

## ERRORS SEEN FREQUENTLY IN SI\* METRIC USAGE

\* SI is the abbreviation for *Systeme International d'Unites*, the modern version of the metric system that the U.S. and other nations have agreed to use. [Do *not* abbreviate it as S.I.]

This list is provided by the U.S. Metric Association (USMA), 10245 Andasol Ave, Northridge CA 91325, to point out the correct way to use the metric system and to show the many incorrect examples of its usage that are given on package labels and in other printed matter.

### Important in SI:

1. The short forms for SI units (such as mm for millimeter) are called **symbols**, not abbreviations.
2. SI symbols *never* end with a period unless they are the last word in a sentence.
3. SI symbols *always* should be preceded by digits and a space must separate the digits from the symbol.  
**RIGHT:** It was 300 mm wide. The millimeter width was given.  
**WRONG:** It was 300mm wide. The mm width was given.
4. Symbols *always* are written in the singular form (even when more than one is meant).  
**RIGHT:** 1 mm 500 mm 1 kg 36 kg  
**WRONG:** 500 mms 36 kgs [the lowercase s is the symbol for the unit, second; therefore 500 mms means 500 millimeter seconds]  
**BUT:** It is correct to pluralize written-out metric unit names: 25 kilograms 250 milliliters
5. The meaning of an SI symbol can be changed if you substitute a capital letter for a lowercase letter;  
**RIGHT:** mm (for millimeter, which means 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of a meter)  
**WRONG:** Mm (for millimeter, because Mm mean one million meters)  
MM (for millimeter, because MM means mega mega and is two prefixes, each meaning one million)

### Correct Usage                      Some Incorrect Usage Frequently Seen

mm	Mm	mm.	MM					(for millimeter)
mL or ml	ML	MI	mL.	ml.				(for milliliter)
g	G	G.	g.	gr	GR	GRM	grms	(for gram)
h	hr	hrs	HR	h.	HR.	HRS.		(for hour)
cm <sup>3</sup>	cc	[cc for cubic centimeter belongs to an obsolete version of the metric system]						
s	sec	S	SEC	sec.	s.	S.		(for second)
kPa	KPA	Kpa						(for kilopascal)
10 °C	10°C	10 deg C						(for degrees Celsius)

### Some explanations

The **spellings** meter and metre [and liter and litre] are both correct. In the U.S., the meter and liter spellings are used most often. Some other English-speaking countries use the metre and litre spellings.

The preferred **pronunciation** of the word kilometer is KILL-oh-meet-ur (*not* kill-AHM-it-ur) with accent on the first syllable, as in CENT-i-meet-ur and MILL-i-meet-ur.

The **symbol for liter** (or litre) may be either a capital el (L) or a lowercase el (l). Both are correct. In the U.S., Canada, and Australia, the capital el (L) is preferred, but many other nations use the lowercase el.

*A list of the SI metric units and symbols, plus examples and details on their use is given in the USMA's Guide to the Use of the Metric System [SI Version], a 35-page book that is available for \$15 plus \$3 shipping/handling from: USMA, 10245 Andasol Avenue, Northridge CA 91325-1504.*