

Working terms

Xavier Fuentes-Arderiu

Clinical Laboratory Sciences Consulting, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain

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Corresponding author:

Xavier Fuentes-Arderiu
Clinical Laboratory Sciences Consulting
Barcelona, Catalonia
Spain
E-mail: 2461xfa@gmail.com

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Many international bodies have recommended systematic terms to describe quantities and other properties in clinical laboratory sciences (1, 2).

These systematic terms are essential to understanding the foundations of clinical laboratory sciences; however, it has been demonstrated that their implementation in the actual environment of a clinical laboratory is very difficult.

The few clinical laboratories that have adopted these terms in their day-to-day usage is a demonstration of such an implementation being very difficult. Thus, an easier alternative (herein called *working terms*) to systematic terms can be more acceptable, in the same way as enzyme nomenclature, which has systematic names (too long to be convenient for practical use) and working names (more convenient for practical use). In addition, in the day-to-day practice of a clinical laboratory (and probably in other kinds of laboratories), the proposed working terms have the advantage over the systematic ones of being more easily translated from English to other languages.

Starting with the concept (and term) of **property**, defined as “that which when possessed by an object

contributes to it being as it is" (e.g. mass concentration is 50 mg/L; colour is yellow) (3), this concept can be divided into four related concepts (and terms) having different levels of abstraction regarding the object involved:

1) Working term for concept: **generic property**

- Concept definition: "property that refers neither to any system, nor to any component" (4,5)
- Corresponding systematic term: *kind-of-property*
- EXAMPLES: Mass concentration, form.

2) Working term for concept: **subgeneric property**

- Concept definition: "property that does not refer to a system, but refers to a given component of a system, although considered abstractly" (4,5)
- Corresponding systematic term: None proposed
- EXAMPLES: Mass concentration of protein; form of bacteria.

3) Working term for concept: **specific property**

- Concept definition: "property that refers to a given system, or to a given system and some of its components, although considered abstractly" (4,5)
- Corresponding systematic term: *dedicated kind-of-property*.
- EXAMPLES: Mass concentration of protein in blood plasma; form of bacteria in tap water.

4) Working term for concept: **individual property**

- Concept definition: "property that refers to a given system, or to a given system and some of its components, spatiotemporally defined" (4,5)
- Corresponding systematic term: None proposed, but described as an instance of a *dedicated kind-of-property*
- EXAMPLES: Mass concentration of protein in the blood plasma of the patient YZ, on day D, at time T; form of bacteria in Barcelona tap water, on day D, at time T.

In all cases, the same applies to **quantity**, changing the terms, definitions, and examples accordingly.

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