

Loose Cannon Press Style Guide



Spelling

We use Canadian standard spelling and grammatical conventions

Punctuation

- **Commas:** These can get overused. Read long or problematic sentences out loud. This will help in deciding how best to punctuate
- Use a comma after words such as ‘so,’ ‘however,’ ‘indeed’ or ‘finally’ when they open a sentence. As a rough guide, the word can be removed without altering the sense:
 - ‘So, many of us decided to eat at the pub’
 - *But:* ‘So many of us decided to eat at the pub, that we had to...’
- Use single quotations for direct speech and double quotations when they appear within quotations:
 - ‘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)The apostrophe is only used for possessives or abbreviations, not plurals:
 - ‘Grandma’s make life more beautiful’ begs the question ‘Grandma’s what?’
 - ‘It’s not raining’ is a contraction of ‘It is not raining’‘It’s’ is a contraction of ‘it is’. It is never used as a possessive:
 - ‘Everything in its place’

- Use a semicolon to separate parts of a sentence that are too far apart for a comma, yet not distinct enough to make two separate sentences:
 - *Not*: ‘She watched him doing it, it made her crack up laughing’
 - *But*: ‘She watched him doing it; it made her crack up laughing’
 - *Or*: ‘She watched him doing it *and* it made her crack up laughing’
- Use commas and semicolons for extended lists:
 - ‘The ships, both steam-driven and sail; the aircraft, having jets or propellers; and all other vehicles that could be brought into use’
- Avoid using a serial comma before ‘and’ in a list (the so-called Oxford comma):
 - *Not*: ‘Stars, nebulae, planets, and comets’
 - *But*: ‘Stars, nebulae, planets and comets’
 - (Supporters of the serial comma would object to this.)
- 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)
 - The ellipsis is a single typographical unit

Abbreviations

- Write per cent, centuries, street names or locations in full
- Do not use # or & unless they appear in Twitter tags or company names
- In general, periods between abbreviations (RCMP not R.C.M.P.) and metric units are not necessary. Exceptions are:
 - Geographical abbreviations: (P.E.I., U.K., etc.)
 - Lower-case abbreviations (a.m., e.g., i.e., etc.)
- There is no period after Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Prof, Rev, etc.

Capitalization

- Capitalize all place names and other proper nouns
- Capitalize the seasons. (It’s discrimination that only the days of the week and the months of the year are capitalized. The seasons deserve equality.)
- Titles are only capitalized when referring to a specific person:
 - ‘Finally, the detective inspector entered the room’
 - *But*: ‘Finally, Detective Inspector Bloggs entered the room’
 - ‘The prime minister at that time was not Prime Minister Bowell’

Dates and Time Periods

- Day, month, year in this order but with no commas: 17 July 1936
- Superscript may also be used: 17th July
- Write centuries out in full (e.g., the nineteenth century) *not* the 1800s
- For decades use either the 1970s, the seventies or the ’70s
- There is no 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, and at a lower level 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)
- There is no hyphenation in compounds where the adverb ends in ‘ly’:
 - Hastily assembled, awkwardly phrased
- A hyphen can be used to indicate negative numbers

Dashes

- Dashes are like hyphens, but longer and used at a higher level
- The En Dash, found in the Insert menu, 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’
 - Note that there are no spaces before and after the Em Dash
- Clauses more closely connected within a sentence may be set off with commas. The same sentence as above could be rendered in this way:
 - ‘She wondered at the time whether they should do this, because she had been caught once before, but she went ahead anyway’
- There is no use for a single Em Dash in separating clauses; colon, semicolon and ellipsis provide all the tools we need
- 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’
- Where there is a list, use a colon:
 - ‘There was a great kit of tools in the box: pliers, saws, screwdrivers, prybars and so on’

- Avoid using parentheses in descriptive texts and in speech. In most cases a pair of Em Dashes will serve the same purpose. If you feel it necessary to use parentheses, try rephrasing the sentence or breaking it.

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 letters 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. Compare these two examples; they are both acceptable:
 - '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 may be italicized, especially in speech, but avoid overuse

Numerals

- Spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and above
- Spell out numbers in full 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
- Exact numbers are rendered in full: 52,325,678 km
- Use 'th', etc. for ordinals. Superscript is acceptable: 27th, 32nd, 53rd, etc.
- For money, add a period after the currency amount: \$6,546.00 or \$6,546.45
- For times, add a colon after the hour: 8:00 a.m. or 8:35 p.m.
- Temperatures are rendered in full: e.g., 20°C, 68°F, 293°K

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,’ ‘so’ or ‘and’; it depends largely upon the context
- Only use ‘however’ to start a sentence. ‘But’ is better at mid-sentence

Further Reading

- *Grammar Rules*, Craig Shriver (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*, online
- *Chicago Manual of Style*, online
- *Grammarly*
- *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, online

Notes

- Some of the ‘rules’ in the foregoing tend to buck trends. For example:
 - Capitalizing the seasons is unique to this Guide
 - The use of the Oxford (or sequential) comma is a subject of much debate
 - Single quotes appear more often in English sources than American.
Canadian practice is predictably fifty/fifty
- Try not to use the MS Word grammar and spell checker features; they are shot full of howlers
- Bear in mind that rules of usage may be broken when reporting speech; we don’t write like we talk