

Loose Cannon Press Style Guide



Spelling and Grammar

Canadian standards are used throughout:

- *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, Second Edition, 2004
- *The Canadian Style*, Dundurn Press, Toronto, 1997
- <http://www.btb.termiumplus.gc.ca/>

Punctuation

- **Commas:** Do not overuse commas. Read long or problematic sentences out loud. This will help in deciding how best to punctuate. There are conventions, but few rules
- Use single quotes ('xx') for direct speech only
- Use double quotes ("xx") in all other applications:
'He told me he was a "doctor" but I didn't believe him.'
- **Punctuation of speech:** Consider the following examples:
'Let's do it,' she said quietly.
'Let's do it!' she yelled. (Note no comma after exclamation)
'Shall we do it?' she asked. (Note no comma after question mark)
'I wish,' she said, 'we could do it.' (Note comma and lower case 'we')
'I wish we could,' she said. 'Do you want to?' (Note period and upper case 'Do')
'I wish we could...' she sighed. (Note no comma after ellipsis)
- **Possessives:** For names ending in 's', use an apostrophe:
'Morris' head was full of...'
If there is a problem with pronunciation, add an 's' after the apostrophe:
'Morris's head was full of...'
With a plural possessive add an apostrophe after the 's':
'The delegates' choice was...' (Note there is more than one delegate)
'It's' is a contraction of 'it is.' It is never used as a possessive.
Do not use an apostrophe in a plural; it is only used for possessives or abbreviations:
'Grandma's make life more beautiful' begs the question 'Grandma's what?'
- Use a semicolon to separate parts of a sentence that are too far apart for a comma, yet not distinct enough to make a separate sentence:
Not: 'She watched him doing it, it made her crack up laughing'
But: 'She watched him doing it; it made her crack up laughing'
- Use commas and semicolons for extended lists:
Ships, both steam-driven and sail; aircraft, having jets or propellers; and all other vehicles that could be brought into use
- Avoid using a comma before 'and' in a list (the serial, or so-called Oxford, comma):

- Not: Stars, nebulae, planets, and comets
 But: Stars, nebulae, planets and comets
- An ellipsis (three dots followed by a space) is intended to indicate a pause or an incomplete thought:
 - ‘Look, I wanted to... it’s... I’m... I’m not saying this well, am I?’
 - ‘I could send him to...’ she mused. (Note: no space before the quotation marks and no comma)
 - Use only one exclamation (!) or question (?) mark. Allow the context to dictate the level of surprise or disbelief

Abbreviations

- Write per cent, centuries, street names or locations in full
- Do not use # or & unless they appear in Twitter tags, company names, etc.
- In general, do not use periods between abbreviations (RCMP not R.C.M.P.) and metric units. Exceptions are:
 - Geographical abbreviations: (P.E.I., U.K., etc.)
 - Lower-case abbreviations (a.m., e.g., i.e., etc.)
- Do not use a period after Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Prof, etc.

Capitalization

- Capitalize all place names
- Do not capitalize titles unless used in reference to a specific person:
 - ‘The detective inspector entered the room’
 - ‘Detective Inspector Bloggs entered the room’

Dates and Time Periods

- Day, month, year in this order but with no commas: 17 July 1946
- Write centuries out in full (e.g. the nineteenth century) *not* the 1800s
- For decades use either the 1970s or the seventies
- Do not use an apostrophe between the numeral and the plural ‘s’: 1970s, not 1970’s
- ‘The seventies’ (for example) is only used in reference to the twentieth century, unless the context is made clear

Hyphenation

The hyphen is a symbol found on the standard keyboard. At a lower level it is used for linking word pairs. The *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* is the best source for modern Canadian practice

- Some expressions are hyphenated when used as nouns:
 - The goal resulted from a beautiful set-up
- These expressions are not hyphenated when used as verbs:
 - He set up a beautiful goal
- Hyphenate the following examples of compounds:
 - ivy-covered, time-consuming (noun plus participle)

- well-earned, lesser-known (adverb plus participle)
- small-scale (adjective plus noun)
- Do not hyphenate compounds where the adverb ends in ‘ly’:
Hastily assembled, awkwardly phrased
- A hyphen can be used to indicate negative numbers (-20°C)

Dashes

- Dashes are like hyphens, but used at a higher level
- The En Dash is a long hyphen found in the Insert menu. It is used to link such items as dates and other numerals:
From 1972–1986
The final score was 45–37
- The En Dash can be used to link associated terms:
Following the old Ottawa–Arnprior railroad track
- The Em Dash is a longer symbol also found in the Insert menu. Em Dashes are *only* used in pairs to separate clauses not closely connected within a sentence:
‘She wondered at the time whether they should do this—she had been caught once before—but she went ahead anyway’
- Do not insert spaces before and after the Em Dash
- Clauses more closely connected within a sentence may be set off with commas:
‘She wondered at the time whether they should do this, *because* she had been caught once before, but she went ahead anyway’
- In place of a single Em Dash use a semicolon:
He used a tire iron to pry the nail out; it was the only tool he had on hand

Italics

- Italicize publications; names of ships, spacecraft, etc.; and works of art
- Italicize non-English language words or abbreviations not commonly used
- Passages set out from the rest of the text may be italicized, such as correspondence being quoted verbatim, or a character’s thoughts
- In general, it is not necessary to italicize words in a text where context gives the reader the emphasis. Here are two examples where italicization is useful:
‘She tried to open it but the damned thing wouldn’t come out of the package’
‘She tried to open it but the damned thing *wouldn’t* come out of the package’
- Exclamations in speech may be italicized, but avoid overuse

Numerals

- Spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and above
- Spell out numbers when they appear in speech
- Spell out numbers where they begin or end a sentence
- Use all numerals where numbers below and above 10 appear in the same sentence
- Ages (8 years, 6 months) and metric quantities (42.2 km) are always numerals

- For large numbers, use commas separating the triplets (1,000). Millions and above are written as decimals: 52.3 million km
- Use ‘th’, etc. for ordinals. Superscript is acceptable: 27th, 32nd, 53rd, etc.

Compound Words

- Using two words instead of compounding them into one is a common error:
‘Camp site,’ ‘fair ground’ and ‘web site’ are all examples of words that should be compounded
- Mis-compounding should also be avoided:
Not: ‘He waited awhile for his friends to arrive’
But: ‘He waited a while for his friends to arrive’

General Usages

- Be very sparing with ‘that’:
‘The party that he attended’ is better as ‘The party he attended’
- Only use ‘which’ in a sub-clause; i.e. following a comma:
‘The old tree on the west side of the house, which had been used for tethering a washing line...’
- Use ‘who’ and not ‘that’ for people. People are not objects:
Not: ‘The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light’
But: ‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light’
(With apologies to the Jacobean translators of *Isaiah*)
- There is no issue in starting sentences with ‘but’ or ‘and’; it depends largely upon the context
- Only use ‘however’ to start a sentence. ‘But’ and ‘although’ are better at mid-sentence
- Use parentheses sparingly in descriptive texts and never in speech. In most cases the Em Dash serves the same purpose. If you feel it necessary to use parentheses, try rephrasing the sentence or breaking it
- Bear in mind that rules of usage may be broken when reporting speech; we don’t write like we talk

Further Reading

- *Grammar Rules*, Craig Shives (London: Kyle Books, 2011)
- *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk and E.B. White (4th edition, 2000)
- *The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing*:
www.bt-tb.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/btb.php?lang=eng&cont=791