*What is a Style Sheet, and why do you need one?*

*Editing is mostly about consistency, both within the document and compared to reference materials. A Style Sheet is a document that’s usually created by your Editor to track all of the details that need to be consistent throughout your manuscript.*

*Your Editor will need to use a dictionary to verify spelling and usage. But, which dictionary? Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged, Abridged, or Collegiate, and which edition? The print form, or can she use the online version? Should she use only the first definition listed, or whichever definition fits? And can she use archaic forms? Will she need to verify the spelling and usage of non-English terms and phrases, and which resource should she use for that? And, that’s just under the Reference Sources Used section.*

*Your Editor has to make a thousand and one little decisions about your document, and the Style Sheet is where she keeps track of all of those decisions. Scan through the sample Style Sheet below, and you’ll get a pretty good idea of all of the things your Editor is checking, cross-checking, verifying, and correcting as she works her way through your manuscript. (You probably thought it was just punctuation and grammar, huh?)*

*And if you have more than one Editor working on your draft (Developmental, Copy, Line, etc.) or have a Proofreader doing the final pass, the Style Sheet is essential to maintain consistency from draft to draft.*

*As you can imagine, depending on the complexity of your book, compiling the Style Sheet can take a lot of time and effort (All those Spanish terms you’ve thrown in there to make your character charming? Every single one has to be verified and listed on the Style Sheet.), and some Editors charge extra to create your Style Sheet.*

*But your Style Sheet can also help you during your writing process, particularly during the first draft and development stages. Obviously you’ve got to keep your timeline straight, but you also need to nail down specific characteristics of each character and location so they don’t shift or change from draft to draft. And if you do change something intentionally, you have a place to record those decisions.*

*If you get a good start on your book’s Style Sheet, you can submit it right alongside your manuscript to communicate all of the decisions you’ve made about all of the detail that have gone into your story. Your Dear Editor won’t have to start from scratch, and she’ll thank you for it.*

**REFERENCE SOURCES USED:**

* *Merriam-Webster’s Eleventh Collegiate Dictionary, Unabridged* (online version); use primary entries rather than variants
* *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 16th Edition; or online version

**FORMATTING:**

* Times New Roman 12
* Double line spacing
* Left flush, 5-space indent for new paragraphs, no space between paragraphs
* No headers, footers, page numbers, etc.
* \*\*\* to indicate dingbat placement (scene changes)

**NUMBERS:**

* Spell out numbers in general, especially in dialogue; some times (eight thirty); some measurements (five-foot-one, six four); clothing size (size eight); ages (forty-five)
* Use numerals for phone numbers, years, decimals, vehicle designations, weapon names and calibers, room numbers, highway numbers, specific times.

**ABBREVIATIONS:**

(i.e. GPS – Global Positioning System) – do not spell out for reader unless they would be unfamiliar

**PUNCTUATION:**

* Serial comma
* Quotation marks for articles, individual songs
* Em dash: closed: one—not
* En dash: open: one – not
* Commas to set off “too” “either” “anyway”
* Ellipses: closed: “Venice…even”
* Hyphenate: grade levels nouns (fifth-grader); compound color terms (black-and-white, silver-gray, reddish orange, sky blue)
* Compound adjective takes hyphen when needed for clarity.
* Compounds with *well, ill, better, best, little, lesser,* and, *least* are hyphenated before the noun
* No hyphenation for adverb ending in “-ly” when followed by a particle or adjective: “highly publicized”, not “highly-publicized”
* Possessives: Atlas’, The Jones’, Jesus’, Moses’ (not Atlas’s, The Jones’s – British treatment)

**USAGE:**

* Dialect for certain characters?
  + Which characters?
  + What region?
  + Special spellings, usage, syntax (may need separate Word List)
* Broken English for foreign speakers?
  + Which characters?
  + What nationality?
  + Spellings, translations, special characters (accent, tilde, umlat, etc.) (may need separate Word List)

**TYPOGRAPHY:**

* Italics for:
  + Foreign words or phrases
  + Thoughts
  + Emphasis
  + Sounds
  + Handwriting and typed text
  + Content of text messages, emails, etc.
  + Names of books, newspapers, magazines, movie titles, TV shows, poems, plays, paintings, album titles
  + Computer commands

**MISCELLANOUS:**

**LINKS/RESOURCES:**

**WORD LIST:** (use to ensure consistency of special words/terms, foreign terms, devised terms or locations, names, nicknames, etc.)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| A: | B: | C: |
| D: | E: | F: |
| G: | H: | I: |
| J: | K: | L: |
| M: | N: | O: |
| P: | Q: | R: |
| S: | T: | U: |
| V: | W: | X: |
| Y: | Z: | Other: |

**CHARACTERS:** (use to keep characteristics of characters consistent throughout MS)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME**  **TITLES**  **NICKNAMES**  **RELATION TO** | **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**  Hair, Eyes, Build, Height, Weight, Distinctions | **LIFE STATUS**  Age, Date of Birth, Married/Single, Children/Pregnancy, Important Events | **OTHER**  Nationality, Ethnic Background, Languages, Home Location(s), Work Location(s), Habits, Personality, Etc. |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**TIMELINE:** (use to track flow of story events, locations, characters, etc.)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **CHAPTER #**  Pages | **LOCATION(S), BUILDINGS, CONVEYANCES** | **DAY/DATE, TIME OF DAY** | **CHARACTERS, EVENTS** | **POV, PURPOSE, INTENTION** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**LOCATIONS:** (use to ensure consistency in building features, locations, and relationship to other buildings/locations)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **BUILDING**  Name, Use, City, State, Country, Occupants | **RELATIVE LOCATION** | **EXTERIOR CHARACTERISTICS** | **INTERIOR CHARACTERISTICS** |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

*This Style Sheet has been pulled together from a number of sources, with my own items added along the way. Feel free to use it as is or change it as you like, and to pass it along to anyone it may benefit. - Mo*