zero (.X mg)	Decimal point is missed, leading to a 10-fold overdose	Never write a single zero after a decimal point (X mg), and always use a zero before a decimal point (0.X mg)
MS MSO ₄ MgSO ₄	Confused for one another. Can mean morphine sulfate or magnesium sulfate	Write “morphine sulfate” or “magnesium sulfate”
μ (for microgram)	Mistaken for “mg” (milligrams) resulting in 1000 fold dosing overdose	Write “mcg”
H.S. (for half-strength or Latin abbreviation for bedtime) q.H.S.	Mistaken for either <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ half-strength or ▪ hour of sleep (at bedtime) ▪ every hour All can result in dosing error	Write out “half-strength” or “at bedtime”
T.I.W. (for 3 times weekly)	Mistaken for 3 times a day, resulting in an overdose, or twice weekly, resulting in an underdose	Write “3 times weekly” or “three times weekly”
S.C. or S.Q. (for sub-cutaneous)	Mistaken as SL for sublingual or “5 every”	Write “sub-Q”, “subQ” or “sub-cutaneously”
D/C (for discharge)	Interpreted as discontinue whatever medications follow (typically discharge meds.)	Write “discharge”
c.c. (for cubic centimeter) as a liquid measure	Mistaken for U (Units) when poorly written	Write “ml” for milliliters
A.S., A.D., A.U. (Latin abbreviation for left, right, and both ears)	Mistaken for each other	Write “left ear”, “right ear”, “both ears”
O.S., O.D., O.U. (Latin abbreviation for left, right, and both eyes)	Mistaken for each other	Write “left eye”, “right eye”, “both eyes”.

Source: Adapted from: “Don’t Use These Abbreviations” *American Nursing Student*. Jan/Feb 2004