

THE *PURSUIT MAGAZINE* STYLE MANUAL

Gleaned (mostly) from the AP Style Guide, with a few extras

FORMATTING YOUR COPY

We prefer Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced. Use short paragraphs, and start new headings (with titles) when you transition to a new idea. It's nice to break up longer stories with at least 3 subheadings within the piece. Add any links you'd like included, and indicate with an underline which text you want as hypertext. If you know how to create hypertext links in your document, do that.

Single space after all punctuation marks (periods, exclamation points, and question marks). The same goes for colons. Please don't put two spaces between sentences, and don't add any formatting into the document (such as bullets or numbering).

We prefer stories in the 300-1,500 word range, and 500-800 word counts seem to work best for the human attention span. If you'd like to write a more in-depth "long-read" piece, maybe pitch the idea before writing the finished article.

Proofreading tip: After you finish your draft, set your article aside for a few hours before proofreading. Read slowly, and if possible, read aloud—you'll catch more mistakes that way. If you've got a second set of eyes available, have a colleague proofread your copy, too.

If you've cited statistics or facts, please include any links to the sources you've used. Do a thorough fact-check, and know that we'll follow up. If you've made sweeping assertions, ask yourself, "Do I know that for sure?"

Most of all, as you proofread, be sure your story passes the following test: Ask yourself, "Would *I* read this? Is it interesting?"

STYLE

Keep in mind [Orwell's rules](#) for clear prose:

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

In other words, clichés—phrases so overused that they no longer evoke any imagery, only a roll of the eyes ([e.g.](#), green with envy). Try to find a more interesting phrase or description, one that creates a picture in readers' minds.

2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.

Use "use," not "utilize"; use "person," not "individual," etc. The latter word choices sound bureaucratic and windy. Intelligent and engaging writing makes a strong argument in the simplest language possible.

3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

Keep it simple! Avoid filler phrases like "inasmuch as" and "it remains to be seen."

4. Never use the passive where you could use the active.

[I.e.](#), write sentences with subject-verb action. Think "The subject burned him" instead of "He was burned by the subject." Also, avoid the hackneyed "one" as the subject.

5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

We private investigators do love our jargon! Skip it. Imagine you're telling the story to your Aunt Tilly. Would she understand all those acronyms?

6. Break any of these rules sooner than saying anything outright barbarous.

COMMAS

Sadly, most publications have abandoned the serial comma (i.e., the comma that goes before the “and” in a series). Do it this way:

e.g.: When he packed his go-bag, he made sure to include binoculars, a camera and Gatorade.

The one exception to this rule is when you’ve got a complex series. The serial comma will help distinguish each unit in the series.

e.g.: When she packed her go-bag, she always included a wide array of scarves, several telephoto lenses, and her favorite brand of dark chocolate.

HYPHENS

Hyphen-related debates rage in editorial offices everywhere. It's best to use a hyphen in compound modifiers that precede a noun (e.g. 10-year-old girl, full-time job).

An adverb modifying an adjective should never be linked by a hyphen (e.g., “illegally produced”). See the [Grammar Girl tutorial on hyphens](#).

DASHES

Hit Shift-Option hyphen to get a long dash, and don't offset the long-dash/double hyphen with spaces. The dash introduces a related idea or emphasizes a parenthetical phrase. It's kind of like a drum roll, so don't overuse it. See *Grammar Girl's* essay, [Dashes vs. Colons](#).

COLONS

When using a colon, capitalize the first letter after the colon if it's a proper name or if it begins a complete sentence.

e.g., Private eyes love three things: long lenses, coffee and wide-mouth bottles.

e.g., Private eyes agree on one thing: Summer surveillance bites.

PARENTHESES

Place punctuation outside the parentheses only if the parenthetical expression is an incomplete sentence. If the expression is a complete sentence, place punctuation inside the parentheses and capitalize the first letter.

e.g., I wouldn't advise advertizing in the Yellow Pages (or on Craigslist, for that matter).

e.g., I wouldn't advise advertizing in the Yellow Pages. (That's how the crazies find you.)

APOSTROPHES

- Be sure you've used apostrophes for contractions and possessives, not for plurals (a common mistake).

- To make proper names ending in *s* possessive, you can either just add the apostrophe or add an apostrophe and an extra *s*. (AP style suggests leaving off the extra *s*.)

e.g., Mr. Humphreys' skills are mad indeed.

- [Plural possessives](#) can be confusing. Generally, just add an apostrophe after the plural *s*, unless the plural is *s*-free: *The children's wardrobe contained a magical portal.*

- Many people confuse it's and its. The best way to check usage is this: If you can substitute "It is," the word should be "it's."

- When referring to historical decades, say "the 1950s" or "the '50s." Don't say "the 1950's" or "the 50's."

QUOTATION MARKS

- Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks.

- Colons and semicolons always go outside the quotation marks.

- Question marks and exclamation points go inside the quotation marks if they are a part of the quotation.

- If a long quotation extends into a second paragraph, don't close the quote at the end of paragraph one; just end the sentence and open quotes again in the next paragraph. Then close quotes at the end of the long quotation.

e.g., "I wouldn't if I were you," she said cryptically. "Open that door, I mean. You'll wish you hadn't. *I'll* wish you hadn't.

"And what's more, you may not live to tell the tale."

COMPOSITION TITLES

- Use quotation marks to set off the names of songs, essays, paintings and shorter works of art.
- For full-length works, newspapers, weekly TV programs, album titles, etc., use italics.

NUMBERS

As a general rule, spell out any number smaller than 10. Otherwise, use numerals.

Exceptions to the rule, which require numerals in all cases:

- Time of day: It was 4 a.m.
- Dimensions: She was 6 feet, 1 inch tall.
- Weights: The newborn weighed 7 pounds, 2 ounces.
- Points: The Titans scored 10 points in the first quarter.
- Chart positions: "Private Eyes" reached No. 1 on the pop charts.
- For percentages, use numerals, but don't use the percent sign: *a 15 percent raise.*

Spell out all numerals when they're at the beginning of a sentence. (e.g., "Twenty thousand dollars in unmarked bills should do the trick.") The one exception to this rule is when you start a sentence with a calendar year, although you should try to avoid this.

Finally, spell out casual references to numbers: *I've told him a hundred times not to conduct moving surveillance in a purple El Camino.*

DATES

When citing a specific date, abbreviate the month:

Oct. 19, 2001

When citing just the month and the year, spell out the month and don't separate it with a comma:

October 2001

CAPITALIZATION (*see this [brief AP guide](#) for more detail*)

Capitalize the proper names of institutions on first reference. Subsequent references can be lower-case if shortened or generalized, as in "Metro Police Department" (all initial caps), but Metro police (lower case "p") when used without "department."

Don't capitalize job titles unless they are used in front of a person's name, *and* if that title is formal as opposed to descriptive.

e.g., former coach Paul Bryant

e.g., former President Warren G. Harding

COMMON ERRORS

Use "a lot," not "alot."

Use "afterward," "backward" and "forward," not "afterwards," "backwards" or "forwards."

"It's" is a contraction for "it is," whereas "its" is a possessive pronoun.

Use "website" (as opposed to "Web site") and "online" (as opposed to "on-line").

Subject vs. object pronouns: Use subject pronouns such as "I," "she" and "they" if they are the subjects of the sentence or clause. If they serve as objects in a sentence or clause, even in a series, use "me," "her" and "them."

e.g., My client and **I** agreed that she still owed **me** a lot of money.

e.g., Let's keep this between you and **me**.

See this simple and fun [The Oatmeal comic](#) for common misspellings such as "they're," "there" and "their," "effect" and "affect," etc.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON STYLE

On brevity: Shorter is usually better. If you can tell the story in 800 words instead of 1500, try your best to do so. Shorter sentences also pack more punch.

On structure: Some people outline before they write, others don't. Either way, have a structure in mind before you start to type. Is your story chronological? Can you divide it into several ideas that build on one another? Do you have an ending in mind or a point you want to make? Try and make each sentence lead inexorably toward your final idea.

On simplicity: As my English teacher mother always says, write to express, not to impress. Simple language, brief sentences, and a straightforward structure that wastes no time getting to the point will capture a reader better than complex

On first-person narration: Put yourself in the story only when there's a good reason to do so. If you're telling an anecdote that's important to the story or sharing an experience that built your expertise, use first person. Otherwise, third-person reportage is standard, especially in profiles, straight how-tos, or newsier pieces.

On images: If you can provide photographs or artwork with your story, so much the better! Just be sure you own the images and have all the proper permissions required for *Pursuit* to use them. We prefer not to use stock images. If you'd like to submit an image with your article, email it as a jpeg of 2MB or smaller.

Thank you for contributing!