

Supplemental Style Sheet for Social Sciences

That vs. Which

The relative pronoun “that” introduces restrictive clauses: “All laughter that is out of place will be stuffed into a nearby drawer.”

The clause is restrictive because it identifies *this* laughter, the out-of-place kind, as opposed to the other kind of laughter, which is not out of place. Notice there is no comma after “laughter.” In contrast, the relative pronoun “which” introduces non-restrictive clauses: “The final act, which is unevenly hilarious, took place on a drifting barge.”

This sentence says that the final act was on a barge. The clause “which is unevenly hilarious” is parenthetical because it is *not* trying to distinguish between types of acts—those that *are* evenly hilarious and those that are not. To make that distinction, one would use “that”: “The act that is unevenly hilarious took place on a barge.”

This sentence says that, of the acts in the play, there is one that is unevenly hilarious and that it was on a barge.

An example of how a “which” that should be a “that” can cause ambiguity: “The Iranians declared null and void the portions of the treaty which gave the USSR the right to intervene in Iranian affairs.”

One could understand the sentence to mean that the nulling and voiding of the treaty gave the USSR the right to intervene when what is meant are those portions of the treaty *that* (introducing restriction) gave the USSR the right to intervene. As you can see, a misuse of restrictive and non-restrictive clauses can have serious diplomatic consequences.

Consistency in Abbreviations

Be consistent with abbreviations: either US or U.S.; either USSR or U.S.S.R. Abbreviations within direct quotations, however, are left just the way they are.

Introductory Adverbial Clauses

The rule for introductory adverbial clauses is to set it off from what follows in the sentence with a comma: “When Irwin was ready to eat, his cat jumped onto the table.”

Without the comma, an ambiguity can arise in the reader’s mind as to what Irwin was ready to eat. The comma introduces the cat as the subject of the sentence, not the object of Irwin’s appetite. The principle to follow is that you do not want to make your reader read your sentence twice in order to understand it. Unless you are writing poetry or evocative prose, avoid ambiguity.

Exception: A comma at the end of an introductory adverbial clause is not needed when two conditions are met: (1) the clause is short and (2) no possible ambiguity exists. Here is an example of a short introductory adverbial clause that requires a comma: “In 1919, cases of flu were reported.”

Notice that without the comma the number “1919” could be taken, on first reading, to indicate the number of flu cases. With the comma, there is no ambiguity.

Incomplete Sentences

Rework incomplete sentences. And sentences that have incomplete thoughts.

Lengthy Sentences

English likes short sentences. But too many short sentences in a row create a choppy effect, while too many long sentences tire your reader. Intersperse the long with the short.

Commas

Some day, I will write a short monograph on the proper use of the comma. But, because I have not done that yet, you are spared the necessity of having to read it. For now, you need only remember that commas fall into two categories: (1) those that set off words, phrases, clauses, dates, etc., from the rest of the sentence and (2) those that help avoid a possible ambiguity in reading the sentence. Commas of the first category require an “opener” and “closer.” The “opener” can be a comma or the beginning of the sentence. The “closer” can be a comma or the end of the sentence. For example,

- The helicopter, using its 100,000-candlepower spotlight, circled above. (comma as “opener” and comma as “closer”)
- Using its 100,000-candlepower spotlight, the helicopter circled above. (beginning of sentence as “opener”; comma as “closer”)
- The helicopter circled above, using its 100,000-candlepower spotlight. (comma as “opener”; end of sentence as “closer”)

Commas of the second category are singular and do not require an “opener” or “closer.” For example, “Justinian said farewell once more to the sad, sad faces of his donkeys.”

Commas in a Series

A comma should appear between the penultimate and last item in a series: “Run, jump, and throw.” The absence of the comma can lead to confusion in certain cases.

If you do not put in the comma, then there may be confusion in reading the following sentence: “Instead of hostility, trade and ordinary diplomacy characterized diplomatic relations during this period.”

If your readers know that you put in the comma, then they know not to read “trade” and “diplomacy,” in addition to “hostility,” as the objects of the preposition “of.”

Identifying Centuries

Write out the names of the centuries, thus: “nineteenth century,” “twentieth century,” *not* “1800s” or “1900s.” There is a reason for this. If one designates the decade between 1920 and 1929 as the “1920s,” and if one designates the decade between 1910 and 1919 as the “1910s,” then how would one designate the decade from 1900 to 1909? If one is using “1900s” to mean the twentieth century, then an immediate ambiguity arises.

A Century Used Adjectivally

When used as an adjective, the form is “nineteenth-century” and “twentieth-century” (with a hyphen). Otherwise, no hyphen is used. For example, “nineteenth-century architecture,” but “the architecture of the nineteenth century.”

Digitizing numbers

Some style manuals say that the numbers “ninety-nine” and below are written out. The numbers 100 and above are digitized. Others say “ten” and below are written out, while 11 and above are digitized. Whichever you choose, be consistent.

Long Quotations

Single space and indent quotations of at least three lines or longer, or longer than thirty words. These numbers are arbitrary and differ from style manual to style manual.

The Hyphen in Compound Words

Check the dictionary to see whether two or more words used together should be hyphenated (water-repellent), combined (waterproof), or written as two separate words (water table). If the compound is not in the dictionary, then treat it as two words.

Note: dictionaries sometimes differ on whether a compound should be one word or two (e.g., fire fighter or firefighter).

Use a hyphen to connect two or more words used as an adjective before a noun: “Make an all-out effort to write clearly.”

Do not use a hyphen when such compounds follow the noun: “The effort was all out.”

Do not use a hyphen to connect *-ly* modifiers (usually adverbs) to the words they modify: “A slowly moving truck won the Indianapolis 500.”

Identifying the Author of a Quotation in Your Text

It is important that you identify in your text (not just in the footnote) the author of any quotation you use. The reason for this identification is that, if you have words within quotation marks in your text, it is not clear whether the author of the book or article you cite in the footnote is the author of those words or they are quoting someone else.

Ellipsis Points (. . .)

If you leave something out of a direct quotation, you must indicate the omission with ellipsis points: “If you leave something out of a direct quotation, . . . indicate the omission with an ellipsis points.”

If you begin a quotation in the middle of a sentence, you do *not* need to put ellipsis points at the beginning of the quotation. The lower case letter indicates you have begun the quotation *in mediis rebus* (in the middle of things). The exception is if the first word of the extracted quotation begins with a capital letter, you might then want to insert ellipsis points at the beginning of your quotation to avoid misleading your reader. Any omission that crosses, or leads up to, the end of a sentence requires an ellipsis of four (. . .) dots.

Avoid Repetition of the Passive Voice

Repeated use of the passive voice in English leads to dull and soporific writing. In other words, your reader *will be put to sleep* if the passive voice *is used* too much. Change passive voice to active voice. Your reader will wake up when you use the active voice.

Changes or Additions in Quotations

Any change in, or addition to, a quotation should be given within brackets: “[a]ny change in, or addition to, a [direct] quotation should be given within brackets.”

A colon is usually used to introduce a quotation that begins with a capital letter. If a quotation begins with a capital letter, but if the quotation is grammatically part of your introductory phrase, then you should lower case and place in brackets the first letter of the quotation. Thus: The paper judged “[t]hat it was folly. . . .”

Use of the Personal Pronoun “I”

Avoid overuse of the pronoun “I” in formal writing. But use it to avoid resorting to the passive voice. For example, instead of “The topic will be investigated” and “Conclusions will be reached” apparently by non-existent disembodied entities, write “I will investigate the topic” and “I will reach conclusions.” The total banishment of “I” is a rhetorical device to try to lend an air of objectivity. But the reality is it is you and the evidence.

Identify What “This” Is

Avoid beginning a sentence with an unspecified “this”: “This often leads to unspeakable atrocities.” The reader is left wondering what could be so dire. Be specific about what “this” might be: “This issue came before Congress.”

Capitalization

Besides capitalizing all proper nouns, one should also capitalize abstractions used to represent a proper noun. For example, when speaking about “the Catholic Church” or “the Church of Christ Scientists,” one can simply use “the Church.” That is, one should maintain a distinction between “the church on the corner” (a physical object) and the abstract concept of a “Church.” Titles of books, articles, and your paper have their own rules of capitalization. Capitalize the first word of a title; all nouns, verbs, adjective, adverbs, and interjections after that; the first word after the colon. Do not capitalize prepositions, conjunctions (unless they are longer than five letters), or the “to” in an infinitive construction (e.g., “To Be or Not to Be”). Book and article titles in non-English languages are usually in sentence style. Remember to capitalize “North” and “South” when they refer to a region of the country. Usually one does not capitalize their adjectival counterparts, thus: “northern” and “southern”.

Use of “However”

Some stylists recommend that you avoid beginning a sentence with “However.” I do not know their reasoning for this recommendation. They, however, may be right.

Generic Pronoun “he”

Despite what prescriptive grammarians have tried to impose on the language for the last 200 years, the pronouns “he,” “him,” and “his” do not include women. Instead, one should use “his or her” or “his and her” where appropriate. Or, better yet, use what native English speakers have been using for hundreds of years: “they” or “their” as the singular generic pronoun. For example, “Everyone should put on their coats.” The sentence sounds right and the meaning is clear. Prescriptive grammarians tend to get upset at the use of “they” and “their” as singular pronouns, but they conveniently manage to overlook the fact that “you” and “your” are used as both singular and plural pronouns all the time.

This entire problem arose in the late eighteenth century when prescriptive grammarians used Latin as their model for grammar rules in English. That is why we are told not to ever split infinitives: one cannot split a Latin infinitive. The prescriptive grammarians of the late eighteenth century were male chauvinists. They thought that men were superior to women, so they declared that such sentences as “All men are created equal” do not apply to women but that “Everyone should obey his government” does. The use of “their” in the latter type of case was banished, but people continue to use it whenever prescriptive grammarians or their eighth-grade

English teachers are not around.

Use of "Ibid."

The reason "Ibid." was originally used was to make it easier for typesetters when typesetting was done by hand as well as to cut down on space used so that two footnotes could be put on the same line. Computer typesetting does away with the first reason for the use of "Ibid." and we require a separate line for each footnote. In addition, computers make cut and paste editing a great deal easier, which means that an "Ibid." in referring to the preceding footnote can have that footnote antecedent placed in another part of the paper or thesis, and another footnote reference put in its place. Unless the author is alert to this, the "Ibid." in any given footnote can end up referring not to the actual preceding footnote but to one that is no longer there. It's the way locals often give directions, for example, "Go down to where the schoolhouse used to be..." which is meaningless and misleading for people who don't know where the schoolhouse used to be. The use of "Ibid." within a footnote is still okay, as long as it is clear within that footnote that the antecedent is the immediately preceding item.

Footnoting and bibliography

Do your footnotes and bibliographical entries according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., "Documentation I: Notes and Bibliography," 653–784. In the footnotes, the author's name is given in normal order (i.e., first name first, last name last). Only in the bibliography are first and last names reversed.

Chicago Manual of Style requires author's last name and short form of title for second and subsequent references to an item in the footnotes: e.g., Pineo, *Useful Strangers*, 871.

*Some William Safire "Fumble Rules"**

2. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
3. A writer must not shift your point of view.
5. Don't use contractions in formal writing.
9. It behooves us to avoid archaisms.
10. Reserve the apostrophe for its proper use and omit it when its not needed.
11. Write all adverbial forms correct.
15. Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
17. If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times: Resist hyperbole.
19. Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
25. Writing carefully, dangling participles should be avoided.
29. Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
30. Use parallel structure when you write and in speaking.
32. Ixnay on colloquial stuff.
36. Better to walk into the valley of the shadow of death than to string prepositional phrases.
37. You should just avoid confusing readers with misplaced modifiers.
42. Take the bull by the hand and don't mix metaphors.
45. Always pick on the correct idiom.
50. Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague.

* From: William Safire, *Fumble Rules: A Lighthearted Guide to Grammar and Good Usage*

(New York, Doubleday, 1990).