English Style and Usage

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English Style and Usage

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Preface

This book is neither a dictionary nor a grammar book. It is a stylebook – or, alternatively, a *style guide*. If, for example, you wrote *Ten Downing Street, Ten Downing St., Number 10 Downing Street,* or *No. 10 Downing St.,* you would be grammatically correct in every case, but you would be stylistically incorrect in all. The way to write this address, home of the British prime minister, is *10 Downing Street.* Similarly, the correct style for the address of the White House, home of the U.S. president, is *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue,* not *1600 Pennsylvania Ave.*

In other words, a stylebook suggests preferred alternatives to the varieties of ways you can write things. Grammar books generally do not do this.

The genesis of this book was a need for something like it. In Singapore and Hong Kong, we could not find a comprehensive style guide that addressed local issues – regionalisms, romanization systems, names of local institutions. As a consequence, we decided to write our own. It took us more than 10 years, and it has been very much our personal endeavor. We did not have an editorial committee to expedite research or vet the entries, so the results are very much our personal view of what we consider good style; likewise, the errors and inconsistencies are our own as well. Meanwhile, we readily accede to any writer who insists on a style that departs from our own: In our view, style is part of a writer's signature on the work itself, so we find most stylistic practices acceptable as long as writers have a rationale and are consistent.

We tried to write a stylebook that would be of general interest to Chinese everywhere, so the style presented here is intended to be universal for Greater China. Another goal was to write a stylebook that would be small enough to fit easily in a purse or a briefcase.

The biggest challenge was deciding whether to favor American or British English. Initially, we objected to the Americanization of Singapore English and Hong Kong English, which then was predominantly British in style and usage. In time, however, we dropped our objection, for three reasons.

The main reason has to do with computer software. Almost all writers use Microsoft Word, an American product. Although one can install a U.K. dictionary in MS Word, the British dictionary is not very good, in our view. Additionally, few people actually install it. As a consequence, the style of English that flows from Singapore, Hong Kong and southern China is replete with Americanizations, and British English has all but disappeared.

Another reason has to do with The Associated Press. This American organization dominates English language journalism worldwide. It transmits news to more than 15,000 media outlets in 120 countries. One cannot run a mainstream newspaper today without subscribing to the AP. While there are "word-swapping" computer programs that replace the American English with British English, these are not in wide use, and they do not work well. Hence, all media organizations that rely on The Associated Press for news pass along American style and usage to their audiences, often without knowing it.

Finally, British usage is converging on American usage. Although it has been observed that America and Britain are two nations separated by a common language (said, in one form or another, by Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, Dylan Thomas,

Bertrand Russell and Winston Churchill, among others), this will not be the case much longer. More British spellings drop by the wayside each year, to be replaced by American ones, and American punctuation techniques are coming to dominate British style.

Not to mention that Li Yang, who claims to have taught English to more than 20 million Chinese, once said, "Chinese people don't learn English because they love it, but because Coca-Cola and Microsoft rule the world." Coca-Cola and Microsoft are two of the most recognizable American trade names.

Today we hold a compromise position that tends to favor American English, especially in regards to usage and orthography. Hence, *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* was our first point of reference for many entries in this book; not finding satisfaction there, we turned to other news media organizations' style guides. If none of these proved satisfactory, we turned ultimately to *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

From the foregoing, readers might correctly infer that this book is crafted from a journalistic perspective. True, but it nevertheless serves writers in general, especially writers for mass circulation print media. For social science research, one should also see the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. For writing in the humanities, one should see the *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*.

As stated in the opening sentence, this book is not a dictionary. It is not based on one, either, but we often referred to dictionaries to clarify usage. In this regard, the ultimate reference is the *Oxford English Dictionary*, at 20 volumes and US$3,000 the most complete and authoritative dictionary in English. The full set has definitions for more than half a million words. It is available in many formats – in print, on CDs, and online. However, it is so cumbersome as to be unusable for casual users. It also is peculiar in providing the oldest definitions first and the newest ones last.

For writers interested in British usage, a suitable alternative is one of the *OED*'s many spin-offs – presented here in order of price, from cheapest to most expensive – the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary,* the *New Oxford Dictionary of English*, or the authoritative, two-volume, 3,792-page *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.* Like its namesake, the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* also provides definitions in chronological order, which can be confusing.

For American English, writers should refer to *Webster's New World* dictionary, available in an inexpensive paperback edition. It is most influential dictionary in the U.S., and it is the first point of reference for The Associated Press and *The New York Times.* Many other American publications, however, rely on *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as the first point of reference, perhaps because its many illustrations make it entertaining to read. A standard desk reference in many homes and offices in North America is *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.* For the most comprehensive dictionary of American English, one should see *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary,* which has some 500,000 entries.

For biological nomenclature, one should see the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* and the *International Code for Botanical Nomenclature.*

For nicknames of places and things, one should see Laurance Urdang's *A Dictionary of Names and Nicknames*.

For place names, one should see *The World Factbook,* published annually by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. It is available online.

A quaint reference for British type houses is *Hart's Rules for Compositors and*

Readers at the University Press Oxford, which in 1983 was in its 39th edition. An interesting insight into British style, it currently is out of print, but it might be reprinted in the future.

Fowler's Modern English Usage also is a noteworthy reference for British usage, but early editions are not wholly relevant to contemporary usage. The early editions we are referring to are the first and second editions, published in 1926 and 1965. R.W. Burchfield's *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage,* published in 1996 and revised in 1998, is a major advancement and a pleasure to read.

Bryce McIntyre

Yin Ling Cheung

A, a

a, an: These are the indefinite articles. Use them to refer to any one thing or person. Use *a* before consonants and vowels that sound like consonants: *a bandicoot, a one-horse town, a universal sentiment.* Use *an* before vowels and consonants that sound like vowels – *an epiphany, an honor, an MRT train, an 8-year-old clunker*. As in *an MRT train,* use whichever article is appropriate for the pronunciation of the abbreviation – *an FCC colloquium, an IOC investigation.*

It is an affectation to use *an* before some words that begin with an aitch – *an historian, an hotel*. These words came from French, whose aitch is silent. The practice of preceding such words with *an* is passé today. Use *a – a historian, a hotel* – unless the aitch is silent – *an hour, an honest mistake.*

See also **articles**, **herb,** and **the.**

abalone, the popular shellfish, has no plural form – *The restaurant owner said about 5 catties of top-grade abalone had been stolen.*

See also **zero plural.**

abbreviations and **acronyms** should be few in number and instantly recognized by the reader. If necessary, use them only after the things they refer to have been written out fully. Sample abbreviations instantly recognized by the reader include B.B.C., C.I.A., C.N.N., F.B.I., H.I.V., I.B.M., U.K., U.N., U.S. The list is incomplete.

Some media organizations have a policy of requiring points for all abbreviations. Other media organizations drop points in all abbreviations -- a more common practice in the U.K. than in the U.S. Whether you use points or not, you should at least be consistent.

Some American wire services use *U.S.*, with points, as an adjective only, but never as a noun – *U.S. Army, U.S. Supreme Court, U.S. president.* Points are dropped when denoting the U.S. currency, however – *A Boeing 747-400 costs about US$175 million.*

If you must use an abbreviation for an organization, spell out the full name of the organization on first reference and use the abbreviation thereafter. An unfortunate style, common among neophytes, is to place an abbreviation in parentheses after the phrase it represents – *Nanyang Technological University (NTU)* . . . . However, this is taboo at the world's largest wire service, The Associated Press. The reason is simple: Research on readability proves that parentheses slow down the reader. Thus, if your goal is fast, efficient communication, avoid placing an organization's abbreviation in parentheses. If it is necessary to use an abbreviation, place it in a subsequent sentence close to the original reference. The reader will make the association.

A superior alternative is merely to write a short form of the full name – *some students at the university* – assuming, of course, there is no ambiguity about which university is meant.

Do not abbreviate months or organizational titles. Do not abbreviate street, road, terrace, circle, boulevard and highway, even when part of an address.

At American news organizations, names of all but six American states are abbreviated after a city name – *He was born in Chico, Calif*. The six oddballs are Ohio, Maine, Utah, Idaho, Texas, Hawaii. U.S. Postal Service abbreviations such as OR for Oregon and AL

for Alabama offend some stylists. They prefer the traditional abbreviations for American states – in this case, *Ore.* and *Ala.*

Abbreviate *company, corporation, incorporated* and *limited* when part of a company name – *Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp.*

Abbreviations pronounced as words are *acronyms*. These are capitalized – *Aids, Nato, Opec, Unicef, Unesco* – and they do not take points.

See also **addresses**; **company; corporation; dates; first reference; incorporated; limited; military titles; numbers, numerals; parentheses; percent; police titles;** and **U.S., U.S.A.**

ABC: Abbreviation for American-born Chinese. ABC is somewhat derogatory. *Chinese American* is preferred – *Martin Fok is a Chinese American.* A similar expression in Canada is *CBC,* for *Canadian-born Chinese.*

Overseas Chinese is a similar expression and might be more appropriate in some contexts.

See also **banana** and **Chinese American.**

ABCs: A reference to the Roman alphabet. No apostrophe is required.

An educator of the author's acquaintance, commenting on his students' knowledge of English, said his students *didn't even know their 26 alphabets*. This is a common error: The 26 letters A through Z comprise a single alphabet. What he should have said was that they *didn't even know their ABCs* or *didn't even know the 26 letters of the alphabet*.

See also **apostrophe** and **plurals**.

about means “approximately”, so *about 3:37 p.m.* does not make sense, but *about 3:30 p.m.* does. With big numbers, precision to the last cent is usually unnecessary detail. Do not write *each plane will cost $1,643,879.55,* but e*ach plane will cost about $1.6 million*. “About” in the phrase *estimated to number about 1,500* is redundant; *estimated to number 1,500* is sufficient.

See also **numbers, numerals**.

above: Some stylists object to the use of this word to mean "more than", as in *He earns above $100,000 per year.*

See also **over.**

academic degrees: It is surprising how many university graduates don't know how to write the names of the degrees they worked so hard to earn. Degrees are lowercase, and some take apostrophes. Examples: *bachelor's degree, master's degree, bachelor of science, master of arts, doctor of philosophy, doctoral degree.*

The abbreviations for academic degrees call for points but no spaces – *B.A., B.S., B.S.Sc., M.A., M.S., M.S.Sc., M.Litt., D.Litt., J.D., M.D., Ph.D*.

See also **academic titles.**

academic fields in general are not capitalized – *She is studying pharmacology at The University of Hong Kong*. The reason is simple: Pharmacology, physics, mathematics, chemistry, engineering, architecture, fine arts, psychology are not proper nouns.

Exceptions include academic fields that are proper nouns in their own right, such as the names of languages – *He now regrets having done a Ph.D. in English because he cannot find employment.*

academic titles: The courtesy title for a person with a Ph.D., or a person with a doctor of philosophy, is *Dr*. If there is any doubt about what kind of doctor the person is, then you should make it clear – *Dr. Cheung, who has a doctorate in linguistics from Purdue . . . .*

See also **courtesy titles**, **Dr**., **Mr**., **organizational titles, Ph.D.** and **Prof**.

accents: In contemporary phonetic alphabets, these are marks denoting tone and pronunciation. They more properly are called *diacritical marks*. Common ones include the acute (*é*), the circumflex (*â*), the grave (*è*), the cedilla (*ç*), the umlaut (*ü*), and the tilde (ñ). English inherited the first four from French; the umlaut is from German; the tilde, from Spanish.

The umlaut occurs on *ä, ö, and ü* in German, and if you cannot create it on your computer, then an acceptable alternative is to put an *e* in the word. Using this convention, a word like *Störenfried* ("troublemaker") becomes *stoerenfried* in English. All nouns are capitalized in German, but the capitalization is dropped when the word is brought into English.

Likewise, the tilde in Spanish can be replaced by *y*. The Spanish word *cañon* thus becomes the English *canyon*.

A diacritical mark that looks like the umlaut but that plays a different role in English is the *dieresis*. It is used to denote separate pronunciations for two adjacent vowels – *naïve, coöperate*. The dieresis is dying out today. Nowadays, it is either dropped altogether or it is replaced with a hyphen – *naive, co-operate*.

accommodate is often misspelled as *accomodate*.

acknowledgement, acknowledgment: The former is British, the latter, American.

acronyms: See **abbreviations and acronyms**.

act is capitalized when followed by a cardinal number – *Ceasar is stabbed in Act 3, Scene 1*. It is lowercase when preceded by an ordinal number. Example: *Please read the first act by Monday*.

See also **capitalization**; **numbers, numerals; Roman numerals;** and **scenes**.

acting is lowercase when part of an organizational title – *The magistrate re-called acting Police Chief Nathan Rutherford for additional questioning*.

See also **former**.

active voice is deemed by stylists to be stronger than the passive voice, so it is preferred. Compare *My first visit to Beijing will always be remembered* with *I will always remember my first visit to Beijing.*

On the other hand, it sometimes is desirable to emphasize the object of an action by placing it in the subject of the sentence – *The dramatists of the Restoration are little*

esteemed today.

See also **passive voice** and **voice**.

acute: See **accents**.

A.D., B.C.: In the best style, A.D. comes before the year, B.C. after. They are capitalized, and small caps are preferred – *The earliest treatise on military science is* The Art of War *by Sun Tzu, who lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, 770–476 B.C.*

These abbreviations often are used without points.

See also **BCE.**

addresses: The words *street, road, boulevard, route, circle, avenue* and related words are capitalized and spelled in full when part of a proper name. If street numbers are included, they always are numerals. Examples: *63 Nathan Road, 9 Wood Road, 1084 Tai Po Road, 4 Waterloo Road*.

Sources representing themselves rather than organizations in your writing should be identified with a city or a district of a city – *Allyn Carter, who lives in the Bronx in New York City, ran for City Council in 2002; Josephine Pang of Hong Kong arrived Monday in Taipei; Ramesh Balakrishnan, 36, of Chittagong, Bangladesh . . . .*

For people from smaller communities, add a country name – *Harold Cavendish of Birmingham, England; Juanita Gonzalez of Puerto Penasco, Mexico*. Exception: The United States and Australia are so large that people associated with a state name as well. If the country is obvious, there is no need to name it – *George Comstock of Syracuse, New York*; *Carol Desmonde of South Pasadena, Calif.*

admit has a special connotative meaning when used in attribution – *to acknowledge, confess or concede*. Thus, *admit* implies guilt, or at least a reluctance to speak openly, so you should use the word carefully as attribution.

See also **allege**, **attribution**.

advice does not have a plural, so *advices* is an error.

See also **zero plural.**

adviser, **advisor**: Both are acceptable, but the former spelling is preferred.

adverbs: Placement of an adverb with a compound verb is sometimes more mellifluous when the adverb is placed after the first part of the compound. Compare *Karl Creelman's diaries ultimately were lost* with *He was well liked.* In the phrase *ultimately were lost,* the adverb "ultimately" precedes the compound verb, while in the phrase *was well liked,* the adverb "well" appears after the first part of the compound verb.

aeroplane, airplane: The former is British; the latter, American.

African-American: This is *au courant* for black Americans. *Negro, black, colored person* and *Afro-American,* all of which have been common in the past, have fallen out of use.

afterwards is British usage. In America, the final *-s* is omitted – *afterward*.

Agence France-Presse: Note the hyphenation.

ageing, aging: Both spellings are correct, but the former is preferred because it captures the soft *g* sound.

ages: A person's age is written as numerals unless it opens a sentence – *A 13-year-old girl will compete*. *Ten-year-old Jimmy Lyons will lead the event.*

Ages are usually noted in three ways. One puts the age between commas after the name – *Taipei carpenter Yeung Man Pui, 33, was . . . .* Another puts the age first, but this requires hyphens and a compound adjective – *The 59-year-old Li Peng . . . .* Finally there is the simple declarative statement: *Mr. Yeung is 33.*

See also **numbers, numerals**.

aggravate, irritate: "Aggravate" means "make worse". It is often confused with *irritate*, which means "annoy" – *My fever was aggravated by the tropical heat. Meanwhile, he irritated me with his questions*.

agree, **approve**: Englishmen use *agree* to mean both "approve" and "agree" – *They agreed a $15 million budget*. In the U.S., *agree* usually is followed by *with – Congress agreed with the president on the need for military intervention.*.

Ah- is used in Chinese as a prefix for a given name to create a familiar form, as in *Ah-Sing*. Note that it is hyphenated. This level of familiarity in Chinese culture is restricted to family and very close friends.

Some writers use only *A-*, as in *A-Sing.* However, the associated Chinese character is pronounced with a low tone, so *Ah-* is preferred.

See also **Chinese names**.

ah-poh: Polite form of address in Cantonese for an elderly woman.

ah-sir: Formal style of address in Hong Kong, especially among junior officers in the disciplined services addressing their seniors.

See also **sir.**

ah-suk: Polite form of address in Cantonese for an adult male.

More specifically, it is used to refer to any uncle on the father's side.

Aids is an acronym for *acquired immunodeficiency syndrome*. The abbreviation *AIDS* is still acceptable, however.

See also **abbreviations and acronyms** and **Sars.**

ain't: Slang for "am not" or "is not". Don't use it unless you want your reader to think you are stupid.

aircraft names: The style for these is difficult to master because there are many conventions for naming aircraft.

Well-known ones may be identified by model number or name without the manufacturer's name – *B-1 bomber, Flying Fortress*. In general, note the positions of hyphens, capital letters, model names and manufacturers' names – *F-16 Fighting Falcon, SR-71 Blackbird, AH-64 Apache helicopter, Tu-95 Bear bomber, B-2 Stealth bomber, F-4 Phantom II, F-100 Super Sabre, F-19 Ghostrider, C-5A Galaxy, FH-227, BAC-111 commercial airliner, B-52 long-range bomber, Huey Cobra*.

Note that hyphens are used when letters appear before numerals. Do not use apostrophes to form plurals – *six B-1s, three Tu-22s* – unless the last part of the name is a single letter – *three C-5A's, five 747B's*.

In case of doubt, consult Jane's *All the World's Aircraft*.

See also **apostrophe** and **plurals**.

airplane is the American rendition of *aeroplane,* which appears in British incunabula. *Plane* is acceptable. *Jet* is acceptable for jet propelled aircraft. *Airplane travel is nature's way of making you look like your passport photo -- Al Gore.*

allege, meaning to assert without proof, is commonly used in attribution when writing about crime and court proceedings – *Police alleged that Mr. Wong borrowed the chopper from a friend shortly before the attack . . . .* "Allege" implies that a charge has been brought, but the proof has not been presented. If you use "allege" for attribution in other contexts – for example, if you write *The consul general alleged that his government's visa restrictions are not racist* – then you cast doubt on the veracity of the person being quoted. In this context, "alleged" implies that no evidence has been presented.

See also **attribution**.

all right is often misspelled as *alright*.

all-round is preferred to all-around.

alphabet: *She doesn't even know the 26 alphabets* is incorrect. It should be *She doesn't even know the 26 letters of the alphabet*.

See also **ABCs.**

alright: See **all right.**

always: Shy away from this word. One can never establish that a situation is *always* the case.

See also **never.**

a.m. is the abbreviation of *antemeridian*, and it means before noon. It takes points, is not capitalized, and there is no word space – *My flight departs at 10:35 a.m.* Note the word space between *10*:*35* and *a.m.* Some newspapers published in commonwealth countries drop the word space and full stops – *11am,* for example – but this style is dubious.

See also **p.m.** and **time**.

American usually refers to citizens and things of the United States of America, not to the two American continents as a whole. Canadians in particular object to being called Americans.

American English: America's particular geographical and historical circumstances give rise to a distinctive vocabulary – *prairie, canyon, mesa, succotash, bayou, calaboose.*

American English is widespread, but Commonwealth nations prefer British English.

British	**American**
agree	approve
aluminium	aluminum
anticlockwise	counterclockwise
bill	check
bonnet	hood
boot	trunk
building society	savings and loan association
Briton	Englishman
call box	telephone booth
car park	parking lot
chemist	pharmacist
children's climbing frame	monkey bars
chips	french fries
cinema	theater
coach	bus
crossroads	intersection
current account	checking account
curtains	drapes
drink driving	drunk driving
driver	railroad engineer
drugs arrest	drug arrest
dustbin	trashcan
dustman	garbage man
estate agent	realtor
flat	apartment
flyway	overpass
football	soccer
full stop	period
garage	gas station
braces	suspenders
gone missing	disappeared
guard’s van	caboose
hoarding	billboard

inverted commas	single quotes
kerb	curb
lift	elevator
lorry	truck
maize	corn
maths	math
nappy	diaper
note	banknote
pay rise	pay raise
pavement	sidewalk
petrol	gasoline
plaster	bandage
post	mail
pram	baby carriage
pressurize	pressure
pushchair	stroller
railway	railroad
ring off	hang up
saloon	sedan
trainers	sneakers, jogging shoes
stand for election	run for office
sweets	candy
tap	faucet
tin	can
tin hat	helmet
training	jogging
training shoes	sneakers
tram	streetcar
tramp	bum
transport	transportation
underground	subway
unit trust	mutual fund
vest	undershirt
wash up	do the dishes
windscreen	windshield

For differences in spelling, see **orthography** and the **Preface** to this book.

American legislators exist at federal and state levels. In both instances they either are members of a senate or members of a house of representatives. The senate is always smaller, more elite and referred to as the *upper chamber*. The house of representatives is referred to as the *lower chamber*. Members of a senate are called *senators*. Members of a house of representatives are called *representatives*. At the federal level only, members of either group may be called *congressmen*. A few special names are used for the lower chamber in selected states. In California, for example, the lower chamber is called the *Assembly*, and its members are *assemblymen*.

Note that: *Sen*., as a title, typically replaces *Mr*. Thus, *Sen. Robert Dole* appears in writing as *Sen*. *Dole*. In the House of Representatives, *Congressman Newt Gingrich* may appear in writing as *Mr*. *Gingrich* after the fIrst reference, although *Rep*. *Gingrich* also is acceptable. In wire service copy, American legislators' names often are followed by an indication in parentheses of their political affiliations and constituencies. (*R-Calif*.), for example, means *a Republican from California*. If this information is to be used locally, it must be spelled out in full. Example: *Sen*. *Pete Wilson, who is a Republican from California...*; otherwise, it will be meaningless to the local audience.

See also **courtesy titles.**

American names: Americans usually have three names – a given name, which includes a first name and a middle name, and a surname or family name. Most Americans abbreviate the middle name, so use the middle initial, if provided – *Anthony J. Silva.*

See also **initials, junior, Western names**.

among, amongst: The former is American; the latter, British.

Use this word for three or more elements – *There was bad blood among the three of them* – not *between the three of them.*

See also **between**.

ampersand: This is the name of the symbol that means “and” (&). It is not used in text, but it appears in tables and headlines to save space.

and may start a sentence, but this is stylistically affected and easily overworked.

and/**or** is not used in good writing. *He and/or I will be present* is awkward. Consider this: *One or both of us will be present*.

See also **he/she** and **virgule**.

animal breeds and species: Breed and species names based on proper nouns are capitalized – *Doberman pinscher, English setter, Boston terrier, German shepherd, Appaloosa, Friesian filly, Romer's tree frog, Chinese white dolphin.*

See also **capitalization**

animals, outside of a sexual context, should be treated as having no gender. An animal is usually referred to as *it*, not as *he* or *she*.

annual: This adjective means "occurring once a year". At least one year must have passed, since the first occurrence, for an event to become an annual one, so *first annual* is incorrect usage and a genuine bugbear among persnickety editors.

anti-: Prefix meaning *against, opposed to,* or *opposite of.* You need to check a dictionary to tell whether it requires a hyphen – *antibiotic, antiballistic, anticlockwise;* but note *anti-American, anti-intellectual.* The following is acceptable: *Police undertook a major anti-car theft operation in Guangzhou.*

anticipate loosely means *expect*, but specifically it means to take action in advance of some foreseen event – *The captain anticipated the pirates' attack by altering course*. This is preferred usage.

anticlockwise, counterclockwise: The former is British; the latter, American.

anyone is singular – *Is anyone there?*

apartment is American for the English *flat*.

apostrophe: The most common error in the use of the apostrophe occurs in constructions like this - *He came to power in the 70's*. Unfortunately, this should read *He came to power in the '70s*.

The apostrophe is used to form the possessive, to form plurals of single letters, to form contractions and to denote omitted letters and figures.

For the possessive, the apostrophe is used with an *-s* for singular words that do not already end in *-s*. Examples: *The Governor's Daimler, All the President's Men*. The same rule applies to plurals that do not end in *s – The deer's antlers, the men's washroom*.

If a plural word does end in *s*, then the apostrophe is placed alone after the *-s*. Examples: *The tenants' organization, the wolves' den*. The same rule applies to words that are plural in form, but singular in meaning – *mumps' symptoms, mathematics' foundations* - and to words that end in -s in both singular and plural forms - *the corps' leadership*.

For proper nouns ending in *-s*, add an apostrophe and another *-s*. Examples: *Agnes's new job, Socrates's legacy*.

Do not use an apostrophe to make the plural of a figure: *the 1990s* is correct. Also: *She is in her 30s*.

An old rule stated that the apostrophe was used alone after words that did not end in *-s* but sounded like they did - words ending in *-z*, *-x*, *-ce*, for example. This rule is no longer applied, so you may ignore it.

To form plurals of single letters, add an apostrophe and *-s*. Examples: *He said that you should mind your p's and q's…*; *Miss Yeung received straight A's last semester*. This is not necessary for multiple letters, however: *They are now learning their ABCs...*; *He gave me two IOUs*.

For contractions, use the apostrophe in place of omitted letters. Examples: *Don't, rock' n' roll, hadn't, 'Tis the season to be jolly*.

The same applies to omitted figures - *the '90s, the Roaring '20s, the Spirit of '76*.

See also **plurals**.

appeal, appeal against: *The defendant said he would appeal against the injunction* is chiefly British usage. Americans drop "against", making it a transitive verb, like this: *The defendant said he would appeal the injunction.*

See also **protest, protest against.**

apposition: This is the placement of a noun or noun phrase immediately after another noun or noun phrase – *The secretary for education and manpower, Arthur K.C. Li, was trained as a surgeon.* In this example, *Arthur K.C. Li* is the *appositive.*

Appositives can be either set off with commas or not, but the meaning changes. Consider these two constructions: *When I met him, last year, he was living with his mother* and *When I met him last year, he was living with his mother.* In the first example, the commas suggest that last year was the first time that the speaker ever met the individual in question. In the second example, the speaker had met the individual prior to last year, but happened to meet him again last year.

See also **restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases.**

April Fool's Day: This is the first day of April, a time for pranks in English society. Note caps and location of the apostrophe. Also called **All Fool's Day**.

Arabic names: Most Moslem Arabs have three given names, but they do not all use a family name. If they do, it appears last. Use whichever style the subject prefers.

art: The names of works of art are capitalized and put in quotes. Examples: *Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," Picasso's "Nude Descending the Stairs".*

See also **capitalization**.

artefact, artifact: The former is an old spelling; the latter, more contemporary.

articles: The articles in English are *a* and *an,* which are called *indefinite articles,* and *the,* the *definite article*.

Articles are difficult to master, even for native English speakers. The two main issues are whether or not an article is needed at all, and, if so, which one.

Generally, a common noun will take *a* when first introduced – *A fire broke out in the tunnel.* And it will take *the* thereafter – *The fire caused about $1 million in damage*.

Nevertheless, some things are universally known, so they do not require the introductory *a*. They always take *the – the sea, the horizon, the solar system, the General Theory of Relativity*.

No article is required when writing about countable things in general – *Automobiles are a major source of pollution*; *Human beings are afraid of snakes*. One oddball is *research,* which never takes the indefinite article *a* -- *They did research on ways of displaying books.*

Government needs *the – the government.* Legislative bodies also take *the – the Legislative Council, the Parliament, the Knesset.*

The titles of ancient works almost always include *the* even if it was not part of the original title – *The Odyssey, The Koran, The Bible*. However, modern works do not take articles unless they are part of the title – *For Whom the Bell Tolls, Howard's End*. But: *The Americans, The Trial*.

Illnesses generally take no article, but there are a few exceptions. Examples: *cancer, hepatitis*. But: *the flu, a cold, the mumps*. Injuries require *a – a fractured hip, a concussion*.

Many place names require *the* unless they include a compass direction – *the Antarctic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Maldives, the Arctic, the Hawaiian Islands*. But: *Western China, southern Europe, East Asia*. *The* is required for rivers and deserts – *the Mojave Desert, the Mongolian Desert, the Yangtze River, the Ganges, the Amazon*. Note

that "the" is not capitalized in place names unless it is part of the place name itself – *The Hague, The Netherlands.* Continents, regions and districts of cities take no article. Examples: *Asia, Australia, Southeast Asia, Southern California, Tsim Sha Tsui, Hung Hom*. Cities, provinces, lakes, and countries take no articles unless they are part of their names -- *The British Isles, The Hague, The Punjab, The Netherlands*. But: *London, Antwerp, New York, Hainan, Luzon, Lake Geneva, Lake Victoria, Laos, Thailand*.

Businesses, airports, and railway stations do not require *the* unless it is part of their name -- *Motorola, Toyota, Chicago O'Hare Airport, Heathrow, Grand Central Station, Gare du Nord*. Organizations and buildings generally require *the*. Examples: *the Bank of China Building, the Empire State Building, the Co-operative Resources Centre, the Chinese Communist Party, the Kuomintang*. Do not capitalize the "the" unless it is part of the official name of the organization.

Laws and important documents usually take *the*. Examples: *the Basic Law, the Registration of Newspapers Act, the Constitution of the United States, the Magna Carta*.

Noncountable nouns**:** *Air, water, sand, mathematics, summer* do not take indefinite articles.

See also **a**, **an; cooperative principle;** and **the**.

artist: In English, "artist" usually refers to people in the fine arts – painters and sculptors, for example – not to people in the performing arts such as actors, singers and musicians.

as: Do not use *as* to mean *because*. To do so often causes ambiguity in meaning – *As I was in Central, I decided to drop by The Landmark.* This should be *Because I was in Central, I decided to drop by The Landmark.*

See also **like vs. as, since.**

ASEAN: This abbreviation for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is acceptable on second reference.

Asia Minor: Old name for most of present-day Turkey. Also called *Anatolia*.

aspect refers to the appearance of something to one's eye – *Many aspects of Hong Kong's skyline are pleasing to the eye*. The word often is misused to mean "respect": *The dogs bring pleasure to the children in many aspects.* This should be *in many respects.*

Associated Press: Note that the full, proper name of this wire service includes "the", which is capitalized – *The Associated Press.*

See also **the.**

at the present time is wordy. Use *now.*

attorney general: Note that there is no hyphen. The plural is *attorneys general*.

See also **plurals**.

attribution: Facts should be attributed unless they are common knowledge among, or very easily verified by, the readers. For example, it is not necessary to attribute *A solar*

eclipse is caused by the moon's passing between the sun and the earth.

See also **believes, claims**, **colon**, **quotation marks**, **quotes** and **thinks**.

audience generally is singular – *The audience gave him a standing ovation.* More than one audience implies more than one performance date and venue – *His audiences consistently gave him standing ovations.*

aunt: See **family relations**.

authorise, authorize: The former is British; the latter, American.

autumn is preferred British usage. *Fall* is American. It is not capitalized.

See also **seasons.**

awaken: *Jack Doyer, 54, was awoken by his wife's screams.* This unfortunate sentence, written by a professional journalist for one of Hong Kong's elite newspapers, illustrates the confusion over *wake* and *awaken.*

The past participle of *awaken* is *awakened,* so *Jack Doyer, 54, was awakened by his wife's screams* is correct. An example of the simple past, *awoke: Anxious about the examination, he awoke at dawn.* The same thought could be rendered thus: *He woke up at dawn.* Indeed, for simplicity, *wake,* usually with the particle *up,* is preferred in the active voice – *His wife's screams woke him up.*

awhile is an adverb, so it modifies verbs – *He jogged awhile around the track.* To write *He jogged for awhile* is incorrect. It should be *He jogged for a while.*

See also **while**.

ax, **axe** is spelled two ways. Both are acceptable.

B, b

bachelor's degree: Anyone who has earned one of these should at least be able to write it properly. Note that the phrase is not capitalized and that it has a possessive form.

See also **academic degrees**.

backbencher: Chiefly British for a member of the opposition party, or the main political party that is not in power – from the fact that most of the members sit on benches in the back.

backformation is the creation of a new word by dropping part of another one, usually the last syllable. "Liaise", for example, comes from "liaison" and "typewrite" comes from "typewriter".

See also **coined expressions, nonce word** and **spoonerism**.

balk, baulk: These are the American and British spellings, respectively, of the same word.

banana: This is a racial epithet for American-born Chinese, who are said by Cantonese people to be "yellow on the outside and white on the inside". You should not use the word in this way.

See also **ABC** and **CBC.**

Band-Aid is a trade name. It is capitalized and hyphenated. Use a generic synonym such as *bandage* or *plaster* unless your intention is to refer to this particular product.

See also **trade names.**

barking deer: See **muntjac.**

baseball cap: Type of hat worn by many American teenage boys, often backwards.

Basic Law is the name of Hong Kong's so-called "mini-constitution". It is capitalized and it requires the article "the" – *The Basic Law*.

basis: *On an annual basis* is a common English idiom, but it is prolix. *Annually* or *every year* is preferred.

B.C.: Abbreviation of *Before Christ*, used to identify dates. Often used without points.

See also **A.D.**

BCE: Abbreviation of *Before Common Era*. Non-Christians and secular citizens promote this abbreviation as a replacement for "B.C." Likewise, *CE*, for *Current Era*, is promoted as a replacement for "A.D."

See also **A.D.**

bear has two past participles, "borne" and "bore", signifying either "to carry" or "to give birth" – *Cholera is a water-borne* illness but *She bore two sons.*

Another example of a word with two past participles is "hang".

See also **hang**.

because vs. **as:** See **as**.

Beaufort scale: A measure of wind speed ranging from 0 to 12.

Beijing, **Peking**: "Peking" is an old rendition of the name of the Chinese capital city. "Beijing" is preferred.

One exception is Peking University, which is still written the old way.

See **pinyin** and **Wade-Giles**.

Beijinger: Person from Beijing.

believe, as in *The chief executive believes the new ministerial system will increase the government's accountability* is not appropriate for attribution. This is because you never know what people *believe*, especially when it comes to politicians; you know only what they *say* they believe. *The chief executive said he believes* or, better yet, *The chief executive said,* is preferred.

See also **attribution** and **thinks, thought.**

benefitted, **benefitting**: Note that the final consonant is doubled.

between: This word is often used interchangeably with "among" when it should not be. Use "between" in reference to two objects only – *Just between you and me. . . .* Use "among" for three or more objects.

Also, do not use "between" when the meaning is "from. . . to" – *between Monday and Friday. Between* does not include the endpoints of a range, so *Monday* and *Friday* would be excluded from the previous set of dates. *From Monday to Friday* is preferred if *Monday* and *Friday* are included.

See also **among.**

biannual usually means twice annually, or every six months. It is synonymous with *semiannual*. Unfortunately, it is sometimes used to mean once every two years, but this is not the preferred usage.

See also **biennial**, **bimonthly**, **perennial** and **semiannual**.

Bible is capitalized and takes the article *the*, which also is capitalized – The Bible. No quotes or italics are used. The same rules apply to the two main divisions of The Bible – The Old Testament, The New Testament. For recommendations for abbreviations of books of The Bible, see *Hart's Rules*.

biblical, in reference to The Bible and events described in it, is not capitalized.

biennial means once every two years. A *biennium* is a *two-year period*.
See also **biannual**, **bimonthly**, **perennial** and **semiannual**.

billion is a thousand million. Some British stylists prefer *thousand million* to *billion.*
See also **numbers**, **numerals** and **trillion**.

bimonthly means occurring every two months.
See also **biannual, biennial, perennial** and **semiannual**.

bisexual: A person who has sexual relations with males and females.
See also **heterosexual**.

blazer: Navy blue men's jacket with brass buttons, usually worn with gray or tan slacks.

block: In some cities, *block* is used to refer to a large building divided into apartments and shops. As part of an address, *block* is capitalized when followed by a number – *He lives in Block 3 of Choi Hung Estate, Sheung Shui*.

In a U.S. city, a block is usually a square of about one-hundredth of a mile in area, one-tenth of a mile on each side, bounded by streets on all four sides.

board sometimes is mistakenly used to mean *sign*, possibly because of the word *signboard*. In any case, *sign* is preferred.

body copy is publishing jargon for text in the body of a story, as opposed to text for titles, headlines, tables and photos.

boffin: British slang for scientist, used facetiously in newspaper headlines.
See also **slang**.

bok choi: Chinese vegetable. Note spelling.

Bombay: See Mumbai.

bonk: British slang for "to have sexual intercourse" – *I bonked her on the first night.* Americans would not know this word.

book titles are normally italicized and capitalized. They may be set off with quotation marks in manuscripts being readied for publication. Some editors prefer underscoring, however, which denotes italics at the time of typesetting.

bore, borne: See **bear**.

botanical names: Provide both the genus and species when giving botanical names - *Aleurites fordii, Scirpus lacustris*. Note that the genus is capitalized, but the species is not. In any event, you should provide the common names as well. Example: Aleurites

fordii, *which is commonly known as the tung tree, is a source of oil in China*.

See also **plants** and **species**.

Boxer Rebellion is the English name for the 1900 Beijing peasant uprising whose objective was to force all foreigners from China.

boy: A male person under the age of 18. Males aged 18 or over are legally adults, so they should be referred to as *men.* An 18-year-old man could be referred to as *a young man.*

See also **girl, lady** and **youth.**

braces and **brackets**: Braces { }are used in mathematics but not in print media. Brackets [ ] are used to insert editorial comments in running text, usually for clarification – *The communiqué read, "We appreciate the efforts of [Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Shimon] Peres to achieve a peaceful resolution to the settlement problem."*

Like single quotes within double quotes, brackets may be used like parentheses within parentheses; however, if your sentence is as complex as this, you probably need to re-cast your thought.

See also **parentheses**.

brand names: See **trade names**.

briefs: A type of men's underwear.

See also **panties, pants** and **trousers.**

brio: Vigor; energy. It often is used with "con" – *Everyone should find a role and play it con brio.*

Brit: Slang for "a British person".

Britain, British: See **England**.

British Isles: The British Isles include the island of Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands.

See also **England** and **United Kingdom**.

British legislators are either elected to the House of Commons or appointed to the House of Lords. Some lords inherit their seats. Members of the House of Commons are called Members of Parliament, abbreviated as *MP*, with no points.

Here is an example of the correct style – *A member of Parliament, Quincy Harris...,* but *A member of the House of Lords, Lord Rochester*. Later in your writing they become *Mr. Harris* and *Lord Rochester*.

Briton: A person from Great Britain.

brother: See **family relations**.

brother-in-law, brothers-in-law: See **family relations**.

buffalo: This word often is misused in Southeast Asia to mean *water buffalo,* which is the preferred usage. Synonyms are *carabao, water ox* and just *ox.*

Used alone, "buffalo" commonly refers to *bison,* a kind of wild ox that roams the plains of North America and Europe. There are two plurals *buffaloes* and *buffalos,* but the former is more common.

See also **ox** and **water buffalo, water ox.**

buildings: The names of prominent buildings are capitalized. Examples: *Chequers, the White House, Government House, the Empire State Building*.

See also **block** and **capitalization**.

bullets are the heavy black dots used in a list (•).

See also **bulleted list.**

bulleted list: This is a list in ordinary text whose entries are preceded by bullets:

. . . In other action, the council:

- *Approved a 0.25 percent increase in the luxury goods tax;*
- *Created an ad hoc committee to study the feasibility of requiring all taxis to convert to liquefied petroleum gas;*
- *Amended the livestock ordinance to permit residents to keep live geese within city limits;*
- *Tabled a motion to increase council members' expense allowances.*

Note that the list is introduced with a colon. Note also that all items in the list are parallel in structure. In this case, all begin with transitive verbs in the past tense, and all except for the last end with a semicolon. A bulleted list can be in the middle of text or at the end. When at the end of a news item, some American editors call a bulleted list a *shirttail.*

Burma: The name of this country is sometimes given as *Myanmar,* but its full proper name is *Union of Burma,* or *Burma* for short. *Myanmar* is a local popular name used by Burmese people themselves.

Burmese names: *U* and *Daw* are Burmese honorific titles, somewhat like Mr. and Mrs. in English. A common *faux pas* by Westerners is to refer to someone such as *U Thant* as *Mr. U* instead of *Mr. Thant*. The latter is correct.

bush fire: Australian for the American "brush fire".

C, c

cab, **cabbie:** Informal for *taxi* and *taxi driver*. Avoid in formal contexts.

cadre: Chinese Communist Party functionary. The plural is *cadres.*

calendar: Some writers refer to the first month of the lunar calendar as January, the second month as February, and so on. This is incorrect usage, because the names of the months in English refer to the Gregorian calendar, which is the one in general use in the Western world, and there is no fit between the lunar calendar and the Gregorian calendar.

References to the Chinese lunar calendar should be written something like this: *On the15th day of the second month of the lunar calendar. . . .*

caliber: Inside diameter of a gun barrel. Decimals are used when the diameter is in inches – *.50-calibre Browning machine gun*, *.357 Magnum revolver, .38 Saturday night special*. Use *mm* when the diameter is in millimeters: *7.62mm assault rifle, 9mm semi-automatic pistol*. Note the absence of a full stop and word space in *7.62mm* and *9mm*. The size of a shotgun is expressed as a gauge: *10 gauge, 12 gauge, 16 gauge.*

See also **gauge, gun** and **pistol**.

Cambodian names: The family name is given first, followed by given names. Exceptions are made for royalty. For example, King Norodom Sihanouk's surname is Norodom, but he is called King Sihanouk, in the same way that British people refer to their monarch as Queen Elizabeth.

cannon, canon: The former is a gun large enough that it needs to be mounted on something before it can be fired; the latter is a decree of the Catholic church.

Canton: Old spelling for the southern Chinese city of *Guangzhou,* which is the preferred spelling today.

See **Guangzhou** and **place names**.

Cantopop, a short form for "Cantonese popular music", is a distinctive genre of music in Hong Kong. It is capitalized.

capitalization: The rules on capitalization are highly detailed. Following are examples of rules mentioned elsewhere in this book:

aircraft	Boeing 747-300
animal breed names	German shepherd
art	*The Scream*
brand names	Levi's
buildings	Elysses Palace
committees	Joint Advisory Committee
districts of cities	South Central Los Angeles
famous places	Forbidden City
films	*In the Mood for Love*
food	Mongolian hot pot
foreign legislatures	Japan's Diet
geographic names	Himalayas
geological formations	Marianas Trench
geological times	Jurassic Period
government bodies	Ministry of Manpower
heavenly phenomena	Southern Cross
historical events	Boxer Rebellion
historical periods	Han Dynasty
holidays	Mid-Autumn Festival
holy days	Rosh Hashana
institutions	Nanyang Technological University
journals	*Journal of Second Language Writing*
legislative bodies	Legislative Council
magazines	*The New Yorker*
months	October
monuments	Statue of Liberty
nationalities	Singaporean
newspapers	*The Straits Times*
nicknames	Bennie
organizations	Rotary International
people's names	Hilary Clinton
planets	Saturn
plants	Douglas fir
plays	*Death of a Salesman*
political parties	Liberal Party
regions	Middle East
room numbers	Room 156
scientific names	Homo sapiens
ships	Global Trader
storms	Hurricane Andrew
titles	Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew
TV programs	*American Idol*

In British style some phrases requiring capitalization will retain the capital on second reference using a short form. This is especially true for government bodies. For example, the *Broadcasting Authority* on the first reference becomes the *Authority* in

subsequent references. This practice is not followed in the U.S., however, because strict adherence to the rule is cumbersome and leads to inconsistencies.

DO NOT WRITE IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS FOR EMPHASIS. This is unnecessary; besides, it looks amateurish. As part of a title or subtitle of a publication, all capitals are acceptable, however.

See also **academic fields, common nouns** and **proper nouns**.

cater, meaning *to provide food for people on commission,* is used with *for* in Britain but with *to* in the U.S.

caption: The text under a photo. Newspaper editors call captions *cutlines*.

carat: Two hundred milligrams, a unit of weight for gemstones.

See also **karat**.

caribou: People in Southeast Asian nations, especially the Philippines, use this word to refer to *water ox,* which is preferred.

In general, *caribou* refers to several species of deer native to the extreme northern regions of North America, Europe and Asia.

Cathay: Medieval reference to China, after the name of a semi-nomadic Mongolian people who ruled Manchuria and northern China for about 200 years, from A.D. 936 to 1122.

catty: Chinese unit of weight equal to 1.33 pounds. Use numerals – *Alice bought 3 catties of smoked duck at the wet market.*

CBC: Abbreviation for *Canadian-born Chinese.*

See also **ABC.**

cedilla: This is the curlicue under a *c* in French, as in *façade*, denoting that the *c* is soft.

See also **accents**.

Celsius refers to the metric temperature scale, named after Anders Celsius (1701-1744), the Swedish astronomer who devised it. Celsius is capitalized and it is preferred to *centigrade*.

The formula for converting from *Fahrenheit* to *Celsius* is C = 5(F – 32)/9.

Celsius to *Fahrenheit*: F = 9C/(5 + 32).

See also **Fahrenheit** and **temperature**.

center, centre: The former is American; the latter, British.

cents means "hundredths", so it should be presented in two decimal places in reference to money, even if the last digit is zero – *$19.99, $105.50.* If there are no cents, do not use any decimals – *A movie ticket today costs up to $70.*

See also **dollars** and **money.**

century is lowercase – *17th century*, *21st century*. Note the use of ordinal numbers. They should be spelled out if less than 10: *first century B.C., third century*.

See also **A.D.** and **numbers, numerals**.

chairperson is widely used as a "genderless" alternative to *chairman.* The main problem is that a person's title, in actual practice, may indeed be *chairman,* according to an organization's bylaws — regardless of the gender of the person holding the office. You will have to weigh each case according to its merits.

See also **sexist language**.

chancellor: In the U.K., an honorary head of a university. In Hong Kong, the chancellor of all the main universities is the chief executive of the Hong Kong government. Day-to-day operations of the various universities are overseen by *vice-chancellors.*

In the U.S., some university systems – notably the University of Wisconsin, which has 26 campuses and 160,000 students – are headed by *presidents*, while individual campuses are headed by *chancellors.* On the other hand, the State University of New York – 64 campuses and 382,000 students – is headed by a *chancellor* while the individual campuses are headed by *presidents.*

In short, usage varies according to individual institutions.

See also **principal, rector** and **vice-chancellor.**

chapter is capitalized when followed by a number, as in reference to a chapter of a book. Example: *The story does not begin to unfold until Chapter 2.*

See also **capitalization**.

check, cheque: A type of bank draft. The former spelling is American, the latter, British.

cheongsam: Tightly fitted, high collared Chinese dress. Note spelling.

chick: Slang for "attractive young woman".

chick lit: Derogatory term for a new genre of literature targeting women searching for "Mr. Right".

chili, chilli: Both are correct but the former is more common in the U.S. Chilli is common in Southeast Asia.

China: The formal name is the *People's Republic of China.* The abbreviation *PRC,* without points, may be used in titles and tables, but not in text. *China* is the preferred short form.

The phrase *mainland China* may be used if there is the possibility of confusion with Taiwan, whose formal name is the *Republic of China,* often abbreviated *ROC,* also without points.

See also **Mainland** and **Taiwan**.

Chinaman: A racial epithet for a Chinese person. Do not use it.

Chinatown is one word. It refers to ethnic Chinese communities in overseas cities. London, Los Angeles, Montreal, New York, San Francisco, Singapore and Sydney all have Chinatowns.

China watcher: A person whose official duty is to read and compile information on China for the consumption of others, principally government bureaucrats. The phrase is two words, and there is no hyphen.

Chinese American: An ethnic Chinese who is a citizen of the U.S. Note that the phrase is not hyphenated. "Chinese" is an adjective and "American" is a noun, so there is no rationale for a hyphen.

See also **ABC** and **CBC**.

Chinese mile: One *li* in Mandarin, or *leih* in Cantonese. It is equivalent to 0.5 kilometers, or about one-third of a statute mile.

See also **mile**.

Chinese names: In Hong Kong the family name is given first, usually followed by one or two given names — *Wong Wing Han, Lee Wing Tat.* An exception is made if the person uses a Western given name — *Paulina Cheung.*

Some individuals with Western given names will provide their full Chinese names after the Western names. This is acceptable style if it is the person's preference — *Allen Lee Peng Fei.* Ask the individual involved and follow that person's preference. A namecard will reveal a person's preference.

Some common styles: *Arthur K.C. Li, T.K. Chang.* Note that word spaces are omitted for strings of abbreviated names.

The given names should not be hyphenated unless this is the clearly stated preference of the individual involved — *Li Chi-shing.*

Many married women decline to use their husband's names. If they do, they might use their husbands' surnames as well as their own. Example: If a Miss Wan Pui Man marries a Mr. Wong Chi Shing, she might refer to herself as *Mrs. Wong Wan Pui Man.* This style is fading in popularity, however.

All of the above rules apply to Singapore and Taiwan, as well as Hong Kong. When writing about mainland Chinese, however, you should follow the *pinyin* rendition. This places the family name first, followed by the given names run together as one word — *Mao Zedong.* Here again, you might discover anomalies based on personal preferences. Many mainland Chinese have only one given name, for example.

For children, use the given name after the first reference.

Ah- is often used with part of a given name as a familiar form – *Ah-Sing.* It can also be attached to an honorific as a sign of friendliness – *Ah-Suk,* for example, means "uncle", but it can be used by any younger male in reference to an older stranger.

See also **initials, pinyin** and **romanization**.

Chinese phonetic alphabet: See **pinyin.**

Chinglish: This is either the mixture of Chinese and English, known to linguists as *code switching,* or the literal translation of Chinese into English. Examples of code switching: *hou fit* for "very fit", *hou friend* for "good friend".

Examples of literal translations: *golden time* for "prime time" television and *these few days* for *in the past few days.*

Literal translations usually do not work. You should seek idiomatic equivalents.

Chink: A racial epithet for a Chinese person. Do not use it.

See also **Chinaman** and **gweilo.**

chow: Informal American English for "food", from the Chinese word for "fry", which has similar pronunciation.

chow mein: Chinese-style dish popular in America with steamed or stir-fried vegetables and shredded meat on top of fried noodles. From *jauh mihn,* or fried noodles.

Christian: Anyone who worships Jesus Christ is a *Christian.* This includes Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists and Baptists, as well as members of Orthodox and Coptic churches. Mormons are not classified as Christians, however.

Christmas: Do not use *Xmas.* It is offensive to Christians to replace the name of Christ with a capital *X*. If you insist on being offensive, then do not render this as *X'mas.* Such a rendition would make you appear to be both stupid and offensive, because there is no rationale for the apostrophe.

cigaret, cigarette: The former rendition is preferred by many American editors, while British editors prefer the latter, which comes directly from French.

ciphers are unnecessary in constructions such as *9:00 p.m.* It is enough to write *9 p.m.* Use ciphers for numbers less than zero — *0.8 seconds*.

See **numbers, numerals**.

circumflex: See **accents**.

civet: Small, cat-shaped mammal. It is a culinary delicacy in southern China, where it sometimes is called a *civet cat.* This is probably not good usage, because it is not a cat and it is not related to cats, zoologically speaking.

The type of civet eaten in southern China is the *masked palm civet.*

claimed is often used for attribution when the writer does not necessarily believe what is being quoted. Example: *Mr. Tze claimed he was at his mother's residence at the time, but his mother was in Macau on vacation, according to neighbors.* Do not instill doubt in the readers' minds by using this word carelessly.

See also **attribution** and **quotation marks**.

clerical titles: See **religious titles**.

clichés are hackneyed, worn-out expressions, and they should be avoided. Some examples: *level playing field, blind as a bat, storm of controversy*. Using them makes your writing pedestrian.

Coca-Cola: Note the hyphen. Also note the two initial C's are capitalized. This is a trade name, so you should use *cola* as an alternative unless *Coca-Cola* specifically is meant.

See also **trade names.**

cocoanut, coconut: This word is spelled two ways, but the latter is preferred.

coined expressions: These are flashy phrases that have the look of clichés, but are fresh enough to have some life in them. Examples: *through train* and *second stove,* both of which were useful descriptors for the political situation in Hong Kong during the Handover. Use coined expressions with discretion. What is flashy today is tomorrow's cliché.

See also **backformation, nonce word** and **spoonerism.**

collective nouns: These are nouns that name groups of things. Examples: *audience, herd, jury, clergy, family, council, team.* They pose problems in agreement with verbs and pronouns.

In general, collective nouns may take singular or plural verbs, depending on the context. When the group is acting collectively, then a singular verb is more appropriate. Examples: *The flock is wintering on the Malay Peninsula*; *the orchestra sounds best in a concert hall.*

When a group is not acting collectively, then the plural form is more appropriate. Example: *The council have failed to act on the proposal because of internal divisiveness.*

collide may be ambiguous if used carelessly. Example: *A goods vehicle collided with a police car* implies that the goods vehicle was at fault. If the police car were stationary at the time, then the statement might be correct. If they were both in motion, however, then *A goods vehicle and a police car collided* would be more accurate.

colon: The colon (:) is probably the least utilized punctuation mark, but it has useful purposes. It is used after salutations in business letters, before explanatory matter, in attribution, between titles and subtitles, and in scriptural references.

The salutation of a letter is the part that says *Dear Mr. So-and-So.* It can be followed either by a colon or a comma, but the colon is more formal — *Dear Sir:*.

Explanatory matter can be either a phrase or a clause that carries a sentence a bit further. Example: *Mrs. Chau's husband had a few problems: gambling, drinking, womanizing.* When the explanatory matter is an independent clause — that is, when it could stand alone as a separate sentence — then it is capitalized, just as a sentence would be. Example: *The car is a real bargain: It's a 2003 Corniche in excellent condition for only $100,000*.

In attribution, the colon is used two ways. When the word order is inverted, the colon, not the comma, is used as punctuation to set off the quotation. Example: *Said she: "I was a candidate for the Sha Tin District Board in the 2003 election."*

Another application is for extended quotations, or quotes that continue for several paragraphs. Example: *Following is the complete text of the chief executive's remarks:* When this style is used, there are no quotation marks around the quoted material.

Between titles and subtitles, the colon is often used. Example: *McGuide: English Style and Usage for Chinese Writers*.

In all of the above uses, there is a word space after the colon, but none before it.

There is no word space when it used to denote scriptural references, however: *She read a passage from John 3:15*.

There is no word space when it is used to denote times, either – *Star Leo docks at Hong Kong China City at 6:35 p.m.*

colony: The official classification of Hong Kong by the British Foreign Office was that of a dependent territory, not a colony. Today Hong Kong formally is designated as a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China, so *region* and *SAR* are preferred today as short forms in reference to Hong Kong.

Macau also is a special administrative region. Taiwan might become one in the future.

See also **special administrative region** and **special economic zone.**

color, colour: The former is American; the latter, British.

commas are used to separate items in a series, to separate independent clauses in the same sentence, to set off subordinated phrases and clauses, and to address others. *Series* are often classified as *simple* or *complex.* In a simple series that includes the conjunction "and", it is commonplace to drop the final comma, known as an "Oxford comma", before the conjunction. Example: *For breakfast, they ate ham sandwiches, eggs and fried tomatoes.* Some stylists object to this, however.

The comma is included before the conjunction in a complex series, which includes subjects and verbs. Example: *He said he wants Mr. Wong to take the Briggs account, Miss Lam to take the Proctor and Gamble account, and Mr. Chen to take the Whampoa account.*

The comma is commonly omitted between simple clauses separated by a coordinating conjunction. Example: *The council approved the appointment and the mayor returned to her office.*

Around quotation marks, British and American styles differ. British editors place the comma outside the close quote unless the quoted matter originally contained either a comma or a period – *He said he was feeling "somewhat peaked", but he forged ahead nonetheless.* American editors place the comma inside the close quote regardless, so an American editor would punctuate the sentence as follows: *He said he was feeling "somewhat peaked," but he forged ahead nonetheless.*

commemorate, commemorative: These words often are misspelled, so note the spellings.

commencement: This is the American equivalent for *convocation*, which is British usage.

commission: Commonwealth countries provide *commissions* and *high commissions* instead of consulates to other commonwealth nations. The people heading them are *commissioners* and *high commissioners.* One noteworthy exception is Australia, which has a consul general in Hong Kong.

See **consulate**, **consul general, embassy** and **high commission**.

common nouns are not capitalized.

See also **capitalization** and **proper nouns**.

communication, communications: The former refers to the process of human interaction, and the study of that process, while the latter refers to a plurality of interactions.

communiqués are official diplomatic communications, so *official communiqués* is redundant.

communism is not capitalized unless part of a title or the first word of a sentence. *Communist* is capitalized when part of a political party's formal name — *the Chinese Communist Party* — or when writing about members of such parties in general. Example: *The Communists won the municipal elections in Naples.*

company: The word *company* usually refers to a business enterprise registered with local government authorities and licensed to engage in selected business practices. It is good practice to refer to a company by its full proper name on first reference. You can use a short form in subsequent references.

In any case, abbreviate the word "company" when it appears at the end of a full proper name – *Ford Motor Co.* – but not when it appears in the middle – *Aluminum Company of America.* Follow this convention with similar words, like *corporation* and *incorporated.*

See also **corporation**, **incorporated**, **limited** and **trade names**.

compass points are not capitalized unless they are part of a proper noun – *A northeast monsoon, a southerly breeze, on the south side of the island, South Korea, North Dakota, South Pole, West Indies.*

Some compass points are hyphenated – *The China Princess, a passenger vessel, sank 150 miles north-northwest of Taiwan.*

compleat, complete: The former is an antiquated spelling that sometimes appears today in jocular contexts, often in reference to a classic work on fishing, *The Compleat Angler* by Izaak Walton (1593-1683). Today, "complete" is preferred.

complementary, complimentary: The former means "supplemental", the latter, "free of charge".

complex sentence is a sentence with at least one main clause and one subordinate clause. A subordinate clause is a string of related words with a subject and a predicate, but it is not a complete sentence. For this reason it depends on a main clause to provide it with meaning. Example: *Mr. Wong Chi Kei, who represents a functional constituency, is a member of Meeting Point.* In this example, *who represents a functional constituency* is a subordinate clause, and because it is an incomplete idea, it *depends* on the main clause for its meaning.

See also **compound sentence**, **compound-complex sentence**, **rhythm** and **simple sentence**.

compose, **comprise:** These are used somewhat interchangeably, but some stylists prefer that *comprise* be used in the active voice followed by a direct object. Example: *The board comprises six members.* Also acceptable: *The board is composed of six members.*

See also **include.**

composition titles: These are the titles of articles, books, essays, television shows, plays, operas, lectures, speeches, and musical scores.

The first word and all of the “main” words are capitalized, and the title is in italics. Examples: *The Elements of Style, The Government and Politics of Hong Kong, The Other Hong Kong Report.*

The only problem with this rule is that people disagree about what a “main” word is. As a rule of thumb, all nouns, pronouns, adverbs, and verbs are capitalized, as are most articles. The conjunction *and* is not capitalized, and the article *the* is not capitalized. Prepositions of three letters or less — *at, for, of, in*, and so on — also are not capitalized.

See also **capitalization** and **quotation marks**.

compound adjectives are created by linking words with hyphens in a construction that modifies a noun — *an on-again, off-again relationship; a six-Iane highway; a honky-tonk atmosphere; four-part harmony; a four-on-the-floor transmission.*

Compound adjectives cause a lot of confusion for beginning writers, especially when it comes to people’s ages. The following forms, which show up frequently, are incorrect: *A 15-year old boy...*; *He was 15-years-old when the cancer was diagnosed.* The correct forms are: *A 15-year-old boy...*; *He was 15 years old when the cancer was diagnosed....*

Another common error is to link adverbs and adjectives, like this: *He was always a properly-dressed man prior to his retirement.* The reason this is incorrect is that the word *properly* is an adverb modifying *dressed,* not an adjective modifying *man.* The correct form is *properly dressed man.*

See also **ages** and **hyphens**.

compound sentence is sentence with two main clauses. Example: *Gen. Ramos is head of the armed forces, and his brother is the mayor of Baranca.*

See also **complex sentence**, **compound-complex sentence**, **rhythm** and **simple sentence**.

compound-complex sentence is a sentence with two main clauses and at least one subordinate clause. Example: *Gen. Ramos, who graduated from the United States Military Academy, is head of the armed forces, and his brother is the mayor of Baranca.*

See also **complex sentence**, **compound sentence**, **loose sentence**, **periodic sentence**, **rhythm** and **simple sentence**.

comprador: In a south or southeast Asian context, this is a local native working in a foreign business establishment as a liaison between the foreign management and local staff and local clients.

concern is commonly misused this way: *He concerns the refugee resettlement problem.* This is classic Chinglish, because the Chinese equivalent of the same verb can be used in a transitive way, meaning that it can take an object. This is not so in English. In English, *concern* acts on human beings, or, by extension, their agencies: *The refugee resettlement problem concerns him.*

The verb sometimes is used in a reflexive way, like this: *She concerns herself with crocheting and weaving,* meaning *She spends her time crocheting and weaving.* When used intransitively with *about* or *with,* it takes on a stronger meaning *He is concerned about your irregular work habits.*

concise writing: Shun circumlocutions – *Maggie Leung has been made the recipient of the Human Rights Press Award* should be *Maggie Leung received the Human Rights Press Award.*

Consider the common phrase *good progress.* Is there such a thing as *bad* progress? Just *progress,* if you please. Another of this author's pet peeves, one which shows up in student writing, is "more and more", as in *Inline skating is becoming more and more popular today.* You can drop "more" altogether – *Inline skating is becoming increasingly popular* or just *Inline skating is increasingly popular.* The present tense implies that the sense is "today".

If you think carefully about it, you might also be able to omit "very" and "many" as well.

As these examples suggest, most writing can be *tightened,* which is to say, shortened. A good editor might return copy to you with the command, "Tighten that up!" Windy, overblown writing is boring and redundant. You want to seduce your readers, not bore them to death.

In rewriting, pare away needless words. Compare *Few students showed familiarity with the subject, and in many cases their answers lacked details* with *Few students were familiar with the subject, and many of their answers lacked details.*

Compare *Students going back and forth to school formed carpools* with *Students formed carpools.*

See also **concrete language, many, more and more, precise language, very** and **word selection**.

concrete language is specific. Do not make the reader guess your meaning. Example: *The provincial governor is overweight and he smokes a lot.* Overweight by how much? How much does he smoke? *The provincial governor smokes a pack of cigarettes a day and weighs 112 kilograms.*

See also **concise writing**, **precise language** and **word selection**.

congress: Capitalize when used in reference to the U.S. lawmaking body.

conjunctive adverbs: These are words such as *anyway, besides, consequently, furthermore, however, indeed, meanwhile, moreover, nevertheless, nonetheless, therefore....*

They get their name from the fact that they function like conjunctions, but the clauses that follow them tend to modify the action in the previous clause, much like an adverb.

When appearing between two main clauses in a single sentence, they should be preceded by semicolons.

See also **fancy words**, **semicolon** and **word selection**.

connotative meaning: A secondary, hidden or suggestive meaning, as opposed to *denotative meaning,* or primary meaning. Compare *shining, twinkling*. These refer to qualities of light, but *shining example* means *a good example, a twinkle in her eye* implies *with a sense of humor.*

See also **denotative meaning.**

consistency is a key to good style. If you unwittingly write *9 percent* in one sentence and *9%* in another, then you have been inconsistent. When you are inconsistent, it appears that you do not know what you are doing. This affects your credibility.

When you realize that you have been inconsistent, it is wise to turn to a style guide for a standard.

Consistency applies to more than just style, however. You should strive for consistency on all levels — facts, organization, sentence structure, tone and themes.

consul, consul general: A *consul* is a person appointed by a foreign government to oversee the welfare of business enterprises and citizens of his country in another nation. A *consul general* is a high-ranking consul, slightly below an ambassador. The plural is *consuls general*.

See also **commission, embassy.**

consulate: A *consulate* is the residence and office of a consul, including personnel.

See also **commission, embassy.**

continual, **continuous**: *Continual* means *continuing intermittently. Continuous* means *continuing without interruption*.

contractions: These are words created by combining two or more words and replacing some of the letters with an apostrophe. Examples: *don't, can't, won't, haven't.*

Formerly, stylists objected to these on the grounds that they were colloquial and vulgar. However, times have changed, and they are here to stay. Use them freely in informal writing. Do not use them if the desired tone is formal.

Some contractions are old-fashioned and seem affected — *shan't, e'er* — so they should be avoided. Other contractions are too colloquial. Examples: *he'll, there's, you're, s'pose, he's.* These should not be used outside of direct quotations. If in doubt, simply do not use them.

See also **tone**.

controller, **comptroller**: These are synonyms for an organization's highest ranking financial officer. Both are acceptable, so you should follow the usage preferred by the organization in question.

co-operative principle: Do not use the definite article "the" until agreement has been established between you and the reader about what thing it is you are writing about. You can do this by using an indefinite article on first reference – *An accident occurred Monday. The accident involved a car and a bus.*

coordinate adjectives generally take commas when modifying a noun, unless the adjective nearest the noun has a special relationship with it – *a large city council*, not *a large, city council*. Here, "city council" is a unitary concept. Other examples: *a good little boy*, not *a good, little boy*; *a big black cat*, not *a big, black cat.*

copy is the slang writers use to mean typewritten text. *Hard copy* is copy that is on paper. *Soft copy* is copy in the form of a computer file. *Copy preparation* is the process of preparing copy according to standards set by editors.

See also **manuscript**.

copyediting symbols: Manuscripts should be free of errors and stylistic inconsistencies, but they show up nevertheless in most copy. One common standard in American academic circles is that a single typographical error per manuscript page is an acceptable error rate.

Writers and editors are expected to go over typewritten copy with a pencil to make last minute changes. To make these changes, *copyediting symbols* are used. They are slightly different from proofreading symbols. The symbols are standardized in the English-speaking world:

abbreviate	The United States envoy left the summit early.
insert apostrophe	She hasnt returned.
bold face	Events in September
capitalize	He arrives in september**.**
center	Box Score
insert colon	He finished the heat in 220.5
insert comma	On the other hand it failed.
correct but unusual	Democrat Szeto Wah was re-elected.
insert dash	“Okay,” he paused, “let’s do it.”

delete word	It was only only a summary.
hyphenate	He named a Hong Kong based firm.
ignore change	It was a 10-mile circuit.
insert text	An oil rig collapsed in sea.
italicize	Mr. Wong read The Analects.
make lowercase	The Governor vetoed the bill.
join	The general or dered french fries.
begin new paragraph	In summary, the evidence is in.
delete character	Have you eatten yet?
convert to numerals	He resides at Nine Waterloo road.
turn upside down	"Beware of the platform gap!"
delete space	That family owns a golden retriever.
move left	Introduction: The Early Days of the Colony
move right	Groceries $12.50
insert space	There are variations acrossethnic groups.
insert stop	A US trade boycott is imminent.
insert quotation marks	Don’t harass me, he told the press.
insert semicolon	He won’t marry her however….
separate	The powerplant often shuts down.
spell out	About 5 boys witnessed the event.
transpose order	The Wiaters’ Race is next week.
link	Women seem to enjoy the play as much as men do.

For a similar list, in use at Oxford University Press, see *Hart's Rules.*

corporate names: Some corporations use unacceptable style in their names, and editors usually override this style in favor of local house style. For example, the *iMail,* a defunct Hong Kong newspaper, was referred to as the *I-Mail* in other media.

corporation: When part of the full proper name of a company, *corporation* should be abbreviated on first reference if it appears at the end of the name – *Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp.* – but not when it appears in the middle of the name – *the State Power Corporation of China.* The abbreviation should be dropped on second reference.

See also **company** and **incorporated.**

councilor, **councillor:** Note that this word is spelled two ways. The former is preferred by American stylists.

courses: The titles of college and university courses are capitalized, but they are not italicized or enclosed in quotation marks.

court martial is the formal name for a military trial. The plural is *courts martial.* Courts martial are rarely open to the general public, and the proceedings may be classified as government secrets.

courtesy titles are titles such as *Mr., Mrs., Miss,* and *Ms.* They are used as a form of polite address – which is to say, as a courtesy. All but *Miss* take a full stop, but some stylists refuse to use a full stop with Ms., arguing that it is not an abbreviation for anything.

Rules for the use of courtesy titles vary from country to country and from medium to medium, but here are a few general observations. Courtesy titles are not used in most American print media. In commonwealth countries, most of which follow British journalistic practices, courtesy titles are commonplace.

When courtesy titles are used, they usually are not used on the first reference, so *Financial Secretary Anthony Leung* becomes *Mr. Leung* on second reference. A man in the street introduced on first reference as *Wong Kwok Shing, a punter who attended the match,* becomes *Mr. Wong* on second reference. Some newspapers published in commonwealth countries drop the full stops in all courtesy titles – *Mr, Mrs,* and so on. Whether you use full stops or not, the most important point to remember is to be consistent.

Some newspapers combine courtesy titles and organizational titles – *Mr. Justice Li,* for example, instead of merely *Mr. Li* or *Chief Justice Li* – but this is old-fashioned and hard to justify today.

See also **academic titles; Dr**.; **Mr., Miss and Ms.; organizational titles; Ph.D.;** and **Prof**.

cousin: English lacks the extensive vocabulary of Chinese to describe family relations. The word "cousin" is used for all sons and daughters of brothers and sisters of your mother or father.

See also **family relations**.

credible, **credulous:** *Credible* means *easily believed. Credulous* means *willing to believe too readily.* Synonyms include *unsuspecting, trustful.* People can be *credulous,* stories can be *credible*.

crisis situation: A crisis is a type of situation, so *crisis situation* is redundant. *Crisis* alone is sufficient.

See also **situation**.

criteria is the plural of *criterion,* so it requires a plural verb – *The criteria were spelled out in a memo.*

crossroads is plural, its singular form long ago having passed out of usage.

See also **plurals**.

cultural China: This is a reference to Chinese culture worldwide, especially as reflected by the Chinese diasporas.

See also **Greater China**.

currencies: The yuan, the petaca, the yen, the dollar, the euro. . . . These are not capitalized.

See also **money** and **yuan.**

cutline: Newspaper jargon for *caption,* or lines under a photo describing it. The term comes from *cut,* a printer's term for a photo in a publication.

Cutlines are written in present tense, no matter how old the photo is: *Scottish Nato soldiers parade in Bielefeld, Germany, during the inauguration of a rapid reaction force*; *Japanese Emperor Akihito collects rice plants while harvesting a rice paddy at the Imperial Palace for a traditional offering.*

For human subjects in a photo, identification is given from left to right and, if there is more than one row, then from front to back — *From left....* If there are only two people in the photo, then you may follow a style such as *Financial Secretary Hamish McLeod (left)*….

For a mugshot, which is a photo only of a person's head, the cutline contains only the individual's name: *Hamish McLeod.* If there is not enough space for the full name, then *Mr. McLeod* will suffice.

D, d

dash: The dash (—) is often confused with the hyphen (-). A useful way to remember the difference is that dashes are used to separate words, while hyphens connect them.

Typewriters did not have dashes on their keyboards. On a typewriter, a dash was created by typing two hyphens in a row (--). Today we do the same on computers.

Dashes are most commonly used like commas and parentheses to set off material in apposition: *Mr. and Mrs. Chan and their two daughters — Karly, 10, and Karen, 8 — are planning to emigrate to Australia.* In this example, commas would have been confusing because the embedded material has commas. Parentheses are not necessary. Note that there are word spaces on each side of the dash.

Dashes are very common after datelines in newspapers: *SEOUL — South Korean President Ro Tae-woo formally resigned from the governing….*

Dashes are sometimes used to attribute a quotation: " *Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." — John F. Kennedy.*

Dashes come in two or three varieties, depending on the type font. The dash that was used in the above examples is called an *em-dash* because it is the width of a capital "m." Another variety is the *en-dash,* which is the width of a capital "n." It is used in numerical tables in the place of missing data.

The em dash also is used to denote deleted or missing text: " *F— you!" shouted the protestor at the chancellor.* Sometimes a few of the first and last letters are provided, like this: *"Don't give me any sh—t!"*

See also **dateline**, **foul language** and **hyphen**.

data is plural for *datum,* but the latter is no longer in common use. The best usage dictates that *data* be treated as a plural, but treating it as a singular noun is gaining in respectability.

dateline: This word is based on the content of the first line of news stories in former days – *NEW YORK, May 10, 1992*. In other words, it was a line that included the date of the news story. Because news is transmitted almost instantaneously now, it is conventional today to drop the date while keeping the city name, or both the city and country names if the city is not well known. In news dispatches, the city name is always written in all caps, but not the country name – *SHENZHEN, China*.

The rule at most newspapers is to provide a dateline on any story that originates outside of a newspaper's circulation area.

dates, in British style, should be written in this order: day, month, year — *26 September 1987*. To write *Sept. 26, 1987,* is American style, which abbreviates the month and places it first, and sets off the year with commas. In China, the custom is to place the year first, followed by the month and the date — *1993 September 26*. This is never done in English.

Do not abbreviate when following British style explained above. Do not use ordinal numbers — *21st May, 8th August, 3rd November*. Use the year only for years other than the current year.

In American style, the year is always separated from the day of the month by a comma – *In the U.S., Dec. 7, 1941, is sometimes called the Day of Infamy.* However, there is no comma if the day of the month is omitted — *December 1941*. Do not write *between 22 and 25 December* if *from 22 to 25 December* is meant. The word *between* implies that the end points are excluded.

Normally, the year is omitted if the date given is within the current calendar year. It also is considered stylistically weak to write *last year* and *next year.* It's stronger merely to name the year.

See also **numbers, numerals;** and **time**.

day: Note that this word is capitalized when used with expressions such as *Valentine's Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day*.

days of the week: Normally, days of the week are not used with days of the month unless there is some need to emphasize the day of the week that a certain date occurs on. So, it is considered wordy to write *The matter will be discussed at a meeting on Monday, June 8,* because any calendar will reveal the day of the week.

The phrases *next Monday* and *last Tuesday* are prolix. If you write merely *The meeting will take place Monday,* your reader will infer that you mean *next Monday*.

decades should be written as numerals in most cases – *the 1980s, the '90s.* Note that in the second example, the apostrophe is placed before the "9".

Decades that represent historical periods can be written out and capitalized -- *the Roaring Twenties, the Sixties.*

See also **capitalization.**

deceased is an old-fashioned euphemism for *dead* or *died,* which are preferred.

See also **euphemisms**.

decimals should not be written out, but expressed as numerals — *98.6 degrees, 99.9 percent.* Do not use commas in place of full stops; this is a European style, not British or American.

If numbers are less than one, they are preceded by a zero in almost all cases — *0.45 grams of heroin.* Gun calibers are an exception — *.32 -caliber revolver.*

See also **caliber** and **numbers, numerals**.

dedicate is misused like this: *The organization dedicates to popularizing art.* This should be *The organization is dedicated to popularizing art*.

deejay, d.j.: Short, colloquial forms for "disk jockey". *Deejay* is acceptable if an informal tone is desired. It is preferred to *d.j.*

defence, defense: The former is British; the latter, American.

defining and nondefining: See **restrictive and nonrestrictive.**

definite article: See **the.**

degrees: See **academic titles** and **temperature**.

Democrat, **Democratic:** In reference to the American political party, "Democrat" is a noun and "Democratic" is an adjective. In the U.S., some Republicans use “Democrat” as an adjective as a way to insult members of the opposition.

demotic: Common; everyday; colloquial.

demotic English: Writing that attempts to capture the sounds of speech by common people -- *wanna, gotta, shoulda.* Not a good practice outside of direct quotations.

dengue: Tropical, mosquito-borne disease characterized by flu-like symptoms.

denotative meaning: The primary meaning of a word, as opposed to its *connotative,* or secondary, meaning. For example, *high as a kite* could refer to *the altitude of a kite,* but it more often refers to drug-induced euphoria – *The streaker ran naked across the football pitch, apparently as high as a kite.* This is the phrase's connotative meaning.
See also **connotative meaning**.

dependants: In American English, this means "spouses and children of military and diplomatic personnel". Note the spelling: It sometimes is confused with the word "dependent".

despatch, **dispatch:** The former is British, the latter, American.

destruct is used erroneously as a verb. Use *destroy* instead.

diarrhea, diarrhoea: The former is American, the latter, British.

diaspora: The dispersion of people from their original homeland – *the Chinese diaspora.*

dieresis: See **accents**.

Diet is the Japanese parliament. It usually is preceded by a lowercase *the* and, on first reference, is followed by an explanation. Example: *Japanese Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe has rejected summons to testify in the Diet, Japan’s parliament, about his involvement in the money scandal.*

different: *Different from* is preferred in the U.S. — *The play was quite different from the version staged last autumn. Different than* and *different to,* abhorred by American editors, are acceptable in the U.K..

dimensions are written with numerals – *He is* 5 *feet 11 inches tall; the smallest room is 8 feet by 10 feet; the other team has a 6-foot-8-inch basketball player.*

Do not use quotation marks to indicate dimensions.
See also **numbers, numerals**.

dim sum, like spinach and spaghetti, does not have a plural form, so *dim sums* is incorrect. This phrase for the common Cantonese breakfast fare is common enough in English not to be italicized.
See also **zero plural.**

dingus: Gadget, thingamajig.

discriminate often requires against. *The Yiu Zhu are severely discriminated by the Han people* is a typical error. It should be *The Yiu Zhu are discriminated against. . . .*

diseases and **medical conditions** generally are not capitalized, and some do not take articles – *He has a cold and his wife has the flu; she had mumps when she was 8. Recently she was also investigated for amenorrhea.*
The few diseases and conditions that are capitalized are named after their discoverers – *Parkinson's disease, Munchausen syndrome, Chagas disease.*

disinformation: A buzzword in daily journalism to describe the unfortunate practice of some governments to mislead the public by issuing false or misleading statements.

disinterested means *impartial,* but it is often mistakenly used in place of *uninterested,* which means *not interested.*

districts of cities are capitalized — *East L.A., Hung Hom, Vancouver's Shaughnessy Heights.*
See also **capitalization.**

d.j.: See **deejay.**

do: American slang for "hairdo" – *Say, that's a real cool do you've got there!*

doctor: See **Dr.**

dog: American slang for "friend" – *What's up, Dog?* or *He's my dog.*

dollars: Do not write *5 dollars.* Follow one of the following styles, all of which are acceptable -- *$5, $15.20, $1 million*. If there is any doubt about which kind of dollar is referred to, then precede the dollar sign with a standard abbreviation, without points – *HK$7.50, S$100, US$1,600, AU$600.*
See also **cents** and **money.**

dos and don'ts: Note the style. This common English idiom is often written as *do's and don'ts,* which is technically incorrect.

dotty: Feeble-minded.

double entendre is French for “double meaning”. Unintended double meanings are a source of embarrassment for writers. Examples include headlines such as these, which have appeared in American newspapers in recent years — *Short Police Officer Loses Sex Appeal / Husband Beats Republican Wife* / *New Faces Sit on Boards* / *British Arrest 126 Protesting Missiles.*

The best protection against this embarrassment is to be constantly on alert for hidden meanings in your writing. You should look for nouns that may be mistaken for verbs, and vice versa.

Double Tenth: The tenth day of the tenth month – 10 October – is National Day in Taiwan. It marks the 1911 Wuchang Uprising, which led to the overthrow of the Manchu government and the establishment of the Republic of China.

See also **People's Republic of China** and **Republic of China.**

Dr. is a courtesy title for a person with a doctoral degree from a university. Be careful how you use this title: People who are entitled to it are overly sensitive to abuse. A *doctor* might be either a *physician* or hold a *doctor of philosophy*. If there is any ambiguity about what kind of doctor you are referring to, then you should clarify. Example: *Dr. David Yau, who received a doctorate in computer science from The University of Texas at Austin . . . ; Dr. Han Suyin, a trauma specialist at Queen Mary Hospital. . . .*

Fussy editors insist that "Dr." be used for earned doctorates only. People with honorary doctorates are not entitled to this courtesy title, they argue.

From an academic standpoint, a Ph.D. is higher in status than an M.D. Some optometrists call themselves doctors, but M.D.s wince at this. The J.D., or doctor of juridical science, is not a Ph.D., and some academics argue that holders of the J.D. are not entitled to be called doctors.

See also **academic titles** and **courtesy titles.**

draft, draught: The former is American; the latter, British. But the words usually are pronounced the same. *Draughts* is British for the American word "checkers".

dragonhead: Regionalism in southern China for head of a Triad organization. A similar word in America is "godfather", head of a Mafia family.

drinks driving, drunk driving: The former is British; the latter, American.

drown means to suffocate in water. A person who *drowned* is *dead* and, as such, cannot be pulled from the water and resuscitated.

See also **electrocute**, **strangle** and **suffocate**.

drug charges, drugs charges: The former is American; the latter, British.

dwarf: The traditional plural form of this word has been *dwarfs*, but *dwarves* has been gaining in popularity in recent decades, so it is now preferred.

See also **wharf.**

dynasty is capitalized when used in reference to a specific dynasty identified with a proper noun – *The Tang Dynasty lasted from A.D. 618-907.*

E, e

each takes a singular verb -- *Each player has three chances to score; each man and woman has the right to vote.*

See also **anyone**, **everybody** and **neither**.

Earth is capitalized when used as the proper name for our planet. Otherwise, it is lowercase – *The third planet from the Sun is Earth; she is a down-to-earth girl.*

See also **sun**.

ecological is often used to mean *environmental*, but this is incorrect usage. *Ecology* is *the scientific study of the environment,* so *ecological problem* has the same sense as *the problem of physics*. It should be *environmental problem.*

EDT: Abbreviation for "Eastern Daylight Time", a time zone on the East Coast of the U.S. The clock is moved forward on hour from the first Sunday in April until the last Sunday in October, when it is moved back again. When Eastern Daylight Time is not in effect, the time on the East Coast of the U.S. is called Eastern Standard Time.

The abbreviation is acceptable on the first reference after a specific time – *The World Cup finals will be broadcast in New York City beginning at 7:30 a.m. EDT.* Note the absence of points.

educationalist, **educationist:** These are often used incorrectly to mean *educator.*

An *educator* is a *teacher, lecturer, professor* or whatnot. An *educationalist* is an *authority on the theory and practice of education*. A person with a Ph.D. in education is an example of an *educationalist.*

e.g. is an abbreviation for the Latin expression *exempli gratia,* and, like other foreign expressions, it should not be used in informal writing. For formal documents such as technical reports it may be acceptable, however.

See also **etc.** and **foreign words and phrases**.

elderly can be a noun or an adjective – *One of the government's priorities is aid for the elderly.* Also: *An elderly woman was fined for begging in the Jordan MTR station.*

See also **old**.

electrocute means *kill by an electric shock.* A person who was *electrocuted* is *dead.*

See also **drown**, **strangle** and **suffocate**.

ellipsis: The ellipsis is a series of three points, usually used to denote omitted material. There are word spaces between the points themselves. Example: "*I will not hesitate… to pursue this matter to the very end," the prosecutor said.*

It also is used to indicate a pause in speech. "*Hm…," she said haltingly, "I don't know what to make of this*."

The ellipsis can be followed by other punctuation, so an ellipsis that occurs at the end of a sentence will end with another point. Then you would need four in a row, like this — *The ceremony is about to begin….*

email takes no hyphen and is not capitalized. The plural is usually *email*, but when referring to a specific number of them, then add an *-s – The university's system distributes about 100,000 emails daily.*

It can be a verb as well – *I'll email you the details.* For the past tense, use *emailed.*

See also **mail** and **zero plural.**

embarrassment is commonly misspelled with only one *r* , probably because of its similarity to *harassment.*

embassy: Viewing the movie thriller *Spy Game,* starring Robert Redford, astute moviegoers were bemused to see the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank building in Hong Kong referred to as the American embassy.

First of all, it was a bank building, not an embassy; furthermore, no nation has an embassy in Hong Kong. All embassies are located in the Chinese capital, Beijing. America does have a consulate in Hong Kong, however.

See also **commission, consulate** and **consul general.**

em dash: A dash as wide as a capital "m". When the dash is used to set off parenthetical material, word spaces should be provided on each side.

See also **dash** and **en dash.**

emigrate, **immigrate:** People who leave one country to settle in another *emigrate from* it. They *immigrate to* the country they eventually settle in.

See also **migrant, migrate**.

emigré: A person who has left his or her native country in order to live elsewhere.

emphasis, emphasize: *Emphasis* is a noun, and it often is followed by *on – They will put the emphasis on quality, not cost.*

Emphasize, the verb, is commonly and incorrectly used with *on*, like this: *The council will emphasize on the development of high art.* The correct form is *The council will emphasize the development of high art.*

en dash: A dash the width of a capital "n", used in tables to denote missing data.

See also **dash** and **em dash.**

England, **English:** *England* is what is left of the island of Great Britain when you take away Wales and Scotland.

Some people who are British, but not English, do not like to be referred to as English. This is especially true of Scottish people.

See also **British Isles** and **United Kingdom**.

enquire, **inquire:** The former is British; the latter, American. Even in the U.K., however, "enquire" is passing out of fashion, gradually being replaced by "inquire".

ensure, insure: The former is British; the latter, American.

entrepôt: A center of trade. This word is commonly used to refer to Hong Kong. Note the circumflex over the o.

See also **accents.**

environmental is often confused with *ecological*.

See also **ecological**.

eo-: Prefix meaning "original" – *The eo-apple is believed to be 40 million years old and native to China.*

See also **ur-.**

epoch: See **geological time**.

equally as: Some stylists view this common phrase as redundant – *Her twin sons are equally tall*, not *equally as tall.*

equipment: A common error is to write the plural with an *-s* – *A brief description of our audio-visual equipments.* It should be *equipment.*

See also **zero plural.**

era: See **geological time**.

-ese: Suffix denoting derivative – *They are Hongkongese.* An *-n* is sometimes inserted to make the word more pronounceable – *Shanghainese is unintelligible to Beijingers.*

Esq.: Short for "esquire", an old fashioned title for gentlemen. Its use today usually is jocular.

estate wagon, station wagon: A private car with a square back, sometimes with three rows of seats. The former rendition is British; the latter, American.

EST: Abbreviation for Eastern Standard Time, a time zone in the eastern U.S. Note the absence of points.

See also **EDT.**

etc. is an abbreviation for the Latin *et cetera.* As a foreign expression, it should not be used outside of a direct quotation in the mass media.

See also **foreign words and phrases**.

euphemisms are synonyms that are considered less offensive than their counterparts. It is usually best to be direct. *Passed away* and *departed*, for example, are often used to mean

died, but editors prefer *died* or *dead*. More examples: *lavatory, rest room, men's room, women's room, public convenience, comfort station, washroom, loo,* and *powder room* are all euphemisms for *toilet.* In diplomatic circles, *frank* or *candid* discussions are likely to have been *rancorous.* In military circles, *collateral damage* means *civilian casualties caused by bombing,* and *1 megadeath* means *1 million deaths.*

In most of these examples, the euphemisms are *circumlocutions,* or roundabout ways of speaking deliberately designed to blunt the harsh reality of the issues in question. A strong writer will recognize these for what they are and either avoid them or pass them along to the reader with an explanation. Example: *In the event of a nuclear attack from the north, South Korea's military leaders believe that Seoul's extensive underground arcades and rail networks will be insurance against massive "collateral damage," a military term meaning "civilian casualties."*

In any event, good taste should be the ultimate criterion in deciding the usage.

euro: like other currencies — the dollar, the peso, the petaca, the yuan, and so on — euro is not capitalized.

See also **currencies** and **dollar.**

everybody and **everyone** take a singular verb – *Everybody seems to prefer the leftist candidates…*; *everyone is coming* .

every day, **everyday:** The former is an adverbial phrase, the latter, an adjective. *He visits her every day* but *Rehearsals are an everyday affair.*

See also **someday**.

ex: When followed by a hyphen and a title, *ex* means *former — Hong Kong's ex-Governor Harold Wilson….* The *ex-* is not capitalized.

It should be noted that *ex-* has negative connotations in English, so *former* is preferred — *Hong Kong's former Governor Harold Wilson….* Prefer *ex-* for someone who was forced out of a position because of incompetence or malfeasance.

exclamation marks (!) should be used only inside direct quotations to denote exclamations, interjections or shouting – *"Jesus Christ!" yelled the deputy.* Newspaper headline writers sometimes use the exclamation mark for humorous headlines, but this is easily overworked.

If you use exclamation marks outside of direct quotations, then the reader may think it is you, the writer, who are exclaiming and that you have thus lost control of your emotions. Readers expect objectivity in the text, so an outburst of emotion on your part will affect your credibility as a writer.

See also **interjections.**

ex officio is Latin, meaning literally *from office.* As a foreign expression, you should avoid it in most contexts.

Some people have certain rights and responsibilities by virtue of the office they hold, but they may not exercise them, so the expression often means *in name only.* An *ex officio committee member,* therefore, is usually a person who is a member of a committee

because of his or her position in an organization. In some organizations, *ex officio* committee members rarely participate in committee meetings.

expiration, expiry: The former is American – *The date of expiration is June 24.* The latter is British – *The date of expiry has passed.*

F, f

Fahrenheit is capitalized because it is derived from a proper name. Gabriel Daniel Fahrenheit (1686-1736) was a German physicist.

See also **Celsius**, **temperature**.

fall, the season, is American for *autumn.* It is not capitalized.

See also **seasons.**

fallback, as in *a fallback position*, is one word.

family relations: The English language lacks the extensive vocabulary in Chinese for describing family relations, so the categories, say, of older and younger uncles on mother's and father's sides are all just *uncles* in English.

The same applies to *aunts.* The children of your aunts and uncles are your *first cousins.* Grandfathers and grandmothers on both your mother's and father's sides are merely called *grandmother, grandfather,* with no distinction between the two. If a distinction is necessary, English speakers say something like *His grandfather on his father's side was a railroad man.*

An uncle of your father or your mother is your *granduncle* or *great-uncle.* A child of a cousin of your father or mother is your *second cousin.* If you share only one parent with someone else, that person is your *half-brother* or *half-sister.*

In-laws are relatives of your legal spouse, so your husband's brother is your *brother-in-law,* his mother your *mother-in-law,* and so on.

famous: Do not tell your readers that someone you are writing about is "famous" — *Miss Anita Auw, the famous Cambodian songstress….*

If the reader does not realize that a person is famous, then the individual in question probably is not really famous at all. On the other hand, if the reader already knows the person is famous, then you needn't mention this fact.

Besides, the mere fact that you are writing about this person suggests a degree of notoriety. A skillful writer will simply outline the person's achievements and let the reader decide the degree of fame that should be accorded.

See also **historical** and **hyperbole**.

fancy words: Weak writers tend to browse through dictionaries in search of fancy synonyms for ordinary words. The result is the digging up of old, forgotten words that long ago were buried in dictionaries — and probably should remain there: *eleemosynary, interlocution, ratiocination, bathetic, commodification….*

Few people know the definitions of such words, so a good rule of thumb is to use only words that you are familiar with.

Far East is capitalized.

See also **capitalization; Orient, Oriental; regions;** and **West**.

farther, **further:** *Farther* is used for distances: *Tai Po is farther down the highway. Further* is used to mean *additionally – The minister said further that the bonds would be issued in Britain*.

favor, **favour:** The former is American; the latter, British.

fax, the abbreviation of *facsimile,* should not be written in all caps.

fee is often plural, as in *school fees*, because there is more than one fee associated with activities such as matriculating in a university.

feet, foot: Note the following styles: *He was 5 feet tall*; but *It was a 15-foot snake*. Also, *He rented a 500-square-foot flat.* All of these are correct.

See also **dimensions;** and **numbers, numerals.**

female: This word can be either an adjective or a noun, but the plural noun *females* is offensive to some stylists. *Women* is preferred. *Female toilet* is poor usage because toilets lack gender. *Women's room* is preferred.

See also **lady** and **male**.

feng shui: Literally, this phrase means "wind water", two important factors in Chinese geomancy. The phrase is two words and it is not capitalized.

See also **foreign words and phrases**.

FEU, TEU: FEU is the abbreviation of *40-foot equivalent unit,* a unit of measurement equivalent to one 40-foot shipping container.

A TEU is a *20-foot equivalent unit,* so two TEUs equal one FEU.

These have been showing up in the news in recent years as lowercase acronyms, but they are not yet recognized as words by lexicographers, so they should not be used without definition.

few, quite a few: These have almost opposite meanings. *Few people came* means *Some people came, but not many.* On the other hand, *Quite a few people came* means *More than just a few people came.*

fewer, less: Use *fewer* for individual, countable objects. Use *less for* noncountable, mass nouns – *The United States has fewer submarines than Russia…. There is less water in the reservoir now.*

See also **less.**

field marshal is the senior military rank in several armies of the world, often symbolized by an embossed baton. It is the highest military rank in the British army, and it is the second highest in the French army.

The United States does not use this term. The equivalent rank in the U.S. is *general of the army,* or *five-star general.* Only one officer may hold this rank at any given time.

See also **military titles.**

figures: Figures and tables are uncommon in mass circulation newspapers and magazines, so you should not provide them when writing for the mass audience. You should provide them only on request from your editors.

See also **numbers, numerals.**

Filipina: A female person from the Philippines.

See also **Philippines**.

finishing line, finish line: The latter is preferred.

See also **starting line, start line.**

first reference means *the first time you refer to something* in your writing, and usually discussions of first reference pertain to people's names and titles. Any reference after the first one is called *second reference.*

The style in English and Chinese writing is quite different. In English, the first time you refer to someone in your writing, you should use the person's full proper name and, if not already clear from the context, some kind of title. Examples: *Local pop star Stephanie Sun...*; *Vice-Chancellor Charles Kao....* After this *first reference,* you should use only a courtesy title and the person's last name — *Miss Cheung, Prof. Kao, Mr. O'Connell.* These are examples of *second reference.*

See also **courtesty titles; Dr.; Mr., Mrs., Miss and Ms.;** and **titles**.

fish: The most common plural is *fish.* When referring to different species of fish, then *fishes* may be used, but it is falling out of fashion.

flag-selling day is Chinglish. It has no equivalent in English.

See also **Chinglish.**

flak, flak attack: Journalese for *public relations staff* and *a flurry of public relations activity.* The connotation is derogatory.

flame: Computer jargon for sending a rude message on a computer network.

flaunt, flout: *To flaunt* is *to show off.* Example: *He flaunted his new Daimler by driving up and down Nathan Road. To flout* is *to show scorn or defiance,* usually for the law. Example: *He flouted the law by tearing up his citation and throwing it at the judge.*

Flesch Reading Ease Score: A scientifically derived score indicating the readability of writing, developed by Rudolf Flesch. It is available in some word processing software.

See also **Gunning Fog Index.**

flier: Often misspelled as *flyer,* this word can mean either an airplane pilot or a small handbill.

fluid volumes: Use numerals, and do not abbreviate the units when writing these – *10 milliliters, 15 fluid ounces.*

See also **numbers, numerals.**

fluorescent: Note the spelling of this word. Some writers forget the "u".

food: The names of dishes that draw upon proper nouns have the proper part capitalized — *Boston baked beans, Welsh rarebit.* A few exceptions are phrases that have long lost their original references, such as *french fries*.

See also **capitalization.**

foot: See **feet, foot**.

Forbidden City: In the heart of the Chinese capital Beijing, this palace complex was the seat of power in China for five centuries, beginning about 1420. Note the capitalization.

See also **capitalization** and **White House.**

foreign words and phrases should not be used when writing for the general public. Exceptions may be made for words that have no common English equivalent, but that are central the issues in question. When it is necessary to use foreign words, provide the foreign word in italics or in quotation marks, and then provide a short translation in parentheses — "*feng shui" (Chinese geomancy)*….

Exceptions may be made also for some titles and legal expressions. Example: *The governor appointed him president* pro tem*; the court received a writ of* habeas corpus. Good style calls for these to be italicized, but they are in common enough use to do without the italics. In any event, such expressions should be defined if there is any doubt about whether the reader will understand.

forgo, forego: *Forgo* is a verb meaning *to do without.* Example: *He said he would forgo the contract because there is not much money involved.* On the other hand, *forego* means *to precede in space or time: It was a foregone conclusion.*

former is lowercase when part of a title, as in *former U.S. President Bill Clinton*.

Formosa: Original Dutch name for *Taiwan,* no longer in use.

See also **Republic of China** and **Taiwan.**

fortuneteller, fortunetelling: Note that these can each be written as one word.

fossick: To rummage about.

foul language: English has vulgar words that should not be used when writing for most audiences. However, these words are used rather liberally in spoken English, and sometimes it is necessary to quote speakers directly.

Some of the techniques for doing this are explained in the entry under “dash.” Another technique is to link the first letter of the vulgar word to *-word,* like this: *He used the f-word when referring to his cabinet ministers.*

This style is considered humorous and is done “tongue- in-cheek,” so to speak. A common humourous derivative is *the m-word,* a synonym for *marriage.*

See also **dash**.

fractions: For numbers greater than one, use numerals and hyphens, like this – *4-1/2 times around the world, 2-1/2 teaspoons.* For numbers less than one, write out the numbers and hyphenate – *two-thirds, three-fifths.*

See also **numbers, numerals**.

french fries is not capitalized because is has long been in common use in English.

See also **capitalization** and **food.**

from A to Z: Colloquial phrase meaning "completely".

Frontier: This word is used to refer to the border between Hong Kong and mainland China. In this sense, it is capitalized.

See also **Mainland**.

fulfil, fulfill: The former is British; the latter, American.

full monty: Complete; the whole thing; the works, as in *She told the wedding planner that she wanted the full monty.*

Lately, it has come to mean "nude", as in *The men's hockey team did the full monty, stripping for charity.*

full stop: See **period**.

full-time is hyphenated.

fundraiser, fundraising: Each of these is one word.

furor, furore: The former is American; the latter, British – and the British pronounce the "e".

future: *In the future* is American; *in future* is British.

See also **articles.**

future perfect tense: Use this tense to indicate *action occurring before a specified time in the future --By next summer, I will have been a full-time university student for 6 years.*

Note that the tense is formed by combining the helping verb *have* with the past participle of the main verb.

G, g

gaol: Old British rendition of *jail,* which is preferred nowadays, both in the U.K. and the U.S.

Garry Owen: A 17th century Irish folk hero from Limerick. Also, the official air of the U.S. Army 7th Cavalry, loved by Gen. George Custer.

gauge is a reference to the size of a shotgun barrel and the width of railroad tracks, not to mention measuring devices.

See also **caliber, gun** and **pistol.**

gay: Adjective referring to a male homosexual. It should not be used to mean "happy". The word was purloined by the homosexual community in the 1950s and it never was returned.

gender traditionally referred to a form in grammar, but it now is a modern word for “sex” and is preferred in several contexts.

See also **sexist language**.

general: Abbreviate this word when used as an organizational title for a military officer – *U.S. Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay was known for his strong belief in strategic bombing.*

See also **military titles** and **organizational titles.**

genus: First part of a species name. It is capitalized and italicized.

See also **species**.

geological time: Geological time is subdivided into eras, periods and epochs. Periods are subdivisions of eras, and epochs are subdivisions of periods. They are all capitalized – *Dinosaurs existed from the Triassic to the Cretaceous Periods, and life as we know it evolved during the Paleozoic Era*.

See also **capitalization** and **ice age**.

get: This is a word with several colloquial and idiomatic uses. The past participle is either *got,* which is British usage, or *gotten,* which is American.

Usually *get* means *to receive, to come by, to fetch, to obtain, to have use of.* In some cases, it even looks like *to be.* If shopping, people can *get a good price* on something, or if they become sick, they may have *gotten an illness.* A person can *get hit by a car* or he can *get hit on the head.* He can *get information, get his shoes from the closet, get sent to prison for five years, get a haircut.* If he is a little boy and his father is violent, he might even *get a spanking* if he is naughty.

If a person escaped from prison, then he *got away.* If he commits a crime, but is not caught, then he *gets away with* it.

If someone wants another person to return a telephone call, he might say, *“When will you get back to me?”* If he tried to call him, but the telephone was busy or out of order,

then he could not *get through* to him. This expression is used metaphorically also: If one has a difficult time explaining something to someone else, then he is *not getting through* to him.

If you don't like someone who has done something bad to you, and if you believe in revenge, then you might *want to get back at* him. If you succeed at this, then you have *gotten even* with him.

Sometimes *get* means something like *to put.* If you are in a hurry to take your dog out for a walk, you *get your dog out of the house.* You can also *get dinner ready,* which means *to prepare dinner,* and you can *get some dinner* or *get a bite to eat,* which could mean *go out to a restaurant for a light meal*.

Get also has an emotional meaning: For example, *you really get me* or *you get to me* implies that *you have a strong emotional effect on me.* And it has a meaning similar to *understand:* I *don't get it* means I *don't understand it.* Americans often say, *Did you get that?*, meaning *Did you understand?* If we succeed in communicating a complex idea, then we *get our ideas across* to someone else. If your papa is scolding you, he is usually trying *to get his ideas across* impatiently; for this reason, we say *you're really going to get it* if you have broken the rules and face astern lecture from someone.

Other meanings are *to arrive at, to reach a certain state, to succeed, to endure, to start a new action: I got back to my office at* 10 *a.m.* means *I arrived at 10*. Perhaps you overslept and *didn't get going until 9 a.m.*, meaning you *didn't leave your residence until then.* Likewise, *let's get going* means *let's move quickly.* We also say *get the lead out,* which means *you move too slowly*.

Almost everyone *gets married* sooner or later and politicians *get elected.* When we *awake* in the morning, we *get up.* If your little boy climbs a tree and is *getting dirty*, you might yell, *"Get down from there!"* And if you're like most people who live on Hong Kong Island, then *you probably don't get out* to the New Territories very often. If you enjoy travelling, then you *really get around.* In England a similar expression is *get about: He really gets about* means *he travels a lot,* but it could be used metaphorically to mean *he has casual sex.*

If you are successful in life, then you *get ahead.* People in a race together all try to *get ahead of one another.* If you *get along well* with someone, it means you *have a good relationship.* We tend to *get together* with good friends once or twice a week to socialize. Likewise, *to get it on* means *to have a strong bond* with someone else and it has sexual overtones. There are about half a dozen other strongly sexual meanings as well that are not appropriate here.

A person without much money who has difficulty meeting expenses is just barely *getting by.*

See also **gotten** and **take**.

girls is used in reference to females under 18. After 18, *women* is preferred usage.

Western women are offended when referred to as "girls", so be careful about the usage of this word.

glasses is plural even when used in reference to eyeglasses, which are a singular item, intuitively speaking. Also, the word is used in conjunction with "pair", although to do so

is not necessary. So, the following forms are correct: *Hand me that pair of glasses* and *I want to try on those glasses over there.*

See also **pants, scissors, shorts, sunglasses** and **trousers**.

gloss: To mark text with explanatory comments or instructions.

GMT: Greenwich Mean Time. You can use this abbreviation on first reference without spelling it out in full after a specific time – *When it is midnight GMT, it is 8 a.m. in Beijing.*

See also **EDT.**

gobbledegook, gobbledygook: Funny word meaning *pretentious language* or *nonsense*. It is spelled two ways. The former is preferred in the U.K, the latter, in America.

gobsmacked: British slang meaning "amazed", "astounded", "speechless". Americans would not know this word.

God, gods: *God* is capitalized when used as a proper noun referring to a single deity. Also capitalized are *Buddha, Allah, Messiah, Mohamed, Krishna, Vishnu, Thor* and so on, because they all are proper nouns.

Do not write *the God*, just *God*. *God* does not take the definite article.

Do not capitalize *god* when used as a general reference or in profanities – *Many Greek gods such as Diana were associated with natural phenomena. "God damn, god damn," he repeated over and over.*

Pronouns referring to God are also capitalized – *He, His* – exceptions being *who, whom* and *whose.* Also capitalized are synonyms such as *the Deity, the Almighty, the Holy Ghost, the Lord.* Note that the definite article is used in these references.

godown: Regionalism in Southeast Asia for *warehouse*, from the Malay *godong*.

gonna: Slang for *going to*. It is used by country bumpkins, lowbrows, troglodytes and cave dwellers. Don't use it unless you desire to appear uneducated.

gotten, in American usage, is a past participle of *get.* In British usage, *got* is preferred. So, *I've gotten a new job* in America means the same as *I've got a new job* in Britain.

A few exceptions are British idiomatic expressions such as *ill-gotten gains.*

See also **get**.

government, in British style, is capitalized when used in reference to a specific government. Example: *In Wan Chai a Government spokesman said that the Territory was drawing up plans to renew the District.* But: *In most nations it is government policy not to give citizenships without long-term residency.* American stylists do not capitalize.

Do not use "she" in reference to a government. This is old-fashioned.

For use of the article with "government", see **articles.**

See also **capitalization** and **she, her**.

governor is capitalized and abbreviated when used as a person's title. It is lowercase when used without a surname: *Gov. Chris Patten toured the last remaining Vietnamese detention center Monday. Later in the day the governor met*….

See also **capitalization.**

grammar: The reason for a definition of grammar here is to clarify the distinction between grammar and style.

Grammar is a widely received set of rules for writing about which there is little disagreement. *Style*, on the other hand, is a set of conventions regarding abbreviation, capitalization and other matters. Stylistic issues generally are not grammatical in nature, and there may be wide disagreement among writers and editors about how these issues should be resolved.

Although some grammatical principles are mentioned in style guides such as this, a full treatment of the rules of grammar requires a good grammar book.

See also **style** and **usage**.

grass-roots is a compound adjective, so it is hyphenated.

grave: See **accents**.

gray, grey: The former is American; the latter, British.

Great Britain: Synonymous with Britain.

See also **British Isles**, **England** and **United Kingdom**.

Greater China is capitalized. It is a reference to ethnic Chinese people and culture worldwide, mainly China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Chinatowns in Japan, North America and Great Britain.

See also **cultural China**.

Great Helmsman: The English rendition of the nickname for Chinese Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong.

greenhouse is one word.

groom: A man who looks after horses.

See also **bridegroom** and **mafoo**.

Guangzhou is preferred to *Canton*, which is the old British spelling of this city's name.

See also **place names**.

gunfight, gunfighter: Each of these is one word.

Gunning Fog Index: A scientifically devised measure of the readability of writing, developed by Robert Gunning. It is available in some word processing software.

See also **Flesch Reading Ease Score.**

guns: References to bullet sizes require unusual style – *a .357 magnum, a 9mm pistol*.
See also **caliber** and **gauge**.

gweilo: Romanization of the Cantonese phrase for Westerner. Literally is means "devil guy." It has pejorative connotations, so it should not be used unless you are quoting someone else who used the expression. In any case, if you use it, it should be italicized or set off with quotation marks.
See also **foreign words and phrases**.

H, h, aitch

ha: Interjection denoting surprise, suspicion: *"Ha! I thought that was you!"*
See also **exclamation marks.**

ha-ha: Interjection denoting laughter: *The prime minister burst into laughter. "Ha-ha! The worst* is *over!" he said.*
See also **exclamation marks**.

hack, hackneyed: A *hackney* was a common English working horse used to pull carriages in London in the seventeenth century. Hence, *hackneyed* has come to mean *trite, common, worn out from frequent use,* and a *hack* is a writer who exploits his talent by hiring himself out to do dull, mediocre work.

half may be singular or plural, depending on the context. Example: *Half of the class was absent* is correct, but so is *Half of the cars were damaged.*

Halloween, Hallowe'en: The evening of 31 October. The former spelling is American, the latter, British.

handover, the noun, is one word. With reference to the return of Hong Kong to Chinese administration, it is a historical event, so it may be capitalized in such a context.
See also **capitalization.**

hang: *Hang* has two past participles, depending on the meaning that is intended by the writer. The past participle *hanged* refers to executions and suicides: *In Singapore, criminals are usually hanged at dawn.*
The past participle *hung* refers to hanging other objects, such as pictures on walls: *She hung the photo behind the door so that no one would see it.*

hangar, hanger: A *hanger* is something that is used to hang things on, usually clothing. A *hangar* is a very large building that airplanes are parked in.

Hanyu Pinyin System: Formal name for a system of romanization adopted by the mainland Chinese government.
See also **pinyin** and **romanization.**

harassment: Note the spelling. See also **embarrassment**.

hardware has no plural form. See also **software**

Have you eaten yet? is Chinglish. It is a literal translation of a Chinese greeting at lunchtime. However, in English this phrase would likely be construed as an invitation to lunch. *Hello!* or *How are you?* are appropriate greetings at this time of day.

health care, healthcare: Both of these are acceptable, but latter is more contemporary.

healthy, **healthful:** The former pertains to the health of living organisms – *The orchid was healthy in its new medium* – while the latter pertains to the health benefits of foods, activities, and processes – *Twenty minutes of aerobic exercise at least four times a week is a healthful activity.*

This is an American distinction, however, one that is not observed in Britain. In Britain, "healthful" is rarely used and "healthy" is used to mean both "being in good health" and "conducive to good health".

headlinese: This refers to special vocabulary and style that journalists use in headlines, usually to save space. Examples of special vocabulary include *dons* (for academics), *boffins* (for scientists), *talks* (for conferences or negotiations), *chiefs* (for heads of large organizations), *bosses* (also for heads of large organizations, but with a somewhat negative connotation), *tipped* (for selected), and more.

heating up, hotting up: The former is American; the latter, British.

heaven is not capitalized unless referring specifically to that fictional locale identified in some religious texts.

See also **hell.**

hectare: A metric system measurement of area. It is 10,000 square meters, or 2.47 acres. The abbreviation *ha* should be avoided in text, because it is uncommon and will not be recognized by most readers. The abbreviation is acceptable in tables, however.

hell, like *heaven,* generally is not capitalized. Fortunately, there is no such place.

See also **heaven.**

her: Do not use the female third person pronoun in reference to a nation or a ship. To do so is old-fashioned. *It* is preferred.

he/she is an awkward structure that some writers have used in recent years in order to avoid sexist language. Example: *If the patient desires, then he/she may have a private room with detached bathroom.* Do not do this.

There are “genderless” alternatives to this awkward style, the most convenient being the plural form of the same thought. Example: *If patients desire, then they may have private rooms with detached bathrooms.*

See also **gender, sexist language** and **virgule**.

hepatitis B: Note that the *B* is capitalized and the *h* is not.

herb: The aitch in *herb* is silent in American English, so this word requires *an* as the indefinite article – *an herb.* In the U.K., the aitch is pronounced, so *herb* requires *a – a herb.*

heterosexual: A person who has sexual relations only with members of the opposite sex.
See also **bisexual**, **gay**, **homosexual** and **lesbian**.

hide: The past tense of this verb is *hid*, and the past participle is *hidden*. In former times, *hid* also was acceptable as a past participle, but it is no longer in fashion, so the phrase *well hid* is somewhat archaic.

high commission refers to the equivalent of an embassy in a Commonwealth country when the foreign country is also in the Commonwealth.
See also **commission, consul**, **consul general** and **consulate**.

high street: Chiefly British for a main street with many shops.

hip-hop, the music genre, is hyphenated.

his/her: See **he/she**.

historical: Do not inform readers that events are *historical*, like this: *In tomorrow's historical World Cup playoffs*…. Historical events occurred in the past, usually the distant past, so this usage is a clear abuse of the language.
Generally, writers use "historical" this way merely for hyperbole, but doing so damages your credibility with the reader.
See also **famous** and **hyperbole**.

historical present: This is use of the present tense for past action in order to create a sense of immediacy. It is common in captions, titles and headlines – *Car Sales Drive Strong Third-Quarter Growth in U.S. Economy.*
It also is used in contemporary speech as a storytelling technique – *"So there I am, walking along minding my own business, when along comes this bus right out of the blue and crashes into guardrail," he said.*
See also **present tense.**

HKSAR: Abbreviation for *Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.* As with other abbreviations, this one probably should be avoided.
See also **abbreviations and acronyms** and **special administrative region.**

hoarding: Chiefly British for "billboard". Most Americans would not recognize this word.
See also **American English.**

Hobson's choice: Thomas Hobson (1544-1631) was a Cambridge liveryman noted for a strict rule – a customer could rent only the horse nearest the livery stable door. Hence, a Hobson's choice is not a choice at all, but a take-it-or-leave it proposition.

homonym: A word that sounds like another – *read, red; bore, boar; mail, male; bee, be; hoarse, horse; stationery, stationary; bear, bare.*

homosexual: Acceptable reference for both men and women who prefer sex partners of same gender as themselves.

See also **gay** and **lesbian**.

Hong Kong: The full official name is the *Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. SAR* and *Region* are acceptable on second reference. The only other special administrative region of China is Macau.

Hong Kong is two words, but it often is written as one, as in *Hongkong Standard*, the former name of an English language newspaper. When the author asked the editor of the newspaper why Hong Kong was written as one word in the newspaper's nameplate, the editor replied, "Hong Kong is one place."

Adopting this logic, one would feel compelled to rename Los Angeles, New York, Sao Paolo, Rio de Janeiro, and San Francisco, not to mention Great Britain, The Netherlands, and Sierra Leone.

As a general rule, writers should follow local government renditions of their own place names, although there are significant exceptions – *Munich* for *München, Rome* for *Roma*, and so on. Such exceptions are based on long standing practice, practice longer than Hong Kong has been in existence.

See also **Special Administrative Region** and **Territory.**

Hongkonger: A person from Hong Kong.

See also **-ese.**

Hongkonese: Of or pertaining to Hong Kong things, including its people. Do not write *Hongkongnese*, with an extra en.

hopefully is an adverb, so it should modify a verb. Example: *The delegates looked hopefully for an end to the impasse....* It is often misused to mean "we are, or I am, hopeful that": *Hopefully, the weather will clear up for the holiday.* This is poor usage.

hospital: *In the hospital* is American, *in hospital* is British.

See also **articles.**

house style: A local publishing house's rules of style. Local style rules are essential to good style, so if your publisher does not have a local style guide, then the publisher probably should develop one.

humor, humour: The former spelling is American; the latter, British.

hyperbole is exaggeration, and it can be an effective literary device in some contexts. In humour, for example, it is often funny to exaggerate the details of a compromising situation. Example: *My back was sore when I flew from London because the English woman beside me was so fat I had to lean over in my seat all the way to Singapore....*

Unfortunately, hyperbole often surfaces in the writing of beginners who are awed by their subject matter or swept away in the circumstances of an event. Examples: *Dr. Li is a*

hero in the eyes of his students…; In a historic decision early Monday...; *As an internationally renowned poet, Miss Peng Wing Hang….*

Heroism, historic decisions and international fame are all circumstances that are beyond the skills of ordinary writers to assess. Most people identified as "heros" in the media are quickly forgotten, and "historic" decisions become mere footnotes. Not to mention that, if people are "famous," the reader obviously does not need to be told this fact.

Further, all of these are extremely opinionated statements, and some readers may disagree with your views. When you alienate your readers, you have failed as a writer.

If you strongly hold an opinion about the degree of notoriety, there are other ways to convey it. For example, if Dr. Li truly is a hero in the eyes of his students, then it should be easy to find a student who will confirm this: "*Dr. Li is our hero," said Mr. Ng Siu Nam, one of Dr. Li's students.* If no students are willing to state this, then perhaps he is really not a hero in their eyes after all.

hyphen: This punctuation mark (-) is often confused with the dash (—), and it is thus used incorrectly.

Hyphens are used to split words at the end of lines, to form compound adjectives, to link prefixes and suffixes to root words, and to prevent ambiguity in pronunciation and meaning.

At the ends of lines, computers automatically insert hyphens at appropriate places for a pleasing amount of space between the words in lines of text. The parts of computer programs that do this are called *hyphenation and justification routines,* and they can be adjusted to increase or decrease the number of hyphens and the amount of word spacing.

Two or more adjectives before a noun may be linked with hyphens if they form a *unitary concept* — that is, a single idea — *17th-century vase, 3-D film.* So linked, the construction becomes known as a *compound adjective.*

A rule of thumb that governs the decision about whether to include the hyphen or not is to imagine the phrase with commas rather than hyphens — *a 10, year, old boy; a sharp, looking suit.* If the phrase makes little or no sense, then hyphens probably are required — *a 10-year-old boy, a sharp looking-suit.* All of these are acceptable: *home-based education, behind-the-scenes efforts, long-range plan, case-by-case basis, after-school programs.*

There's no limit on the number of words that may be linked in forming a compound adjective. Examples: *The other candidates resented Mr. Lam's holier-than-thou attitude*; *She's one of those early-bird- gets-the- worm types.*

Occasionally it is useful to omit part of the compound adjective in a structure known as *suspensive hyphenation – He said small- and medium-sized contractors would be the first to feel the effects of the stalemate...*; *The event is open only to 10- to 12-year-old boys from the New Territories.*

Adverbs are not used to form compound adjectives, so the following are incorrect — *a quickly-written note, a sharply-honed knife.* A common exception to this rule is *well-known,* as in *A well-known artist will be the featured guest at a fund raiser….*

Prefixes and suffixes are often linked with root words to form new concepts. Examples: *the post-war era, President-elect Fidel Ramos.*

After a hyphenated expression has been in common use for a while, the hyphen is often dropped and it shows up in dictionaries as one word – *cooperate*, *housewife*.

Finally, hyphens are used to avoid ambiguous constructions. Examples: *A convention of small - business men...*; *They could have re-covered the sofa*….

See also **accents, anti-, dash, ex-** and **well**.

I, i

ibid. is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *ibidem*, which means *in the aforementioned place*. It is commonly a footnote referring to the same source named in the immediately preceding footnote.

Ibid. is used only in formal, academic writing. It has no place in the mass media.

ice age: This is not capitalized, because it does not refer to a single geological era. There have been several ice ages.

See also **geological time**.

ice skate, ice-skate: The former is the shoe that you wear on your foot when skating on ice: *She donned her ice skates and ice-skated around the ice rink.* The latter is the art of skating on ice.

identification of people: On first reference, a person should be identified by full name, possibly a title, and, if representing an organization, then the full name of the organization. If not representing an organization, the person should be identified with a full name, city or district of a city, and sometimes his or her age. Examples: *Kevin Leung, 22, of Guangzhou. . . ; Tsang Pui Ying of Sha Tin, an 18-year-old secondary school student, said. . . .*

Here are some examples of people representing organizations: *Hamish Sullivan, executive director of the Hong Kong Tourist Association. . . ; The Hong Kong Tourist Association's executive director, Hamish Sullivan, reported Monday that. . . .*

Note that when you use *the*, as in the last example, you are required to subordinate the person's name; however, this is not necessary if you omit it. Hence, this also would be correct: *Hong Kong Tourist Association Executive Director Hamish Sullivan reported Monday that. . . .* In the second example, the man's title is capitalized because it appears before his name and is an organizational title. Note also that the courtesy title is dropped.

On the second reference, you can use: (1) a pronoun (*he* or *she*); (2) courtesy title with family name (*Mr. Li, Ms. Chan*); or, if the second reference is several paragraphs away from the first reference, then (3) courtesy title with family name, plus a clue for the reader about who this person is in the news story (*The Consumer Council's Mr. Chan. . .).*

On second reference, you should not refer to a person only by first name unless you are trying to strike a familiar tone with the reader. A word of caution: An overly familiar tone may be construed as disrespectful by some readers.

There are some common exceptions to these rules. For example, the victims of some crimes often are deliberately not identified in the news. Indeed, it is against the law in some places, but lack of identification also is sometimes done as a courtesy to the victims, who have suffered enough without having to bear the public humiliation on top of the criminal act itself.

Another exception involves people who are willing to be interviewed, but who are shy about having their names in the press. If this is the case, then the proper way to identify the person is as follows: *One Stock Exchange executive who requested that his name be withheld expressed anger about the administration's policy*; or, *An anonymous source in*

the Government Information Services Department said. . . ; or, *A source who requested anonymity reported that. . . .*

Another technique, and one that should be used only sparingly, is something like this: *Another complaint about the system was filed by "Bill" (not his real name), who. . . .*

Occasionally, you will run across articles in which people are referred to by their first names only. This is typical with performance artists. For example, in an interview with American pop diva Diana Ross, she said to the interviewer, "Just call me Diana." If that is the way she wants to be known, then you should feel free to use her first name on second reference.

Here is a rule of thumb on the use of given names: *Use given names on second reference for children under age 15, for certain celebrities who are seeking to promote an informal persona, and for feature writing in which you are trying to draw the reader closer to your subject through an informal tone.*

See also **Chinese names, first reference** and **Western names.**

if is often confused with *whether*. It should be used to indicate uncertainty: *I don't know if she is coming*.

See also **whether**.

imply, infer: A speaker can *imply* something. The listener *infers* it.

in order to is wordy. Use only "to", if possible.

include is often misused to mean "comprise." It would be incorrect to write *The committee included three men and seven women* if these 10 people formed the entirety of the committee. *Include* usually suggests that not all elements are listed. The correct form is *The committee comprised three men and seven women*.

See also **compose, comprise.**

incorporated is usually regarded as superfluous when used along with a corporate name because most people assume that big companies are incorporated. But if you must use it, then you should abbreviate it and drop the surrounding commas – *Apple Computer Inc*.

See also **company** and **limited.**

indirect quote: See **quotes and quotations**.

Indian refers to people from India as well as people from the native tribes of North and South America. If the true meaning is not obvious from the context, then you should clarify.

Indian names: Many Indians do not have surnames. Often the father's initial is placed in front of a given name – *A. Sivam* In this example, "A" is the initial of the father's name (say, Arul) and Sivam is the person's own name. He could be addressed as Mr. Sivam.

A married Indian woman usually uses her husband's name, so a Miss R. Devi – "R" being her father's initial – on marrying Mr. A. Sivam, she becomes Mrs. Sivam Devi, or Mrs. Sivam. Names last only one generation.

indict is legalese for *formally charge with a crime*. The document itself is *an indictment*.

Indonesian names: Many Indonesians have only one name, like *Suharto*. In such cases, the first and second references are identical - *President Suharto*.

infinitive: This is the simple, uninflected form of a verb, usually preceded by the particle "to" – *to kiss, to go.* It is considered bad form to split these – *to really believe, to brazenly lie.*

See also **split infinitive.**

initials: These are abbreviations of proper names using the first letter of each part of the name. *Lee Chin-chuan* and *Lau Tuen-yu,* for example, are commonly known in Western circles as *C.C. Lee* and *T.Y. Lau*. Note that there is no word space between the initials. This style is very common for Chinese people who have extensive contact with Western culture.

Westerners themselves commonly use a single initial, for the middle name: *Edwin B. Parker*. This is called a *middle initial*. Another style is this: *C. Wright Mills*. Less commonly, one also sees this style: *E.B. White.*

See also **Western names**.

in-laws: See **family relations**.

in passim: See ***passim.***

insure: See **ensure, insure.**

interjections: An interjection is a part of speech, as is a verb or a noun. Interjections usually are accompanied by an exclamation mark – *Wow! Hey! Oops! Ouch! Oh! Good grief! Holy cow! Fiddlesticks! For crying out loud!*

When beginning a sentence, an interjection may be accompanied by a comma: *Oh, I didn't know that! Oops, excuse me!*

See also **exclamation marks.**

Internet is a proper noun, so it should be capitalized. Many news media organizations are ignoring this rule, however, so the word might be treated as a common noun in the near future.

See also **Web** and **World Wide Web.**

inverted commas is British for "single quotes".

investigation: It's *investigation of,* not *investigation on* -- *The Education Bureau has begun an investigation of the examination system.*

Irish surnames often have an apostrophe and two capital letters -- *Meaghan O'Connor, Brandon O'Sullivan.*

See also **Scottish surnames**.

irritate: See **aggravate, irritate**.

IT: This common abbreviation for information technology does not take points.

italics are used for the titles of books, films, plays, television programmes, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, famous speeches, major poems, and famous works of art: *The Analects*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, *60 Minutes*, *The Straits Times*, Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, *Bhagavad-Gita*, and Michelangelo's *David*.

Italics are also used for foreign words and phrases: "*Ciao!*", a common Italian expression used in parting, and *trompe l'oeil*, a type of optical illusion in painting. This rule includes Latin phases such as the names of species – *the Yangze River dolphin, or* Lipotes vexillifer.

In the past, italics were common for names of ships and aircraft, but this style is passing out of fashion. Also, italics are sometimes used to emphasize text, in constructions such as this: "*He said* you *had the key!*"

As illustrated above, when italics are called for in text that is already set in italics, then regular type is required to achieve the emphasis.

See also **genus, species**.

J, j

jalousie: Small window with glass slats for ventilation.

Japanese emperors, like kings and queens elsewhere, are known only by a single name. Examples: *Emperor Akihito, Emperor Hirohito*.

Japanese names: The given name is first, the family name last. Example: *Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa will decide next month whether to visit. If he does visit, Mr. Miyazawa will become the first Japanese prime minister to do so.*

jargon is the specialized language of a field. In music, we see *riff, downbeat, fadeout*; in computers, *bus, lan, network*; in police work, *snakehead, supergrass, fence*.

In general, jargon should be avoided. If it is necessary to use jargon for some reason, then you should include definitions. *Jargon* has no plural, so *jargons* is incorrect usage.

J.D.: Abbreviation for *juris doctor,* the terminal degree in the legal profession.

See also **doctor.**

jet, jetliner, jet plane: These are all acceptable usage for modern, jet-propelled aircraft.

jeunesse dorée: Rich, fashionable young people.

jeweller, jeweler: The former spelling is British, the latter, American.

jewellery, jewelry: The former spelling is British, the latter, American.

job descriptions are always lowercase when used as titles before a person's name – *pop artist Stephanie Sun, domestic helper Mary Cheung*.

See also **Mr.** and **titles**.

John Doe, Jane Doe: These names are temporarily assigned by police in the United States to people whose identities are unknown, so some writers use them to denote anonymous people or members of the general public.

John Q. Public: Phony name designating an average or typical American – *Mass entertainment television is directed at John Q. Public.*

joss: I have never heard a Chinese person use this word, but James Clavell's characters in *Noble House,* which is set in Hong Kong, use it liberally to mean something like "fate" or "karma".

journals: The names of journals are capitalized and italicized – *Canadian Medical Association Journal, The Journal of Immunology*.

judges: An aberrant style is to refer to judges as if they had surnames only. For example, the style at the *South China Morning Post* is to refer to judges on first reference like this: *Mr Justice Kadoori*; *Judge Tang*.

This style contravenes all other stylistic practices regarding identification of people in writing, so it should not be emulated. Use full names and an organizational title on first reference – *High Court Justice Rajistan Kadoori, District Court Judge Tang Man Yin.*

See also **courtesy titles, first reference** and **titles**.

jumbo jet: This may be used in reference to any so-called "wide-bodied" jet aircraft.

junior is part of the full proper name of most American men named after their fathers, so it should be included in the first reference – *John F. Kennedy Jr*. There is no comma between the family name and *Jr*. The *Jr*. is dropped on the second reference unless it is needed for clarity.

Some American men use the expression *II*, as in *Henry Carter Wilson II*. This suggests that the man is named after another person in the family, not necessarily his father.

K, k

Kaposi's sarcoma: A common early sign of Aids. Note capitalization and possessive.

karat: A measure of the purity of gold. Pure gold is 24-karat. An 18-karat ring is 18 parts gold and six parts alloy.
See also **carat**.

KCR: An acceptable abbreviation for the Kowloon-Canton Railway after first reference.
See also **abbreviations**.

Khmer: The dominant ethnic group in Cambodia. Their language also is called Khmer.

kibosh, as in *put the kibosh on*, means "to end", "to terminate". It is slang, popular in both the U.S. and U.K.

kidnap, kidnapper, kidnapped are all correct. However, some American newspapers use *kidnaper, kidnaped*. This is not recommended.

kilogram: One thousand grams, or 2.2 pounds. Do not abbreviate outside of tables – *The baby weighed 3.6 kilograms.*

kilometer, kilometre: The former spelling is American, the latter, British. A kilometer is one thousand meters. It is equal to 3,281 feet, or 0.6 statute miles. Do not abbreviate outside of tables – *The distance from New York City to Beijing is 11,019 kilometers.*
See also **mile**.

knights are entitled to the honorific title *Sir*. Provide full name on first reference - *Sir Paul McCartney*. On second reference use *Sir* with the given name: *Sir Paul*.
See also **Lady**, **Lord** and **titles**.

knot: One nautical mile per hour. *Knots per hour* is redundant. A nautical mile is 1,852 meters, or 1.15 statute miles.

known: Any reasonable stylist must object to this kind of construction, common among journalists: *He had known connections to Triad organizations.* "Known" by whom?, one might reasonably ask. The journalist? If so, then *He had connections to Triad organizations* will suffice. The goal in writing usually is to answer questions, not to raise them.

Korean names: The family name appears first followed usually by two given names. So *President Park Chung Bee* on first reference becomes *President Park* on second reference.

kowtow: Chinese loanword meaning "to grovel" or "to act in an obsequious manner". It is written as one word.

See also **loanword.**

kumquat: English rendition for the small citrus fruit that is so popular in southern China around the Lunar New Year holidays. From the Chinese *gam gwat.*

kung fu, the Chinese martial art, is not capitalized because it is not a proper name. Also, it is not italicized because it long ago made its way into English, so it no longer is considered a foreign expression.

Kung Hei Fat Choy is the most common rendering of this popular Chinese greeting around the Lunar New Year.

Kuomintang: The Chinese Nationalist Party of Taiwan. An accepted abbreviation after first reference is *KMT*. To write *Kuomintang Party* is redundant.

L, l

lab: Acceptable short form for *laboratory.*

labor, labour: The former spelling is American, the latter, British. A person who does heavy, physically demanding work is a *laborer,* not a *labor*. *Labor* is work.

lady: Some American women object to this word as a synonym for *woman*.
See also **girl**.

Lady: Honorific for wives of British barons, baronets, earls, viscounts, knights and marquesses. It also is a title for women below the rank of duchess who are peeresses.

For women who became peeresses on their own, and for wives of knights, baronets, barons, viscounts, earls and marquesses, the title is never followed by the given name. So it's *Lady Wilson,* not *Lady Elizabeth Wilson*.

The title also is applied to daughters of earls, marquesses and dukes, and in these uses, the title is followed by a given name. So, *Lady Anne Taylor* can be referred to as *Lady Anne,* but not *Lady Taylor*. Women who are the wives of younger sons of marquesses and dukes use their husband's given names. So *Lady Malcolm McIntyre* can be referred to as *Lady Malcolm*.

laissez faire: This French expression, which implies noninterventionist government policies toward business, has been in use in English long enough no longer to require italics. Note also that it is not hyphenated.

laugh, laughed: Do not use these as attributive verbs, like this: *"I thought that was you!" she laughed.* This is preferred: *"I thought that was you!" she said, laughing.*
See also **thinks, thought.**

lbs. is the abbreviation for *pounds,* but it should be confined to tables and avoided in text.
See also **pounds.**

lectures: The title of a lecture series should be italicized. The titles of individual lectures within the series should not be italicized, but placed within quotation marks.
See also **television programmes.**

Legco is an acceptable reference to Hong Kong's Legislative Council, but on second reference only.

lesbian: A homosexual woman.
See also **gay** and **homosexual**.

less: Use *less* for noncountable nouns – *less water, less fuel, less air, less sand.* Use *fewer* for countable nouns – *fewer students, fewer books, fewer birds, fewer cars.*
See also **fewer**.

The Levant is the geographical region that includes all countries of the eastern Mediterranean Sea from Turkey to Egypt.

Levi's: Note the capitalization and the apostrophe. *Jeans* or *blue jeans* is preferred unless a specific reference to Levi's is necessary.

See also **trade names.**

li: A Chinese measure of distance equal to about one-half kilometer. It is no longer in use, but it shows up frequently in Chinese literature.

See also **Chinese mile.**

liaise is a coined word resulting from a backformation of the word *liaison*. It is stylistically dubious and probably should be avoided.

See also **backformation** and **nonce word**.

licence, license: In Britain, *licence* is a noun, *license* a verb. In America *license* is used for both.

See also **practice, practise.**

like vs. as: To use *like* as a conjunction is considered bad form by stylists – *They sang like he did, hitting all the high notes.* In this example, *like* should have been replaced by *as – They sang as he did.* Unfortunately, this rule is commonly overridden in colloquial speech – *I need this like I need a hole in the head.* So, when considering the options, ask yourself what tone you want to strike, formal or informal.

Some writers object to *like* in lieu of *such as – Hong Kong celebrities like Jacky Cheung and Do Do Cheng are idolized in Guangzhou* would be considered weaker style than *Hong Kong celebrities such as Jacky Cheung and Do Do Cheng are idolized in Guangzhou.*

The use of *like* as a preposition is acceptable, however – *Write like me; she eats like a bird; he drinks like a fish.* Note that in the first example, *me* is in the objective case because it is the object of the preposition *like.*

limited: For most writing, this word is superfluous when used as part of a corporate name because big firms are presumed to be limited companies. So, do not use it in most contexts.

On the other hand, if you are obliged to use it, then abbreviate it and omit the commas that usually surround the abbreviation – *Tyco International Ltd.*

See also **company** and **incorporated.**

literally is often misused to mean *figuratively – "I was literally walking on water!" he exclaimed.*

loaded: Language is said to be *loaded* when the connotative meaning is charged with emotional significance that hinders understanding based on the rational understanding of the words themselves.

See also **connative** and **denotative.**

loanword: A word borrowed from another language. English has a few borrowed from Chinese – *gung ho, ketchup, kowtow, kumquat, shanghai, typhoon.* There are more.

loath, **loathe:** The former is an adjective, the latter, a verb.

loo: British colloquialism for *toilet*. It is inappropriate in most writing, unless quoting someone directly.

loose sentence: A loose sentence is simple declarative one. A common stylistic weakness is to string together a series of these. Example: *The news agency lamented the fact that corruption was rampant. It said some cadres had ignored bans on trading shares. It called for a halt to official corruption.*

The problem here is the absence of rhythm. Rhythm is easily achieved through variation in sentence structures.

The above series of loose sentences could be rewritten as compound sentences, as complex sentences, or as compound-complex sentences. Here is a more rhythmic version that uses a complex sentence followed by a simple sentence: *Lamenting the fact that corruption was rampant, the news agency said some cadres had ignored bans on trading shares. It called for a halt to official corruption.*

See also **complex sentence**, **compound sentence**, **loose sentence**, **periodic sentence** and **rhythm**.

Lord is the title of British barons, viscounts, earls and marquesses. Use it on first reference to barons – *Lord Wilson,* and on second references to the others. So the first reference to the *Earl of Wight* becomes *Lord Wight* on second reference.

Given names are never used unless the title is applied to the younger sons of marquesses and dukes – *Lord Charles Manley, Lord Charles,* but not *Lord Manley*.

lowercase: See **uppercase**.

lunar calendar: See **calendar**.

luthier: A violin maker.

M, m, em

Macau: Like Hong Kong, Macau is a special administrative region of the People's Republic of China. A former Portuguese colony – the first Portuguese landed there in 1513 – it was the first European colony in the Far East. It reverted to Chinese rule on 20 December 1999.

Macau is sometimes spelled *Macao,* but *Macau* is preferred.

Mach 1, Mach 2: Measurement system usually used in reference to the speed of jet fighter aircraft. It is based on the speed of sound, l, 088 feet per second at sea level at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Note the capitalization.

machine gun: This is a rapid firing, automatic small arm popular among gangsters. The verb and adjective forms are hyphenated – *machine-gun, machine-gunned*.

madam: *Madam* is a formal style of address for a woman of rank – "*Madam President, may I make a motion?"*

Madam occasionally is used also to refer to a woman who runs a brothel, however, so the intended meaning must be absolutely clear to the reader: A *double entendre* in such a case could be very embarrassing for both the writer and the subject.

See also **Mr., Mrs., Miss** and **Ms.**

madame formerly was used as a title of respect for elderly women, not of British extraction, whose marital status was unknown. Nowadays *madame* is passé and should not be used unless you have a specific reason to believe it is appropriate for the context, as in *Madame Tussaud, Madame Bovary, Madame Butterfly.*

mafoo: Regionalism in Southeast Asia for a groom – that is, a stable boy. This word probably should not be used without clarification.

See also **groom.**

magazine names: These are capitalized and italicized. Most magazines do not use an article as part of the name, but there are exceptions – *Time, Newsweek, The New Yorker*.

See also **articles**, **capitalization**, **italics** and **newspaper names**.

mahjong is the preferred spelling for the common Chinese parlor game.

mail is usually singular. To refer to a collection of letters and parcels, write *There are 3.1 million pieces of mail delivered every day* or *Of these, there are 2.8 million letters.*

See also **email.**

Mainland is capitalized when used as a proper noun in reference to the People's Republic of China, but not when used as an adjective: *In a visit to the Mainland….* But: *Just across the border, mainland Chinese officials have….* The people themselves may be referred to as *Mainlanders*.

majority, plurality: In an election, *majority* means *more than 50 percent.* If there are only two candidates, chances are high that one will receive a majority of votes. In an election in which there are three or more candidates, however, a majority vote is much less likely, so *plurality* means *the excess of votes received by the leading candidate over the next highest candidate.* This distinction is rigorously followed in the U.S., but in Britain, *majority* is used to mean *plurality.*

makeup: One word – *She plans to get a job as a makeup artist.*

Malaysian names do not follow conventional rules. *Mahathir Mohamad* on first reference is *Dr. Mahathir* on second reference.

Some ethnic Malays and Indians do not use surnames, but only their fathers' given names. People with given names and surnames do not follow any convention regarding the positions of the family and given names. Any person may have a preference different from the next one. If there is any doubt, you should ask your subject about the proper form of address.

male: This word usually is an adjective referring to the sex of something – *male guppy, male voice*. *Male toilet,* a common sign on restroom doors, is poor usage because toilets lack gender. *Men's toilet* is preferred.

See also **female.**

Mandarin: See **Putonghua**.

mano a mano: A confrontation between two people.

manuscript preparation: Beginning writers underestimate the importance of proper preparation of manuscripts for publication. One result is that, from a cursory glance at a manuscript, a professional editor may form an unfortunate opinion about a writer's abilities. Here are a few important rules:

Manuscripts should be typewritten and double spaced, and there should be 1-inch margins on all sides of the text. There should be no extra spacing between paragraphs, but there should be quadruple spacing between sections, and each chapter should begin on a new page. Paragraphs should be indented five word spaces, which is the default in common text editing software, but the tab key should be used for paragraph indents, not the space bar.

Use only one word space between sentences. In the unlikely event the pages are separated from one another, each page should include a header with a short form of the name of the manuscript. The header should include page numbers.

For decades, the preferred typeface for manuscripts was courier 12-point. This provided *10 cpi,* or *characters per inch*. As a standard face and size, courier 12-point facilitated the editor's work at estimating the length of the manuscript because all characters are the same width. In recent years, 12-point Times New Roman has displaced courier in this function, but Times New Roman is less functional because of its variable character widths.

Most editors nowadays also ask the writer to submit the text on a computer diskette.

Unless otherwise directed, it is discourteous of writers to send manuscripts as email attachments: These make extra work for editors, who have to open the attachments and print and fasten them, not to mention the exposure of the editors' hard drives to viruses in the process.

See also **copyediting symbols.**

many: Consider this sentence, from one of this author's students: *He taught inline skating to many teenagers.* How is this different from *He taught inline skating to teenagers*?

When the author was a young journalist, one of his editors consistently deleted "many" from his stories. "How many is 'many'?" the editor queried peevishly. Eventually the author learned to live without this word. You can, too.

See also **concise writing** and **very.**

Mao Zedong, Mao Tse-tung: The chairman of the Chinese Communist Party for decades. His name also appears in the West as *Mao Tse Tung* and *Mao Tse-Tung,* but *Mao Zedong* is preferred today. On second reference, he is Chairman Mao.

See also **Chinese names, Great Helmsman** and **pinyin**.

matériel is military arms and supplies. Note the accent grave. In pronunciation the emphasis is on the last syllable – *materi-ELL*

math, maths: Short forms for *mathematics*. The former is American, the latter, British.

matter has no plural form, so “organic matters” is incorrect. It’s “organic matter”.

mean, median, mode: In a series of numbers, the *mean* is the arithmetic average. The *median* is the number in the middle. The *mode* is the most commonly occurring number.

media is plural. It takes plural verbs and pronouns – *The media have been accused; the media are; they are*…. The singular form, *medium,* is seldom used in this context.

meet, meet with: In the sense of t*o confer,* British simply say *meet,* Americans say *meet with.*

memoranda is the plural of *memorandum*.

metaphors can be awkward in writing – *The sound of the earthquake was the sound of a thousand horses thundering across a vast plain*. Like this one, metaphors tend to look corny and overwritten. It’s a sound practice to stick to the facts. Leave poetry to the troubadours.

meter, metre: In British usage, a *meter* is used to take measurements: *ohmmeter, thermometer, odometer*. A *metre* is the basic unit of length in the metric system, equal to 39 inches or 1,000 millimetres. In American usage, *meter* is used to mean both a measuring device as well as the basic unit in the metric system.

metric system is preferred wherever convenient. However, do not attempt to convert every figure that crosses your desk to the metric system, but accept the standard units of measurement preferred by your sources and recognized by your audience.

middle-aged: The World Health Organization defines a middle-aged person as one between the aged 35 to 69. Authorities who object to this long range place it at about 45 to 65.

See also **elderly, senior citizen, teenager** and **youth.**

middle initial: See **initials, Western names**.

midnight is *12 p.m. Midnight* is preferred, because *12 p.m*. is confusing to some readers, including this author, who think it can mean either *noon* or *midnight*. The last moment of time on any given day is midnight – *midnight Saturday*. So *Britain returned the administration of Hong Kong to China at midnight 30 June 1997.*

See also **a.m., noon, time**.

migrant, migrate: *Migrant* is used to refer to a person who moves from one place to another. It has negative connotations in English because it is used mainly to refer to unskilled laborers who move from one region to another in search of seasonal work, such as farm laborers.

Migrate is a verb usually applied to animals that change their habitats with the seasons.

See also **emigrate** and **immigrate**.

mile: There are two main kinds, the *statute mile,* or 5,280 feet, and the *nautical mile,* 6,076 feet. If neither is specified, the reader will assume that you mean statute miles. A kilometer is 0.62 statute miles, or 3,281 feet.

See also **Chinese mile** and **li.**

military titles: These can be abbreviated when used as organizational titles before a person's name – *Gen. Colin L. Powell.* Common abbreviations include *Pvt.* for *private, Cpl.* for *corporal, Sgt.* for *sergeant, Lt.* for *lieutenant, Capt.* for *captain, Maj*. for *major, Col.* for *colonel.*

See also **academic titles, courtesy titles, police titles** and **religious titles.**

milliliter: One thousandth of a liter. Do not abbreviate – *55 milliliters.*

See also **fluid volumes.**

million: Because some readers are easily confused, you should use the word rather than numerals – not *1,674,445,* but 1.67 million. Round to the nearest tenth or hundredth, depending on the level of accuracy sought.

See also **numbers**, **numerals**.

mm: Abbreviation for *millimeter*. It is acceptable on first reference in some contexts, such as to calibers of weapons and sizes of films – *9mm pistol, 16mm film.*

Note that there is no space between the number and *mm,* and the abbreviation does not take a full stop.

modernization is preferred to *modernisation,* which is the British spelling of this word.

Mohamed, Mohammed, Muhammad: All three are spellings of a common given name for male followers of Islam. The second version is most common,

money: If referring to dollars, simply use a dollar sign, followed by numbers: *$10, $560, $5.60.* Note the final zero. More examples: *$5,000, $700,000, $9 million, $5.5 million*. Do not use *dollars, HKD* or *HK$*. If the reference is to foreign dollars, an abbreviation should precede the dollar sign: US$, A$ and so forth. Cents should be carried to two decimal places – *$2.20,* not *$2.2* – in spite of the fact that most currencies are expressed in hundredths. The practice is unknown in most Western nations.

Many countries have dollars, francs, and pesos, so you must specify the country when referring to foreign currencies. If symbols are not available for these in your computer's font library, you should write out the name of the currency – *1 million francs, 560 pesos, 6 billion lire*.

Foreign sums of money may be converted and presented inside parentheses – *He was paid US$500 (about 4,000 yuan).*

For sums greater than $1 million, round to the nearest tenth or hundredth – *$1.5 billion, US$1.16 million*.

See also **cents; dollars; numbers, numerals;** and **U.S.**

monuments are usually capitalized – *L'Arc de Triomphe, the Washington Monument, the Great Wall of China.* Note that, in the last example, *the* is not capitalized.

more and more: One of this author's pet peeves, often showing up in student work, is "more and more", as in *Ice cream is becoming more and more popular today.*

When I see this, I cannot help wondering how much more "more and more" is than merely "more". Indeed, we could drop "more" altogether – *Ice cream is becoming increasingly popular.* The present tense implies that the sense is "today".

In sum, don't use this phrase.

See also **concise writing, many** and **very.**

mother-in-law, mothers-in-law: Note how the plural is formed.

See also **family relations**.

mouse: In reference to the human-computer graphic interface device, the plural is *mouses,* not *mice,* which is reserved for the rodent.

See also **walkman.**

MP is the abbreviation in England for Member of Parliament. However, in some contexts, it also is the abbreviation for *military policeman*.

Mr., Mrs., Miss and **Ms.:** These are courtesy titles. They are strictly shunned by most American media; however, they are widely used in the British press.

The following is British style. In the absence of any other title, use an organizational title before a person's name on first reference followed by the full name. On second reference, use courtesy titles and family names. Hence, after the first references *James Ligunjang, Director of Operations Jim Buckle, witness for the prosecution Pang Hang Yin,* these subjects become *Mr. Ligunjang, Mr. Buckle,* and *Mr. Pang*.

Do not use *Messrs., Madam, Mesdames, Misses, Mm., Mme., Mlle., Mlles*. They are passé. Some of them are French, not English. Also, do not use a courtesy title for children under age 12. Use given names instead.

Do not combine courtesy titles with organizational titles, like this: *Chief Minister Mr. Tun Mustapha Harun*. This is a common mistake. Use only one title at a time.

Regarding women's titles, follow women's preferences. Some married women prefer to use their maiden names and use the title *Miss*. Other married women do not like the title *Ms*. When interviewing a woman, ask her how she prefers to be addressed.

Note that *Ms.* takes a full stop. Some stylists disagree with this practice, arguing that *Ms.* is not an abbreviation of anything.

In American style, you can ignore the above rules and just use surnames without courtesy titles.

See also **titles** and **organizational titles**.

MTR and **MRT** are acceptable abbreviations for Mass Transit Railway and Mass Rapid Transit, respectively, after the first reference.

Mumbai: New name for Bombay, based on its pre-colonial name, with effect from 1995.

muntjac: Small deer found in southeast Asia and southern China. Also called a *barking deer.*

music, musical: *Musical school* is incorrect because a school itself is incapable of creating melodious harmonies. *Music* can be an adjective, so *music school* is correct.

Myanmar: See **Burma.**

my friend, my colleague: This is Chinglish, a direct translation from Chinese. The phrase in English implies that the speaker has one, and only one, friend. This phrase would be appropriate if this were the intended meaning, but what usually is meant is *one of my friends* or *one of my colleagues.*

N, n, en

Nationalist China: Acceptable reference to **Taiwan**, which see.

National People's Congress: The official name of China's main lawmaking body. Note the apostrophe.

nature does not take the article *the* when referring to the totality of physical reality.

naught: British for zero.

nauseated, nauseous: Use *nauseous* for things causing nausea, not for people afflicted by it. Such people are *nauseated*.

nautical mile: 6,076 feet.
See also **mile**.

nautical terms: Be cautious about using terms unfamiliar to readers. Common terms – *bow, stern, port, starboard, mast, tiller* – are acceptable, but do not use terms such as *poop deck, doghouse, lanyard, forepeak.*

When writing about sailing vessels, always state the length of the boat on the waterline and the type of rig. Example: *A 42-foot ketch was spotted foundering off the coast*. If you don't mention the rig, the sailors in your audience will think you are a landlubber. For ships, you should provide the tonnage, registry and type, if available – *A 12,000-ton Panamanian registered bulk ore carrier. . . .*

N.B.: Abbreviation for *nota bene,* a Latin phrase meaning "take notice". It often is used *in passim.*
See also **passim**.

Near East is synonymous with *Middle East,* which is more common nowadays.
See also **Orient, Oriental.**

nebbish: A pitiful, shy, ineffectual person. Chiefly American usage.

neither can be an adjective or an indefinite pronoun. It is singular when used as an indefinite pronoun – *Neither of them likes the teacher*.

In *neither...nor* constructions, the verb agrees with the nearer part. *Neither the coach nor the players were satisfied with the outcome* and *Neither the players nor the coach was satisfied with the game* are both grammatically correct, but the first version sounds better to the ear.

It is better to recast the sentence if it strikes you as awkward: *The coach was not satisfied with the outcome, and neither were the players*. In this sentence, a plural verb follows "neither" because it is not an indefinite pronoun, but an adjective meaning "not either."

netiquette: A new word meaning “network courtesy”, or courtesy when using the Internet, especially when sending email.

See also **coined expressions.**

never: Never say "never".

See also **always.**

news is singular and does not take the indefinite article “a”, as in *a news.*

newsgroup is one word.

newspaper names should be capitalized and italicized. *The* may or may not be part of the name, but if it is, it should be capitalized. You should check each case individually. Example: *He reads* The New York Times *and the* South China Morning Post.

Americans offend Brits by referring to *The Times,* published in London, as *The Times of London* or *The London Times*. This is bad form. Its name is *The Times.*

In languages other than English, the article usually is included in newspaper names, however: *Le Monde, Le Figaro, Das Build, Il Mondo*.

See also **articles, italics**, **capitalization** and **magazine names**.

New York, New York City: The first is an American state, the second is a city in that state. Include the word “city” to avoid ambiguity, unless the meaning is obvious from the context.

The state capital of New York, by the way, is Albany, not New York City.

nicknames: These are familiar short forms of given names, used by close friends and family. A common misconception is that all Westerners like to be addressed in familiar fashion – by nicknames and whatnot – but this is not true. As a rule, you should not use familiar a form of address for a Westerner unless invited to do so.

Nicknames are fairly standardized. Following are some common ones: *Barney* is short for *Bernard; Carol* for *Caroline; Chuck* for *Charles; Chris* for *Christopher; Dan* for *Daniel; Dot* for *Dorothy; Ted* for *Edward; Liz* or *Beth* for *Elizabeth; Fred* for *Frederic; Hank* for *Henry; Jim* for *James; Jack* for *John; Joe* for *Joseph; Kitty* for *Katherine; Meg* for *Margaret; Mike* for *Michael; Nick* for *Nicholas; Pat* for *Patricia; Pete* for *Peter; Becky* for *Rebecca; Reggie* for *Reginald; Bob* for *Robert; Sam* for *Samuel*; and *Bill* for *William*. It is not uncommon to see *Bill Clinton* for *William Jefferson Clinton* and *Jimmy Carter* for *James Earl Carter, Jr.* Indeed, Jimmy Carter, the 39th president of the U.S., rarely uses his full, proper name, preferring his nickname instead.

See also **Western names.**

No. is acceptable as an abbreviation for “number,” but only if it is capitalized and followed by a numeral, like this: *We took the No. 73A bus to Kowloon*. Note that it takes a full stop.

A common colloquialism is *He’s my No. 1 man*, meaning *He’s my main assistant.*

nonce-word, nonce-phrase: A word or phrase used temporarily for some special occasion – *through train, second stove, perestroika, glasnost.*

See also **backformation, coined expressions** and **spoonerism.**

none: An old rule is that none is always singular. Nowadays, *none* may be singular or plural, depending on the context. If it means *not a single one,* then it takes a singular verb. For example: *None of them does tai chi anymore.*

If it means *no two or more,* or if it refers to some amount, then it can take a plural verb: *None of the Governor's advisers have reached agreement; none of the revenues have come in.*

noon is preferred to *12 a.m.,* which is confusing to some readers. Example: *He arrived at noon.*

See also **midnight**.

number in writing refers to singular and plural forms of nouns and pronouns, as well as the words surrounding and modifying them. The Chinese language lacks number, at least as it is known in European languages, so this is one of the most common sources of problems among Chinese writing in English as a second language.

The most basic rule is this*: Avoid needless shifts in number.* Here is an example of the error: *The graduating class decided to invite all their professors to their graduation dinner.* In this example, the subject of the sentence is *class,* which is singular, but the pronoun for which *class* is the antecedent is *their,* which is plural. So, this sentence shifted needlessly in number from singular to plural. Corrected, the sentence should read *The graduating class decided to invite all its professors to its graduation dinner.* If that seems awkward, then consider this option: *The members of the graduating class decided to invite all their professors to their graduation dinner.*

One more example: *The professors at the National Institute of Education have a good reputation.* The problem here is that *professors* is plural, while *reputation* is singular. It is unreasonable to assume that all the professors have a good reputation – after all, there are almost 1,000 of them – so the sentence should be revised as follows: *The professors at the National Institute of Education have good reputations.*

numbers, numerals: The words *number* and *numeral* are roughly synonymous, but, strictly speaking, a *numeral* is a figure expressing a *number*. Numbers and numerals can be written as words or figures, depending on the context.

Numbers and numerals can be *Arabic, Roman, cardinal* or *ordinal*. The ordinal numbers are *first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth.* Ordinal numbers in the teens end with *-teenth,* as in *sixteenth, eighteenth*. These can also be written *17th, 18th*. Ordinal numbers that are multiples of 10 end in *-eth,* as in *twentieth, fiftieth.*

The cardinal numbers are *one, two, three, four,* and so on.

The Roman numerals are *I, V, X, L, C, D,* and *M*. These mean *1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500,* and *1,000,* respectively.

Finally, the Arabic numerals are *1, 2, 3, 4,* and so on. They are universal.

Style with regard to numbers and numerals is probably the single most troublesome for beginning writers. The problem stems from the fact that there is one basic rule, but this rule has several exceptions, so it is knowledge of the exceptions that marks a good stylist.

The basic rule is that numbers from one to nine are spelled out, while numbers greater than nine are written as Arabic numerals — *10, 55, 93* and so on. With the above as background, following are some of the exceptions.

Never begin a sentence with a numeral, even if it is greater than 10. Instead, write out the number – *Thirteen people died in a railway accident in Bangladesh.* The single exception to this rule is years – *1996 promises to be a good year for pinot gris, a white wine that has been growing in popularity among young executives.*

Times, dates, percentages, ages and amounts of money almost always are written as Arabic numerals. All of the following styles are widely received: *3 p.m., 12:30 a.m., 30 June 1997, the year 2000, $6, $6.50*. A few exceptions include some famous holidays that are known as phrases, such as *Double Tenth* and *Fourth of July.* Another exception is colloquial phrases that are not, literally speaking, references to dollars: *She looks like a million dollars!*, meaning *She is exceptionally beautiful and well dressed!*

Times and scores for sporting events, and votes in committees, councils and courts, also require Arabic numerals: *The team's record for the season now stands at 6-6-0...*; *The match was tied at 4-4 at the top of the hour...*; *The world record for the 100-meter dash is 9.86 seconds...*; *The best time in the marathon last year was 2:08:35.2...*; *The council voted 8 to 4 in favor of the bill...*; *The appeals court denied the motion in a 2 to 1 vote*.

Military units have their own unique style that should be followed, regardless of other rules regarding numerals: *The Eighth Army, IX Corps, 2nd Battalion*. Similarly, aircraft have their own unique style that should be followed, regardless of other rules: *Douglas DC-3, Lockheed L-1011*. *Boeing 747*.

Fractions less than 1 should always be written out in text. They are hyphenated, and ordinal forms are used: *He gave me two-thirds of the total...*; *Only a fifth of the registered voters turned out*. For numbers greater than 1, use numerals and hyphens – *add 3-2/3 cups milk.*

Decimals are signified by a full stop – *98.6 degrees Fahrenheit.* Do not use a comma in place of a full stop; this is European style, not observed in Britain or America. Decimals should be written to the nearest tenth unless there is a rationale for a more precise figure. Decimals less than 1 should be preceded by a zero – *The Australian, who finished the heat in 30.40 seconds, narrowly edged the Chinese contender out of the finals by a margin of only 0.06 seconds...*; *The temperature was 30.6 degrees Celsius.*

Large numbers are separated into groups of three numerals, beginning from the right: *1,356 people bought tickets…*; *$276,900*. This rules applies to Arabic numerals only, not to Roman numerals. When it comes to numbers of 1 million or more, then the words *million, billion, and trillion* are preferred, and the numbers are rounded to the nearest tenth: *The company was running a $1.6 million deficit...*; *China's population of 1.2 billion is the largest in the world, but it is closely followed by the population of India, which now stands at 990 million*.

An exception to the above is colloquial expressions making use of numbers, such as "*If I told you once, I told you a thousand times not to do that!*" *he shouted*.

O, o

Occident, **Occidental** are capitalized.
See also **Orient**, **Oriental**.

octothorpe: Fancy word for *hash, lb.,* or *number sign* – #.

oh: Interjection denoting surprise – *"Oh! You scared me!"*

OK, okay: These are both colloquial, so they should not be used outside direct quotes. Inside a direct quote, *okay* is preferred – "*She's okay now*," *Inspector Lui said.*

old is somewhat pejorative in English when used to refer to senior citizens, so *elderly* is preferred in reference to older people – *An elderly man was found dead on the pavement beside Salisbury Road,* not *An old man was found dead. . . .*
See also **elderly, middle age, senior citizens, teenager** and **youth.**

old-fashioned is a compound adjective, so it is hyphenated.
See also **compound adjectives, hyphens.**

one-country, two-systems: This is the way to write the phrase describing the fundamental relationship between mainland China and Hong Kong – and, in the fecund imaginations of the leadership of China, the future relationship between China and Taiwan.

online is one word.

only: Apparently unknown to some writers, the location of this word in a sentence affects the meaning – *In the past, agents have only testified about their official duties.* This sentence states that agents have done nothing else in the past but testify about their official duties. Surely, however, they did other things in the past – went to universities, got married, had children.

To fix the problem, move *only* to the other side of *testified – In the past, agents have testified only about their official duties.*

To see how the placement of *only* affects meaning, read the following permutations in an exercise suggested by *Fowler's – The peacocks are seen only on the western hills. Only the peacocks are seen on the western hills. The peacocks are seen on the western hills only. The only peacocks are seen on the western hills.*

onomatopoeia: Creation of special words to represent sounds of nature. These representations vary from language to language. A few examples of onomatopoeia in English: cock – *cock-a-doodle-doo*; cat – *meow*; bird – *chirp*; dog – *woof-woof*; explosion – *boom*; fly – *buzz;* jet plane – *vroom*; snake – *hiss*; small bell – *ding-ding*; .
See also **backformation; nonce-word, nonce-phrase;** and **spoonerism.**

oolong: A popular amber tea in Taiwan and southern China whose leaves are partially fermented before being dried. It is not capitalized or italicized.

op. cit. is an abbreviation for the Latin phrase *opere citato*, which means *in the work cited*. In scholarly writing, it is used in footnotes — *Wong, op. cit., P. 10.*

This phrase should not be used when writing for the popular press.

oral: See **verbal**.

organise, organize: The former is British; the latter, American.

organizational titles are titles of people that signify their positions in organizations. They should be capitalized when used before people's names – *Last year saw a record 7.69 million arrivals, according to Singapore Tourism Board Chairman Wee Eee-chao*.

Organizational titles are not capitalized when the person's name is subordinated, or placed in apposition to, the organizational title. This kind of structure is called a *nonrestrictive phrase – According to the chairman of the board, Felix Rodriguez, the firm's profits rose 200 percent.*

Organizational titles are not capitalized when they appear with no name – *According to the chairman of the Democratic Party, the bill will be widely opposed by directly elected members of the Legislative Council.*

Organizational titles are lowercase and set off with commas when following a name – *Tony Latter, deputy chief executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority, Monday announced the creation of the Hong Kong Institute for Monetary Research.*

See also **courtesy titles; military titles; religious titles;** and **restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases.**

Orient Express is the name of a train running from London to Istanbul, Istanbul being considered part of the Orient in former times. The name sometimes is used incorrectly to refer to trains running from China through Russia to Eastern Europe.

Orient, **Oriental** are always capitalized. The word *Orient* includes the Far East as well as the Near East – the Near East including Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other nations of the Arabian Peninsula.

See also **Occident**, **Occidental**.

orientated, oriented: Because these words have identical meanings, some stylists prefer the latter because it is shorter.

orthography is the fancy word for *spelling*.

There are divergent spellings for the same words in American and British English. As part of a spelling reform movement in the U.S. in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, *calibre* became *caliber, centre* became *center,* and *theatre* became *theater.* Also, *colour* became *color, humour* became *humor,* and *neighbour* became *neighbor.* A complete list would include several hundred words. For computers, so-called *swap*

programs are available that exchange, or *swap,* British for American spellings and vice versa.

To minimize the work for editors, you should strive for consistency by understanding the expectations of your audience and relying on a good pocket dictionary.

See also the **Preface** to this book.

outback: Australian for desert country.

outlook is often misused to mean *appearance,* which is preferred

over should not be used to mean *more than,* as in *He earned over $1 million last year.* Use it to mean *above – The plan flew over the radar site,* but *He earned more than $1 million last year.*

See also **above.**

overall is one word – *the overall policy* .

overseas Chinese: Chinese living abroad.

See also **ABC, CBC** and **Greater China**.

ox: The plural is *oxen.*

See also **buffalo.**

Oxford comma: In a series, this is the comma that appears before the *and – Ernest Hemingway was a famous American novelist, short-story writer, and essayist.* American stylists tend to omit the final comma unless there is the possibility of confusion – *He ate a huge breakfast of muffins, pancakes, bacon and eggs, and fried tomatoes.*

P, p, pee

page is capitalized and abbreviated when followed by a number – *P. 15*. Use two pees for the plural – *For Tuesday, please read Pp. 162-175*.

palindrome: Phrase reading the same backwards and forwards – *Madam, I'm Adam.* Rare in English.

panties: Colloquial for *women's underpants.*

pants: Short for *underpants,* but trousers worn by women are often called *pants.* In any case, *pants* always takes the plural – *"Where are my pants?" the financial secretary queried.* The word is often accompanied by *pair of – Under his trousers, he wore a pair of bikini pants*.

See also **scissors, shorts** and **trousers**.

PAO: Abbreviation for *public affairs officer,* an organizational title denoting relations with the media and the general public. This abbreviation is not in wide use, so it should be avoided when writing for popular consumption.

See also **PR**.

paragraph style: Authorities in English composition often recommend that a paragraph should begin with a topic sentence, followed by exposition of the topic, followed, in turn, by a transition to the next topic. This practice results in several sentences that are unified in meaning.

However, paragraphs are much shorter today than they were in former times. The next time you read a dispatch from the Associated Press, count the number of sentences per paragraph. Don't be surprised if the average is between one and two.

Purists object to the AP's style on this matter, but research on readability indicates that shorter paragraphs are more readable. Readers are put off by large blocks of text.

paraphrase: This is a type of indirect quote in which a writer re-phrases a person's speech using the writer's own words. Usually this is done when the original speech does not merit direct quotation.

For an example of a paraphrase, see also **quotes and quotations**.

parentheses are overused by beginning writers. You should avoid them. Especially objectionable is putting an abbreviation in parentheses after a full proper name – *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).* Strangely, some writers do this even though they make no use of the abbreviation subsequently.

A skillful writer can introduce the abbreviation without the parentheses merely by placing it in a nearby subsequent sentence and allowing the reader to draw the inference: *The Association of Southeast Asian Nations agreed Monday to a regional security pact in the region. ASEAN, whose members have opposed such a pact in the past….*

There are times when parentheses are useful, however, and their application at these times is not disputed. One application is to insert clarification into a direct quotation. Example: *The Prime Minister said England would spend "about £2 million ($28 million)" on Hong Kong's defense, prior to 1997.* Another example: *The Governor said he was "looking forward to meeting (Chinese Prime Minister) Li Peng" on his first trip to Beijing*. The second example assumes that Mr. Li's title had not been provided previously in the story.

If a story is well crafted, then such applications will be unnecessary. In the last example, it would have been a simple matter to introduce the foreign minister's name and title in a paragraph preceding the quote.

A final application, one that is widely accepted, is to place a capital letter inside parentheses at the beginning of a direct quotation, like this: *"(P)rofessional education cannot stand alone, but must be complemented by explanation of the arts and humanities," said Myles Brand, president of Indiana University*. This is done when the directly quoted material did not begin at the beginning of the original sentence, but is picked up somewhere in the middle of the sentence.

If it is necessary to write parenthetical matter that continues for several paragraphs, do not close the parentheses until the final graph, as with quotation marks.

See also **abbreviations and acronyms; braces and brackets;** and **quotation marks**.

parking lot is American for the British phrase *car park*.

See also **American English.**

partial quotes: See **quotes and quotations**.

partner: Westerners, both men and women, use this word to refer to lovers with whom they have long-term, non-marital, relationships.

part-time is hyphenated.

passé: No longer in fashion. Although it comes directly from French, it is common enough in English to use without italics.

passed away: This is a euphemism. *Died* is preferred.

See also **deceased** and **euphemisms.**

passerby: The plural is *passersby.*

***passim*:** This word, which means "here and there" or "scattered about", is used by editors like this: *See my notes in passim,* meaning that the editor has written comments in various places throughout the text.

See also **N.B.**

passionate, passionately: Americans *feel passionate* about things, while British *feel passionately.*

passive voice is placement of the action of a verb in the subject of a sentence, like this: *My railway trip to Yunnan Province will always be remembered.* Here, the verb is *remember,* but what is being remembered is *my railway trip,* which is the subject of the sentence.

Stylists consider this kind of passive construction weak. You should work mainly in the active voice, shifting to the passive only for the sake of rhythm and emphasis: *I will always remember my railway trip to Yunnan Province.*

As an example of proper use of passive voice for the sake of emphasis, consider this: *A 17-year-old assistant chef was arrested for the theft of 3 catties of abalone from the restaurant's locker, police said.* Here, the emphasis should not be on the police, who took the arrest action, but on the suspect, who was the object of the arrest.

See also **voice**.

pastime: Note the spelling. This word is sometimes misspelled as *passtime* and *pasttime*.

past perfect progressive: This refers to verb forms such as *had been going.*

The past perfect *had,* makes the verb "perfect". The past participle *been,* combined with the present participle *going,* makes the verb "progressive".

Use this form of the verb when an action that continued for some time in the past ended when some other action began – *They had been swimming there for years when it was announced that the water was polluted.*

See also **progressive.**

past perfect tense: Use this form of the verb to refer to some action that was completed in the past prior to some other past action – *He already had arrived by the time the police showed up.*

Note that the past perfect is formed by combining the past perfect *had* with the past *arrived.*

See also **past tense.**

past progressive: An example of a past progressive verb is *was eating.*

This form of a verb is created by using a past tense of *be* along with the present participle of another verb. Examples: *They were jogging; he was swimming; the dog was barking.*

Use this verb to indicate some action that continued for some time in the past: *"Where were you yesterday?" she asked. "I was attending classes at the university all day," I replied.*

See also **progressive.**

past tense: Sometimes called the *simple past tense,* this form is used to describe actions completed in the past – *He ran to the corner; she drove him crazy; it all came out.*

See also **past perfect tense.**

Pearl of the Orient has achieved cliché status: It is used variously to refer to Hong Kong, Shanghai and sometimes even Penang and Beirut. You could write a lifetime's worth of works without using this phrase, and no one would notice.

Peking: See **Beijing**.

Peking University is correct, not *Beijing University.*

people, persons: The former is preferred as a plural of the word “person”.

peoples: Use this word to refer to collections of ethnically or culturally diverse groups of people – *The peoples of Africa. . . .*

People’s Liberation Army: This is the full proper name of mainland China’s standing army. *PLA* is acceptable on second reference. Note the apostrophe.

People's Republic of China: Full proper name of mainland China. It may be abbreviated as *PRC* on second reference. Note the apostrophe.

See also **Greater China, Formosa, Republic of China** and **Taiwan.**

per annum is Latin for *a year,* which is preferred.

See also **foreign words and phrases**.

percent, percentage: Write out in full, use Arabic numerals, and do not use the percent symbol (%) in text, although it may be used in tables. Also, use decimals, not fractions – *The market soared a full 4.5 percent in a single day of trading*.

For amounts less than 1 percent, use a zero and a decimal point – *Interest rates have risen 0.6 percent in one month.*

Per cent, two words, is no longer in fashion. Use *percent.*

perception: It's *perception of,* not *perception on – "What is your perception of the pace of democratization in Hong Kong?"*

perennial: Occurring every year. The term usually is used in reference to herbs that die back in winter but regenerate every year from their roots. However, it often is used figuratively to mean *never ending – Finding qualified people has been a perennial problem.*

See also **biennial**.

perfect tenses: These are verb tenses that use the helping verb *have* and indicate an action completed in relation to some other action. An example of the past perfect: *At the time he was laid off, he had worked there almost 20 years.* An example of the present perfect: *Have you seen* The Sound of Music *yet?*

period: Americans use the word "period" to mean *full stop, point* or *full point.*

Use the period to end declarative sentences, mild commands and indirect questions – *The prime minister donated his lottery winnings to charity. Meet me in front of the hotel. She asked him what was wrong*.

A sentence that ends with an abbreviation does not require another full stop. The

same holds for sentences ending in exclamation points and question marks.

In manuscripts being prepared for publication, use only one word space after a full stop, not two. This is standard practice in commercial typesetting.

Around quotation marks, British and American styles differ. British editors place the period after the close quote unless the period is part of the quoted matter. American editors place the period inside the quotation mark. So, the following sentence follows standard British style: *The girls' parents want the service to celebrate the lives of their children "even though they had been cut short"*. The same sentence edited by an American editor would be punctuated like this: *The girls' parents want the service to celebrate the lives of their children "even though they had been cut short."*

British and American editors follow different conventions with regard to use of the comma around quotations.

The period also is used in abbreviations.

See also **abbreviations, comma** and **ellipsis**.

periodic sentence: A periodic sentence is one that opens with a long, introductory phrase, placing the main clause last. It is an effective way to add rhythm to your writing. It also builds suspense: *Spiralling higher and higher on a current of hot air off the stony desert floor, Mohammed's first paycheck in five years disappeared from sight.*

When a periodic sentence grows to unmanageable length, the dash is used to signify the arrival of the subject of the sentence: *Challenge an American's right to buy a gun on demand; suggest that handgun purchases should be subject to delay pending a background check on the purchaser; explain that the proliferation of guns is responsible for the proliferation of violence in American society — do any of these things, and you will quickly discover why gun control remains one of the hot-button issues of American politics.*

In this sentence, note that the phrases are long enough to require semicolons.

See also **complex sentence**, **compound sentence**, **loose sentence** and **rhythm**.

person in grammar refers to *first person, second person* and *third person*. In writing for mass consumption, an excellent rule is to avoid forms of the first person — *I, me, we, us, our, ours* — and all forms of the second person — *you, your, yours* — outside of direct quotations.

So, instead of writing *The depletion of ozone in the atmosphere will have a significant impact on us all,* consider this alternative: *The depletion of the ozone in the atmosphere will have a significant impact on the human population*.

personal pronouns: These are *he, she, it;* their possessive forms, *his, hers, its;* their objective forms, *him, her, it;* and the corresponding plural forms, *they, their, theirs, them.*

Generally speaking, Chinese personal pronouns lack case and gender, so these gender-related forms are a source of much confusion. Just remember that a pronoun must agree with its antecedent – that is, the word that it refers to – in terms of gender, case and number.

petaca: The currency of Macau. It is not capitalized.

See also **currencies.**

phase: Capitalize when followed by a number. *Phase II*, *Phase 6*. Either Roman or Arabic numerals are acceptable.

Ph.D.: Abbreviation of the Latin *philosophiae doctor,* or *doctor of philosophy.* Note that the abbreviation has a lowercase *h* and takes points. There is no word space. It should be used sparingly. Instead, use the expression *holds (or has) a doctorate in – Dr. Lubna Alsagoff, who has a doctorate in linguistics*….

See also **academic titles**.

Philippine names follow the conventions of Western names, probably because the Philippines was ruled by the Spanish for 330 years, until 1898, at which time America seized it as spoils in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War.

See also **Western names.**

Philippines is short for Republic of the Philippines, which is the full, proper name. "Philippines" is used both as a proper noun and an adjective — *Former Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos.* But *Philippine* also is acceptable as the adjective, as in *Philippine Airlines.*

References to the country itself require the definite article "the": *After two years in Japan, the State Department assigned him to the Philippines.*

The people who come from this country are *Filipinos.* A *Filipina* is *a female Filipino*.

photo op: A short form of *photographic opportunity*, this is a staged ceremony by public officials who invite photographers to take photos of an event.

A similar phrase, common in England, is *photo call*.

Ping-Pong is capitalized because it is a trade name. *Table tennis* is the preferred name for this sport.

See also **trade names.**

pinyin: A system for transliteration of Chinese into the roman alphabet. It should not be capitalized, although it frequently is. There is no justification for capitalization because the word is not a proper noun.

Pinyin is a phonetic alphabet using roman characters adopted by the mainland Chinese government in the mid-1950s. Also called the Chinese Phonetic Alphabet and the Hanyu Pinyin System, it was initially conceived as a pedagogical device to standardize the pronunciation of Putonghua nationwide. It promotes the Putonghua accent heard in Beijing.

In the 1970s, the Chinese government made it official policy that all diplomatic communications using roman characters must follow the pinyin system of romanization. As a result, the spellings of Chinese place names immediately changed in most print media – *Peking* became *Beijing*, *Canton* became *Guangzhou*, *Nanking* became *Nanjing*, and so on.

Further confusing the issue, Taiwan's Ministry of Education in 1998 adopted another pinyin system, the Tongyong Pinyin System, to replace Wade-Giles system.

See also **Pinyin System** and **Wade-Giles.**

pistols are handguns. There are two kinds, *revolvers* and *automatics.* The automatic uses a *magazine clip* that is inserted into the handle. The revolver has a revolving cylinder that holds the bullets.

See also **caliber**.

PLA: See **People's Liberation Army**.

place names are names of places. Unfortunately, the spellings and pronunciations of early global travelers prevail in contemporary writings. There is a careless disregard for their success at rendering the local, contemporary pronunciation.

One result in recent years has been a trend to replace early place names with contemporary local renditions. For example, with regard to China, The Associated Press in the 1970s adopted a policy of using only *pinyin* spellings for Chinese place names. With this policy, *Peking* overnight became *Beijing* in American wire service reports, while *Canton* became *Guangzhou* and *Nanking* became *Nanjing.*

British stylists have steadfastly refused to comply with this trend, and one result is confusion among uninformed readers.

Although this defines the problem, there is no clear solution. Probably the best rule of thumb with regard to local place names is to use the local government's official, romanized renditions. In any case, the writer should also consider the audience he or she is writing for and tailor usage to meet their expectations.

When writing place names, use commas to set off political divisions – *Harbin, China.*

See also **pinyin; romanization;** and **Wade-Giles.**

plain-clothes: A police detective in *mufti* — that is, out of uniform — is said to be *a plain-clothes policeman.*

planets are capitalized: *Earth, Mars, Venus, Jupiter.* The adjective forms are not capitalized, however: *martian, venusian, jovian.*

Earth is not capitalized in contexts where the meaning is "soil" rather than the name of our planet. Example: *She is a down-to-earth girl.*

plants: Plant names derived from proper nouns are capitalized, *Oregon grape, Colorado blue spruce, Scotch pine.*

See also **botanical names** and **species**.

play: You can *play a game,* but not an *activity.* You can *play cards* and you can *play football* and *play tennis,* because these are games, but you cannot *play inline skating, play rock climbing, play sailing* or *play swimming.* These are activities, not games. The main difference is that games result in scores, whereas sports activities in general do not.

plough, plow: The former is British; the latter, American.

plump: To give full support for, as in a political contest.

plurality: See **majority, plurality.**

plurals: To form the plural, add *-s* in most cases — *boats, boys, cars.* The same applies to numerals, proper names and strings of multiple letters: *1990s, ABCs, IOUs, the '60s, three Boeing 727s, temperatures in the low 30s, the Carters*.

Exceptions include words ending in *ch, s, sh, ss, x,* and *z,* which require *es*: *the Bushes, finches, lenses, ashes, losses, foxes, buzzes.* The same applies to proper names ending in *es.* You must add another *es — keep up with the Joneses*.

For words ending in *y* preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* and add *es*: *eighty, eighties; industry, industries.*

For most words ending in *f* or *fe,* change the ending to *ve* and then add the *s*: *wolf, wolves; wife, wives* .

There is no standard rule for words ending in *o,* so the plural forms must be committed to memory or looked up with each use. Some take a simple *s,* others take *es*: *hero, heroes; auto, autos; potato, potatoes; memo, memos; motto, mottos; commando, commandos.*

For plurals of matter inside quotation marks, merely add an *s – With regard to the Good Quarto, published in 1604, and the First Folio, published in 1623, some of the differences between these two "Hamlet"s are dramatic.*

For single letters of the alphabet, form plurals with *'s – He has a problem minding his p's and q's.*

So-called irregular nouns have plural forms that follow unusual rules. Often these words come from other languages, and the rules for the plural forms are foreign to English – *fungus, fungi; mouse, mice; phenomenon, phenomena; child, children.* There are more.

Some words are used in plural form only, their singular forms having passed out of usage: *data, media, premises, crossroads, barracks.* There are more.

Some words have two plural forms. The singular *fish* can be either *fish* or *fishes,* depending on whether a single species or several species are referred to. Fortunately, there are very few of these.

Do not use the definite article when referring to countable things in general – *Automobiles today cost much more than they did in the 1950s.*

For noncountable things, see **articles.**

See also **zero plural.**

p.m. is the abbreviation for *postmeridian*. It means after noon. Some newspapers published in commonwealth countries drop the full stops – *3 pm,* for example – but whether you use full stops or not, the most important thing to remember is to be consistent.

See also **a.m.** and **time.**

points: See **period**.

police titles: These are capitalized, but not abbreviated, when used before a name – *Police Chief William Hawking, Inspector David Byrne, Assistant Commander Nancy Farrell.*

See also **academic titles, courtesy titles, military titles** and **religious titles.**

political parties: These are capitalized when the full proper name is used – *United Democrats of Hong Kong, the Chinese Communist Party*. Words like "communist", "socialist" and "democrat" are not capitalized when used loosely to refer to political orientation. Example: *He said he would never appoint a socialist to this post.*

positive statements are easier to comprehend than negative ones. A common fault is the double negative – *A not unnecessary condition for the venture is a strong infusion of capital.* This is awkward. It is better written *A necessary condition for the venture is a strong infusion of capital.*

Sometimes the double negative is used properly for emphasis, however: *Hong Kong cannot afford to do nothing about improving waste treatment facilities.*

possessive: To form the possessive, add *'s* unless the word is a plural. Plural words that do not end in *-s* also require *-'s*. For example, *men's room, alumni's contributions*. The possessive pronouns *his, hers, ours, its,* and *theirs* take no apostrophe.

For plurals ending in *-s,* merely add the apostrophe: *All of these vehicles' licenses have expired.*

For proper nouns ending in *–s,* add *-'s – Jesus's robe was taken by a Roman soldier*. It should be noted that this particular rule is widely disputed, however.

Be cautious about joint and individual possession. *Michael and Sophia's residences* means something different from *Michael's and Sophia's residences*. The former implies that Michael and Sophia jointly possess more than one residence. The latter implies that Michael and Sophia separately possess their own residences.

Do not use an apostrophe if the noun is used as a descriptive modifier – *He is writing an operators manual.*

See also **apostrophe** and **possessive with gerund.**

possessive with gerund: Surprisingly few writers realize how classy it is to use the possessive case of nouns preceding gerunds – *Then there is the issue of his coming late every day to lectures,* not *him coming late. . . .* More examples: *Bill's saying he wanted to marry her patched things up* and *The correspondence had nothing to do with our signing the contract.*

Note that these examples employ proper nouns or personal pronouns. The possessive is not used with the gerund when the noun is a common one – *The warm weather will hasten the cherries ripening.*

post mortem: *Autopsy* is preferred. *Post mortem* is a legal term from Latin meaning "after death". It usually surfaces in the expression *post mortem examination,* an inspection of a body in the event there are suspicious circumstances behind a death.

pounds, in reference to weight, should be spelled out and specified with numerals rather than abbreviated in text. The abbreviation *lbs*. may be used in tables, however. In any case, use numerals – *A catty equals 1.3 pounds.*

As for the British currency, use the symbol £ – *The government will provide up to £40 million in assistance to airlines for losses arising from the terrorist attacks*.

See also **numbers, numerals.**

PR is an abbreviation for *public relations*. Writers often are referred to public relations officials in large organizations when they make inquiries, so public relations personnel play an important role in the writing profession.

See also **flak** and **PAO**.

practice, practise: In Britain, the former spelling is used for the noun, the latter spelling for the verb. In the U.S., *practice* is used for both the noun and the verb.

See also **licence, license.**

precise language: Unfortunately for some writers, writing is a window on a person's mind. It explicitly reveals the clarity of one's thoughts. It opens the logical processes of the writer to inspection by outsiders.

This is a frightening prospect, and it should be reason enough for using precise language in writing, but a more important one is that, if the meaning is lost, the writer has failed in his objective to communicate effectively.

Often, imprecise writing is merely a matter of sloppy word selection. Consider *He ran in the house* and *He ran into the house*. In the former case, the reader might infer that the subject of the sentence did not enter from the exterior while running. In the latter case, the reader must infer that he did. Likewise, consider *He ran around half a mile* and *He ran about half a mile.*

Sometimes imprecise writing is a result of poor grammar: *I gave the guitar to my brother, Henry* and *I gave the guitar to my brother Henry* have different meanings. In the first, the comma implies that the writer has only one brother; in the second, the absence of a comma implies that the writer has more than one brother.

See also **concise writing**, **concrete language, restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases** and **word selection**.

premises, in reference to real estate, is always plural – *The premises are new*.

prepositions: A longstanding rule in English writing is that it is weak to end a sentence with a preposition. Example: *Botany is the field that he received his doctorate in*.

The problem with the rule is that sentences that are revised to avoid placing the preposition at the end often seem cumbersome. This is illustrated by Winston Churchill's famous remark to an editor who made a marginal note in one the statesman's manuscripts about a preposition at the end of a sentence: "This is the type of arrant pedantry, up with which I shall not put."

Then there is the story about a boy whose father, an English professor, read to him every night from the same dull book. One day, the boy said, "Why do you always bring that book that I don't want to be read out of to up for?"

The lesson is that it is natural to end some phrases with prepositions in English, and that unnatural revisions may seem awkward.

present perfect progressive: *It has been raining since Sunday; I have been lying here all night, unable to sleep.*

present perfect tense employs *have* or *has* in combination with the past participle of a verb – *have gone, has planned.* It has three basic applications.

One, the present perfect indicates actions that began in the past and continue to the present time – *It has snowed every day this week; I have been teaching full-time for six years.*

Two, the present perfect indicates past action when the time is not specified – *I have read that book.* If you want to indicate a specific time, then simple past is required – *I read that book last year.*

Three, the present perfect indicates actions that occurred in the past but have bearing on the present situation – *He has broken the fourth metatarsal on his left foot, so he cannot play football today.*

See also **tense**.

present progressive: A type of verb that combines a form of the verb *be* with a present participle – that is, one ending in *–ing.* The present progressive is used to indicate current, ongoing action – *The train is coming into the station; I am reading, so don't bother me; He is studying French full time.* Do not use the simple present to denote current, ongoing action, like this: *I read now.* This is definitely non-idiomatic.

The present progressive can be used only with dynamic verbs – that is, verbs that connote some action or process. It cannot be used with verbs that indicate states of being – *He is resembling his father; I am loving you*. These thoughts should be expressed in the present tense – *He resembles his father; I love you.*

See also **progressive.**

present tense has four applications. It indicates:

- Actions or situations that are currently true – *Hi! My name is Peter, and I am a university student* and *Those diesel minibuses pollute the air;*
- Habitual actions – *I ride my bicycle to the university every day* and *I always eat at the student canteen because the food is cheap;*
- Universal statements – *Ketchup makes everything taste better* and *One plus one equals two;*
- The historical present. The most common examples are newspaper and magazine headlines, titles and photo captions, which are always written in the historical present – *China Races To Replace U.S. as Economic Power in Asia.* The historical present also is used in storytelling to create a sense of immediacy – *I was minding my own business when this guy comes up to me and starts hassling me about my buzz cut.*

The present tense is often misused like this: *Looking for internships becomes extremely difficult.* In this construction, the present perfect or the present progressive would be preferred – *Looking for internships has become extremely difficult* or *Looking*

for internships is becoming extremely difficult – because they indicate current, ongoing action.

See also **historical present** and **tense.**

pressure, pressurize: The former is American usage; the latter, British.

See also **American English.**

prima facie is Latin for *at first appearance.* It is a common legal term that should not be used without definition when writing for a lay audience. It refers to "obvious" evidence that a crime has been committed and that a case should be brought to court. Loosely, the phrase is used colloquially to mean "on the face of it."

principal: This word is used generally to refer to the head of a primary or secondary school, not to the head of a university. Related words are *headmaster, rector, president, provost,* and *dean.*

A *headmaster* usually is the head of a private secondary school. *Rector* has a similar connotation, although some university chiefs also have the title *rector — Iu Vai Pan, rector of the University of Macau, received his Ph.D. from The University of Hong Kong*.

President is the most common title in America for the head of a university. *Provost* is a high-ranking university administrator, usually concerned with legal matters. A *dean* usually is the head of a college or faculty within a university.

See also **chancellor, rector** and **vice-chancellor**.

prior to: *Before* is preferred.

professor is a courtesy title for an assistant, associate, or full professor. It should be abbreviated when used as a courtesy title before a person's name – *Prof. Wilson*.

See also **academic titles.**

programme, program: British and American spellings, respectively, of the same word, especially with regard to radio and television content.

One exception is that, in Britain, *program* sometimes is used specifically to refer to computer software, but this is passing out of fashion.

progressive: This word refers to a class of verb forms that is usually overlooked in importance. Progressive forms are created with the present participle and a form of the verb "to be", and they are used to indicate action that continues for a period of time – *He has been dating Angela for some time now.* This is an example of the present perfect progressive. One more example: *It is becoming trendy in Hong Kong to eat* al fresco. This is an example of the present progressive.

pronouns require antecedents. Antecedents are the words that the pronouns refer to – *Doris decided it was time to let her hair down.* In this sentence, *Doris* is the antecedent for the third person possessive pronoun *her.* As in this example, the pronoun should agree

with the antecedent in number – singular or plural – and in gender – masculine, feminine or neuter.

Always be certain that there is no ambiguity about which antecedent is intended. Here is an example of an ambiguous one: *Robert wrote to Henry every day when he was away at school.* Ask yourself, who is "he" in this sentence? Here's another: *If your wife and the gray mare cannot get along, then you should have her put down.* Who should be put down – the wife or the horse?

proofreading symbols: These are for editing page proofs. Copyediting symbols are for editing copy. Examples of proofreading symbols are provided in many dictionaries.

See also **copy** and **copyediting symbols**.

proper nouns are the names of specific persons, places or things – *Spiderman, Garry Owen, Jiang Zemin, Canterbury, the Great Wall of China.* They are capitalized.

See also **capitalization** and **common nouns**.

prose: Writing that is not poetry. There is no plural form.

See also **zero plural.**

pro tem is an abbreviation of the Latin expression *pro tempore,* which means *for the time,* or *temporary*. Its use in writing may be acceptable if it is part of the formal title of a person — *president pro tem*. Otherwise, you should avoid it.

See also **foreign words** and **phrases**.

protest, protest about, protest against: To omit *against* is chiefly American usage – *The doctors protested the long working hours and heavy workloads.* To write *The doctors protested against the long working hours* is standard British usage. *Protest about* also is British usage.

See also **appeal.**

pu-erh: Green or black medicinal tea from Yunnan Province. Note hyphen and capitalization.

punctuation: See separate entries for **apostrophe, brackets, colon, comma, dash, ellipsis, exclamation point, hyphen, period, question mark, quotation marks, semicolon** and **virgule.**

Putonghua: Literally, "common speech", the principal dialect of mainland China. The word *Putonghua* is unrecognized by most Westerners, who use *Mandarin* to mean the same thing.

See also **pinyin.**

Q, q

Qantas Airways has no “u.”

Qatar also has no “u.”

qi gong, the stylized form of Chinese exercise designed to promote good health, is two words. It is not capitalized. It is common enough in English not to be italicized.

See also **kung fu.**

queen’s counsel should not be capitalized unless used as a title before a person's name.

question mark: Use only after direct questions, not after indirect ones. Example: *Where are you going?* But: *Your mother asked where you were going*. Another sample pitfall: *I wonder when we will see him again* does not take a question mark because it is a declarative statement about the object of the speaker's wonder. Similarly, *How To Write Plain English* is not a question – indeed, it is not even a sentence – so it also does not take a question mark.

It is a hallmark of an amateur writer to use the question mark inside parentheses to denote irony: *Her hospitality (?) left something to be desired*.

Sometimes the question mark appears in text to indicate that the accuracy of information is in doubt: *Charles Darwin’s* Origin of the Species *(1862?) had a profound effect on man’s perception of his role in the universe*. This is also a sign of an amateur: If you check the facts, you won’t need the question mark.

Another common abuse is to place question marks in pairs, sometimes with exclamation points: *Can you believe it??!!* If you do this, you will be pegged as a rank beginner.

See also **rhetorical questions**.

quit: The past tense is *quit*, not *quitted – Mandy quit her job at Treasure Restaurant only a month before it closed*.

quotation marks: These come in two kinds: *single* (‘ ’) and *double* (“ ”). The first of each pair is the *open quote,* the second, the *close quote.* On most typewriters and computers, use the apostrophe key to get the single quote. The open quote will be upside down if you use a run-of-the-mill typeface, but a competent editor will take care of this little detail when the typesetting is done.

You should use double quotes first. Use single quotes for quotes within quotes. Some people use double quotes for full, direct quotes and single quotes for words and phrases, but this is bad style: Use double quotes for all applications in which you want quotation marks, except for quotes within quotes.

When used around question marks and exclamation points, the question mark or exclamation point should be placed in a way that maintains the meaning: *Have you heard the song "Mambo No. 5"?*

In the English book publishing industry, single quotes are often used to denote direct

quotes. See *Hart's Rules* for details on British usage. At the overwhelming majority of English-language newspapers worldwide, however, double quotes are preferred for this. An exception to this rule is made for newspaper headlines, where single quotes are almost universally used.

Quotation marks serve at least four purposes: to signify the exact words of a speaker, to identify titles of compositions and works of art, to highlight unusual language or words that are being defined, and to denote irony.

In quoting speakers, words inside quotation marks are, for the most part, the exact words of the speaker. It is a courtesy to take the liberty of *cleaning up* a person's grammar, however — that is, the writer might alter the verb tenses so that they conform to one another, or break a long, rambling sentence into two shorter ones, even supplying missing verbs where necessary to make the text meaningful — but the original words and meaning are largely intact. When writers deliberately do not clean up a person's quotes, they usually are attempting to preserve the flavor of the speaker's original language.

One of the most common problems facing Chinese writers in English is how to handle direct quotes collected during an interview in the Chinese language. The received technique is to translate these into idiomatic English and present them to the reader as direct quotes, as though the interview were conducted in English. The key phrase in that last sentence is *idiomatic English*: Chinese idioms do not translate well into English, so the writer must search carefully for similar phrases in English.

To quote a speaker who is quoting someone else, use single quotes within double quotes: "*When I ran into her on the street, she said, 'Hello!', as though she knew me,*" *the manager said*.

Regarding the titles of compositions and works of art, newspapers differ from books and magazines in the style on this. Well edited books and magazines will use quotation marks for book chapters, but italics for book titles, works of art, and even the names of ships.

Newspapers, on the other hand, being daily publications with a short production cycle, use cruder typography. In newspaper style, double quotes commonly are used for the titles of books, films, television shows, song titles, musical scores, plays, poetry, and magazine articles, and for chapters of books and works of art, including paintings and sculpture. Examples: *J. D. Salinger's* "*Franny and Zoey*"; *Picasso's* "*Woman Descending the Staircase*"; "*Waltzing Mathilda*"; "*Apocalypse Now*"; "*Nightly News at Six*."

When it comes to unusual language, quotation marks are a useful way to denote a word or phrase that is being talked about rather than an integral part of the text. In writing, this usually occurs when you are introducing a new term. For example, *The government prosecutor referred to Wong as a* "*snakehead*"*, which is Cantonese slang for a person who brings immigrants across the border illegally*. Once the term has been defined, then the quotation marks are dropped for the remainder of the article.

Quotation marks are sometimes used to indicate irony – *The Aids awareness* "*campaign*" *was in fact nothing more than a few 10-second radio spots*. Naturally, this loads the text with your personal interpretation of events, so it seems extremely opinionated. Also, some stylists object to this technique, calling it "apologetic quotes" – implying that the writer who does this is apologizing for his inability to find a more appropriate way to express the thought.

One final note about quotation marks: Other punctuation used around quotation

marks should go *inside* the quotation marks if part of the quote itself, and *outside* if it is not: "*You already read* '*The Iliad*' *?" he asked*. Another example: *Remember the tabloid headline about the man transformed by surgery into a girl: "Doctors Say Christine Can't Date Yet"?*

See also **Chinglish, composition titles** and **quotes and quotations**.

quotes and quotations may be classified as *direct* or *indirect,* and as *running, full* or *partial*. They may also be *paraphrases*.

Following is an example of a *full, direct quotation*. In reading it, note the punctuation around the quotation marks: "*Taiwan and its leaders have a moral responsibility to assist China in its drive toward modernization*," *Minister of State Planning Chen Jinhua said*.

Now, here is a *partial quote*: *Minister of State Planning Chen Jinhuu said Taiwan has a* "*moral responsibility*" *to help China modernize.*

And here is a *paraphrase*: *Minister of State Planning Chen Jinhua said Taiwan should help China modernize.* Note that there are no quotation marks in a paraphrase.

A *running quote* is one that continues for two or more paragraphs. Close quotes are not used until the final graf: "*Taiwan and its leaders have a moral responsibility to assist China in its drive toward modernization*.

"*We must unite in thought and action if we are to survive as partners in the next century*," *said Minister of State Planning Chen Jinhua*.

A partial quote that ends a sentence and precedes a full direct quote is closed, however: *The minister described Taiwan's obligation to China as a "moral responsibility".*

"We must unite in thought and action if we are to survive as partners in the 21st century," he explained.

When presenting the full text of a person's speech, it is commonplace to open the quote with a colon and omit the quotation marks:

Following is a complete text of the minister's remarks:

Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to speak on the future of China-Taiwan relations.

As you all know....

See also **quotation marks**.

R, r

reason: *The reason why* and *the reason is because* are both abhorred by stylists. They should be *the reason that* and *the reason is that.*

So, *The reason why he quit his job is because he wants to spend more time with his family* should be *The reason he quit his job is that. . . ,* or *The reason that he quit is job is that he wants to spend more time with his family.*

re-: No hyphen is required as long as the pronunciation is obvious: *remake, reopen, reappear*. However. you should include the hyphen if you suspect there will be any ambiguity: *re-enter. re-election. re-use, re-cover* (meaning *cover again,* as opposed to *recover*).

rebut, refute: These words are roughly synonymous, meaning *to disprove.*

recognize: Note the spelling. *Recognise,* with an *s,* is a common misspelling.

record: It is redundant to write *He set a new record*. To write *He set a record* is sufficient.

rector: A title at some universities for the head of the school. For example, the heads of the International Islamic University of Malaysia and the University of Macau are *rectors,* not presidents or vice-chancellors. The word originally meant the person in charge of an Anglican or Catholic parish.

See also **chancellor, principal** and **vice-chancellor.**

Red Army: Colloquialism for the People's Liberation Army.

red pocket: This literal translation of the common Chinese phrase for a red envelope containing a gift of money has no equivalent in English, so it is meaningless to most Western readers.

See also **Chinglish.**

redundant, as in *He was made redundant when the firm halved its workforce,* is chiefly British. Americans would say *He was laid off.* Likewise, *redundancies* in British English are *layoffs* in American.

refute: To disprove. Refute often is misused to mean "rebut", as in *He refuted the changes*.

regions of the world generally are capitalized. For example: *the West, the Orient, the Northern Hemisphere, the Central Highlands, the Mekong Delta, the Temperate Zone, the Arctic Circle.*

The rule applies to major geographic features as well: *the Equator. the North Pole, the International Date Line.*

See also **capitalization.**

religious titles: Use these as courtesy titles for clerics. Proper form is important, because members of various religious groups are offended if the form is incorrect.
Most Christian congregations use *The Rev*. in reference to their leaders. For Catholics, use *Father* after the first reference; for Lutherans, use *Pastor — Father Edwards, Pastor Wong*.

Additional conventions:

The Most Rev.	Roman Catholic bishops Roman Catholic archbishops Episcopal archbishops
The Right Rev.	Roman Catholic abbots Episcopal bishops
The Very Rev.	Deans of Anglican cathedrals Catholic priests who head seminaries Dominican priests
The Rev. Msgr.	Roman Catholic monsignors
Bishop	United Methodist bishops

The article *The*, which always is capitalized in these titles, is required in proper style. If a member of the clergy has a doctorate, then *Dr*. is, unfortunately, inserted between his religious title and his name: *The Rev*. *Dr*. *William Boile*.

renminbi, the currency of China, is not capitalized. It should be written as *Rmb3,000*, with no word space, or *3,000 yuan* with a word space. Alternatively, it may be written *¥3,000*, if you can find the symbol in your computer type font.

See also **currencies, money** and **yuan.**

reported speech: This is a reference to quoted matter in text.

See also **quotation marks, quotes** and **thinks, thought.**

Republic of China: Official name for Taiwan.

See also **Formosa, People's Republic of China** and **Taiwan.**

research has no plural form and it never takes the indefinite article "a": *All of that research* is correct form to refer to several studies. *There have been many researches* and *I supervised a research on e-banking* are common errors in usage. These should read *There has been much research* and *I supervised research on e-banking.*

See also **zero plural.**

respectively is overused and misused. Consider the following, from one of the author's students: *While some university students enjoy dormitory life, Tiffany and Robin, failing to obtain a dorm room, rent a flat near their university respectively.* This sentence is ambiguous, to say the least, but one thing is clear: The word "respectively" is not needed.

Respectively means *in the order stated,* and it should be used something like this: *Arthur and Harry married Leonie and Sally, respectively.* In fact, this is rather clumsy and pompous, and the same idea could be better stated like so: *Arthur married Leonie and Harry married Sally.*

restaurateur is the correct spelling for this word, commonly misspelled as *restauranteur*.

restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases: Called *defining and nondefining phrases* by some British stylists, these types of phrases cause weak writers a good deal of trouble with punctuation.

Consider the following two sentences: *My brother, John, plays the guitar* and *My brother John plays the guitar*. The commas have a significant effect on the meaning: In the first sentence, the commas around *John* indicate that *John* is in apposition to *My brother,* meaning that *John* and *My brother* are the same person. In the second sentence, *John* is used as a means to confine, or *restrict,* the observation to a specific brother, thus implying that the speaker has more than one male sibling.

The first sentence contains a *nonrestrictive phrase,* while the latter one contains a *restrictive phrase.*

See also **apposition.**

Reuters is a noun and *Reuter* is an adjective, so the style is: A *news report from Reuters Monday indicated* ...; but: *A report from Reuter News Agency Monday indicated....*

rewriting: Now hear this: Rewriting is an essential part of the writing process, but it is the part most overlooked by amateurs.

Scholars who study the writing process divide it into three stages: *prewriting, freewriting* and *rewriting*. *Prewriting* is the preliminary research phase. *Freewriting* takes place when you begin taking notes, and it continues through the stage of a preliminary draft. *Rewriting* is the process of revision.

During the rewriting stage, you should:

- Select new words to make the language plain and simple;
- Break long sentences into shorter ones;
- Eliminate redundancies and delete unnecessary material;
- Modify sentence structures to improve rhythm;
- Rearrange paragraphs to ensure logical development of ideas;
- Check for internal consistency of facts, usage and style;
- Insert transitions where needed;
- Insert new material, if necessary, to make the piece stronger.

See also **rhythm**.

rhetorical questions are questions designed to produce an effect or to make an assertion, not to elicit a reply. *Could anyone do better than this?*

Beginning writers tend to rely heavily on rhetorical questions to make transitions: *What are Mr. Tam's views on distace education?* Or as an indirect question: *The South China Morning Post then asked the justice what his views were in regard to the Chinese legal system*. These are weak transitions.

An occasional weak transition may be acceptable, but two or three of these in a single piece of writing will weaken the overall product. It is superior to seek an alternative: *On the matter of distance education, Mr. Tam said....* This is much stronger.

rhythm in writing is achieved through word selection and variations in sentence structure. Although the simple sentence is the basic building block for most types of writing, a series of simple sentences can be monotonous. Example: *The Prime Minister explained the new policy. He said it would bring Japan into conformity with the international community. He said the policy would be introduced as proposed legislation next week.*

If two of these sentences were combined into a compound sentence, the writing would be more rhythmic. Example: *The Prime Minister explained the new policy. He said it would bring Japan into conformity with the international community, and he added that the policy would be introduced as proposed legislation next week.*
See also **complex sentence, compound sentence, loose sentence** and **periodic sentence.**

Richter scale: A scale of earthquake magnitudes using Arabic numerals -- *The earthquake had a magnitude of 6.7 on the Richter scale*. Note the capitalization.

ring off, with regard to telephones, is British for the American expression *hang up.*

road: Do not abbreviate, even when part of an address.

ROC: Abbreviation for *Republic of China.* It is not common enough to use on second reference. Use *Taiwan* instead.

See also **Formosa, People's Republic of China, Republic of China** and **Taiwan.**

rock 'n' roll is the common spelling for this phrase. Note that there are word spaces on both sides of 'n'. Note also that the punctuation marks are both apostrophes, not single quotes.

Roman numerals: These are letters used to express numbers. There are only seven: I (1), V (5), X (10), L (50), C (100), D (500). M (1,000). And they have only very limited use in most writing: *World War I, World War II*, for example. Also the names of kings, popes, movie sequels, book chapters, acts in some plays: *King Henry VIII, Pope John XXII, Back to the Future II, Chapter IX, Act III*.

A common mistake is to use the lowercase *l* to represent *I*. It should be a capital *i*.

The volume and issue numbers of publications are commonly expressed as a combination of Roman and Arabic numerals – *Vol. X, No. 4*. Modern publications use Arabic numerals for both volume and issue number – *Vol. 10, No. 4.*

romanization is the process of transliterating the words of a language such as Japanese, Korean or Chinese into a form using letters from the roman alphabet – *a, b, c, d, e* and so on. In conversions from Chinese to the roman alphabet, there are several systems, resulting in confusion. Various spellings for the same word – *Beijing* for *Peking*, *Guangzhou* for *Canton* – give pause to the conscientious writer.

For Cantonese the received system is the New-Asia--Yale-in-China system, or Yale system for short. The system was specially designed for the romanization of Cantonese, as opposed to Mandarin.

In mainland China, the most widely used system is *pinyin*, which was specifically developed for the romanization of Mandarin. It is inappropriate for Cantonese.

For place names, you should follow the romanization used by local governments. This applies to Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Taiwan.

For Chinese people's names everywhere. You should ask individuals about their preferences, because *Mr. Chan* and *Mrs. Chen*, although having different family names in English, might have the same family name in Chinese, as might *Mrs. Li* and *Miss Lee*. and *Mr. Chang* and *Dr. Cheung*.

For pinyin renditions of Mandarin words, consult a pinyin-Chinese dictionary, of which several are available. For New-Asia--Yale-in-China romanization, there are several publications of The Chinese University Press, including dictionaries, that explain the system.

See also **Chinese names, pinyin** and **place names.**

room numbers: Capitalize, do not abbreviate, and use numerals. Example: *He said we would meet in Room 316.*

round can be used idiomatically to mean *around*. The following uses are all acceptable, albeit somewhat less than formal: *We met round the clock*; *it was a round-the-clock session*; *she is an all-round athlete*; *it rained the year round.*

routes: Capitalize and use numerals. Example: *The most direct road to Kowloon Bay is Route 4.*

rube: Country bumpkin.

rumor, rumour: These are the American and British spellings, respectively, of the same word.

S, s, ess

sahib: In India, a title of respect for a man of wealth, power or education.

salad cream: Common phrase in Hong Kong for "mayonnaise".

SAR: See **special administrative region.**

Sars: Acronym for *severe acute respiratory syndrome.* Note that it is capitalized. *SARS* is also acceptable, but *Sars* is more common.

See also **abbreviations and acronyms** and **Aids.**

Satan is a proper noun, so it is capitalized.

scenes in plays are expressed with numerals, and "scene" is capitalized: *Act 2, Scene 3*.

See also **capitalization**.

sceptic, skeptic: The former is British; the latter, American.

scientific names: Latinate forms are italicized, and the genus portion is capitalized – Helicobator pylori *is a bacterium commonly associated with gastric complaints.*

See also **genus** and **species**.

scissors is always plural: *My scissors are on the desk.* Sometimes *pair* is used, but then a singular verb is required because *pair* is singular: *This pair of scissors is not very sharp*.

See also **pants** and **trousers**.

scold does not require *at.* It is not *I would not scold at them*, but *I would not scold them.*

Scot, Scotch, Scottish: A *Scot is* a person from Scotland. *Scottish* is an adjective referring to things from Scotland. *Scotch* is a type of whisky from Scotland. *Scotch* should never be used to refer to Scottish things or people.

Scottish surnames often have two capital letters: *McPhee, McGovern*. The *a* is understood, so different families with the same surnames may spell them *MacPhee* and *MacGovern*. Note that there is no word space in any case.

See also **Irish surnames** and **Western names.**

seasons: Spring, summer, autumn and winter are not capitalized unless they begin a sentence. *Fall* is American for "autumn."

second reference: This is a reference to any person after the first reference in a piece of writing. Generally, the style is to use a courtesy title and family name: *Mr. Lee, Mrs. Lockyear*.

See also **first reference** and **Mr**.

secretary general is not hyphenated.

section: Capitalize when used in reference to part of a document with a number or a letter – *In Section 11 of the broadcasting code it is written that....*

Section also is an American measure of land area equal to 1 square mile, or 640 acres.

See **figure** and **table**.

semiannual: Occurring twice yearly.

See also **biannual** and **biennial.**

semicolons are used between two short, related, independent clauses. Example: *William was quite handsome; his brother* was *not*. Semicolons are always followed by a single word space.

The semicolon is always required before a conjunctive adverb that appears between two independent clauses. Example: *She questioned the effectiveness of multiple vitamins; however, she took them anyway*.

Semicolons are also used to separate items in a complex series. Example: *Guests included William Stern, president of Ocean Garden Realty Corp.; Anna Feigenbaum, mamaging director of Magma Personnel Agency; and Henry Wallace, chief administrator of Queen Mary Hospital.*

See also **conjunctive adverbs**.

semi-monthly: Twice a month.

See also **biannual, biennial** and **bimonthly.**

senior citizen: A person aged 65 or older.

See also **elderly, middle-aged, teenager** and **youth.**

sentence length: Short sentences strengthen writing. There has been much research on the attributes of readability, and the most striking finding — a finding documented in several studies — is that short sentences are easy to read. Long ones are not.

The average length of sentences in the published novel in English today is less than 15 words. The average length of sentences published in prestigious newspapers and current affairs magazines in English is 20 to 22 words. Documents with an average sentence length of 45 words or more are not fully comprehensible to 95 percent of the native English-speaking population, according to researchers.

In rewriting, therefore, it is a good practice to break long sentences into short ones, and short sentences into even shorter ones.

This does not mean, however, that a series of loose sentences will result in a superior style. Indeed, variations of sentence structure are essential for a rhythmic, fluid text.

See also **loose sentence, rewriting** and **rhythm.**

serial comma: The last comma in a series, before "and" – *red, white, and blue.* Some stylists, especially American stylists, argue that the last comma should be dropped – *red, white and blue.*

Consider this sentence: *Alice, Carrie and Chloe left for Repulse Bay at dawn.* Does the sentence state that all three women went to Repulse Bay, or is it a statement to Alice that Carrie and Chloe went there?

Stylists who argue for omission of the comma state that it should be retained if there is any possibility of confusion.

See also **Oxford comma.**

sewage, sewerage: *Sewage* is liquid waste, usually human. *Sewerage* is the system of pipes and treatment facilities that handle sewage.

Most cities have separate systems to handle runoff from heavy rainfall. These are known as *storm sewers*.

sex: See **gender.**

sexist language is language that is linked to a specific gender. For examples: *postman, fireman, chairman, forefathers, statesman, watchman, mankind*. Some such words denote the female gender: *wife, stewardess, hostess, actress*.

The problem with sexist language is that it promotes stereotypes in the professions, so you should avoid it unless you have a concrete reason for using it. In every case, there is a "genderless" alternative — *mail carrier, postal worker, firefighter, chair, forebears, leader, security guard, humanity, spouse, flight attendant, host, actor*.

See also **he/she** and **she, her**.

SEZ: Abbreviation for *Special Economic Zone*, of which there are more than two dozen in China. Many other countries have developed them to attract outside investment.

The abbreviation probably should not be used on second reference because it is not widely known

See also **special administrative region.**

shall, will: Traditional usage is that *shall* denotes future action for first person, and *will* denotes future action for second and third person. Example: *I shall be there Monday. Will you be there by then?*

To express determination, however, the roles of these words are reversed: "*I will prevail!*" *the alderman shouted*. "*They shall not visit us in this house!*"

For organizational bylaws and public signage, *shall* is commonly employed. Example: *Photography in the museum shall be permitted, provided that no flash equipment is used.*

The above distinctions have become blurred over time, however, and nowadays *will* is preferred for most constructions. Example: *If I have any say in this, then we definitely will meet again!*

Shall is sometimes used for formal effect: *I shall return,* for example, or *Shall we dance?* But this usage is more common in spoken English than in written forms.

shanghai: This is a Chinese loanword in English, a verb meaning "to press into labor by unscrupulous means". The past participle is *shanghaied – I was shanghaied into proofreading that book.*

See also **loanword.**

Shanghainese: Dialect spoken in Shanghai; also, people from Shanghai, and an adjective denoting things from and pertaining to Shanghai.

See also **-ese.**

she, her: Do not use female gender in reference to governments, ships and other inanimate objects. This is old-fashioned. With regard to ships in particular, even *Lloyd's List,* the daily gazette of world shipping news since 1734, switched from "she" to "it" in 2002.

On the other hand, it is acceptable to refer to house pets, horses and favorite farm animals with third person pronouns.

ships' names should be capitalized – *The rudderless container ship Ocean Blessing collided with all oil tanker in the Straits of Malacca*.

Some editors prefer either italics or quotation marks around ship names, but this is falling out of fashion.

See also **she, her.**

shopping parade: Strictly British for a row of shops.

short-cut, shortcut: The former is a verb; the latter, a noun.

shorts: Short for *short pants* – pants cut above the knee – or *boxer shorts,* a type of men's underwear.

See also **briefs, panties, pants** and **trousers.**

showbiz: Colloquial for *show business.* It takes no article – *He began his career in showbiz at the age of 8.*

shroff: Regional term in the south and east Asia for a cashier or bank teller. Lore has it that the word comes from a family name in India whose family members were trusted by British to work as cashiers. More probably it hails from the Indian phrase *gujarati sayrafi*, or money changer.

sightseeing, sightseer: *To go sightseeing* is *to go on a tour.* The tourists themselves are *sightseers*.

simplified, traditional: A reference to styles of writing Chinese characters. Simplified characters have fewer strokes than traditional characters.

Beginning in 1956, some 2,000 simplified characters were introduced in mainland China as a means to promote literacy. Fewer strokes meant they were easier

to remember. Singapore adopted them as well. Hong Kong and Taiwan have stuck with traditional characters, however.

since: This word is commonly misused in constructions like this: *He started his music career since 1997*. This should read *He started his music career in 1997*. Another example from one of the author's students: *The university has launched the China Career Development Award Programme since 1997.* This sentence uses an incorrect verb form as well. The sentence should read *The university launched the China Career Development Award Programme in 1997.*

In these examples, *started* and *launched* refer to points in time, but *since* should refer to action continuing to the present – *He has been chair of his department since 1997.* Note that the verb form is present perfect progressive.

Singaporean, meaning a person from Singapore, is sometimes misspelled as *Singaporian.*

sink: The past tense of this verb should be *sank – The tanker Prestige sank about 1 a.m. with 70,000 tons of oil in its hold.* In the U.K., *sunk* is common, but some stylists recommend against it.

In any case, *sunk* is the past participle – *The ship already had sunk by the time salvage vessels arrived.*

sir: In the U.K., a title for a knight or a baron – *Sir Philip Haddon-Cave.* On second reference, only the given name should be used – *Sir Philip.*

The word also is used as a sign of respect in addressing a man – *Yes, sir.*

See also **ah-sir.**

sister-in-law, sisters-in-law: Note how the plural is formed.

See also **family relations**.

situation is widely abused, especially in broadcast news. *The weather situation* should be just *the weather,* for example. The weather, after all, is a situation. And *a crisis situation* should be just *a crisis.*

sizes: Lowercase with numerals: *His coach said he wears a size 13 shoe*.

slang: Contemporary, ephemeral language, used more frequently by lesser educated people. Examples: *Hit the road, Pal,* meaning, *Go away; Get your face out of my life,* meaning, *I don't want to see you again*. Much slang cannot be found in standard dictionaries, but there are several dictionaries specializing in slang for both British and American English. The Oxford English Dictionary's rule on including slang is that a word must appear in five different places over a period of five years to reach catchword status.

Such language should be avoided, because it is too colloquial to use in most writing, and it quickly becomes dated.

See also **ain't.**

smalls is chiefly British for small items of clothing such as socks and underwear. Most Americans would not recognize this word.

smoking gun: Colloquial for physical evidence of a crime.

snakehead: Regionalism in southern China for a person who aids illegal immigrants for a fee.

sneakers: Rubber-soled shoes for jogging and other forms of exercise. Chiefly American.

See also **trainers.**

snog: British slang meaning "to engage in heavy petting". *They snogged on the sofa all night like a couple of teenagers.* Americans would not know this word.

society, in reference to the human community as a whole, takes no article – *He wants to contribute to society*.

Specific organizations do take articles, however – *He is a past president of the Hong Kong Society of Accountants.*

See also **articles**.

software has no plural form.

See also **hardware** and **zero plural**.

some is used colloquially to mean *about – Some 30,000 people have emigrated this year*. Do not use it with an exact figure – *Some 234 birds were killed* looks silly.

some day, someday: As two words, the phrase points to a specific time – *We need to meet again on some day when we all are free*. As one word, it refers to an indefinite time in the future – *Someday the market will turn around.*

See also **every day, everyday.**

some time, sometime: *Some time* means a long time – *It's been quite some time since we last met. Sometime* means a point in time – *Surely we will meet again sometime*.

sound bite, sound byte: The former is the preferred spelling for *a brief statement from a recorded interview*.

South Asia: This is the region that includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It is capitalized.

Southeast Asia is capitalized because it is widely recognized as a geopolitical unit. The Southeast Asian nations are Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

sovereignty: This word is commonly misused in reference to the return of Hong Kong and Macau to Chinese administration. Example of misuse: *Britain returned Hong Kong's sovereignty to China at midnight on June 30, 1997.*

The reason this is improper usage is that "sovereignty" applies only to independent nation-states. China and Britain are sovereign states. Neither Hong Kong nor Macau was an independent nation-state.

special administrative region: In China, there are two of these, Hong Kong and Macau, distinguished by their political autonomy under a "one country, two systems" policy sanctioned by the mainland government.

In local contexts, *SAR* is an acceptable abbreviation.

Beijing hopes Taiwan will become a third SAR.

species names are usually preceded by the genus. The genus is capitalized, but the species is not — Homo sapiens, Civettictis civetta. The Latin forms are italicized.

Naturally, it would be inappropriate to use species names in mass circulation magazines and newspapers without providing a common name, for example, *The African civet*, Civettictis civetta, *is facing extinction.*

Species is both singular and plural: *Several Asian species are extinct* and *That species is being bred in captivity* are both correct. After the first reference, the genus name may be abbreviated – C. civetta *inhabits the savannahs and the forests of southern and central Africa.*

For official biological nomenclature, see the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature* and the *International Code for Botanical Nomenclature.*

See also **genus, scientific names** and **zero plural**.

speeds: Write speeds as follows: *250 kilometers per hour*, *75 miles per hour*, not *250 kph, 75 mph.*

spelled, spelt: The former is American; the latter, British. Both are the past tense and part participle of the verb *spell.*

See also **American English.**

spelling: American orthography is so widespread that it is preferred unless you are specifically targeting a British – make that *a Commonwealth* – audience.

See also **orthography** and the **Preface** of this book.

split infinitive: This is the name of a common grammatical error that results from placing a word between the two parts of the infinitive form of a verb. Example: *To boldly go where no man has gone before...*, an opening line from the popular American television series *Star Trek*. Correcting the error is simple: All you have to do is pull out the word and put it somewhere else nearby – *To go boldly where no man has gone before ...*; or: *Boldly to go where no man has gone before….*

Rigid enforcement of this rule sometimes results in awkward constructions, however. Consider *The rainfall during the monsoon season is expected to more than make up for last year's light rain.*

spoonerism, from The Rev. William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930), is a transposition of syllables in a word or phrase, often with humorous results – *flutterby* for *butterfly, blushing crow* for *crushing blow*.

See also **backformation.**

sports scores: When writing sports results, use numerals – *Lleyton Hewitt won his first Grand Slam by defeating Pete Sampras 7-6, 6-1, 6-1 in the 2001 U.S. Open*.

An example from football: *Newcastle United defeated Middlesborough 2-0 thanks to goals by Shola Ameobi and Stephen Caldwell.*

spring, the season, is not capitalized.

See also **seasons.**

stand out does not require *it – He wanted to make the doll ugly in order to stand it out* is incorrect usage. It should be *He wanted to make the doll ugly so it would stand out*.

starting line, start line: The former is preferred.

See also **finishing line, finish line.**

stationary, stationery: The former means "unmoving"; the latter, "office supplies".

station wagon: See **estate wagon.**

stone: British unit of weight equal to 14 pounds. This is not used in America.

storms with names and numbers are capitalized: *Hurricane Andrew, Tropical Storm Wanda.*

strangle implies death, so *strangled to death* is redundant.
See also **drown, electrocute** and **suffocate**.

stress is a noun and a verb. When used as a noun, it is commonly used with *on – He put stress on his students.* However, *on* is not used with the verb – *He stressed analytical thinking rather than rote memory.* To write *He stressed on* is a common error.

stuff has no plural.

See also **zero plural.**

style in writing can mean different things, depending on the context. Literary critics sometimes refer to Albert Camus's *white style* or *zero degree of writing*. Used this way, a writer's *style* means *manner* or *form*, something separate and distinct from *content*.
In this book *style* means *a set of rules for usage, capitalization, abbreviation, punctuation and spelling that are not covered by the rules of grammar*.

Style guides are written for specific audiences. This one is written for people who write for popular consumption. For scientific writing, a common standard is the

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. For scholarly writing in the humanities, a standard reference is the *Modern Language Association Handbook*.

See also **grammar, usage** and the **Preface** of this book.

subjunctive mood: Most forms of the subjunctive are rare in today's English, so using them makes your writing seem stilted and old-fashioned. For example: *The committee is insisting that the treaty be ratified* is a grammatically correct use of the subjunctive; however: *The committee is insisting on ratification of the treaty* sounds a bit more natural today.

Were and *would* are still common forms of the subjunctive, however, and they should be used where appropriate. Example: *If Nancy were here, we could play a foursome*. Another, very old fashioned, example: *If the legislation were approved, it would prohibit personal criticism of China's leaders.* In contemporary English, the following would be a more likely rendition of the same thought: *If the legislation is approved, it will prohibit personal criticism of China's leaders.*

See also **would**.

suffocate means to die from lack of oxygen. *Suffocate to death* is redundant.

See also **drown**, **electrocute** and **strangle**.

summer, the season, is not capitalized.

See also **seasons.**

summons: The plural is *summonses.*

Sun is capitalized when used in reference to the star at the center of the local solar system.

sunglasses is one word, plural and not hyphenated. So *He walked in with a sunglasses hanging from his collar* is incorrect. Being plural, it should not be used with the indefinite article "a". Indeed, it often is used in conjunction with *pair*, like *trousers*: *He wore a pair of reflector sunglasses* is correct usage. Use plural forms of the demonstrative pronouns – *Give me those sunglasses on the seat; these sunglasses are no good.*

See also **glasses, scissors** and **trousers**.

supergrass: Regionalism in East Asia for *informant*.

supersede is correct. *Supercede* is a common misspelling.

survey: It is *survey of*, not *survey on*: *He is conducting a survey of the modern art of Tokyo,* not *a survey on the modern art of Tokyo*.

sweats: Slang for *sweatsuit*, a thick, usually cotton, outfit worn during exercise.

T, t, tee

table: In the context of committee and council meetings, this word has almost opposite meanings in British and American English. In British English, *to table a motion* is *to introduce it for debate.* In American English, it means *to agree not to debate the motion at the present time* – in other words, *to reject the motion.*

tables and **figures** are uncommon in newspapers and magazines; charts and graphs are preferred.

table tennis: This is two words and it is not hyphenated.
See also **Ping-Pong.**

tael: Chinese unit of weight equal to 1.20337 troy ounces. Use numerals – *The ring weighed more than 3 taels.*

tae kwon do: This Korean martial art is written in three words. It is neither capitalized nor italicized.

tai chi: Form of martial art and meditative exercise. The full name is *tai chi chuan.* It is not capitalized, and italics are unnecessary because it is common in English.

tailor-made is a common expression meaning *made to order,* and it should he hyphenated.

taipan: Regionalism for foreign owner of major business enterprise in southeastern China.

Taipei: This is the preferred spelling for the capital of Taiwan.

Taiwan was known for 350 years as *Formosa.* Its formal name today is the *Republic of China,* sometimes abbreviated *ROC. Nationalist China* is also acceptable.

For political reasons, you will not find the formal name *Republic of China* in *The World Fact Book,* published by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
See also **China.**

take is a common word with several idiomatic uses. It generally means *to grasp*: *to take a pen out of a drawer, to take a book from the shelf*. However, it also means *to capture*: *they took no hostages, they took the city at nightfall*; and it also means *to accept* or *to receive*: *they took first prize, he took a bribe.*

People might say they *take a breath, take cream in their tea, are taking the train to Kuala Lumpur, took the stitches out, took all their energy to climb the Peak.*
To take up with another person means *to become friendly with* that person, suggesting intimacy. *Take up* alone might mean *to occupy: The bookcases alone take up half the*

space in his office; or *to continue: We will take up where we left off* is a very common colloquial expression meaning *We will continue from the point at which we ended*.

A person who *is taken with himself* is narcissistic, probably spending a lot of time before the mirror. *To take on* is *to accept responsibility* for a job. *To take off* is *to depart by airplane*; or, more colloquially, merely *to depart. To take over* is *to assume control* of something. Example: *Fidel Ramos took over the presidency in 1993*.

Take out, as a noun, is a meal from a fast food vendor that is packed in a box for carrying away. Example: "*Why don't we just do take out tonight?*" *she said*. But it also can be used as a verb.

"*I can't take it any more!*" *is* a complaint meaning: "*I've had enough of this foolishness!*" *Take after* means *resemble*, usually in reference to behaviours. Example: *He takes after his father*. But *take for* has a similar meaning: *The police took me for the burglar* means *The police thought I was the burglar*.

On the take means *open to the possibility of accepting bribes.*

As a noun *take* also might mean *a shot for a film* or *a page of newspaper copy*. Hence, we *take pictures* and *shoot takes* for movies.

See also **get**.

target: *Target at* is incorrect. This is correct: *The newspaper plans to target young adults.*

The present participle is *targeting*. It is commonly misspelled as *targetting.*

Tarmac, tarmac: When capitalized, this word is a trademark for a bituminous binder for roads. When lowercase, it refers to the surface of an airport runway.

See also **trade names.**

tarot: This refers to a set of 28 cards used in fortunetelling. It is not a card game. It is not capitalized. In common use, one *reads tarot cards*, not *plays tarot.*

teenage, teenaged: Both of these are acceptable adjectives for teenagers and their activities.

teenager: *Teenager* refers to someone in the early- to mid-teens. People aged 18 and 19 are legally adults in most Western societies, so they should not be referred to as teenagers, but as *adults* or *young adults.*

See also **youth**.

tee shirt: See **T-shirt.**

television: Informally, this is generally acceptable as a short form for *television set – He wants to buy a new television.*

See also **TV.**

television programmes: Names of television programmes are capitalized and italicized – Eye On Hong Kong *was moved from its 7:30 p.m. time slot to 9:15 in order to make*

way for the World Cup coverage. Episode names are set off with quotes but not italicized.

See also **lectures** and **TV**.

telly: British slang for "television".

temperature: Use numerals for degrees – *The temperature was 31 degrees at noon*. "Degrees" may be omitted if the meaning is clear – *The temperature dipped to 17 by 5 a.m*.

Include "Fahrenheit" or "Celsius" if there is ambiguity, but local custom is usually well established. Some acceptable styles are *86 degrees Fahrenheit, 32 F*.

It is poor usage to write *He had a temperature* when the meaning is *He had a fever.* The latter is preferred.

See also **Celsius** and **Fahrenheit**.

tennis: Use numerals for scores. Example: *Rallying in the final set after being behind by love–40, he won the match 6–1, 3–6, 9–7*. Note that en dashes are used, not hyphens.

See also **en dash** and **numbers, numerals**.

10 Downing Street: This is the correct style for the residence and office of the British prime minister.

Territory is capitalized when used in reference to the British Dependent Territory of Hong Kong.

Since 1997, the preferred term is *Region,* short for *Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China*.

See also **capitalization**, **China, Colony, Hong Kong** and **Mainland.**

terrorist: This word is loaded and should be used with caution. To supporters, a *terrorist* may be viewed as a *freedom fighter*.

TEU: Abbreviation of *20-foot equivalent unit.*

See also **FEU, TEU.**

text: As a verb, this means to send an SMS text message by telephone handset -- *You can text me later.*

Thai names provide the surname last, but it is common practice to use the first name on second reference – *Mechai Viravaidya, the "condom king of Thailand," favors prevention programmes. This would help cope with the shortage of hospital beds, Mechai said*.

that: Problems in the use of this word arise in two common contexts – as a conjunction introducing a dependent, substantive clause, and as a relative pronoun.

With regard to its use as a conjunction, a common query from writers is whether it is necessary to use *that* in constructions such as *He said that he is getting married.* The short answer is no – *He said he is getting married* is sufficient.

A good rule is that *that* is unnecessary and wordy unless its omission would cause ambiguity. Consider this sentence: *Kayce Law, chief executive officer of Nanxuan Industrial Co. Ltd., said that on Wednesday factory and office equipment was smashed and a truck belonging to a supplier was torched.* If *that* had been omitted, the meaning would have been ambiguous – that is, it would not be clear whether Mr. Law made his statement on Wednesday, or whether the violence occurred on Wednesday. Including *that* makes it clear the the latter interpretation is the correct one.

With regard to the use of *that* as a relative pronoun, see also **which.**

the is the definite article in English. Its use is a common source of grief among speakers of English as a foreign language, because its use is highly idiomatic. If it's any consolation, native English speakers also have problems with this little word.

When it comes to places, organizations and the titles of books and plays – indeed, the full range of proper nouns – capitalize "the" when it is part of the formal name: *The Hague,* The New York Times, The Times, *The Associated Press, The Bible, The Chinese University of Hong Kong,* but *the Pacific Ocean, the Pyrenees, the* South China Morning Post, *the West Coast, the River Thames.* If in doubt, check a gazetteer or the organization in question. Websites are useful for this purpose.

Use "the" with selected diseases and medical conditions, but not all – *He has the mumps/the measles/the flu,* but *She has a cold/a broken leg/a headache,* and *He has cancer, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's.*

For uses of "the" with countable and noncountable nouns, see also **articles.**

theater, theatre: The former is American; the latter, British.

Third World is capitalized. It can be an adjective as well as a noun, as in *Third World nations*. It refers mainly to underdeveloped nations in Africa, South America and Asia.

3-D: *Three-dimensional,* used most commonly in reference to stereoscopic commercial feature films. The abbreviation *3-D* is acceptable on second reference.

thinks, thought: These often are used incorrectly for attribution, as in *He thinks the pace of democratization in Hong Kong is too slow*. The reason it is incorrect to use *think* for attribution is that you never know what people are thinking; you know only what they *say* they think. *Says* and *said* are preferred.

See also **attribution** and **believe**.

Tiananmen Square: Note the spelling. *Tiananmen* is frequently misspelled.

tidal wave: See **tsunami.**

time: An unfortunate style in some commonwealth newspapers is to write times with points instead of colons – *She departs at 4.30*. In some fields, such as engineering,

factions of hours are expressed as decimals, so the meaning is ambiguous. There is no ambiguity if the colon is used, however. Some newspapers even drop points and word spaces – *3.45am,* for example – but this style is dubious.

Use the 12-hour system, and use *a.m.* or *p.m.* if there is any ambiguity. Do not use "o'clock" except under special circumstances, such as inside direct quotes. If no minutes are given, do not use ciphers – *5 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 10:51 p.m., 12:05 a.m.* If seconds are necessary, as in reporting a sports event, then the style is: *He ran the mile in 3:58.5; He ran the marathon in 2:22:14.5*. If days and hours are needed, as in a balloon race, do not use commas: *7 days 16 hours and* 22 *minutes.*

In general, durations are in numerals.

Indicate the time zone for events outside of your own, and, if appropriate, indicate the local time in parentheses. Example: *The shooting occurred at 6:15 p.m. EDT (7:15 a.m. in Hong Kong) at the west entrance of the White House*.

See also **a.m.; dates; EDT; GMT; midnight; noon; numbers, numerals;** and **p.m.**

tin hat: Chiefly British for "helmet".

titleholder is one word. It means the *winner of a sports event*.

titles: Regarding the titles of people, capitalize organizational titles that appear before a name, but not descriptive titles. *President Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan, Sen. Francisco Tatad, Premier Hun Sen* are all people whose titles derive from their official positions in organizations. On the other hand *businessman Apichit Angsupalakul, movie star Gong Li, veteran politician Juan Ponce Enrile, German student Peter Daniel* do not have such titles, so they are not capitalized.

Titles should be lowercase after a name – *Milton Chen, professor of economics at Princeton. . . .*

For titles of books, plays, newspapers, see **italics**.

See also **academics; capitalization; field marshal; italics; job descriptions; Lady; Lord; Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms.; organizational titles;** and **religious titles.**

ton, tonne: The American ton of 2,000 pounds is sometimes called a *short ton*. The British ton, 2,240 pounds, is a *long ton*. There are two Spanish weights: short tons, 2,028 pounds; and long tons, 2,272 pounds.

In any case, the *metric ton* (1,000 kilograms, or 2,205 pounds) is preferred for most references. If you write *metric ton* on the first reference, you can drop the word *metric* on subsequent references and there will be no ambiguity. The metric ton is sometimes spelled *tonne,* but it is not common usage.

tone in writing be classified as *formal* or *informal*, as *serious* or *humorus*, as *weak* or *strong*. Indeed *tone* can be characterized with any adjective that seems to describe the writer's attitude — *indignant, guarded, reserved, business-like, disapproving.*

Tone is controlled through selection of language. Example: *You need to watch out for pickpockets when hanging out in Rio* is less formal than *Travellers to Rio de Janeiro should guard their valuables from street thieves*. What makes it less formal is the use of the second person — *you* — and colloquialisms — *watch out* and *hanging out*.

Inexperienced writers at times lose control of tone through improper word selection. The wise writer chooses words carefully. In general, writing for popular consumption is slightly on the formal side.

See also **usage**.

Tongyong Pinyin System: New system for the romanization of Chinese characters. It is based on the Wade-Giles system has been officially adopted by Taiwan.

Tongyong was only recently invented in Taiwan, in 1998. It is supposed to be 85 percent similar to the hanyu pinyin system of mainland China. Most of the differences are in consonant symbols: tongyong pinyin does not use *q*'s, *x*'s and *zh*'s. There are also differences in vowel symbols, using *-iou* to replace *-iu*. The umlaut in some characters in hanyu pinyin is not used in tongyong..

See also **pinyin, romanization** and **Wade-Giles.**

total is often used in prolix constructions – *He gave me a total of $20* probably should be just *He gave me $20.* Use "total" only to emphasize the total amount in question.

trade names are government-registered, commercial product names, or brand names. As proper names, they are capitalized: *Kodak, Levi's, Ping-Pong, Snickers*.

A few such names have come into common use and do not require a capital: *aspirin, scotch tape*.

As a general rule, writers try to avoid using product names unless they are part of the story. *He smoked a package of cigarets* is preferred to *He smoked a package of Camels*. *He asked for a bandage* is preferred to *He asked for a Band-Aid.*

See also **Band-Aid, Coca-Cola, Levi's, Ping-Pong, Tarmac** and **Walkman**.

traditional Chinese medicine is an oxymoron because medicine is a science, and science is not based on tradition. Merely *Chinese medicine* will suffice, and it will prevent the guffaws from medical practitioners who know better.

trainers: Chiefly British for robber-soled athletic shoes.

See also **sneakers.**

transitions are short, simple phrases that aid the reader in shifting focus over time or distance.

Transitions are often accomplished with transitional phrases — *meanwhile, just as significant, elsewhere, on the other hand, likewise, for this reason, in summary*.

A common device in writing a long explanation is enumeration of paragraphs: *First..., Second..., Third...*; or some related technique: *First..., Then..., Next..., Finally....*

These not only provide transitions, but link the paragraphs together into a unit.

During the rewriting phase of the writing process, the writer should carefully assess the writing for proper transitions and insert them where necessary.

See also **rewriting**.

transliteration is the process of rendering the characters of one language into those of another. The preferred method of transliterating Chinese for Western consumption is a system of *romanization* using the *pinyin* system.

See also **pinyin** and **romanization.**

transport is singular in the phrase *public transport*. There is no plural form.

See also **zero plural.**

transsexual: A person who has had a sex-change operation.

See also **transvestite**.

transvestite: A person who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex.

See also **transsexual.**

Triad, when capitalized, is short for *Triad Society*, a reference to Chinese organized crime in southern China and overseas Chinese communities. *Triad* refers to the *union of heaven, Earth and man*. The plural is *Triads.*

When not capitalized, *triad* means any *grouping of three elements.*

trillion: A thousand billion.

See also **billion** and **numbers, numerals.**

trousers are long pants worn mainly by men, and they always take the plural. Example: *His trousers were dirty and threadbare*. The word is often accompanied by "pair of": *He wore a pair of black trousers*. When accompanied by *pair of*, the phrase *pair of trousers* takes a singular verb.

See also **pants**, **scissors** and **sunglasses.**

try and, try to: The latter is preferred in constructions such as *try to achieve 12 percent growth next year*. To write *try and achieve 12 percent growth* separates the act of trying from the act of achieving, but they obviously are linked.

T-shirt, tee shirt: Both are acceptable, but the former is preferred. Note the capitalization and hyphenation.

tsunami: A large wave produced by an earthquake. It is usually referred to as a *tidal wave* in the mass media, so *tidal wave is* preferred usage when writing for a lay audience; however, *tsunami* is the correct geological term for this disturbance.

TV is an abbreviation for *television set* or *television receiver*. It is not acceptable in the body of text. Use only in titles and headlines and inside direct quotations. Note that is has no points.

See also **television.**

twig: This is chiefly British for "to figure out" or "come to understand" – *The audio transmission was restored when the censors twigged to the inoffensive nature of the news.* Most Americans would not recognize this word.

U, u

u: The 21st letter of the modern English alphabet, "u" was identical in form and function to "v" in the Latin alphabet, so Latin words like *forvm* were pronounced as *forum.*

uh: Interjection denoting hesitation – "*Uh, I don't know what to say*."

uh-huh: Interjection denoting agreement. It should be inside direct quotes – *"Uh-huh, I agree."*

uh-uh: Interjection denoting disagreement. It should be used only inside direct quotes: *"Uh-uh," he said, "count me out."*

Uighurs, Uyghurs: Muslim minority group in eastern Turkestan and western China. The former spelling is preferred.

umlaut: See **accents**.

uncountable nouns like *water, snow* and *sand* are grammatically singular, but plural forms arise in special applications, complicating the issue – The Snows of Kilimanjaro, *the waters of the Gulf, White Sands missile range*.... When in doubt, use the singular.

under water, underwater: *Under water* is an adjective modifying a noun – *Arrowhead, a species of* Sagittaria*, does not do well under water*. *Underwater* is an adjective – *He purchased an underwater camera.*

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom comprises Northern Ireland and Britain.
See also **British Isles** and **England.**

United States: See **U.S., U.S.A.**

university: To write *The dean of the Faculty of Education in The University of Hong Kong* is incorrect. It should be *at The University of Hong Kong.*
Also note that some universities use *the* as part of their full, proper names and some do not, so it's *The Chinese University of Hong Kong* and *The University of Hong Kong,* but *City University of Hong Kong.*
See also **the.**

up is sometimes used colloquially as a verb, as in *He upped the ante*; *it will up the price of rice futures*. This is poor usage, however.

uppercase, lowercase: The *uppercase* letters in Western alphabets are the capitals; the *lowercase* letters are the small ones. Historically, the terms originate from the position of the *cases,* or wooden drawers, that the letters were stored in at a printing company: capital letters were in the *upper case* and small letters were in the *lower case.*

ur-, as a prefix, means "original" or "primitive" – *The ur-text of Churchilliana is Sir Martin Gilbert's eight-volume biography,* Churchill: A Life.

See also **eo-.**

URL, the abbreviation of "uniform resource locator", is acceptable on first reference because most people do not know what stands for.

U.S., U.S.A. *U.S.A.* is the preferred abbreviation for the United States of America. *U.S.* is preferred as the adjective form – *the U.S.-led economic boycott, the U.S. Army, the U.S. trade deficit, he returns to the U.S.A. today.*

The points are dropped in references to U.S. currency: *The trade deficit was US$143.6 billion.*

usage: *Usage,* in the context of this book, is a reference to word selection. Two major domains of usage are *British usage* and *American usage* – that is, should the writer use *pavement* or *sidewalk, lift* or *elevator, flat* or *apartment*. Naturally, the answer depends on the target audience.

Usage also extends to issues concerning *tone,* however. One uses slang to achieve an *informal tone*. Example: *He was totally pissed, so he crashed at John's* means *He was quite drunk, so he slept at John's residence.*

Regarding person, using the first and second person – *I* and *you* – in writing automatically creates a personal relationship with the reader and thus contributes to an informal tone.

See also **American English, person, style** and **tone**.

usage, use: *Usage* sometimes is used incorrectly to mean *use,* which can be a noun as well as a verb — *Power usage was up*. This should be *Power use was up*.

V, v

variorum: Edition of a classic work that attempts to include all variations as well as scholarly commentary.

VCD: Abbreviation for videocassette disc. Acceptable after first reference.

VCR: Abbreviation for videocassette recorder. Acceptable after first reference.

verbal: This word can refer to either *spoken* or *written communications*, but people use it mistakenly to mean only *oral*.

very: This word, like "many", is one you probably can live without.
See also **many** and **more and more.**

VHF: Very high frequency, a reference to a range of radio waves used in commercial television broadcasting. It can be abbreviated on first reference.

vice-chancellor is hyphenated. In Hong Kong especially, it refers to the working head of a university, and it should be capitalized when used as a title before a person's name – *Former Vice-Chancellor Arthur K.C. Li. . . .*
See also **chancellor, headmaster, principal** and **rector.**

vice-chairperson is hyphenated.

vice president is not hyphenated when used as a noun. The adjective *vice-presidential* is hyphenated, however.

videocassette is one word. It is not hyphenated and has no word space.

videotape is one word and it has no word space.

Vietnamese names: The family name is first, followed by two given names – *Le Duc Anh, Ho Chi Minh, Ly Tong*. However, it is common practice on second reference to use the last name: *Gen. Anh, Mr. Tong.*

virgule: This is the fancy word for a forward slash (/).
It is stylistically awkward to use it in text, but it recent years it has surfaced in constructions such as *he/she* and *and/or*: *The chief executive and/or his wife are expected at the reception* This is a poor practice. It would be better to recast the sentence: *The chief executive and his wife are both expected at the reception, but it is possible that only one will come.*
See also **and/or** and **he/she**.

vitamin is not capitalized in references such as *vitamin B12, vitamin A, vitamin B6*. Note that, when both a letter and a number are part of a vitamin's name, there is no word space between the letter and the number.

vocabulary is singular. It is incorrect to write *vocabularies* when what is meant is *vocabulary words*.

voice is a state of a verb that indicates whether action is being performed on the subject or the object of the sentence. It takes two forms, *active* and *passive*.

The following statement is active: *Mr. Li organized the ill-fated journey of the Golden Venture*.

This is passive: *The ill-fated journey of the Golden Venture was organized by Mr Li*.

In the first example, the object of the action is the predicate of the sentence; in the second example, the object of the action is in the subject of the sentence.

Most stylists argue that the active voice is superior to the passive because it is more direct. However, the passive voice is appropriate if you desire to emphasize the object of the action. Example: *Mr. Li was charged by police with two counts of murder, one of attempted murder and one of onspiracy to murder*.

In the last example, the phrase *by police,* being in the predicate, was subordinated because it was of little importance. Indeed, it could have been omitted because the reader would understand from the context that police had brought the charges.

voice mail is two words.

voice out is Chinglish. It shows up in expressions such as *I would like to voice out about any unfairness*. The *out* should be dropped, and *about* may be dropped in some contexts.

Here are examples of the proper use of *voice* as a transitive verb – *I would like to voice my opinion about any unfairness; she voiced no complaints.*

volume numbers of serial publications are usually written with Roman numerals, while the series numbers are written with arabic numberal – *Vol. XIX, No. 3*.

votes are reported with numerals: *The vote was 33 to 5, with 4 abstentions*. Note the special use of hyphens in compound modifiers – *The motion failed on a 6-to-3 ruling*. However, *The justices voted 6 to 3 in his favor* also is correct style.

See also **numbers, numerals**.

W, w, double-u

Wade-Giles is the name of the most popular system for romanization of Chinese characters in the 20th century. It is named after Thomas Francis Wade and Herbert Allen Giles.

Sir Thomas Francis Wade (1818-1895) was a British army officer who was first sent to China in 1842. An ardent student of the Chinese language, he published *Peking Syllabary* in 1859 and later became the official British interpreter for significant treaty discussions. In 1888 he was appointed as the first ever professor of Chinese at Cambridge University. His successor in this post was Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935), who modified and popularized Wade's system of romanization.

In the late 20th century, the Wade-Giles system was supplanted by the pinyin system in mainland China, but Wade-Giles is still in use in Taiwan, and it shows up frequently in references to mainland Chinese language and culture that pre-date the pinyin system.

See also **pinyin** and **romanization.**

wake: See **awaken.**

Walkman is a trade name for a series of portable music players, so it should be capitalized. The plural is *Walkmans,* not *Walkmen.*

See also **mouse** and **trade name.**

wanna: Used in casual writing to mean "want to". Don't use it unless you desire to appear uneducated.

war is capitalized when used in reference to a historical event — *the Opium Wars, the Spanish-American War, World War II.*

See also **capitalization**.

Washington: Many U.S. place names use this word, resulting in confusion.

For the U.S. capital, write *Washington, D.C.*

For the state, write *the state of Washington.*

For the state university in Pullman, Wash., write *Washington State.*

water buffalo, water ox: This is the correct name for the bovine beast of burden seen in the rice paddies of South and East Asia. A synonym is *carabao,* although this is not nearly so common. The plurals are *water buffaloes* and *water oxen.*

See also **buffalo.**

weather situation: *Weather* is a *situation,* so *weather situation* is redundant. Just write *weather – Turning now to the weather. . . .*

See also **crisis situation**.

Web: *Web* is capitalized when used in reference to the World Wide Web.

See also **Internet.**

website is one word, and it is not capitalized.

well is an adverb, but a lot of people hyphenate it unnecessarily — *The room is well-ventilated*. This is incorrect because *ventilated* is an adjective and *well* is an adverb modifying *ventilated*.

On the other hand, *well* is routinely hyphenated with adjectives appearing before nouns – *well-mannered boy, well-read barrister, well-known politician*. Example: *After all, all he did was string together a lot of old, well-known quotations,* a comment by H.L. Mencken, writing about Shakespeare.

The following always require hyphens – *well-being, well-advised, well-to-do.*

well-being is hyphenated.

See also **hyphen** and **well.**

West is capitalized when used in reference to American and European culture. Also capitalized are derivations such as *Western, Westerner,* and *Westernization*.

Do not capitalize when used as a compass point – *Tropical Cyclone Rammasun blew out of the west; the Uighurs live in western China.*

Western names: The family name, often referred to as the *surname*, usually is the last one. Other names are called *given names* or *Christian names,* the latter being somewhat outmoded.

Usually there are two given names and one surname, making a total of three – *Dwight David Eisenhower.* However, some people have only one given name, and others have three – *Nathan Ethan Henry Allen,* for example. But in many cases, the so-called *middle names* are omitted or abbreviated: *George Comstock, Bart Simpson, John F. Kennedy*. When the middle name is abbreviated, the abbreviation is referred to as the *middle initial*. When asking a Westerner to spell his or her name, the writer might inquire, "Do you use a middle initial?"

Some Westerners abbreviate both given names – *E.B. White, O.J. Simpson, C.S. Lewis, E.E. Cummings.* (But it should be noted that Mr. Cummings, an eminent American poet, did not capitalize his name when he wrote it himself: He always wrote it as *e.e. cummings.*) In former times, there was a word space between the initials, but note that, in modern style, there is no word space between them.

A woman's surname prior to marriage is her *maiden name*. Traditionally, Western women use their husband's surnames after marriage, but it is not uncommon today for married women from the U.K. and the U.S. to hyphenate their surnames – *Mathilda Butler-Paisley*. In this style, the woman's maiden name, *Butler*, is followed by her husband's surname, *Paisley*.

In Spanish and Portuguese cultures, it is common for men to have hyphenated surnames. The father's surname is first, followed by the mother's – *Hector Garcia-Goday*. Occasionally, a *y* is used instead of a hyphen: *Raul Jimenez y Lopez*. There are word spaces on each side of the *y*. When a woman marries, she retains her

surname but also takes her husband's, preceded by *de*; so if *Julia Gonzalez* marries *Juan Garcia*, she becomes *Julia Gonzalez de Garcia*.

See also **Irish surnames, nicknames,** and **Scottish surnames**.

wet market: Regionalism in southern China for an open, covered area, usually overseen by a government agency, where fresh fruits and vegetables are sold.

Wet markets in Guangdong Province also sell hundreds of species of live animals, including civets, ducks, cranes, chickens, fish, foxes, frogs, martens, muntjacs, pangolins, pheasants, pigeons, snails, snakes, sparrows, toads, tortises turtles and turtledoves -- not to mention live cats and dogs for human consumption. Many species are endangered.

Wet market is two words and it is not hyphenated.

wharf: The plural is *wharves.*

See also **dwarf.**

whereabouts: Whether this should take a singular or plural verb is a matter of debate. The preference of this author is for the singular – *His whereabouts is unknown.* However, most writers prefer the plural – *The whereabouts of the missing necklace remain a mystery.* Decide for yourself what you think is best, and stick to it.

whether is sometimes confused with *if*. *Whether* implies that there are two alternatives – *I do not know whether I should buy that car or not*. Some stylists object to the use of "or not", but to use it is not incorrect. It merely is wordy.

See also **if**.

which, that: With regard to these relative pronouns, American stylists prefer *which* in nonrestrictive clauses and *that* in restrictive clauses – *Legislators opposed measures that would increase the financial burden on consumers. They specifically objected to a sales tax, which they said would be regressive.*

One more example: *The fan that is broken is in the closet* versus *The fan, which is broken, is in the closet.*

See also **restrictive and nonrestrictive phrases** and **that.**

while, whilst: The former is American; the latter, British.

While is a noun meaning *a short time – He slept for a while*. It often is confused with *awhile*, which is an adverb – *He slept awhile*.

The word also is used rather like a conjunction, meaning "during the time" – *Agnes fed my tropical fish while I was on vacation in the Maldives.*

See also **awhile**.

whinge, meaning to protest or complain, is chiefly British. Most Americans would not recognize this word.

whisky, whiskey: A type of liquor. The first spelling is Scottish, and it is the form used in America; the second is Irish. Scottish whiskey is also called *scotch*.

See also **Scot**, **Scotch, Scottish**.

White House takes "the" – *the White House* – but the "the" is not capitalized.

whom is the objective form of *who*. *Who* often is used colloquially when *whom* is required. Example: *Whom did she see at the office?* is gramatically correct, but *Who did she see at the office?* is colloquial and is considered by some people to be acceptable in spoken English.

The colloquial use of *who* is not acceptable in written English, however, so *It is not yet known whom the chief executive appointed* is preferred to *It is not yet known who the chief executive appointed,* even though the latter may sound natural in spoken English.

wind surfer and **wind surfing** are not hyphenated.

winter, the season, is not capitalized.

See also **seasons.**

wonton: Chinese dumpling filled with minced pork and spices, usually served in a soup. It is usually written as one word.

word selection: Mark Twain, who was arguably the greatest American writer of the 19th century, once said the difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug. In other words, the difference is big.

There are a few simple rules of thumb regarding word selection. The most important rule is to use simple words. English contains a mix of words from all over the world, but large portions are from Roman and Anglo-Saxon languages. Anglo-Saxon words are known for being blunt, one-syllable words. Many writers prefer them.

For example, if you have a choice between *proficient* and *good,* use the latter. Use *use* instead of *utilize*; *get* instead of *acquire*; *wealth* instead of *prosperity*; *power* instead of *authority*; *he knew* instead of *he was cognizant of*; *the maid was cooking* instead of *the maid was preparing a meal*.

Short, simple, direct language is a key to good writing.

See also **concise writing, concrete language, fancy words** and **precise language.**

word space: A common error is to insert word spaces before final punctuation marks. This is because there are no word spaces in Chinese, and their application in English seems somewhat arbitrary, but they are not arbitrary in most cases.

In general, final punctuation marks are always hard up against the last letter in the previous word — or, in some cases, another punctuation mark — and they are followed by a word space.

Use only one word space between sentences in copy being prepared for publication in books, magazines, and newspapers and on the Internet.

Other than open quotes, punctuation marks cannot begin a line of text, as they can in Chinese.

Some exceptions include dashes (—), which have spaces on both sides, and periods (.) and colons (:), which have no space on either side in some contexts – *The plane gets in at 2:33; He has a Ph.D. in microbiology; The necklace weighed 82.7 grams.*

If in doubt about how to use word spaces, read a newspaper.

See also **manuscript, period** and **quotes**.

work: The most common plural of *work,* the noun, is *work,* not *works – He was asked to collect examples of the students' work in broadcasting.*

With an *–s,* the word refers specifically to industrial activities and infrastructure – *ironworks, public works, waterworks.*

One exception is collections of the output of major literary figures, which are called *works – The Complete Works of William Shakespeare.*

World Wide Web is capitalized.

See also **Internet** and **Web.**

would is one of the few forms in which subjunctive mood survives in English. It is used most often to indicate the hypothetical status of government proposals such as bills, which are proposed laws – *If approved, the bill would lower the voting age from 21 to 18.*

See also **subjunctive mood.**

wrath, wroth: Anger, fury, especially from the Deity. *Wroth* is archaic for *wrath.*

Brits spell it *wrath* today, but they continue to pronounce it as *wroth.* In America, it's pronounced the way it's spelled – *wrath.*

X, x, ex

xenophobia: Fear of foreigners or foreign things – an undesirable trait.

Xerox is a trade name, so it should be capitalized. *Photocopy* is a preferred generic alternative. *Carbon* and *carbon copy* are old-fashioned.

See also **trade names.**

Xinhua: This is the pinyin for *New China News Agency*, the official international news agency operated by the People's Republic of China. *Xinhua News Agency* is also acceptable.

Xmas: This common short form for Christmas offends some Christians. Besides, it is ugly. In any case, if you insist on using it, do not add an apostrophe, like this: *X'mas.* If you do, then you will appear to be both offensive and ignorant, because there is no rationale for the apostrophe.

See also **Christmas.**

X-ray is capitalized and hyphenated.

Y, y

Yale system: This is a short reference to a popular romanization system for Cantonese.
See also **pinyin** and **romanization.**

Yank: Slang for "an American person". The term is short for "Yankee", a person from New England – Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island – a region in the northeastern United States.

yet: Often used at the beginning of a sentence to mean *but*, which is preferred.

yin and yang: Two principles in Chinese philosophy and religion whose interactions affect the destinies of all things. They are not capitalized.

youngster: Someone aged about 10 to 15.
See also **teenager.**

youth, the noun, is often used to refer to a male person in his teenage years. In general, however, it also means the early period of one's lifetime, from about 13 to 18 years of age.
See also **teenager**.

yuan: Chinese currency. This can be written as *Rmb3,000*, with no word space, or *3,000 yuan*, with a word space. If you can find the symbol in your computer type font, then *¥3,000* is preferred.
See also **currencies** and **renminbi.**

Z, z, zed, zee

zed, zee: The former is the British pronunciation of *z;* the latter, the American.

zero plural: Some words in English have plurals identical to their singular forms – *advice, aircraft, Chinese, deer, dim sum, email, equipment, fiction, fish, mail, premises, prose, research, steelworks, series, sheep, software, species, stuff.* There are many more. This condition is known as *zero plural.*

See also **work.**

zodiac, as in *Chinese zodiac,* is not capitalized.

Appendix: 18 Rules for Writers

1. Be concise
2. Be consistent
3. Be precise
4. Be concrete
5. Rewrite
6. Provide transitions
7. Provide rhythm
8. Write in parallel fashion
9. Write short sentences
10. Do not state the obvious
11. Do not write in all caps
12. Do not overstate
13. Prefer the positive to the negative
14. Prefer the active to the passive
15. Avoid rhetorical questions
16. Avoid abbreviations
17. Avoid sexist language
18. Use simple words