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Resource

## Style Guide

Demystifies standard fiction-writing grammar and punctuation choices

**Context:** This Style Guide has been developed for Australian fiction authors but can add value to all writers by demystifying some of the essential style choices they have to make when writing a novel.

There are universally accepted Style Guides that you can buy, e.g. “Style Manual” by Wiley.

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Abbreviations consist of the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of a word, but not the last. A full-stop is used at the end.</li> <li>▪ Acronyms use 1<sup>st</sup> letter of each word and are pronounced as a word, e.g. UNICEF. No punctuation is used.</li> <li>▪ Contractions use the 1<sup>st</sup> letter and some other letters of each word. No punctuation is used.</li> <li>▪ Initialisms are the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of each word, but are not pronounced as a word, e.g. CEO. No punctuation is used.</li> </ul>
<b>Adjective</b>	Adjectives are used to modify nouns, e.g. The dog is loud.
<b>Adverb</b>	Adverbs are used to modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs, e.g. The dog barks <u>loudly</u> .
<b>Colon (:)</b>	Are used to preface a list, <u>or</u> to lead into a quote. (Also see semi-colons.)
<b>Commas</b>	Are used to demarcate items in a list, <u>or</u> to isolate parenthesis, <u>or</u> to give the reader a pause.
<b>Comparisons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If you are <u>comparing 2 things</u>, use an ‘R’ in the adjective, e.g. he was the brighter of the pair, or she was more beautiful than her sister. If you are <u>comparing more than 2 things</u>, use an ‘S’ in the adjective, e.g. she was the brightest of the trio, or he was the most handsome of the six men.</li> <li>▪ ‘Nor’ is used when you are talking about more than 2 items and is usually paired with neither, e.g. I like neither hotdogs nor mustard.</li> </ul>
<b>Compound Words</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ These are 2 words joined together. There are many rules in the Style Manual, but here are the main ones:</li> <li>▪ Verb + adverb = hyphenated (eg. shake-out, make-up)</li> <li>▪ Adverb + verb = joined (eg. bypass, downpour)</li> <li>▪ Noun + noun vary, but hyphenated if both elements have equal status, or rhyme (eg. owner-driver, culture vulture)</li> <li>▪ Adjective + noun = separate (eg. black market, red tape, free will)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Compound adjectives = hyphenated (eg. bitter-sweet, red-hot, colour-blind). If they are preceded by an adverb that ends in ly, join. If preceded by a non-ly adverb, hyphate.</li> <li>▪ Verb + noun or vice-versa = joined if the verb has no suffix, ie. ing, ed (eg. scarecrow, roadblock)</li> <li>▪ Inflected verb, ie. ly or ed on the end, + noun = separate words (eg. flying saucer, shredded wheat)</li> <li>▪ Single syllable noun + inflected verb = joined (eg. bookmaker, stock taking)</li> <li>▪ Two-syllable noun + inflected verb = hyphenated (eg. cabinet-maker, potato-growing)</li> </ul>
<b>Contractions</b>	<p>If the last letter of the word is incorporated in the contraction (eg. St for Saint), no stop is used. When the last letter of the word is not incorporated (eg. Capt. for Captain), the stop is used.</p>
<b>Dash (Em or En)</b>	<p>It should not be confused with the hyphen, which is used to join compound words together. Hyphens join. Style manuals differ in their preference for spaces either side of the em dash.</p> <p><b>Em-dash</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The em-dash separates. The term derives from its width of one em (length, expressed in points by which font sizes are specified). Eg. in 12-point font an em is 12 points wide. This is the length of the letter “m”.</li> <li>▪ It is used in much the way as a set of parentheses, in that it can show an abrupt change in thought, or be used where a full stop (period) is too strong and a comma too weak. (Eg. I rolled my eyes — I’d explained this multiple times before — at Penny.)</li> <li>▪ It is used to indicate that a sentence is unfinished because the speaker has been interrupted. It also indicates an open range (eg. “Peter Sheerin [1969—] authored this document.”), or vague dates (eg. as a stand-in for the last two digits of a four-digit year 20—).</li> <li>▪ Two adjacent em dashes (a 2-em dash) are used to indicate missing letters in a word (eg. “I just don’t f——ing care.”).</li> <li>▪ Three adjacent em dashes (a 3-em dash) are used to substitute for the author’s name when a repeated series of works are presented in a bibliography, as well as to indicate an entire missing word in the text.</li> </ul> <p><b>En-dash</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The en-dash joins. It is half the length of an em-dash and is used to indicate a range of numbers, including dates, game scores and pages.</li> </ul>
<b>Dates</b>	<p>Use the following format because it is universally recognizable and easy to read: 12 October 2010.</p>
<b>Dialogue tags</b>	<p>A dialogue tag is text that goes before, in the middle of, or after the dialogue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dialogue should only be joined to a tag line with a comma, if the tag is something that can actually be said, e.g. he said, she whispered, he yelled, she mumbled.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If the tag can't be said, then you must use a full stop, e.g. he grunted, she waved, he chewed on his lip, she glanced around the room.</li> <li>▪ It is better to use "said", the character's movements and their unique voice, to show who's speaking, rather than a lot of unnecessary descriptive words, like remarked, argued, asked.</li> <li>▪ Dialogue should also start in a new paragraph. There can sometimes be a tag before it, but it must be directly relevant.</li> </ul>
<b>Elipsis ( ... )</b>	This indicates that words have been omitted. (space . space . space . space, or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+.)
<b>Exclamation Mark</b>	It is used after an <a href="#">exclamatory</a> remark that indicates strong feelings or raised voice, eg. "Wow!", "Boo!", or a command, eg. "Stop!", or to show astonishment, eg. "They were the footprints of a gigantic hound!". It denotes extreme happiness, shouting, or surprise, but use them sparingly.
<b>Fewer</b>	Use 'fewer to indicate things that can be counted and 'less' to indicate things that cannot. E.g. <i>I realized we had fewer flowers and less flour than before the Gorgola's attack.</i> Not this: <i>I realized we had less flowers and fewer flour than before the Gorgola's attack</i>
<b>Hyphens</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ As a rule dashes separate &amp; hyphens join.</li> <li>▪ Refer to a modern dictionary when hyphenating words, because this aspect of the English language is constantly changing. If in doubt, go without the hyphen, because this is the way the English language is heading.</li> <li>▪ It is a short line (available on all keyboards) and is shorter than a dash. There is no space between a hyphen &amp; the characters either side. It joins words together to show they are linked, eg. book-case, race-horse or pick-me-up.</li> <li>▪ It can also be used to make compound modifiers <b>before</b> nouns, eg. a blue-eyed boy, the well-known actor, or their four-year-old son.</li> <li>▪ It can be used with certain prefixes, eg. all-inclusive, ex-wife and self-control, but it's becoming more common for prefixes to be joined without a hyphen. It should always be used when a prefix comes before a capitalized word, eg. non-English.</li> <li>▪ Use it when a prefix itself is a capital, eg. A-frame.</li> <li>▪ Use it when writing numbers 21 to 99 in words, eg. twenty-one.</li> </ul>
<b>Numbers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Numbers one to ten should be written in words.</li> <li>▪ Numbers above 11 should be written in figures, <u>except</u> in novels, where it is preferable to use words up to 200, as well as for ordinal numbers, e.g. first, second, third.</li> <li>▪ Occasionally a precise number may be more suitable in figures, e.g. The race attracted 53 cyclists.</li> </ul>
<b>Parenthesis ( )</b>	Brackets are used to enclose a word or phrase inserted as an explanation or qualification in a sentence that would be grammatically complete without it. The word or phrase digresses from the main theme of the text.

	They are also used to enclose symbols, numbers or letters that can be considered a single entity, or are to be offset (eg. bring your friend(s)).
<b>Percentages (%)</b>	Use words in text instead of the symbol.
<b>Quotation Marks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Each publishing house has its own style, which you need to check. Whichever style you choose, you should be consistent and use the other style only for quotes within quotes.</li> <li>▪ I suggest using double quotation marks, e.g. “Hey!”, because if you have to change them to single quotation marks, you can easily do a find and replace. Whereas, if you use the single quotation marks, a search will pick up apostrophes too.</li> <li>▪ For long quotes it is preferable to omit quotation marks and indent the paragraph(s).</li> </ul>
<b>Semi-colons (;)</b>	These are used to separate two closely connected sentences that are part of the same thought, <u>or</u> to list items (this is always precluded by a colon). Only separate listed items with a semi-colon if they are complex, or contain commas within them, otherwise use commas.
<b>Sounds</b>	When you write sounds, e.g. <i>click</i> or <i>grrr</i> , italicize them.
<b>Text types</b>	Always use a serif typeface. A serif is a small line attached to the end of each part of a letter, like a foot or hand. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Typefaces that use serifs are called ‘serif’ fonts.</li> <li>▪ Typefaces that don’t use serifs are called ‘sans serif’ fonts.</li> </ul>
<b>Titles</b>	When referencing books, magazines, films, plays, works of art, names of boats, etc. italicize them, e.g. <i>Combatting Fear</i> .
<b>Verb</b>	A word used to describe an action, e.g. sing, develop, love.
<b>Voice</b>	The active voice is always preferred over passive because it is the more concise and natural way of thinking and speaking. It is achieved when the subject, verb and object are lined up in the sentence, e.g. The manager patronises Amy.
<b>Weights and Measures</b>	No space after the number, e.g. 25cm.
<b>Which or That?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restrictive clauses (<i>necessary</i> information) are introduced by <i>that</i> and are not separated from the rest of the sentence by commas.</li> <li>▪ Non-restrictive clauses (<i>helpful but non-essential</i> information) are introduced by <i>which</i> and must be separated by commas from the rest of the sentence to indicate parenthesis.</li> <li>▪ In a sentence such as "The company that invented the <u>microchip</u> we use invited us to a demonstration," the word "that" is relative to "company." There are thousands of companies in the world, but it is important to know the "company that invented the microchip" is specifically the one holding the demonstration.</li> <li>▪ <i>Which</i> could be used in a similar sentence constructed this way: "Widgets Incorporated, which invented the microchip we use, has officially declared <u>bankruptcy</u>." The information about the microchip is useful, but not essential to the main idea of the sentence. It could be removed and the sentence would still make sense.</li> </ul>

<b>Who or Whom?</b>	Use the rule: He = who      Him = whom For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Who</b>/whom wrote the letter? <b>He</b> wrote the letter.</li> <li>▪ For who/<b>whom</b> should I vote? I should vote for <b>him</b>.</li> </ul>
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## Commonly Misused Words

<b>Already vs all ready</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All ready means “prepared”, as in “the cookies are all ready to be eaten.” If you separate the two words, the sentence still makes sense, eg. “all the cookies are ready to be eaten.”</li> <li>▪ Already is concerned with time; it means “previously”, as in “I can’t believe you ate the cookies already.”</li> </ul>
<b>Alright vs all right</b>	Alright is not a word! You must always use all right.
<b>Altogether vs all together</b>	Altogether means “entirely”, as in “we are altogether too tired”. You only use all together when the sentence would make sense if the “all” was dropped.
<b>Arse or Ass</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ass is American/Canadian.</li> <li>▪ Arse is English/Australian/Irish/Scottish.</li> </ul>
<b>T-shirt</b>	Tee-shirt or T-shirt? The acceptable term is T-shirt, but you can call it a tee for short.

## Where to next?

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