

This article is a translated version from Italian. The original article was published on the [Research4Life](#) website on the occasion of the BOARD24 campaign

Speaking and Writing about Animal Experimentation: A Reflection on Language

In light of the BOARD24 campaign, dedicated to transparency regarding animal experimentation, we have reflected on the language used to discuss it. Language, like content, should strive to promote clarity and understanding. That's why Research4Life has always preferred stylistic choices that avoid technical jargon in favor of more immediate content

When the cat's away, the preclinical models will play. This alternative version of the well-known proverb can illustrate a problem related to the language used to discuss animal testing.

Today, on the occasion of the [European Animal Research Association](#) (EARA)'s campaign for transparency in animal experimentation, we want to dedicate a reflection to the language used to address this issue, explaining some of the terminological choices we make for our articles and insights.

Specialized Language and Animal Testing

Speaking (or writing) about animal testing is not easy. It is a very complex issue with significant ethical and scientific implications. Moreover, the reasons and methods underlying it often require expertise and previous knowledge that is difficult to possess without being "in the field".

Furthermore, like any specialized field—not just scientific, of course—biomedical research also employs specific and precise terminology. This terminology, based on terms that are not commonly used in everyday life (who would ask to stroke the lagomorph instead of the rabbit?), can be an obstacle when discussing scientific topics in general.

When the specific topic is animal testing, the use of technical language that struggles to be understood risks becoming more than just an obstacle to dissemination and information. It risks becoming a sort of "euphemistic shield": a way to avoid bringing our thoughts to the animals used and, in this way, to stimulate possible controversies.

In Research4Life, we seek to ensure accurate and transparent information by addressing the [limitations of animal use in research](#), the problems in ensuring their welfare, and by [following the approach of the 3Rs](#), as well as the [potential of alternative methods](#) (and, in this case, their limitations too). Just as we aim for transparency in our content, we would like correctness and transparency to be present in the language we use.

In How Many Ways Can You Say "Mouse"?

"A drug tested in preclinical models," "An in vivo study on murine models," "The development of a genetically modified experimental model," and so on. These are all expressions that can be found not only in scientific articles but also often in popular science articles and press releases. They are not incorrect, indeed. However, when choosing to engage in dissemination and information, it may be important to abandon them in favor of more direct and equally correct versions.

"It's the choice we made in Research4Life: opting for formulas of more immediate understanding. In short, we write that a study was conducted in mice, not in murine models," says Giuliano Grignaschi, spokesperson for Research4Life. "This can certainly evoke more immediate images, including distressing ones—those of animals we are familiar with undergoing more or less invasive procedures. For us, anyway, this is also an important aspect: we don't want to deny that animal experimentation is distressing and potentially a source of suffering, both for the animals and for those who practice it (let it be clear, it's not always the case. A simple blood draw is also considered animal experimentation). But it is certainly more honest to make clear what is being done, much like we should always be aware that the steak bought for dinner was once a living and breathing pig."

Sacrifice or Killing?

With these premises, there is a term that still makes us question. It is the term "sacrifice," commonly used to indicate the killing of an animal when it is necessary for experiments; it is essentially a technical term. It differs from euthanasia, which is indeed referred to as the suppression when the humane endpoint is reached, the point at which the animal begins to show stress or suffering, and measures must be taken to limit it. Depending on the cases, these measures can include the administration of analgesics and painkillers or, precisely, euthanasia.

In some respects, the term "sacrifice" can be perceived as hypocritical, as if one wanted to mask the animal's death with a euphemism; it also has a religious connotation that is hardly

appreciable in the scientific field. The problems posed by this expression have led to discussions [even in scientific literature](#). Some articles prefer to use a more direct "killing" of laboratory animals: just as it happens by specifying the animals used with their common name, the evoked image is cruder but perhaps clearer.

However, there is something that, in our opinion, can make the term "sacrifice" appropriate when it comes to animal experimentation. According [to the dictionary](#), figuratively, sacrifice is a "deprivation, renunciation, discomfort imposed by certain conditions or endured for a given purpose."

"From my point of view, the term 'sacrifice' is correct because it is an act carried out, in a deliberate manner, as a last resort to achieve a greater good—improving human health and, in many cases, that of other animals," says Dr. Grignaschi. "It is the renunciation of a precious good, the life of a living being, for a purpose of enormous importance, and for an enormous number of individuals."

Those who practice animal experimentation are often still portrayed as individuals lacking empathy, deriving pleasure from the suffering, or at the very least, showing indifference to the suffering of animals. This is not an accurate picture: the emotional and psychological burden for those who perform it, especially at the time of sacrifice (or killing) of animals, [is enormous](#). In this sense, the term "sacrifice" can help describe the ethical weight that the action implies.

A Few Words to Conclude

Our reflection on language does not aim to be a guideline but rather to propose a reasoning for those who practice animal testing and are therefore also called upon to explain its logics and motivations. The aim is certainly not to "change minds" about it, but to ensure accurate information for full awareness of this practice.

Terminological choices can have significant implications for the perception of the audience. Reflecting on these choices is therefore fundamental to narrate scientific practices clearly and transparently, thus aiming to guarantee the possibility of open and informed dialogue.