

Style Guide

Introduction

Clarity of writing usually follows clarity of thought. So think what you want to say, then say it as simply as possible. Keep in mind George Orwell's six elementary rules ("Politics and the English Language", 1946):

- i. Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ii. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- iii. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out.
- iv. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- v. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- vi. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Metaphors

“A newly invented metaphor assists thought by evoking a visual image,” said Orwell, “while on the other hand a metaphor which is technically ‘dead’ (eg, iron resolution) has in effect reverted to being an ordinary word and can generally be used without loss of vividness. But in between these two classes there is a huge dump of worn-out metaphors which are merely used because they save people the trouble of inventing phrases for themselves.”

Every issue of *The Economist* contains scores of metaphors: trails of crushed rivals, billing and cooing politicians, projects falling at the first hurdle, track records on inflation, tabloid reporters lapping up stories, reports leaving the door ajar, irresistible forces about to meet immovable objects, roadblocks in the path of reform, investors crying foul, doors slammed shut in China, blind eyes turned in Taiwan.

Some of these are tired, and will therefore tire the reader. Most are so exhausted that they may be considered dead, and are therefore permissible. But use all metaphors, dead or alive, sparingly, otherwise you will make trouble for yourself.

An issue of *The Economist* chosen at random had a package cutting the budget deficit, the administration loth to sign on to higher targets, liberals accused of playing politics on the court (Supreme, not tennis), only to find in the next sentence that the boot was on the other foot, the lure of eastern Germany as a springboard to the struggling markets of eastern Europe, west Europeanness helping to dilute an image, someone finding a pretext to stall the process before looking for a few integrationist crumbs, a spring clean that became in the next sentence a stalking-horse for greater spending, and Michelin axing jobs in painful surgery in order to stay at the top of a league table. Soon the Michelin man was plunging his company even further in to debt, though if it were to stay afloat his ambitions would have to be deflated.

Two pages on, the reader had to go down to the seas again when a flotilla of mutual and quoted life-assurance outfits were confident of surviving turbulent waters. The galleons were afloat, but the medium-sized and smaller mutuals quickly turned into fodder for domestic and foreign predators. Further on, banks going to the altar in the expectation of a tax-free dowry saw it become a sweetener in the next sentence and the bill that delivered it transformed into a panacea. Those who wanted to learn about Japanese equity financing were told of a stockmarket crawling back (not on its feet, it was explained) towards its old high, of commercial banks keeping the wolf from the door and, three paragraphs later, of the stockmarket's double whammy. On, on went the reader past masked bunglings, key measures, money-supply growth out of hand, a haunted Bank of Japan redoubling its squeeze, banks slashing growth lest they found themselves

on a tight leash before being cracked down on. Few could have been surprised to learn at the end of the article that another dose of higher interest rates might be forced on the banks if the present inflationary symptoms turned into measles-like spots, and if the apothecaries at the finance ministry agreed with the diagnosis.

Others are even more extravagant in their figures of speech. These two sentences were used as an opening paragraph to arrest the attention of the readers of *A.N.Other* newspaper:

Bulgaria is on its knees. A long-simmering economic crisis has erupted, gripping the country in a fierce and unrelenting embrace.

Another publication reported:

The basic question for the Bush campaign, as the fervour from the Republican convention in Houston last week dissipates, is whether or not it is barking up the wrong social tree by painting an exclusionary picture of an American society that has otherwise long been characterised as a melting-pot eternally susceptible to change. This may only be part of the broader election canvas, which also runs to more legitimate criticism of the opposition . . .

On another occasion, it lamented:

Mr Clinton has had to pull the plug on a plan that had been tarred as a bail-out for an incompetent regime and the Wall Street fat cats who invested in it.

And poor Reuters had to report that:

A BBC statement said today: "This is an off-the-wall programme with a track record of cutting-edge humour, but on this occasion we appear to have overstepped the mark."

So did Léon Dion, cited as "an important constitutional expert" by another publication:

In his opinion, give the Anglophones an inch and they will demand a mile. "The signs issue is just the Trojan horse," he says. "It is the tip of the iceberg. Once the dam is open you won't be able to close it."

Short words

Use them. They are often Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin in origin. They are easy to spell and easy to understand. Thus prefer **about** to **approximately**, **after** to **following**, **let** to **permit**, **but** to **however**, **use** to **utilise**, **make** to **manufacture**, **plant** to **facility**, **take part** to **participate**, **set up** to **establish**, **enough** to **sufficient**, **show** to **demonstrate** and so on. **Underdeveloped** countries are often better described as **poor**. **Substantive** often means **real** or **big**. "Short words are best and the old words when short are best of all." (Winston Churchill)

Unnecessary words

Some words add nothing but length to your prose. Use adjectives to make your meaning more precise and be cautious of those you find yourself using to make it more emphatic. The word **very** is a case in point. If it occurs in a sentence you have written, try leaving it out and see whether the meaning is changed. **The omens were good** may have more force than **The omens were very good**.

Avoid **strike action** (**strike** will do), **cutbacks** (**cuts**), **track record** (**record**), **wilderness area** (usually either a **wilderness** or a **wild area**), **large-scale** (**big**), the **policymaking process** (**policymaking**), **weather conditions** (**weather**), etc. **This time around** just means **This time**.

Shoot off, or rather shoot, as many prepositions after verbs as possible. Thus people can **meet** rather than **meet with**; companies can be **bought** and **sold** rather than **bought up** and **sold off**; budgets can be **cut** rather than **cut back**; plots can be **hatched** but not **hatched up**; organisations should be **headed** by rather than **headed up** by chairmen, just as markets should be **freed**, rather than **freed up**. And children can be **sent** to bed rather than **sent off** to bed—though if they are to **sit up** they must first **sit down**.

This advice you are given **free**, or **for nothing**, but not **for free**.

Certain words are often redundant. The leader of the **so-called** Front for a Free Freedonia is the leader of the Front for a Free Freedonia. A **top politician** or **top priority** is usually just a **politician** or a **priority**, and a **major speech** usually just a **speech**. A **safe haven** is a **haven**. **Most probably** and **most especially** are **probably** and **especially**. **The fact that** can often be shortened to **That** (**That I did not do so was a self-indulgence**). Loans to the **industrial and agricultural sectors** are just **loans to industry and farming**.

Community is another word often best cut out. Not only is it usually unnecessary, it purports to convey a sense of togetherness that may well not exist. The **black community** means **blacks**, the **business community** means **businessmen**, the **homosexual community** means **homosexuals**, the **intelligence community** means **spies**, the **international community**, if it means anything, means **other countries, aid agencies** or, just occasionally, **the family of nations**.

Use words with care. A **heart condition** is usually a **bad heart**. A **near miss** is probably a **near hit**. **Positive thoughts** (held by long-suffering creditors, according to *The Economist*) presumably means **optimism**, just as a **negative** report is probably a **critical** report. **Industrial action** is usually **industrial inaction, industrial disruption** or a **strike**. A **courtesy call** is generally a **sales offer** or an **uninvited visit**. A **substantially finished** bridge is an **unfinished** bridge. Someone with **high name-recognition** is **well known**. Something with **reliability problems** probably **does not work**. If yours is a **live audience**, what would a dead one be like?

In general, be concise. Try to be economical in your account or argument ("The best way to be boring is to leave nothing out"—Voltaire). Similarly, try to be economical with words. "As a general rule, run your pen through every other word you have written; you have no idea what vigour it will give to your style." (Sydney Smith) Raymond Mortimer put it even more crisply when commenting about Susan Sontag: "Her journalism, like a diamond, will sparkle more if it is cut."

Active, not passive

Be direct. **A hit B** describes the event more concisely than **B was hit by A**.

Jargon

Avoid it. You may have to think harder if you are not to use jargon, but you can still be precise. Technical terms should be used in their proper context; do not use them out of it. In many instances simple words can do the job of **exponential** (try **fast**), **interface** (**frontier** or **border**) and so on. If you find yourself tempted to write about **affirmative action** or **corporate governance**, you will have to explain what it is; with luck, you will then not have to use the actual expression.

Avoid, above all, the kind of jargon that tries either to dignify nonsense with seriousness (**The appointee...should have a proven track record of operating at a senior level within a multi-site international business, preferably within a service- or brand-oriented environment**, declared an advertisement for a financial controller for The Economist Group) or to obscure the truth (**We shall not launch the ground offensive until we have attrited the Republican Guard to the point when they no longer have an effective offensive capacity**—the Pentagon's way of saying that the allies would not fight on the ground until they had killed so many Iraqis that the others would not attack). What was meant by the Israeli defence ministry when it issued the following press release remains unclear: **The United States and Israel now possess the capability to conduct real-time simulations with man in the loop for full-scale theatre missile defence architectures for the Middle East**.

Try not to use foreign words and phrases unless there is no English alternative, which is unusual (so **a year** or **per year**, not **per annum**; **a person** or **per person**, not **per capita**; **beyond one's authority**, not **ultra vires**; and so on).

Tone

The reader is primarily interested in what you have to say. By the way in which you say it you may encourage him either to read on or to stop reading. If you want him to read on:

Do not be stuffy. "To write a genuine, familiar or truly English style", said Hazlitt, "is to write as anyone would speak in common conversation who had a thorough command or choice of words or who could discourse with ease, force and perspicuity setting aside all pedantic and oratorical flourishes."

In "How to Be a Better Reporter", Arthur Brisbane put it like this: "Avoid fancy writing. The most powerful words are the simplest. 'To be or not to be, that is the question,' 'In the beginning was the word,' 'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep,' 'Out, out, brief candle,' 'The rest is silence.' Nothing fancy in those quotations. A natural style is the only style."

Use the language of everyday speech, not that of spokesmen, lawyers or bureaucrats (so prefer **let** to **permit**, **people** to **persons**, **buy** to **purchase**, **colleague** to **peer**, **way out** to **exit**, **present** to **gift**, **rich** to **wealthy**, **break** to **violate**). It would not have been difficult to rephrase these sentences from a British civil servant's report: "At a national level, the department engaged stakeholders positively from 23 February 2001. This helped...to improve stakeholder buy-in to agreed changes." Enron's **document-management** policy simply meant **shredding**. It is sometimes useful to talk of **human-rights abuses** but often the sentence can be rephrased more pithily and more accurately. **The army is accused of committing numerous human-rights abuses** probably means **The army is accused of torture and murder**.

Avoid, where possible, euphemisms and circumlocutions promoted by interest-groups. In most contexts the **hearing-impaired** are simply **deaf**. **Female teenagers** are **girls**, not **women**. The **underprivileged** may be **disadvantaged**, but are more likely just **poor**. **Decommissioning weapons** means **disarming**.

And **man** sometimes includes **women**, just as **he** sometimes makes do for **she** as well. However, it is often possible and even preferable to phrase sentences so that they neither give offence to women nor become hideously complicated. Using the plural can be a helpful device. Thus **Instruct the reader without lecturing him** is better put as **Instruct readers without lecturing them**. But some sentences resist this treatment: **Find a good teacher and take his advice** is not easily rendered gender-neutral. Avoid, above all, the sort of scrambled syntax that people adopt because they cannot bring themselves to use a singular pronoun: **We can't afford to squander anyone's talents, whatever colour their skin is**. Or **When someone takes their own life, they leave their loved ones with an agonising legacy of guilt**. Or **Where a person positions their writing on the page...** Avoid also **chairpersons** (**chairwoman** is permissible), **humankind** and the **person in the street**—ugly expressions all. And, so long as you are not insensitive in other ways, few women will be offended if you restrain yourself from putting **or she** after every **he**.

He or she which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him or her depart; his or her passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his or her purse:
We would not die in that person's company

That fears his or her fellowship to die with us.

In some contexts, though, **she** can be a substitute for **he**:

That ever was thrall, now is he free;
That ever was small, now great is she;
Now shall God deem both thee and me
Unto his bliss if we do well.

(15th-century carol)

Be sparing with quotes. Direct quotes should be used when either the speaker or what he said is surprising, or when the words he used are particularly pithy or graphic. Otherwise you can probably paraphrase him more concisely. The most pointless quote is the inconsequential remark attributed to a nameless source: "Everyone wants to be in on the act," says one high-ranking civil servant.

Do not be hectoring or arrogant. Those who disagree with you are not necessarily **stupid** or **insane**. Nobody needs to be described as silly: let your analysis show that he is. When you express opinions, do not simply make assertions. The aim is not just to tell readers what you think, but to persuade them; if you use arguments, reasoning and evidence, you may succeed. Go easy on the oughts and shoulds.

Do not be too pleased with yourself. Don't boast of your own cleverness by telling readers that you correctly predicted something or that you have a scoop. You are more likely to bore or irritate them than to impress them.

Do not be too chatty. **Surprise, surprise** is more irritating than informative. So is **Ho, ho**, etc.

Do not be too didactic. If too many sentences begin **Compare, Consider, Expect, Imagine, Look at, Note, Prepare for, Remember** or **Take**, readers will think they are reading a textbook (or, indeed, a style book). This may not be the way to persuade them to renew their subscriptions.

Journalese and slang

Do not be too free with slang (eg, **He really hit the big time in 1994**). Slang, like metaphors, should be used only occasionally if it is to have effect. Avoid expressions used only by journalists, such as giving people **the thumbs up, the thumbs down** or **the green light**. Stay clear of **gravy trains** and **salami tactics**. Do not use **the likes of**. And avoid words and expressions that are ugly or overused, such as **the bottom line, high profile, caring** (as an adjective), **carers, guesstimate** (use **guess**), **schizophrenic** (unless the context is medical), **crisis, key, major** (unless something else nearby is **minor**), **massive** (as in **massive inflation**), **meaningful, perceptions, prestigious** and **significant**.

Politicians are often said to be highly **visible**, when **conspicuous** would be more appropriate. Regulations are sometimes said to be designed to create **transparency**, which presumably means **openness**. **Governance** usually means **government**. Elections described as **too close to call** are usually just **close**.

Try not to be predictable, especially predictably jocular. Spare your readers any mention of **mandarins** when writing about the civil service, of **their lordships** when discussing the House of Lords, and of **comrades** when analysing communist parties. Must all lawns be **manicured**? Are

drug traffickers inevitably **barons**?

In general, try to make your writing fresh. It will seem stale if it reads like hackneyed journalese. One weakness of journalists, who on daily newspapers may plead that they have little time to search for the apposite word, is a love of the ready-made, seventh-hand phrase. Lazy journalists are always at home in **oil-rich** country A, ruled by **ailing** President B, the **long-serving strongman**, who is, according to the **chattering classes**, a **wily political operator**—hence the present **uneasy peace**—but, after his recent **watershed** (or **landmark** or **sea-change**) decision to arrest his prime minister (the **honeymoon is over**), will soon face a **bloody uprising** in the **breakaway** south. Similarly, lazy business journalists always enjoy describing the problems of **troubled** company C, a victim of the **revolution** in the gimbal-pin industry (change is always revolutionary in such industries), which, **well-placed insiders** predict, will be riven by a **make-or-break** strike unless one of the major players makes an **11th-hour** (or **last-ditch**) intervention in a **marathon** negotiating session.

Prose such as this is freighted with codewords (**respected** is applied to someone the writer approves of, **militant** someone he disapproves of, **prestigious** something you won't have heard of). The story can usually start with the words, **First the good news**, inevitably to be followed in due course by **Now the bad news**. A quote will then be inserted, attributed to **one** (never **an**) **industry analyst**, and often the words **If, and it's a big if...** Towards the end, after an admission that the author has no idea what is going on, there is always room for **One thing is certain**, before rounding off the article with **As one wag put it...**

Perhaps even more wearying for the reader is the trendy journalist's fondness of vogue words and expressions. Some of these are deliberately chosen (**bridges too far; empires striking back; kinder, gentler; F-words; flavours of the month; Generation X; hearts and minds;\$64,000 questions; southern discomfort; back to the future; thirty-somethings; windows of opportunity; where's the beef?**), usually from a film or television, or perhaps a politician. Others come into use less wittingly, often from social scientists. If you find yourself using any of the following words, you should stop and ask yourself whether (a) it is the best word for the job (b) you would have used it in the same context five or ten years ago, and if not why not:

address (questions can be **answered**, issues **discussed**, problems **solved**, difficulties **dealt with**)

care for and all **caring** expressions (how about **look after**?)

community (see above, under [Unnecessary Words](#))

environment (in a writing environment you may want to make use of your Tipp-Ex, rubber or delete button)

famously (usually redundant, nearly always irritating)

focus (all the world's a stage, not a lens)

individual (fine in some contexts, but increasingly used as a longer synonym for **man, woman** or **person**)

overseas (increasingly used, and often wrongly, to mean **abroad** or **foreign**)

participate in (**take part in**—more words but fewer syllables)

partner ("**Take your partners for the Gay Gordons!**" by all means, but dancing together does

not necessarily mean sleeping together—just as a sleeping partner is not necessarily a lover)

process (a word properly applied to the Arab-Israeli peace affair, because it was meant to be evolutionary, but now often used in place of **talks**)

relationship (**relations** can nearly always do the job)

resources (especially human resources, which may be **personnel**, **staff** or just **people**)

skills (these are turning up all over the place—in learning skills, thinking skills, teaching skills—instead of **the ability to**. **He has the skills** probably means **He can**)

supportive (**helpful**?)

target (if you are tempted to **target** your efforts, try to **direct** them instead)

transparency (**openness**?)

Such words are not wrong, but if you find yourself using them only because you hear others using them, not because they are the most appropriate ones in the context, you should avoid them. Overused words and off-the-shelf expressions make for stale prose.

Americanisms

If you use Americanisms just to show you know them, people may find you a **tad** tiresome, so be discriminating. Many American words and expressions have passed into the language; others have vigour, particularly if used sparingly. Some are short and to the point (so prefer **lay off** to **make redundant**). But many are unnecessarily long (so use **and** not **additionally**, **car** not **automobile**, **company** not **corporation**, **court** not **courtroom** or **courthouse**, **transport** not **transportation**, **district** not **neighbourhood**, **oblige** not **obligate**, **rocket** not **skyrocket**, **stocks** not **inventories** unless there is the risk of confusion with stocks and shares). **Spat** and **scam**, two words beloved by some journalists, have the merit of brevity, but so do **row** and **fraud**; **squabble** and **swindle** might sometimes be used instead. The **military**, used as a noun, is nearly always better put as **the army**. **Gubernatorial** is an ugly word that can almost always be avoided.

Other Americanisms are euphemistic or obscure (so avoid **affirmative action**, **rookies**, **end runs**, **stand-offs**, **point men**, **ball games** and almost all other American sporting terms). Do not write **meet with** or **outside of**: **outside** America, nowadays, you just **meet** people. Do not **figure out** if you can **work out**. To **deliver on** a promise means to **keep** it. A **parking lot** is a **car park**. Use **senior** rather than **ranking**, **rumpus** rather than **ruckus**, and **rumbustious** rather than **rambunctious**.

Put adverbs where you would put them in normal speech, which is usually after the verb (not before it, which usually is where Americans put them). Choose tenses according to British usage, too. In particular, do not fight shy—as Americans often do—of the perfect tense, especially where no date or time is given. Thus **Mr Bush has woken up to the danger** is preferable to **Mr Bush woke up to the danger**, unless you can add **last week** or **when he heard the explosion**.

Prefer **doctors** to **physicians** and **lawyers** to **attorneys**. They rest from their labours **at** weekends, not **on** them and during the week their children are **at** school, not **in** it.

In an American context you may **run** for office (but please **stand** in countries with parliamentary systems) and your car may sometimes run on **gasoline** instead of **petrol**. But if you use **corn** in the American sense you should explain that this is **maize** to most people (unless it is an **old**

chestnut). Trains run from **railway stations**, not **train stations**. The people in them, and on buses, are **passengers**, not **riders**. Cars are **hired**, not **rented**. **City centres** are not **central cities**. Cricket is a **game** not a **sport**. London is the **country's** capital, not the **nation's**. **Ex-servicemen** are not necessarily **veterans**. In Britain, though cattle and pigs may be **raised**, children are (or should be) **brought up**.

Make a **deep** study or even a study **in depth**, but not an **in-depth** study. **On-site inspections** are allowed, but not **in-flight entertainment**. Throw **stones**, not **rocks**, unless they are of **slate**, which can also mean **abuse** (as a verb) but does not, in Britain, mean **predict**, **schedule** or **nominate**. **Regular** is not a synonym for **ordinary** or **normal**: Mussolini brought in the **regular** train, All-Bran the **regular** man; it is quite **normal** to be without either. **Hikes** are **walks**, not **increases**. Vegetables, not teenagers, should be **fresh**. Only the speechless are **dumb**, the well-dressed **smart** and the insane **mad**. **Scenarios** are best kept for the theatre, **postures** for the gym, **parameters** for the parabola.

Grow a beard or a tomato but not a company. By all means **call for** a record profit if you wish to exhort the workers, but not if you merely predict one. And do not **post** it if it has been achieved. If it has not, look for someone new to **head** the company, not to **head it up**.

You may **program** a computer but in all other contexts the word is **programme**.

Try not to verb nouns or to adjective them. So do not **access** files, **haemorrhage** red ink (haemorrhage is a noun), let one event **impact** another, **author** books (still less co-author them), **critique** style sheets, **host** parties, **pressure** colleagues (**press** will do), **progress** reports, **trial** programmes or **loan** money. **Gunned down** means **shot**. And though it is sometimes necessary to use nouns as adjectives, there is no need to call an **attempted coup** a **coup attempt** or the **Californian legislature** the **California legislature**. Vilest of all is the habit of throwing together several nouns into one ghastly adjectival reticule: **Texas millionaire real-estate developer and failed thrift entrepreneur Hiram Turnipseed...**

Do not feel obliged to follow American fashion in overusing such words as **constituency** (try **supporters**), **perception** (try **belief** or **view**) and **rhetoric** (of which there is too little, not too much—try **language** or **speeches** or **exaggeration** if that is what you mean). And if you must use American expressions, use them correctly (a **rain-check** does not imply checking on the shower activity).

Syntax

Try not be sloppy in the construction of your sentences and paragraphs. Do not use a participle unless you make it clear what it applies to. A recent issue of *The Economist* contained the following:

When closed at night, the fear is that this would shut off rather than open up part of the city centre.

Unlike Canary Wharf, the public will be able to go to the top to look out over the city.

Only a couple of months ago, after an unbroken string of successes in state and local elections, pollsters said...

To never split an infinitive is quite easy. Don't overdo the use of **don't**, **isn't**, **can't**, **won't**, etc; one per issue is usually enough. And avoid the false possessive: **London's Heathrow Airport**.

Make sure that plural nouns have plural verbs. Too often, in the pages of *The Economist*, they do not. **Kogalym today is one of the few Siberian oil towns which are [not is] almost habitable. What better evidence that snobbery and elitism still hold [not holds] back ordinary British people?**—and this in a leader on education.

Use the subjunctive properly. If you are posing a hypothesis contrary to fact, you must use the subjunctive. Thus, **If I were you...** or **If Hitler were alive today, he could tell us whether he kept a diary.** If the hypothesis may or may not be true, you do not use the subjunctive. Thus **If this diary is not Hitler's, we shall be glad we did not publish it.** If you have **would** in the main clause, you must use the subjunctive in the **if** clause. **If you were to disregard this rule, you would make a fool of yourself.**

It is common nowadays to use the subjunctive in such constructions as **He demanded that the Russians withdraw, They insisted that the Americans also move back, The referee suggested both sides cool it, In soccer it is necessary that everyone remain civil.** This construction is correct, and has always been used in America, whence it has recrossed the Atlantic. In Britain, though, it fell into disuse some time ago except in more formal contexts: **I command the prisoner be summoned, I beg that the motion be put to the house.** In British English, but not in American, another course would be to insert the word **should**: **He demanded that the Russians should withdraw, The Americans should also move back, Both sides should cool it, Everyone should remain civil.** Alternatively, some of the sentences could be rephrased: **He asked the Russians to withdraw, It is necessary for everyone to remain civil.**

Take care with the genitive. It is fine to say a **friend of Bill's**, just as you would say a friend of mine, so you can also say **a friend of Bill's and Carol's.** But it is also fine to say a **friend of Bill**, or **a friend of Bill and Carol.** What you must not say is **Bill and Carol's friend.** If you wish to use that construction, you must say **Bill's and Carol's friend**, which is cumbersome.

Respect the gerund. Gerunds look like participles—**running, jumping, standing**—but are more noun-like, and should never therefore be preceded by a personal pronoun. So the following are wrong: **I was awoken by him snoring, He could not prevent them drowning, Please forgive me coming late.** Those sentences should have ended: **his snoring, their drowning, my coming late.** In other words, use the possessive adjective rather than the personal pronoun.

Do your best to be lucid ("I see but one rule: to be clear", Stendhal). Simple sentences help. Keep complicated constructions and gimmicks to a minimum, if necessary by remembering the *New Yorker's* comment: "Backward ran sentences until reeled the mind." The following readers' letters may be chastening.

SIR—"Big, earnest and well-conducted last Saturday's demonstrations, in Washington and San Francisco, against the war in Indochina undoubtedly were."

Aided, chuffed and well-rewarded in his search for memorable journalese this reader, in your May 1st 1971 edition on the American mass demonstrations, most certainly was.

—DAVID C. BELDEN

SIR—At times just one sentence in *The Economist* can give us hours of enjoyment, such as "Yet German diplomats in Belgrade failed to persuade their government that it was wrong to think that the threat of international recognition of Croatia and Slovenia would itself deter Serbia" (August 15th 1992).

During my many years as a reader of your newspaper, I have distilled two lessons about the use of our language. Firstly, it is usually easier to write a double negative than it is to interpret it. Secondly, unless the description of an event which is considered to be not without consequence includes a double or higher-order negative, then it cannot be disproven that the writer has neglected to eliminate other interpretations of the event which are not satisfactory in light of other possibly not unrelated events which might not have occurred at all.

For these reasons, I have not neglected your timely reminder that I ought not to let my subscription lapse. It certainly cannot be said that I am an unhappy reader.

—WILLARD DUNNING

Mark Twain described how a good writer treats sentences: "At times he may indulge himself with

a long one, but he will make sure there are no folds in it, no vaguenesses, no parenthetical interruptions of its view as a whole; when he has done with it, it won't be a sea-serpent with half of its arches under the water; it will be a torch-light procession."

Long paragraphs, like long sentences, can confuse the reader. "The paragraph", according to Fowler, "is essentially a unit of thought, not of length; it must be homogeneous in subject matter and sequential in treatment." One-sentence paragraphs should be used only occasionally.

Clear thinking is the key to clear writing. "A scrupulous writer", observed Orwell, "in every sentence that he writes will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? And he will probably ask himself two more: Could I put it more shortly? Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?"

Some dos and don'ts

An should be used before a word beginning with a vowel sound (**an egg, an umbrella, an MP**) or an h if, and only if, the h is silent (**an honorary degree**). But **a European, a university, a U-turn, a hospital, a hotel. Historical** is an exception: it is preceded by **an**, the h remaining silent.

As of (April 5th or April): prefer **on** (or **after**, or **since**) April 5th, **in** April.

As to: there is usually a more appropriate preposition.

Bale: in boats and in the hayfield, yes, otherwise **bail, bail out**.

Biannual can mean **twice a year** or **once every two years**. Avoid. Since **biennial** also means **once every two years**, that is best avoided too.

Bicentennial: prefer **bicentenary** (as a noun).

Black: **in the black** means **in profit** in Britain, but **making losses** in some places. Use **in profit**.

Case: "There is perhaps no single word so freely resorted to as a trouble-saver," says Gowers, "and consequently responsible for so much flabby writing." Often you can do without it. **There are many cases of it being unnecessary** is better as **It is often unnecessary. If it is the case that** simply means **If. It is not the case** means **It is not so**.

Come up with: try **suggest, originate** or **produce**.

Commit: do not **commit to**, but by all means **commit yourself to** something.

-ee: **employees, evacuees, detainees, referees, refugees** but, please, no **attendees** (those attending), **draftees** (conscripts), **escapees** (escapers), **retirees** (the retired), or **standees**. A **divorcee** may be male or female.

Environment: often unavoidable, but not a pretty word. Avoid **the business environment, the school environment, the work environment**, etc. Try to rephrase the sentence—**conditions for business, at school, at work**, etc. **Surroundings** can sometimes do the job.

Fact: **The fact that** can often be boiled down to **That**.

Former: avoid wherever possible use of **the former** and **the latter**. It usually causes confusion.

Gentlemen's agreement, not **gentleman's**.

Important: if something is important, say why and to whom. Use sparingly.

Last: the **last** issue of *The Economist* implies its extinction; prefer **last week's** or the **latest** issue. **Last year**, in 1996, means 1995; if you mean the 12 months up to the time of writing, write the **past year**. The same goes for the **past** month, **past** week, **past** (not **last**) ten years. **Last week** is best avoided; anyone reading it several days after publication may be confused. **This week** is permissible.

Lifestyle: prefer **way of life**.

Locate, in all its forms, can usually be replaced by something less ugly. **The missing scientist was located** means he was **found**. **The diplomats will meet at a secret location** means either that they will meet **in a secret place** or that they will meet **secretly**. **A company located in Texas** is simply **a company in Texas**.

Millionaires: the time has gone when girls in the Bois de Boulogne would think that the term **millionaire** adequately described the man who broke the Bank at Monte Carlo. If you wish to use it, make it plain that **millionaire** refers to income (in dollars or pounds), not to capital. Otherwise try **plutocrat** or **rich man**.

Move: do not use if you mean **decision**, **bid**, **deal** or something more precise. But **move** rather than **relocate**.

One: try to avoid **one** as a personal pronoun. **You** will often do instead.

Phone: permissible, especially when preceded by **mobile**. But use sparingly, and generally prefer **telephone**.

Photo: not permissible, so use **photograph**.

Premier, as a noun, should be confined to the first ministers of Canadian provinces, German *Länder* and other sub-national states. Do not use it as a synonym for the prime minister of a country.

Proactive. Not a pretty word: try **active** or **energetic**.

Problem: the problem with problem is it is overused, so much so that it is becoming a problem word.

Proper nouns: if they have adjectives, use them. Thus a **Californian** (not **California**) **judge**, the **Pakistani** (not **Pakistan**) **government**, the **Texan** (not **Texas**) **press**.

Pry: use **prize**, unless you mean **peer**.

Relationship is a long word often better replaced by **relations**. **The two countries hope for a better relationship** means **The two countries hope for better relations**.

Relative: fine as an adjective, but as a noun prefer **relation**.

Rocketed, not **skyrocketed**.

Run. In countries with a presidential system you may **run** for office. In those with a

parliamentary one, **stand**.

Same: often superfluous. If your sentence contains **on the same day that**, try **on the day that**.

Sector: try **industry** instead or, for example, **banks** instead of **banking sector**.

Simplistic: prefer **simple-minded, naive**.

-style: avoid **German-style supervisory boards, an EU-style rotating presidency**, etc. Explain what you mean.

Table: avoid it as a transitive verb. In Britain to **table** means to bring something forward for action. In America it means exactly the opposite.

There is, there are: often unnecessary. **There are three issues facing the prime minister** is better as **Three issues face the prime minister**.

Total: all right as a noun, but as a verb prefer **amount to** or **add up to**.

Venues: avoid them. Try **places**.

Some common solecisms

Acronym: this is a word, like radar or NATO, not a set of initials, like the BBC or the IMF.

Aetiology is the **science of causation**, or **an inquiry into something's origins**. **Etiolate** is to **make** or **become pale for lack of light**.

Aggression is an unattractive quality, so do not call a **keen** salesman an aggressive one (unless his foot is in the door or beyond).

Agony column: when Sherlock Holmes perused this, it was a **personal column**, not letters to an **agony aunt**.

Agree: things are agreed **on, to** or **about**, not just agreed.

Aggravate means **make worse**, not **irritate** or **annoy**.

Alibi: an **alibi** is the proven fact of being elsewhere, not a false explanation.

Alternate, as an adjective, means **every other**.

Alternative: strictly, this is one of two, not one of three, four, five or more (which may be **options**).

Among and **between**. Some sticklers insist that, where division is involved, **among** should be used where three or more are concerned, **between** where only two are concerned. (So **The plum jobs were shared among the Socialists, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, while the president and the vice-president divided the cash between themselves.**) This distinction is unnecessary. But take care with **between**. **To fall between two stools**, however painful, is grammatically acceptable; **to fall between the cracks** is to challenge the laws of physics.

Anarchy means the **complete absence of law or government**. It may be harmonious or

chaotic.

Anticipate does not mean **expect**. Jack and Jill expected to marry; if they anticipated marriage, only Jill might find herself expectant.

Apostasy and **heresy**. If you abandon your religion, you commit **apostasy**. If that religion is the prevailing one in your community, and your beliefs are contrary to its orthodoxy you commit **heresy**.

Appeal is intransitive nowadays (except in America), so appeal **against decisions**.

Appraise means **set a price on**. **Apprise** means **inform**.

Assassinate is, properly, the term used not just for any old killing, but for the murder of a prominent person, usually for a political purpose.

Autarchy means absolute sovereignty. **Autarky** means self-sufficiency.

Beg the question means neither **raise the question**, **invite the question** nor **evade the answer**. To **beg the question** is to adopt an argument whose conclusion depends upon assuming the truth of the very conclusion the argument is designed to produce. **All governments should promote free trade because otherwise protectionism will increase. This begs the question.**

Bellwether. This is the leading sheep of a flock, on whose neck a bell is hung. It is nothing to do with climate, prevailing winds or the like.

Between: see [Among and between](#).

Blooded means **pedigreed** or **initiated**. **Bloodied** means **wounded**.

Bon vivant, not **bon viveur**.

Both...and: a preposition placed after **both** should be repeated after **and**. Thus, **both to right and to left**; but **to both right and left** is all right.

Brokerage is what a stockbroking firm does, not what it is.

Canute's exercise on the seashore was designed to persuade his courtiers of what he knew to be true but they doubted, ie, that he was not omnipotent. Don't imply he was surprised to get his feet wet.

Cartel. A cartel is a group that restricts supply in order to drive up prices. Do not use it to describe any old syndicate or association of producers—especially of drugs.

Cassandra's predictions were correct but not believed.

Catalyst: this is something that speeds up a chemical reaction while itself remaining unchanged. Do not confuse it with one of the agents.

Centred on, not **around** or **in**.

Charge: if you **charge** intransitively, do so as a bull, cavalry officer or somesuch, not as an **accuser** (so avoid **The standard of writing was abysmal, he charged**).

Circumstances stand around a thing, so it is **in**, not **under**, them.

Coiffed, not **coiffured**

Collapse is not transitive. You may collapse, but you may not collapse something.

Compare: A is compared **with** B when you draw attention to the difference. A is compared **to** B only when you want to stress their similarity. ("**Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?**")

Compound does not mean **make worse**. It may mean **combine** or, intransitively, it may mean to **agree or come to terms**. To **compound a felony** means to **agree for a consideration not to prosecute**.

Comprise means is **composed of**. **The Democratic coalition comprises women, workers, blacks and Jews. Women make up** (not comprise) **three-fifths of the Democratic coalition**. Alternatively, **Three-fifths of the Democratic coalition is composed of women**.

Confectionary: a sweet. **Confectionery:** sweets in general.

Contemporary: see [Current](#).

Continuous describes something uninterrupted. **Continual** admits of a break. If your neighbours play loud music every night, it is a **continual** nuisance; it is not a **continuous** one unless the music is never turned off.

Contract: see [Subcontract](#).

Convince. Don't **convince** people **to** do something. In that context the word you want is **persuade**. **The prime minister was persuaded to call a June election; he was convinced of the wisdom of doing so only after he had won**.

Crescendo. This is not an acme, apogee, peak, summit or zenith but a **passage of increasing loudness**. You cannot therefore **build to a crescendo**.

Crisis. This is a decisive event or turning-point. Many of the economic and political troubles wrongly described as **crises** are really **persistent difficulties, sagas** or **affairs**.

Critique is a noun. If you want a verb, try **criticise**.

Current and **contemporary** mean **at that time**, not necessarily **at this time**. So a series of current prices from 1960 to 1970 will not be in **today's prices**, just as **contemporary art** in 1800 was not **modern art**. **Contemporary history** is a contradiction in terms.

Cusp. This is a pointed end or a horn of, eg, the moon, or the point at which two branches of a curve meet. So it is odd to write, say, "Japan is on the cusp of a recovery," unless you think that recovery is about to end.

Deal. Transitivity, this means distribute: "He was dealt two aces, two kings and a six." Intransitively, **deal** means **engage in business**. Do not **deal** horses, weapons, drugs, etc; **deal in** them.

Decimate means to destroy a proportion (originally a tenth) of a group of people or things, not to destroy them all or nearly all.

Deliver is transitive. So if someone is to **deliver**, he must deliver **letters, babies** or **the goods**

—whether **groceries** or **what he promised**.

Demographics: no, the word is **demography**.

Different from, not **to** or **than**.

Dilemma. This is not just any old awkwardness, it is one with horns, being, properly, a form of argument (the horned syllogism) in which you find yourself committed to accept one of two propositions each of which contradicts your original contention. Thus a dilemma offers the choice between two alternatives, each with equally nasty consequences.

Discreet means **circumspect** or **prudent**; **discrete** means **separate** or **distinct**. Remember that "**Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.**" (Oscar Wilde)

Disinterested means **impartial**; **uninterested** means **bored**. ("**Disinterested curiosity is the lifeblood of civilisation.**"G.M. Trevelyan)

Due to: when used to mean **caused by**, it must follow a noun, as in **The cancellation, due to rain, of...** Do not write **It was cancelled due to rain**. If you mean **because of** and for some reason are reluctant to say it, you probably want **owing to**. **It was cancelled owing to rain** is all right.

Earnings: do not write **earnings** when you mean **profits** (try to say if they are **operating, gross, pre-tax** or **net**).

Effectively means **with effect**; if you mean **in effect**, say it. **The matter was effectively dealt with on Friday** means it was **done well** on Friday. **The matter was, in effect, dealt with on Friday** means it was **more or less attended to** on Friday. **Effectively leaderless** would do as a description of the demonstrators in East Germany in 1989 but not those in Tiananmen Square. The devaluation of the Slovak currency in 1993, described by some as **an effective 8%**, turned out to be a rather ineffective 8%.

Either...or. See [None](#).

Enormity means a **crime, sin** or **monstrous wickedness**. It does not mean **immensity**.

Epicentre means that point on the earth's surface above the centre of an earthquake. To say that **Mr Putin was at the epicentre of the dispute** suggests that the argument took place underground.

Ex- (and **former**): be careful. A **Communist ex-member** has lost his seat; an **ex-Communist member** has lost his party.

Execute means **put to death by law**. Do not use it as a synonym for **murder**. An **extra-judicial execution** is a contradiction in terms.

Factoid: something that sounds like a fact, is thought by many to be a fact (perhaps because it is repeated so often), but is not in fact a fact.

Fellow: often unnecessary, especially before **countrymen** ("**Friends, Romans, fellow-countrymen**"?).

Fewer (not **less**) **than seven speeches, fewer than seven samurai**. Use **fewer**, not **less**, with numbers of individual items or people. **Less than £200, less than 700 tonnes of oil, less than a third**, because these are measured quantities or proportions, not individual items.

Fief, not **fiefdom**.

Finally: do not use **finally** when you mean **at last**. **Richard Burton finally marries Liz Taylor** would have been all right second time round but not first.

Firm. Accountants', consultants', lawyers' and other partnerships are **firms**, not companies. Huge enterprises, like GE, GM, Ford, Microsoft and so on, should, by contrast, normally, be called **companies**, though such outfits can sometimes be called **firms** for variety.

Flaunt means **display**; **flout** means **disdain**. If you flout this distinction, you will flaunt your ignorance.

Forgo means **do without**; it forgoes the e. **Forego** means **go before**. A **foregone conclusion** is one that is predetermined; a **forgone conclusion** is non-existent.

Former: see [Ex-](#).

Frankenstein was not a monster, but its creator.

Free is an adjective or an adverb, so you cannot have or do anything **for free**. Either you have **it free** or you have it **for nothing**.

Fund is a technical term, meaning to convert floating debt into more or less permanent debt at fixed interest. Do not use it if you mean to **finance** or to **pay for**.

Garner means **store**, not **gather**.

Gender is a word to be applied to grammar, not people. If someone is female, that is her **sex**, not her **gender**. (The gender of *Mädchen*, the German word for girl, is neuter, as is *Weib*, a wife or woman.)

Generation: take care. You can be a second-generation Frenchman, but if you are a second-generation immigrant that means you have left the country your parents came to.

Get: an adaptable verb, but it has its limits. A man does not **get** sacked or promoted, he is sacked or promoted.

Good in parts is what the curate said about an egg that was wholly bad. He was trying to be polite.

Gourmet means **epicure**; **gourmand** means **greedy-guts**.

Halve is a transitive verb, so deficits can double but not **halve**. They must **be halved** or **fall by half**.

Haver means to **talk nonsense**, not **dither**, **swither** or **waver**.

Healthy: if you think something is **desirable** or **good**, say so. Do not call it **healthy**.

Heresy: see [Apostasy](#).

Hoards: few secreted treasures (**hoards**) are multitudes on the move (**hordes**).

Hobson's choice is not **the lesser of two evils**; it is **no choice at all**.

Homogeneous means **of the same kind or nature**. **Homogenous** means **similar because of common descent**.

Homosexual: since this word comes from the Greek word *homos* (same), not the Latin word *homo* (man), it applies as much to women as to men. It is therefore as daft to write **homosexuals and lesbians** as to write **people and women**.

Hopefully: by all means begin an article hopefully, but never write **Hopefully, it will be finished by Wednesday**. Try **With luck, if all goes well, it is hoped that...**

Hypothermia is what kills old folk in winter. If you say it is **hyperthermia**, that means they have been carried off by heat stroke.

Ilk means **same**, so **of that ilk** means **of the place of the same name as the family**, not **of that kind**. Best avoided.

Immolate means to **sacrifice**, not to **burn**.

Inchoate means **not fully developed** or **at an early stage**, not **incoherent** or **chaotic**.

Investigations of, not **into**.

Key: keys may be **major** or **minor**, but not **low**. Few of the decisions, people, industries described as **key** are truly **indispensable**, and fewer still **open locks**.

Lag. If you **lag** transitively, you lag a pipe or a loft. Anything failing to keep up with a front-runner, rate of growth, fourth-quarter profit or whatever is **lagging behind it**.

Like governs nouns and pronouns, not verbs and clauses. So **as in America** not **like in America**. But **authorities like Fowler and Gowers** is a perfectly acceptable alternative to **authorities such as Fowler and Gowers**.

Masterful means **imperious**. **Masterly** means **skilled**.

May and **might** are not always interchangeable, and you may want **may** more often than you think. If in doubt, try **may** first. You need **might** in the past tense. **I may go to Leeds later** becomes, in the past, **I might have gone to Leeds later**. And in indirect past speech it becomes **I said I might go to Leeds later**. Conditional sentences using the subjunctive also need **might**. Thus **If I were to go to Leeds, I might have to stand all the way**. This could be rephrased **If I go to Leeds, I may have to stand all the way**. Conditional sentences stating something contrary to fact, however, need **might**: **If pigs had wings, birds might raise their eyebrows**.

Do not write **George Bush might believe in education, but he thinks the people of Greece are Grecians**. It should be **George Bush may believe in education, but he thinks the people of Greece are Grecians**. Only if you are putting forward a hypothesis that may or may not be true are **may** and **might** interchangeable. Thus **If George Bush studies hard, he may (or might) learn the difference between Greek and Grecian**.

Media: prefer **press and television** or, if the context allows it, just **press**. If you have to use the **media**, remember it is plural.

Mete: you may **mete out** punishment, but if it is to fit the crime it is **meet**.

Mitigates mollifies; **militates** does the opposite.

Monopoly. A **monopolist** is the sole seller; a sole buyer is a **monopsonist**.

Neither...nor. See **None**.

None usually takes a singular verb. So does **neither** (or **either**) **A nor (or) B**, unless B is plural, as in **Neither the Dutchman nor the Danes have done it**, where the verb agrees with the element closest to it. Similarly,

**“Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That hills and valleys, dales and fields,
Or woods or steepy mountain yields.”**

(Christopher Marlowe)

Nor means **and not**, so should not be preceded by **and**.

Only. Put **only** as close as you can to the words it qualifies. Thus, **These animals mate only in June**. To say **They only mate in June** implies that in June they do nothing else.

Overwhelm means **submerge utterly, crush, bring to sudden ruin**. Majority votes, for example, seldom do any of these things. As for the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, although 90% of the population, they turned out to be an **overwhelmed majority**, not an **overwhelming one**, until NATO stepped in.

Oxymoron: an **oxymoron** is not an unintentional contradiction in terms but **a figure of speech in which contradictory terms are deliberately combined**, as in bitter-sweet, cruel kindness, sweet sorrow, etc.

Per caput is the Latin for per head. **Per capita** is the Latin for by heads; it is a term used by lawyers when distributing an inheritance among individuals, rather than among families (**per stirpes**). Unless the context demands this technical expression, never use either **per capita** or **per caput** but **per person**.

Per cent is not the same as a **percentage point**. Nothing can fall, or be devalued, by more than 100%. If something trebles, it increases by 200%. If a growth rate increases from 4% to 6%, the rate is two percentage points or 50% faster, not 2%.

Percolate means to pass **through**, not **up** or **down**.

Populace. This is a term for the **common people**, not a synonym for the **population**.

Positive means **definitely laid down, beyond possibility of doubt, absolute, fully convinced** or **greater than zero**. It does not mean **good**. **It was a positive meeting** probably means **It was a good, or fruitful, meeting**.

Practicable means **feasible**. **Practical** means **useful**.

Presently means **soon**, not **at present**. (“**Presently Kep opened the door of the shed, and let out Jemima Puddle-Duck.**” Beatrix Potter)

Pressurise. This is what you want in an aircraft, but not in an argument or encounter where persuasion is being employed. The verb you want there is **press** (use **pressure** only as a noun).

Prevaricate means **evade the truth**; **procrastinate** means **delay**. (“**Procrastination—or punctuality, if you are Oscar Wilde—is the thief of time.**”)

Pristine means **original** or **former**; it does not mean clean.

Propaganda (which is singular) means a **systematic effort to spread doctrine or opinions**. It is not a synonym for **lies**.

Protagonist means the **chief actor** or **combatant**. If you are referring to several people, they cannot all be protagonists.

Protest. By all means **protest your innocence**, or **your intention to write good English**, if you are making a declaration. But if you are making a complaint or objection, you must **protest at** or **against** it.

Real. Is it really necessary? When used to mean **after taking inflation into account**, it is legitimate. In other contexts (**Investors are showing real interest in the country, but Bolivians wonder if real prosperity will ever arrive**) it is often better left out.

Rebut means **repel** or **meet in argument**. **Refute**, which is stronger, means **disprove**. Neither should be used as a synonym for **deny**. ("**Shakespeare never has six lines together without a fault. Perhaps you may find seven: but this does not refute my general assertion.**" Samuel Johnson)

Report on, not **into**.

Reshuffle, resupply: shuffle and **supply** will do.

Scotch: to **scotch** means to **disable**, not to **destroy**. ("**We have scotched the snake, not killed it.**") The people may also be **Scotch, Scots** or **Scottish**; choose as you like. **Scot-free** means free from payment of a fine (or punishment), not **free from Scotsmen**.

Second-biggest (third-oldest, fourth-wisest, fifth-commonest, etc): think before you write. **Apart from New York, a Bramley is the second-biggest apple in the world. Other than home-making and parenting, prostitution is the third-oldest profession. After Tom, Dick and Harriet, Henry I was the fourth-wisest fool in Christendom. Besides justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude, the fifth-commonest virtue of the Goths was punctuality.** None of these sentences should contain the ordinal (second- , third- , fourth- , fifth- , etc).

Sensual means **carnal** or **voluptuous**. **Sensuous** means pertaining to aesthetic appreciation, without any implication of lasciviousness.

Sequestered means **secluded**. **Sequestered** means **confiscated** or **made bankrupt**.

Simon Pure is the real person (or thing), and has nothing to do with Caesar's wife or driven snow.

Soft is an adverb, as well as an adjective and a noun. **Softly** is also an adverb. You can speak softly and carry a big stick, but if you have a quiet voice you are **soft**—not softly—**spoken**.

Soi-disant means **self-styled**, not **so-called**.

Specific: a **specific** is a **medicine**, not a **detail**.

Stationary: still. **Stationery**: writing paper and so on.

Straight means **direct** or **uncurved**; **strait** means **narrow** or **tight**. The **strait-laced** tend to be **straight-faced**.

Subcontract. If you engage someone to do something, you are **contracting** the job to him; only if he then asks someone else to do it is the job **subcontracted**.

Systemic means **relating to a system or body as a whole**. **Systematic** means **according to system, methodical** or **intentional**.

Target is a noun. If you are tempted to use it as a verb, try **aim** or **direct**. **Targeted** means **provided with a shield**.

Testament is a will, **testimony** evidence. It is **testimony to the poor teaching of English that journalists habitually write testament instead**.

Ticket, platform, manifesto. The **ticket** lists the names of the candidates for a particular party (so if you **split your ticket** you vote for, eg, a Republican for president and a Democrat for Congress). The **platform** is the statement of basic principles (**planks**) put forward by an American party, usually at its pre-election convention. It is thus akin to a British party's **manifesto**, which sets out its policies.

Times: take care. **Three times more than X** means **four times as much as X**.

To or **and**? **To try and end the killing** does not mean the same **as to try to end the killing**.

Transpire means **exhale**, not **happen**, **occur** or **turn out**.

Underprivileged. Since a privilege is a special favour or advantage, it is by definition not something to which everyone is entitled. So **underprivileged**, by implying the right to privileges for all, is not just ugly jargon but also nonsense.

Unlike should not be followed by **in**. Like **like**, **unlike** governs nouns and pronouns, not verbs and clauses.

Use and abuse: two words much used and abused. You **take** drugs, not **use** them (Does he use sugar?). And **drug abuse** is just **drug taking**, as is **substance abuse**, unless it is **glue sniffing** or **bun throwing**.

Venerable means **worthy of reverence**. It is not a synonym for **old**.

Verbal: every agreement, except the nod-and-wink variety, is **verbal**. If you mean one that was not written down, describe it as **oral**.

Viable means **capable of living**. Do not apply it to things like railway lines. **Economically viable** means **profitable**.

Warn is transitive, so you must either **give warning** or **warn somebody**.

Which informs, **that** defines. **This is the house that Jack built**. But **This house, which Jack built, is now falling down**. Americans tend to be fussy about making a distinction between **which** and **that**. Good writers of British English are less fastidious. ("**We have left undone those things which we ought to have done.**")

While is best used temporally. Do not use it in place of **although** or **whereas**.

Wrack is an old word meaning **vengeance, punishment** or **wreckage**. It can also be **seaweed**. It is not an instrument of torture or a receptacle for toast: that is **rack**. Hence **racked with pain, by war drought**, etc. **Rack** your brains—unless they be **wracked**.

Abbreviations

Unless an abbreviation or acronym is so familiar that it is used more often than the full form (eg, **BBC, CIA, FBI, HIV, IMF, NATO, OECD**), or unless the full form would provide little illumination (eg, **AWACS, DNA**) write the words in full on first appearance: thus, Trades Union Congress (not **TUC**). If in doubt about its familiarity, explain what the organisation is or does. After the first mention, try not to repeat the abbreviation too often; so write **the agency** rather than **the IAEA, the Union** rather than **the EU**, to avoid spattering the page with capital letters. There is no need to give the initials of an organisation if it is not referred to again.

If an abbreviation can be pronounced (eg, **EFTA, NATO, UNESCO**), it does not generally require the definite article. Other organisations, except companies, should usually be preceded by **the** (**the BBC, the KGB, the NHS, the UNHCR** and **the NIESR**). Except in the Britain section, use **MP** only after first spelling out member of Parliament in full (in many places an **MP** is a military policeman).

Abbreviations that can be pronounced and are composed of bits of words rather than just initials should be spelt out in upper and lower case: **Cocom, Frelimo, Kfor, Legco, Mercosur, Nepad, Renamo, Sfor, Unicef, Unisom, Unprofor, Trips** (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights). There is generally no need for more than one initial capital letter, unless the word is a company or a trade name: **MiG, ConsGold**.

Do not use spatterings of abbreviations and acronyms simply in order to cram more words in; you will end up irritating readers rather than informing them.

In bodymatter, all such abbreviations, whether they can be pronounced as words or not (**GNP, GDP, FOB, CIF, A-levels, D-marks, T-shirts, X-rays**), should be set in small capitals, with no points—unless they are currencies like **Nkr** or **SFr**, elements like **H** and **O** or degrees of temperature like **°F** and **°C**. Brackets, apostrophes and all other typographical furniture accompanying small capitals are generally set in ordinary roman, with a lower-case s (also roman) for plurals and genitives. Thus **IOUs, MPs'** salaries, **SDRs**, etc. But ampersands are set as small capitals, as are numerals and any hyphens attaching them to a small capital. Thus **R&D, A23, M1, F-16**, etc. Abbreviations that include upper-case and lower-case letters must be set in a mixture of small capitals and roman: **BPhils, PhDs**. Prefer **chief executive** or **boss** to **CEO**.

Do not use small caps for **roman numerals**.

In headings, rubrics, cross-heads, footnotes, flytitles, captions, tables, charts (including sources), use ordinary caps, not small caps.

Use lower case for **kg, km, lb** (never **lbs**), **mph** and other measures, and for **ie, eg**, which should both be followed by commas. When used with figures, these lower-case abbreviations should follow immediately, with no space (**11am, 4.30pm, 15kg, 35mm, 100mph, 78rpm**), as should **AD** and **BC** (**76AD, 55BC**), though they should be set in small capitals. Two abbreviations together, however, must be separated: **60m b/d**.

Most scientific units, except those of temperature, that are named after individuals should be set in small capitals, though any attachments denoting multiples go in lower case. Thus a **watt** is **W**, whereas **kilowatt, milliwatt** and **megawatt**, meaning **1,000 watts, one thousandth of a watt** and **1m watts**, are abbreviated to **kW, mW** and **MW** (**k, m** and **M** are standard international metric abbreviations for **thousand, thousandth** and **million**).

The elements are not scapped. **Lead** is **Pb**, **carbon dioxide** is **CO₂**, **methane** is **CH₄**. **Chlorofluorocarbons** are, however, **CFCs**, and the **oxides of nitrogen** are generally **NOX**. Different isotopes of the same element are distinguished by raised prefixes: **carbon-14** is **¹⁴C**, **helium-3** is **³He**.

Most upper-case abbreviations take upper-case initial letters when written in full (eg, the **LSO** is the London Symphony Orchestra), but there are exceptions: **CAP** but **common agricultural policy**, **EMU** but **economic and monetary union**, **GDP** but **gross domestic product**, **PSBR** but **public-sector borrowing requirement**, **VLSI** but **very large-scale integration**.

Initials in people's names, or in companies named after them, take points (with a space between initials and name, but not between initials). Thus **F.W. de Klerk**, **V.P. Singh**, **E.I. Du Pont de Nemours**, **F.W. Woolworth**. In general, follow the practice preferred by people, companies and organisations in writing their own names.

Do not use **Prof**, **Sen**, **Col**, etc. **Lieut-Colonel** and **Lieut-Commander** are permissible. So is **Rev**, but it must be preceded by the and followed by a Christian name or initial: **the Rev Jesse Jackson** (thereafter **Mr Jackson**).

Always spell out **page**, **pages**, **hectares**, **miles**. But **kilograms** (not **kilogrammes**) and **kilometres** can be shortened to **kg** (or **kilos**) and **km**. Miles per hour are **mph** and kilometres per hour are **kph**.

Ampersands should be used (1) when they are part of the name of a company (eg, **AT&T**, **Pratt & Whitney**); (2) for such things as constituencies where two names are linked to form one unit (eg, **The rest of Brighouse & Spenborough joins with the Batley part of Batley & Morley to form Batley & Spen**. Or **The area thus became the Pakistani province of Kashmir and the Indian state of Jammu & Kashmir**); (3) in **R&D** and **S&L**.

Remember that **EFTA** is the **European Free-Trade Association**, the **FAO** is the **Food and Agriculture Organisation**, the **FDA** is the **Food and Drug Administration**, **IDA** is the **International Development Association**, the **MFA** is the **Multi-Fibre Arrangement**, **NAFTA** is the **North American Free-Trade Agreement**, the **OAU** was the **Organisation of African Unity** (now the African Union), the **PLO** is the **Palestine Liberation Organisation**. Remember, too, that the **V** of **HIV** stands for virus, so do not write **HIV virus**.

Members of Parliament are **MPs**: of the **Scottish Parliament**, **MSPs**; and of the **European Parliament**, **MEPs** (not Euro-MPs).

Spell out in full (and lower case) **junior** and **senior** after a name: **George Bush junior**, **George Bush senior**.

Accents

On words now accepted as English, use accents only when they make a crucial difference to pronunciation: **cliché**, **soupçon**, **façade**, **café**, **communiqué**, **exposé** (but **chateau**, **decor**, **elite**, **feted**, **naive**).

If you use one accent (except the tilde—strictly, a diacritical sign), use all: **émigré**, **mêlée**, **protégé**, **résumé**.

Put the accents and cedillas on French names and words, umlauts on German ones, accents and tildes on Spanish ones, and accents, cedillas and tildes on Portuguese ones: **Françoise de Panafieu**, **Wolfgang Schäuble**, **Federico Peña**. Leave the accents off other foreign names.

Any foreign word in italics should, however, be given its proper accents.

Capitals

A balance has to be struck between so many capitals that the eyes dance and so few that the reader is diverted more by our style than by our substance. The general rule is to dignify with capital letters organisations and institutions, but not people. More exact rules are laid out below. Even these, however, leave some decisions to individual judgment. If in doubt use lower case unless it looks absurd. And remember that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds" (Emerson).

People

Use upper case for ranks and titles when written in conjunction with a name, but lower case when on their own. Thus **President Bush**, but the **president**; **Vice-President Cheney**, but the **vice-president**; **Colonel Qaddafi**, but the **colonel**; **Pope John Paul**, but **the pope**; **Queen Elizabeth**, but **the queen**.

Do not write **Prime Minister Blair** or **Defence Secretary Rumsfeld**; they are **the prime minister, Mr Blair**, and **the defence secretary, Mr Rumsfeld**. You may, however, write **Chancellor Schröder**.

All office holders when referred to merely by their office, not by their name, are lower case: **the chancellor of the exchequer, the foreign secretary, the prime minister, the speaker, the treasury secretary, the president of the United States, the chairman of British Coal**.

The only exceptions are (1) a few titles that would look unduly peculiar without capitals, eg, **Black Rod, Master of the Rolls, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Lord Privy Seal, Lord Chancellor**; (2) a few exalted people, such as the **Dalai Lama** and the **Aga Khan**. Also **God**.

Some titles serve as names, and therefore have initial capitals, though they also serve as descriptions: **the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Emir of Kuwait, the Shah of Iran**. If you want to describe the office rather than the individual, use lower case: **The next archbishop of Canterbury will be a woman**.

Organisations, acts, etc

Organisations, ministries, departments, treaties, acts, etc, generally take upper case when their full name (or something pretty close to it, eg, **State Department**) is used. Thus, **European Commission, Forestry Commission, Arab League, Amnesty International, the Scottish Parliament (the parliament), the Welsh Assembly (the assembly), the Household Cavalry, Ministry of Agriculture, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Treasury, Metropolitan Police, High Court, Supreme Court, Court of Appeal, Senate, Central Committee, Politburo, Oxford University, the New York Stock Exchange, Treaty of Rome, the Health and Safety at Work Act**, etc.

So too the **House of Commons, House of Lords, House of Representatives, St Paul's Cathedral (the cathedral), Bank of England (the Bank), Department of State (the department)**.

But organisations, committees, commissions, special groups, etc, that are either impermanent, ad hoc, local or relatively insignificant should be lower case. Thus: **the subcommittee on journalists' rights of the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party, the**

international economic subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the Oxford University bowls club, Market Blandings rural district council.

Use lower case for rough descriptions (**the safety act, the American health department, the French parliament**, as distinct from its **National Assembly**). If you are not sure whether the English translation of a foreign name is exact or not, assume it is rough and use lower case.

Parliament and **Congress** are upper case. But the **opposition** is lower case, even when used in the sense of **her majesty's loyal opposition**. The **government**, the **administration** and the **cabinet** are always lower case. In America acts given the names of their sponsors (eg, **Glass-Steagall, Gramm-Rudman**) are always rough descriptions and so take a lower-case act.

The full name of political parties is upper case, including the word party: **Republican Party, Labour Party, Peasants' Party**. Note that usually only people are **Democrats, Christian Democrats, Liberal Democrats** or **Social Democrats**; their parties, policies, committees, etc, are **Democratic, Christian Democratic, Liberal Democratic** or **Social Democratic** (although a committee may be **Democrat-controlled**). The exceptions are Britain's **Liberal Democrat Party** and Thailand's **Democrat Party**.

When referring to a specific party, write **Labour**, the **Republican nominee**, a prominent **Liberal**, etc, but use lower case in looser references to **liberals, conservatism, communists**, etc. **Tories**, however, are upper case.

A political, economic or religious label formed from a proper name—eg, **Gaullism, Paisleyite, Leninist, Napoleonic, Wilsonian, Jacobite, Luddite, Marxist, Hobbesian, Thatcherism, Christian, Buddhism, Hindu, Islamic, Maronite, Finlandisation**—should have a capital.

In finance and government there are particular exceptions to the general rule of initial caps for full names, lower case for informal ones. Use caps for the **World Bank** and the **Fed** (after first spelling it out as the **Federal Reserve**), although these are shortened, informal names. The **Bank of England** and its foreign equivalents have initial caps when named formally and separately, but collectively they are central banks in lower case (except those like Brazil's and Ireland's, which are actually named the **Central Bank**). Special drawing rights are lower case but abbreviated in small caps as SDRs, except when used with a figure as a currency (**SDR500m**). **Deutschmarks** will still probably be known just a **D-marks**, even when all references are historical. Treasury bonds issued by America's Treasury should be upper case; treasury bills (or bonds) of a general kind should be lower case. Avoid **T-bonds** and **t-bills**.

After first mention, the **House of Commons** (or **Lords**, or **Representatives**) becomes the **House**, the **World Bank** and **Bank of England** become the **Bank** and the IMF can become the **Fund**. Organisations with unusual names, such as the **African National Congress, Civic Forum** and the **European Union**, may become the **Congress**, the **Forum** and the **Union**. But most other organisations—agencies, banks, commissions (including the **European Commission**), etc—take lower case when referred to incompletely on second mention.

Places

Use upper case for definite geographical places, regions, areas and countries (**The Hague, Transylvania, Germany**), and for vague but recognised political or geographical areas: **the Middle East, South Atlantic, East Asia** (which is to be preferred to **the Far East**), **the West** (as in the decline of the West), **the Gulf, the North Atlantic, South-East Asia, the Midlands, Central America, the West Country**.

Lower case for **east, west, north, south** except when part of a name (**North Korea, South Africa, West End**) or when part of a thinking group: **the South** (in the United States, but lower case **west**), **the Highlands** (of Scotland). But use lower case if you are, say, comparing regions

of the United States some of which are merely geographical areas: **House prices in the north-east and the south are rising faster than those in the mid-west and the south-west.**

Europe's divisions are no longer neatly political, and are now geographically imprecise, so use lower case for **central, eastern and western Europe.** But **North, Central and South America** are clearly defined areas, so should be given capitals as should **Central, South, East and South-East Asia.**

Use **West Germany (West Berlin)** and **East Germany (East Berlin)** only in historical references. They are now **western Germany (western Berlin)** and **eastern Germany (eastern Berlin).**

The **third world** (an unsatisfactory term now that the communist second world has disappeared) is lower case. If in doubt use lower case (**the sunbelt**).

Use capitals for particular buildings even if the name is not strictly accurate (eg, the **Foreign Office**).

Lower case for province, county, river, state, city when not strictly part of the name: the **Limpopo river, New York state, Washington state, Cabanas province.** But we will now make exceptions for the **River Thames, Mississippi River**—and **Guatemala City, Ho Chi Minh City, Kuwait City, Mexico City, New York City, Panama City** and **Quebec City**, even though **City** is not part of their names, as it is in **Dodge City, Kansas City, Quezon City, Oklahoma City, Salt Lake City.**

Use capitals to avoid confusion, especially with no (and therefore yes). **In Bergen no votes predominated** suggests a stalemate, whereas **In Bergen No votes predominated** suggests a triumph of noes over yeses. In most contexts, though, yes and no should be lower case: "The answer is no."

Political terms

Communist (if a particular party)

Congress

the Crown

Parliament

Social Security (in American contexts only, where it is used to mean pensions, not what is usually understood by social security elsewhere)

Teamster

Tory

Warsaw Pact

Historical periods

Black Death

Cultural Revolution

the Depression

Middle Ages

New Deal

Reconstruction

Renaissance

Restoration

Thirty Years War

Year of the Dog (but new year)

Trade names

Hoover, Teflon, Valium, Walkman

Euro-terms

Usual rules apply for the full, proper names. Thus:

European Commission

European Parliament

European Union

Treaty of Rome

Treaty on European Union

Informally, these become:

the commission

the parliament

the Rome treaty

the Maastricht treaty

but **the Union**.

The **IGC** is an **inter-governmental conference**, the **CAP** is the **common agricultural policy** and the **ERM** is the **exchange-rate mechanism**. Remember **EMU** stands for **economic and monetary union**. When making **Euro-** or **euro-words**, always introduce a hyphen, except for **Europhile**, **Europhobe** and **Eurosceptic**. Prefer **euro zone** or **euro area** (two words, no hyphen) to **euro-land**.

e-expressions

Except at the start of a sentence, the **e-** is lower case and hyphenated:

e-business

e-commerce

e-mail

Computer terms are also usually lower case:

dotcom

laptop

online

the **net** (and **internet**)

the **web**, **website** and **world wide web**

Cyber-terms are also lower case:

cyber-attack

cyber-soccer

cybernetics

cyberspace

cyberwars

CD-ROM should be set in small capitals.

Miscellaneous (Upper case)

Antichrist

anti-Semitism

the Bar

the Bible

Catholics

Christ

Christmas Day

Christmas Eve

Coloureds (in South Africa)

the Cup Final

the Davis Cup

Earth (when, and only when, it is planet)

Eurobond

Euroyen bond

Hispanics

House of Laity

Koran

Labour Day

Mafia (the genuine article)

May Day

Memorial Day

New Year's Day

New Year's Eve

Pershing missile (because it is named after somebody)

Protestants

the Queen's Speech

Russify

Semitic (-ism)

Stealth fighter, bomber

Test match

Utopia (-n)

Miscellaneous (Lower case)

19th amendment (but **Article 19**)

aborigines

administration

angst

blacks

cabinet

civil servant

civil service

cold war

common market

communist (generally)

constitution

cruise missile

draconian

euro (the currency)

first world war

french windows

general synod

government

Gulf war

internet

junior (as in **George Bush junior**)

Kyoto protocol

left

mafia (any old group of criminals)

mid-west

new year (but **New Year's Day**)

opposition

philistine

platonic

the pope

the press

pyrrhic

the queen

quisling

realpolitik

the right

second world war

senior (as in **George Bush senior**)

six-day war

the shah

the speaker

state-of-the-union message

the sunbelt

third world

titanic

white paper

wild west

world wide web

young turk

Figures

Never start a sentence with a figure; write the number in words instead.

Use figures for numerals from 11 upwards, and for all numerals that include a decimal point or a fraction (eg, **4.25**, **4¹/₄**). Use words for simple numerals from one to ten, except: in references to pages; in percentages (eg, **4%**); and in sets of numerals, some of which are higher than ten, eg, **Deaths from this cause in the past three years were 14, 9 and 6**. It is occasionally permissible to use words rather than numbers when referring to a rough or rhetorical figure (such as a **thousand curses**).

Fractions should be hyphenated (**one-half**, **three-quarters**, etc) and, unless they are attached to whole numbers (**8¹/₂**, **29³/₄**), spelled out in words, even when the figures are higher than ten: **He gave a tenth of his salary to the church, a twentieth to his mistress and a thirtieth to his wife**.

Do not compare a fraction with a decimal (so avoid **The rate fell from 3¹/₄% to 3.1%**).

Fractions are more precise than decimals (**3.14** neglects an infinity of figures that are embraced by **22/7**), but your readers probably do not think so. You should therefore use fractions for rough figures (**Kenya's population is growing at 3¹/₂% a year, A hectare is 2¹/₂ acres**) and

decimals for more exact ones: **The retail price index is rising at an annual rate of 10.6%**. But treat all numbers with respect; that usually means resisting the precision of more than one decimal place, and generally favouring rounding off. Beware of phoney over-precision.

Use **m** for **million**, but spell out **billion**, except in charts, where **bn** is permissible but not obligatory. Thus: **8m, £8m, 8 billion, €8 billion**. A **billion** is a thousand million, a **trillion** a thousand billion, a **quadrillion** a thousand trillion.

Use **5,000-6,000, 5-6%, 5m-6m** (not **5-6m**) and **5 billion-6 billion**. But **sales rose from 5m to 6m** (not **5m-6m**); **estimates ranged between 5m and 6m** (not **5m-6m**).

Where **to** is being used as part of a ratio, it is usually best to spell it out. Thus **They decided, by nine votes to two, to put the matter to the general assembly which voted, 27 to 19, to insist that the ratio of vodka to tomato juice in a bloody mary should be at least one to three, though the odds of this being so in most bars were put at no better than 11 to 4**. Where a ratio is being used adjectivally, figures and hyphens may be used, but only if one of the figures is greater than ten: thus **a 50-20 vote, a 19-9 vote**. Otherwise, spell out the figures and use **to: a two-to-one vote, a ten-to-one probability**.

Do not use a hyphen in place of **to** except with figures: **He received a sentence of 15-20 years in jail** but **He promised to have escaped within three to four weeks**.

With figures, use **a person** or **per person, a year** or **per year**, not **per caput, per capita** or **per annum**.

In most non-American contexts, prefer **hectares** to **acres, kilometres** (or **km**) to **miles, metres** to **yards, litres** to **gallons, kilos** to **lb, tonnes** to **tons, Celsius** to **Fahrenheit**, etc. In the United States section, you may use the more familiar measurements (though remember that American pints, quarts, gallons, etc, are smaller than imperial ones). Regardless of which you choose, you should give an equivalent, on first use, in the other units: **It was hoped that after improvements to the engine the car would give 20km to the litre (47 miles per American gallon), compared with its present average of 15km per litre**.

Remember that in few countries do you now buy petrol in imperial gallons. In America it is sold in American gallons; in most other places it is sold in litres.

The style for aircraft types can be confusing. Some have hyphens in obvious places (eg, **F-22, B-2 bomber**), some in unusual places (**MiG-31M**) and some none at all (**Airbus A340, BAe RJ70**). Others have both name and number (**Lockheed P-3 Orion**). When in doubt, use Jane's "All The World's Aircraft". Its index also includes makers' correct names.

The style for calibres is **50mm** or **105mm** with no hyphen, but **5.5-inch** and **25-pounder**.

Use the sign % instead of **per cent**. But write **percentage**, not **%age** (though in most contexts **proportion** or **share** is preferable).

A fall from 4% to 2% is a drop of two percentage points, or of 50%, but not of 2%.

Roman numerals should **not** be set in small capitals.

Hyphens

Use hyphens for

1. FRACTIONS (whether nouns or adjectives): **two-thirds, four-fifths, one-sixth**, etc.

2. MOST WORDS THAT BEGIN with **anti**, **non** and **neo**. Thus **anti-aircraft**, **anti-fascist**, **anti-submarine** (but **antibiotic**, **anticlimax**, **antidote**, **antiseptic**, **antitrust**); **non-combatant**, **non-existent**, **non-payment**, **non-violent** (but **nonaligned**, **nonconformist**, **nonplussed**, **nonstop**); **neo-conservative**, **neo-liberal** (but **neoclassicism**, **neolithic**, **neologism**).

Words beginning **Euro** should also be hyphenated, except **Europhile**, **Europhobe** and **Euroseptic**; **euro zone** and **euro area**.

Some words that become unmanageably long with the addition of a prefix. Thus **under-secretary** and **inter-governmental**. **Antidisestablishmentarianism** would, however, lose its point if it were hyphenated.

A sum followed by the word worth also needs a hyphen. Thus **\$25m-worth of goods**.

3. SOME TITLES

vice-president

director-general

under-secretary

secretary-general

attorney-general

lieutenant-colonel

major-general

field-marshal

but

general secretary

deputy secretary

deputy director

district attorney

4. TO AVOID AMBIGUITIES

a little-used car

a little used-car

cross complaint

cross-complaint

high-school girl

high schoolgirl

fine-tooth comb (most people do not comb their teeth)

third-world war

third world war

5. AIRCRAFT

DC-10

Mirage F-1E

MiG-23

Lockheed P-3 Orion

(If in doubt, consult Jane's "All the World's Aircraft".)

6. ADJECTIVES FORMED FROM TWO OR MORE WORDS

right-wing groups (but **the right wing** of the party)

balance-of-payments difficulties

private-sector wages

public-sector borrowing requirement

a 70-year-old judge

state-of-the-union message

value-added tax (VAT)

Adverbs do not need to be linked to participles or adjectives by hyphens in simple constructions: **The regiment was ill equipped for its task; The principle is well established; Though expensively educated, the journalist knew no grammar.** But if the adverb is one of two words together being used adjectivally, a hyphen may be needed: **The ill-equipped regiment was soon repulsed; All well-established principles should be periodically challenged.** The hyphen is especially likely to be needed if the adverb is short and common, such as **ill, little, much** and **well**. Less-common adverbs, including all those that end -ly, are less likely to need hyphens: **Never employ an expensively educated journalist.**

Do not overdo the literary device of hyphenating words that are not usually linked: the stringing-together-of-lots-and-lots-of-words-and-ideas tendency can be tiresome.

7. SEPARATING IDENTICAL LETTERS:

book-keeping (but **bookseller**), **coat-tails**, **co-operate**, **unco-operative**, **pre-eminent**, **pre-empt** (but **predate**, **precondition**), **re-emerge**, **re-entry** (but **rearm**, **rearrange**, **reborn**, **repurchase**), **trans-ship**. Exceptions include **override**, **overrule**, **underrate**, **withhold**.

8. NOUNS FORMED FROM PREPOSITIONAL VERBS:

bail-out, build-up, call-up, get-together, lay-off, pay-off, round-up, set-up, shake-up,
etc.

9. THE QUARTERS OF THE COMPASS:

north-east(ern), south-east(ern), south-west(ern), north-west(ern), the mid-west(ern).

10. HYBRID ETHNICS:

Greek-Cypriot, Irish-American, etc, whether noun or adjective.

Words gathered together in quotation marks to serve as adjectives do not usually need hyphens as well: **the "Live Free or Die" state.**

A general rule for **makers**: if the prefix is of one or two syllables, attach it without a hyphen to form a single word, but if the prefix is of three or more syllables, introduce a hyphen. So **carmaker, chipmaker, peacemaker, marketmaker, troublemaker,** but **candlestick-maker, holiday-maker, tiramisu-maker, antimacassar-maker. Policymaker** (one word) is an exception.

With other words ending **-er** that are similar to **maker (builder, dealer, driver, grower, owner, player, runner, seeker, trafficker, worker,** etc) the general rule should be to insert a hyphen. But some prefixes, especially those of one syllable, can be used to form single words (**coalminer, foxhunter, householder, landowner, metalworker, muckraker, nitpicker, shipbroker, steeplechaser**), and some combinations will be better left as two words (**insurance broker, crossword compiler, tuba player**).

ONE WORD

airfield

airspace

airtime

antibiotic

anticlimax

antidote

antiseptic

antitrust

bedfellow

bestselling

bilingual

blackboard

blueprint

bookmaker

businessman

bypass

carmaker

cashflow

ceasefire

chipmaker

clockmaker

coalminer

coastguard

codebreaker

comeback

commonsense (adj)

cyberspace

dotcom

fallout

farmworker

figleaf

foothold

forever (adv, when it precedes the verb)

foxhunter (-ing)

goodwill

halfhearted

handout

handpicked

hardline

headache

hijack

hobnob

kowtow

lacklustre

landmine

landowner

laptop

loophole

lopsided

lukewarm

machinegun

marketmaker (-ing)

metalworker

minefield

multilingual

nationwide

nevertheless

nitpicker (-ing)

nonetheless

offline

offshore

oilfield

online

onshore

overpaid

overrated

override

overrule

overrun

payout

peacekeepers (-ing)

peacemaker (-ing)

peacetime

petrochemical

placename

policymakers(-ing), but foreign-policy makers (-ing)

profitmaking

rainforest

roadblock

rustbelt

salesforce

seabed

shipbroker (-ing)

shipbuilder (-ing)

shipowner

shortlist

shutdown

soyabean

spillover

statewide

steelmaker (-ing)

steelworker (-ing)

stockmarket

streetwalker

strongman

subcommittee

subcontinent

subcontract

subhuman

submachinegun

sunbelt

takeover

threshold

timetable

transatlantic

transpacific

troublemaker (-ing)

turnout

underdog

underpaid

underrated

videodisc

videocassette

wartime

website

windfall

workforce

worldwide

worthwhile

TWO WORDS

ad hoc (always)

air base

air force

arm's length

any more

ballot box

birth rate

car maker

child care (noun)

common sense (noun)

dog owner

errand boy

for ever (when used after a verb)

girl friend

health care (noun)

Land Rover

no one

on to

some day

under way

vice versa

TWO HYPHENATED WORDS

agri-business

aid-worker

aircraft-carrier

asylum-seekers

bail-out

bell-ringer

build-up

buy-out

call-up (noun)

catch-phrase

copper-miner

death-squads

drawing-board

drug-dealer (-ing)

drug-trafficker (-ing)

end-game

end-year

faint-hearted

field-worker

front-line

front-runner

fund-raiser (-ing)

get-together (noun)

gun owner

gun-runner

hand-held

health-care (adj)

heir-apparent

hot-head

ice-cream

infra-red

inter-governmental

interest-group

joint-venture

kerb-crawler

know-how

lay-off (noun)

like-minded

long-standing

machine-tool

mid-week, mid-August, etc

mill-owner

nation-building

nation-state

news-stand

pay-off (noun)

post-war

pot-hole

pressure-group

pre-war

pull-out (noun, not verb)

question-mark

rain-check

re-create (meaning create again)

re-present (meaning present again)

re-sort (meaning sort again)

round-up (noun)

set-up (noun)

shake-out (noun)

stand-off

starting-point

start-ups

sticking-point

stumbling-block

talking-shop

task-force

tear-gas

think-tank

time-bomb

truck-driver

turning-point

vote-winner

working-party

THREE WORDS

ad hoc agreement (meeting, etc)

armoured personnel carrier

chiefs of staff

half a dozen

in as much

in so far

multiple rocket launcher

nuclear power station

third world war (if things get bad)

THREE HYPHENATED WORDS

A-turned-B

brother-in-law

chock-a-block

commander-in-chief

no-man's-land

prisoners-of-war

second-in-command

Avoid **from 1947-50** (say **in 1947-50** or **from 1947 to 1950**) and **between 1961-65** (say **in 1961-65, between 1961 and 1965** or **from 1961 to 1965**).

"If you take hyphens seriously, you will surely go mad" (Oxford University Press style manual).

Italics

1. FOREIGN WORDS AND PHRASES, such as *cabinet* (French type), *de jure*, *glasnost*, *in camera*, *intifada*, *loya jirga*, *Mitbestimmung*, *papabile*, *perestroika*, *ujamaa*, should be set in italics unless they are so familiar that they have become anglicised and so should be in roman. For example:

ad hoc

apartheid

a priori

a propos

avant-garde

bona fide

bourgeois

café

coup d'état (but ***coup de foudre***)

de facto, de jure

elite

en masse, en route

in situ

machismo

nouveau riche

parvenu

pogrom

post mortem

putsch

raison d'être

realpolitik

status quo

vice versa

vis-à-vis

Remember to put appropriate accents and diacritical marks on all foreign words in italics (and give initial capital letters to German nouns when in italics, but not if not). Make sure that the meaning of any foreign word you use is clear.

For the Latin names of animals, plants, etc, see [Spelling: Miscellaneous](#)

2. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS. Note that only *The Economist* has *The* italicised. Thus the *Daily Telegraph*, the *New York Times*, the *Observer*, the *Spectator* (but *Le Monde*, *Die Welt*, *Die Zeit*). The *Yomiuri Shimbun* should be italicised, but you can also say the *Yomiuri*, or the *Yomiuri* newspaper, since *shimbun* simply means newspaper in Japanese. The *Nikkei* is an abbreviation (for *Nikon Keizai*) and so should not be written as *Nikkei Shimbun* as that is not strictly this financial daily's name. Books, pamphlets, plays, radio and television programmes are roman, with capital letters for each main word, in quotation marks. Thus: "**Pride and Prejudice**", "**Much Ado about Nothing**", "**Any Questions**", "**Crossfire**", etc. But **the Bible** and its books (**Genesis**, **Ecclesiastes**, **John**, etc) without inverted commas. These rules apply to footnotes as well as bodymatter.

3. LAWSUITS. Thus: *Brown v Board of Education*, *Coatsworth v Johnson*. If abbreviated, *versus* should always be shortened to *v*, with no point after it (roman *v* if not a lawsuit).

4. THE NAMES OF SHIPS, AIRCRAFT, SPACECRAFT. Thus: *HMS Illustrious*, *Spirit of St Louis*, *Challenger*, etc. Note that a ship is **she**; a country is **it**.

Do not use italics in titles, captions or rubrics.

Plurals

No rules here. The spelling of the following plurals may be decided by either practice or derivation.

—oes

archipelagoes
buffaloes
cargoes
desperadoes
dominoes
echoes
embargoes
haloes
heroes
innuendoes
mementoes
mosquitoes
mottoes
noes
potatoes
salvoes
tomatoes
tornadoes
torpedoes
vetoes
volcanoes

—os

albinos
armadillos
commandos
demos
dynamos
embryos
Eskimos
falsettos
fandangos
fiascos
flamingos
folios
ghettos
impresarios
librettos
manifestos
memos
mulattos
neutrinos
oratorios
peccadillos
pianos
placebos

—ums

conundrums
crematoriums
curriculum
forums
moratoriums
nostrums
quorums
referendums
stadiums
symposiums
ultimatums
vacuums

—ves

hooves
scarves
wharves

—s

agendas

—eaus

bureaus
plateaus

—uses

buses
caucuses
circuses
fetuses
focuses
geniuses
prospectuses

Note: **indexes** (of books), but **indices** (indicators, index numbers).

Punctuation

Pick a topic from the list on the right, or click “next” below to start browsing this section.

Apostrophes

Use the normal possessive ending 's after singular words or names that end in s: **boss's**,

provisos
quangos
radios
silos
solos
sopranos
stilettos
studios
virtuosos
weirdos

—a

consortia
corrigenda
data
media
memoranda
phenomena
quanta
sanatoria
spectra
strata

—fs

dwarfs
roofs
turfs

—ae

amoebae
antennae
formulae
lacunae

—eaux

chateaux

—i

alumni
bacilli
nuclei
stimuli
termini

caucus's, Delors's, St James's, Jones's, Shanks's. Use it after plurals that do not end in s: **children's, Frenchmen's, media's.**

Use the ending **s'** on plurals that end in **s**—**Danes', bosses', Joneses'**—including plural names that take a singular verb, eg, **Reuters', Barclays', Stewarts & Lloyds', Salomon Brothers'.**

Although singular in other respects, the United States, the United Nations, the Philippines, etc, have a plural possessive apostrophe: eg, **Who will be the United States' next president?**

People's = of (the) people.

Peoples' = of peoples.

Try to avoid using **Lloyd's** (the insurance market) as a possessive; it poses an insoluble problem. The vulnerable part of the hero of the Trojan war is best described as an **Achilles heel.**

Do not put apostrophes into decades: the **1990s.**

Brackets

If a whole sentence is within brackets, put the full stop inside.

Square brackets should be used for interpolations in direct quotations: "**Let them [the poor] eat cake.**" To use ordinary brackets implies that the words inside them were part of the original text from which you are quoting.

Colons

Use a colon "to deliver the goods that have been invoiced in the preceding words" (Fowler). **They brought presents: gold, frankincense and oil at \$35 a barrel.**

Use a colon before a whole quoted sentence, but not before a quotation that begins in mid-sentence. **She said: "It will never work." He retorted that it had "always worked before".**

Use a colon for antithesis or "gnomic contrasts" (Fowler). **Man proposes: God disposes.**

Commas

Use commas as an aid to understanding. Too many in one sentence can be confusing.

It is not always necessary to put a comma after a short phrase at the start of a sentence if no natural pause exists there: **On August 2nd he invaded. Next time the world will be prepared.** But a breath, and so a comma, is needed after longer passages: **When it was plain that he had his eyes on Saudi Arabia as well as Kuwait, America responded.**

Use two commas, or none at all, when inserting a clause in the middle of a sentence. Thus, do not write: **Use two commas, or none at all when inserting . . .** or **Use two commas or none at all, when inserting . . .**

If the clause ends with a bracket, which is not uncommon (this one does), the bracket should be followed by a comma.

Commas can alter the sense of a sentence. To write **Mozart's 40th symphony, in G minor,** with commas indicates that this symphony was written in G minor. Without commas, **Mozart's 40th symphony in G minor** suggests he wrote 39 other symphonies in G minor.

Do not put a comma before **and** at the end of a sequence of items unless one of the items includes another and. Thus **The doctor suggested an aspirin, half a grapefruit and a cup of broth. But he ordered scrambled eggs, whisky and soda, and a selection from the trolley.**

Do not put commas after question-marks, even when they would be separated by quotation marks: **"May I have a second helping?" he asked.**

Dashes

You can use dashes in pairs for parenthesis, but not more than one pair per sentence, ideally not more than one pair per paragraph.

Use a dash to introduce an explanation, amplification, paraphrase, particularisation or correction of what immediately precedes it. Use it to gather up the subject of a long sentence. Use it to introduce a paradoxical or whimsical ending to a sentence. Do not use it as a punctuation maid-of-all-work (Gowers).

Full stops

Use plenty. They keep sentences short. This helps the reader.

Do not use full stops in abbreviations or at the end of rubrics.

Inverted commas

Use single ones only for quotations within quotations. Thus: **"When I say 'immediately', I mean some time before April," said the spokesman.**

For the relative placing of quotation marks and punctuation, follow Hart's rules. Thus, if an extract ends with a full stop or question-mark, put the punctuation before the closing inverted commas. **His maxim was that "love follows laughter." In this spirit came his opening gambit: "What's the difference between a buffalo and a bison?"**

If a complete sentence in quotes comes at the end of a larger sentence, the final stop should be inside the inverted commas. Thus, **The answer was, "You can't wash your hands in a buffalo." She replied, "Your jokes are execrable."**

If the quotation does not include any punctuation, the closing inverted commas should precede any punctuation marks that the sentence requires. Thus: **She had already noticed that the "young man" looked about as young as the New Testament is new. Although he had been described as "fawnlike in his energy and playfulness", "a stripling with all the vigour and freshness of youth", and even as "every woman's dream toyboy", he struck his companion-to-be as the kind of old man warned of by her mother as "not safe in taxis". Where, now that she needed him, was "Mr Right"?**

When a quotation is broken off and resumed after such words as **he said**, ask yourself whether it would naturally have had any punctuation at the point where it is broken off. If the answer is yes, a comma is placed within the quotation marks to represent this. Thus, **"If you'll let me see you home," he said, "I think I know where we can find a cab."** The comma after home belongs to the quotation and so comes within the inverted commas, as does the final full stop.

But if the words to be quoted are continuous, without punctuation at the point where they are broken, the comma should be outside the inverted commas. Thus, **"My bicycle", she assured**

him, "awaits me."

Question-marks

Except in sentences that include a question in inverted commas, question-marks always come at the end of the sentence. Thus:

Where could he get a drink, he wondered?

Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?

Semi-colons

Semi-colons should be used to mark a pause longer than a comma and shorter than a full stop. Don't overdo them.

Use them to distinguish phrases listed after a colon if commas will not do the job clearly. Thus, They agreed on only three points: the ceasefire should be immediate; it should be internationally supervised, preferably by the AU; and a peace conference should be held, either in Geneva or in Ouagadougou.

Singular or plural?

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

There is no firm rule about the number of a verb governed by a singular collective noun. It is best to go by the sense—that is, whether the collective noun stands for a single entity (The council was elected in March, The me generation has run its course, The staff is loyal) or for its constituents: (The council are at sixes and sevens, The preceding generation are all dead, The staff are at each other's throats). Do not, in any event, slavishly give all singular collective nouns singular verbs: The couple have a baby boy is preferable to The couple has a baby boy. Indeed, in general, treat both a pair and a couple as plural.

A rule for majority. When it is used in an abstract sense, it takes the singular; when it is used to denote the elements making up the majority, it should be plural. A two-thirds majority is needed to amend the constitution but A majority of the Senate were opposed.

A rule for number. The number is. . . , A number are. . .

OTHER NOUNS

A government, a party, a company (whether Tesco or Marks and Spencer) and a partnership (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill) are all it and take a singular verb. So does a country, even if its name looks plural. Thus The Philippines has a congressional system, as does the United States; the Netherlands does not. The United Nations is also singular. So are acoustics, ballistics, dynamics, economics, kinetics, mathematics, mechanics, physics, politics and statics when being used generally, without the definite article. Thus Economics is the dismal science, Politics is the art of the possible (Bismarck), Statics is a branch of physics. But such -ics words are plural when preceded by the, or the plus an adjective, or with a possessive. The politics of Afghanistan have a logic all their own, The dynamics of the dynasty were dynamite, The economics of publishing are uncertain. Antics, atmospheric, basics, graphics, histrionics, hysterics, tactics and statistics are all plural. Specifics are discouraged (try details).

Demographics should be demography.

Brokers are singular too. Legg Mason Wood Walk is preparing a statement. Avoid stockbrokers Furman Selz Mager, bankers Chase Manhattan or accountants Ernst & Young. And remember that Barclays is a British bank, not the British bank, just as Ford is a car company, not the car company, and Luciano Pavarotti is an opera singer, not the opera singer. If it seems absurd to describe someone or something thus—that is, with the indefinite article—you can probably dispense with the description altogether.

Propaganda looks plural but is not. Billiards, bowls, darts and fives are also singular. Data and media are plural. So are whereabouts. Teams that take the name of a town, country or university are plural, even when they look singular: England were bowled out for 56.

Law and order defies the rules of grammar and is singular.

Prefer the singular when referring to chemical (not chemicals) companies, drug (not drugs) traffickers, pension (not pensions) systems and so on. But arms-trader and sales force.

Remember that elections are not always plural. The opposition demanded an election is often preferable to The opposition demanded fresh elections.

Spelling

Use British English rather than American English or any other kind. Sometimes, however, this injunction will clash with the rule that people and companies should be called what they want to be called, short of festooning themselves with titles. If it does, adopt American (or Canadian or other local) spelling when it is used in the name of an American (etc) company or private organisation (Alcan Aluminum, Pulverizing Services Inc, Travelers Insurance), but not when it is used for a place or government institution (Pearl Harbour, Department of Defence, Department of Labour). The principle behind this ruling is that placenames are habitually changed from foreign languages into English: Deutschland becomes Germany, München Munich, Torino Turin, etc. And to respect the local spelling of government institutions would present difficulties: a sentence containing both the Department of Labor and the secretary of labour, or the Defense Department and the need for a strong defence, would look unduly odd. That oddity will arise nonetheless if you have to explain that Rockefeller Center Properties is in charge of Rockefeller Centre, but with luck that will not happen too often.

The Australian Labor Party should be spelt without a u not only because it is not a government institution but also because the Australians spell it that way, even though they spell labour as the British do.

Sandinist, not Sandinista.

Use -ise, -isation (realise, organisation) throughout. But please do not hospitalise.

Use amid not amidst and while not whilst.

Common problems

**abattoir
abut, abutted, abutting
accommodate**

acknowledgment
acquittal, acquitted, acquitting
adrenalin
adviser, advisory
aeon
aeroplane, aircraft, airliner
aesthetic
aficionado
Afrikaans, (the language), Afrikaner (the person)
ageing (but caging, paging, raging, waging)
agri-business (not agro-business)
amiable
amid (not amidst)
amok (not amuck)
annex (verb), annexe (noun)
appal, appals, appalling, appalled
aqueduct
aquifer
arbitrager
artefact
asinine
balk (not baulk)
balloted, balloting
bandanna
bandwagon
battalion
bellwether
benefiting, benefited
biased
bicentenary (noun, not bicentennial)
billeting, billeted
blanketing, blanketed
block (never bloc)
blowzy (not blousy)
bogey (bogie is on a locomotive)
borsch
braggadocio
brethren
bused, busing (keep bussing for kissing)
by-election, bypass, by-product, bylaw, byword
bye (in sport)
caesium
cannon (gun), canon (standard, criterion, clergyman)
cappuccino
carcass
caviar
chancy
channelling, channelled
checking account (spell it thus when explaining to Americans a current account, which is to be preferred)
choosy
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
cipher
clubable
combating, combated

commemorate
connection
consensus
cooled, cooler, cooly
coral (stuff found in sea), corral (cattle pen)
coruscate
cosseted, cosseting
defendant
dependant (person), dependent (adj)
depository (unless referring to American depository receipts)
de rigueur
desiccate, desiccation
detente (not détente)
Deutschmark, D-mark
dexterous (not dextrous)
dignitary
dilapidate
disk (in a computer context), otherwise disc (including compact disc)
dispatch (not despatch)
dispel, dispelling
distil, distiller
divergences
doppel-ganger(s)
doveish
dryer, dryly
dwelt
dyeing (colour)
dyke
embarrass (but harass)
encyclopedia
enroll, enrolment
ensure (make certain), insure (against risks)
enthrall
extrovert
farther (distance), further (additional)
favour, favourable
ferreted
fetus (not foetus, misformed from the Latin *fetus*)
field-marshal (soldier), Marshall Field's (Chicago department store)
Filipino, Filipina (person), Philippine (adj of the Philippines)
filleting, filleted
flotation
flyer, frequent flyer, high-flyer
focused, focusing
forbear (abstain), forebear (ancestor)
forbid, forbade
foreboding
foreclose
forefather
forestall
forewarn
forgather
forgo (do without), forego (precede)
forsake
forswear, forsworn

fuelled
-ful, not -full (thus armful, bathful, handful, etc)
fulfil, fulfilling
fullness
fulsome
funnelling, funnelled
furor
glamour, glamorous
graffito, graffiti
gram (not gramme)
grey
guerrilla
gypsy
haj
hallo (not hello)
harass (but embarrass)
hiccup (not hiccough)
high-tech
Hizbullah
honour, honourable
hotch-potch
humour, humorous
hurrah (not hooray)
impostor
impresario
inadvertent
incur, incurring
innocuous
inoculate
inquire, inquiry (not enquire, enquiry)
install, instalment, installation
instil, instilling
Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI)
intransigent
jail (not gaol)
jewellery (not jewelry)
judgment
kilogram or kilo (not kilogramme)
labelling, labelled
laisser-faire
lama (priest), llama (beast)
lambast (not lambaste)
leukaemia
levelled
libelling, libelled
licence (noun), license (verb)
limited
linchpin, lynch law
liquefy
literal
littoral (shore)
loth (reluctant), loathe (hate), loathsome
low-tech
manilla envelope, but Manila, capital of the Philippines
manoeuvre, manoeuvring

marshal (noun and verb), marshalled
mayonnaise
Médecins Sans Frontières
medieval
mêlée
mileage
millennium, but millenarian
minuscule
moccasin
modelling, modelled
mould
mujahideen
Muslim (not Moslem)
naivety
'Ndrangheta
nonplussed
nought (for numerals), otherwise naught
obligato
occur, occurring
optics (optician, etc) ophthalmic (ophthalmology, etc)
paediatric, paediatrician
panel, panelled
paraffin
parallel, paralleled
Parti Québécois
pastime
pavilion
phoney (not phony)
piggyback (not pickaback)
plummeted, plummeting
Politburo
practice (noun), practise (verb)
predilection
preferred (preferring, but proffered)
preventive (not preventative)
pricey
principal (head, loan; or adj), principle (abstract noun)
proffered (proffering, but preferred)
profited
program (only in a computer context), otherwise programme
protester
Pushtu, Pushtun
pygmy
pzazz
queuing
rack, racked, racking (as in racked with pain, nerve-racking)
racket
rankle
rarefy
razzmatazz
recur, recurrent, recurring
regretted, regretting
restaurateur
resuscitate
rococo

ropy
rottweiler
sacrilegious
sanatorium
seize
shaky
shenanigans
shibboleth
Sibylline
siege
sieve
skulduggery
smelt
smidgen (not smidgeon)
smoky
smooth (both noun and verb)
sobriquet
soothe
souped up
soyabean
specialty (only in context of medicine, steel and chemicals), otherwise speciality
sphinx
spoilt
storey (floor)
straitjacket and strait-laced but straight-faced
stratagem
strategy
supersede
swap (not swop)
swathe
synonym
tariff
threshold
titbits
titillate
tonton-macoutes
tormentor
trade union, trade unions (but Trades Union Congress)
transatlantic
transferred, transferring
transpacific
travelled
tricolor
trouper (as in old trouper)
tyres
unnecessary
unparalleled
untrammelled
vaccinate
vacillate
vermilion
wacky
wagon (not waggon)
weasel, weaselly
wilful

withhold
yogurt

—able

debatable
dispensable
disputable
forgivable
imaginable
implacable
indescribable
indictable
indispensable
indistinguishable
lovable
movable
salable (but prefer sellable)
tradable
unmistakable
unshakable
unusable
usable

—eable

bridgeable
knowledgeable
likeable
manageable
rateable
serviceable
sizeable
traceable
unenforceable
unpronounceable

—ible

accessible
convertible
digestible
inadmissible
indestructible
investible
irresistible
permissible
submersible

When it is necessary to use a Latin name, follow the standard practice. Thus for all creatures higher than viruses, write the binomial name in italics, giving an initial capital to the first word (the genus): *Turdus turdus*, the song thrush; *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the dawn redwood; *Culicoides clintoni*, a species of midge. This rule also applies to *Homo sapiens* and to such cod uses as *Homo economicus*. On second mention, abbreviate the genus (*T. turdus*). In some

species, such as dinosaurs, the genus alone is used in lieu of a common name: *Diplodocus*, *Tyrannosaurus*. Also *Drosophila*, a fruitfly favoured by geneticists. But *Escherichia coli*, a bacterium also favoured by geneticists, is known universally as *E. coli*, even on first mention.

Miscellaneous

ANIMALS, PLANTS, ETC

When it is necessary to use a Latin name, follow the standard practice. Thus for all creatures higher than viruses, write the binomial name in italics, giving an initial capital to the first word (the genus): *Turdus turdus*, the song thrush; *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, the dawn redwood; *Culicoides clintoni*, a species of midge. This rule also applies to *Homo sapiens* and to such cod uses as *Homo economicus*. On second mention, abbreviate the genus (*T. turdus*). In some species, such as dinosaurs, the genus alone is used in lieu of a common name: *Diplodocus*, *Tyrannosaurus*. Also *Drosophila*, a fruitfly favoured by geneticists. But *Escherichia coli*, a bacterium also favoured by geneticists, is known universally as *E. coli*, even on first mention.

COUNTRIES AND INHABITANTS

In most contexts favour simplicity over precision and use Britain rather than Great Britain or the United Kingdom, and America rather than the United States. ("In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness." Dr Johnson.)

Sometimes, however, it may be important to be precise. Remember therefore that Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales, which together with Northern Ireland (which we generally call Ulster, though Ulster strictly includes three counties in Ireland) make up the United Kingdom.

Holland, though a nice, short, familiar name, is strictly only two of the 11 provinces that make up the Netherlands, and the Dutch are increasingly indignant about misuse of the shorter name. So use the Netherlands.

Ireland is simply Ireland. Although it is a republic, it is not the Republic of Ireland. Neither is it, in English, Eire.

Remember too that, although it is usually all right to talk about the inhabitants of the United States as Americans, the term also applies to everyone from Canada to Cape Horn. It may sometimes be necessary to write United States and even United States citizens.

EU can be used, but only after a first mention of the European Union, and then only sparingly. Europe and Europeans may be used as shorthand for citizens of countries of the European Union, but be careful for there are plenty of other Europeans too.

The primary definition of Scandinavia is Norway and Sweden, but it is often used to include Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, which, with Finland, make up the Nordic countries.

Where countries have made it clear that they wish to be called by a new (or an old) name, respect their requests. Thus Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar, etc, awkward as they are, along with Burkina Faso, Congo, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Zimbabwe, etc.

Former Soviet republics that are now independent countries include:

Belarus (not Belorus or Belorussia), Belarussian

Kazakhstan

Kirgizstan (not Kirgizia or Kyrgyzstan)

Moldova (not Moldavia)

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan (not Turkmenia)

Uzbekistan

FOREIGN NAMES

Arab. Try to leave out the al-. If the name looks odd without it, include it (lower-case, followed by a hyphen). Similarly, Osama bin Laden, and any other Arab names with bin, is Mr bin Laden on second mention. Use Muhammad unless it is part of the name of someone who spells it differently.

Bangladeshi. If the name includes the Islamic definite article, it should be lower-case and without any hyphens: Mujib ur Rahman.

Chinese. In general, follow the Pinyin spelling of Chinese names, which has replaced the old Wade-Giles system, except for people from the past, and people and places outside mainland China. Peking is therefore Beijing and Mao is Zedong, not Tse-tung.

There are no hyphens in Pinyin spelling. So:

Deng Xiaoping

Guangdong (Kwangtung)

Guangzhou (Canton)

Hu Yaobang

Jiang Qing (Mrs Mao)

Mao Zedong (Tse-tung)

Qingdao (Tsingtao)

Tianjin (Tientsin)

Xinjiang (Sinkiang)

Zhao Ziyang

But

Chiang Kai-shek

Hong Kong

Li Ka-shing

Lee Teng-hui

The family name in China comes first, so Deng Xiaoping becomes Mr Deng on a later mention.

Names from Singapore and Vietnam have no hyphens:

Lee Kuan Yew

Ho Chi Minh

Again, the family name comes first.

Dutch. If using first name and surname together, vans and dens are lower case: Dries van Agt and Joop den Uyl. But without their first names they become Mr Van Agt and Mr Den Uyl; Hans van den Broek becomes Mr Van den Broek. These rules do not always apply to Dutch names in Belgium and South Africa; Karel Van Miert, for instance (as well as Mr Van Miert).

French. Any de is likely to be lowercase, unless it starts a sentence. De Gaulle goes up; Charles de Gaulle goes down, or plain de Gaulle, goes down. So does Yves-Thibault de Silguy.

German. Any von is likely to be uppercase only at the start of a sentence.

Italian. Any De is likely to be uppercase, but there are exceptions, so check.

Japanese. Although the Japanese put the family name first in their own language (Koizumi Junichiro), they generally reverse the order in western contexts. So we, too, refer to Junichiro Koizumi.

Korean. South Koreans have changed their convention to Kim Dae-jung. But North Koreans, at least pending unification, have stuck to Kim Jong Il. Kim is the family name.

Pakistani. If the name includes the Islamic definite article ul, it should be lowercase and without any hyphens: Zia ul Haq, Mahbub ul Haq (but Sadruddin, Mohieddin and Saladin are single words).

•Russian. Each of the different approaches to transliterating Russian has its drawbacks. The following rules of thumb are chosen chiefly for reasons of simplicity, not phonetic accuracy.

(i) No y before e: Belarus, *perestroika*. Exception: if the e starts the word: Yeltsin, Yevgeny.

(ii) Where pronunciation demands it, use y before a at the start of a word, but not at the end. Yavlinsky, Yakovlev, Alia (not Aliya). Chechnya and Niyazov are exceptions.

(iii) Anything pronounced yo is usually spelled e: Fedorov, Gorbachev.

(iv) With words ending -ski, -skii or -sky, choose -sky. But with all other words ending -i, -ii or -y, choose -i. Thus: Zhirinovsky and Tchaikovsky, but Bolshoi, Rutskoï, Yuri.

Exceptions: Grigory (because of the association with Gregory), Nizhni Novgorod.

Replace dzh with j. So: Jokar (Dudaev), Jaba (Iosseliani).

•Ukrainian. Ukrainians are engaged in an orgy of retransliterating Russian versions of their words, often several times. It is impossible to keep up, so go for the familiar, if there is one.

One generalisation: Ukrainian has no g, so it is Yevhen (not Yevgeny), Ihor (not Igor) and Luhansk (not Lugansk). The currency is the hryvnia.

ETHNIC GROUPS

Avoid giving offence. This should be your first concern. But also avoid mealy-mouthed euphemisms and terms that have not generally caught on despite promotion by pressure-groups. If and when it becomes plain that American blacks no longer wish to be called black, as some years ago it became plain that they no longer wished to be called coloured, then call them African-American (or whatever). Till then they are blacks.

When writing about Spanish-speaking people in the United States, use either Latino or Hispanic as a general term, but try to be specific (eg, Mexican-American).

Africans may be black or white. If you mean blacks, write blacks.

People of mixed race in South Africa are Coloureds.

The inhabitants of Azerbaijan are Azerbaijanis, some of whom, but not all, are Azeris. Those Azeris who live in other places, such as Iran, are not Azerbaijanis. Similarly, many Croats are not Croatian, and many Serbs not Serbian.

Anglo-Saxon is not a synonym for English-speaking.

The language spoken in Iran (and Tajikistan) is Persian, not Farsi. Flemings speak Dutch.

People

Gianni Agnelli

Muhammad Farrah Aideed

Heidar Aliev

Askar Akaev

Yasser Arafat

Bashir Assad

Issaias Afwerki (Mr Issaias)

Omar Bashir

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali

Chadli Benjedid

Ritt Bjerregaard

Frits Bolkestein

Boutros Boutros-Ghali

Zbigniew Brzezinski

Mangosuthu Buthelezi

Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo

Cuauhtémoc Cardenas

**Nicolae Ceausescu
Emilio Chuayffet
Jean-Pierre Chevènement
Uncle Tom Cobbleigh
José Cutileiro
Poul Dalsager
Carlo De Benedetti
Gaston Defferre
Gianni De Michelis
Ciriaco De Mita
Yves-Thibault de Silguy
Carlo Ripa di Meana
John Deutch
Fedor Dostoevsky
Edward du Cann
Jokar Dudaev
Lawrence Eagleburger
King Fahd
Boris Fedorov
Garret FitzGerald
Gandhi
Hans-Dietrich Genscher
Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (Mr Giscard d'Estaing)
Felipe Gonzalez
Mikhail Gorbachev
Gurkha
Habsburgs
Stelios Haji-Ioannou
Denis Healey
Gulbuddin Hikmatyar
Elias Hrawi
Saddam Hussein
Jaba Iosseliani
Alija Izetbegovic
Radovan Karadzic
Muhammad Khatami
Ahmad Khomeini
Nikita Khrushchev
Kim Dae-jung
Kim Jong Il
Jean Kirkpatrick
Sergei Kozalev
Alain Lamassoure
René Lévesque
Alexander Lukashenka
Ahmad Shah Masoud
Milan Martić
Pierre Mendès-France
Slobodan Milosevic
François Mitterrand
Ratko Mladic
Mahathir Mohamad
King Mohammed of Morocco
Daniel arap Moi
Olexander Morozov**

Milan Mrsic
Hosni Mubarak
Muhammad (unless it is part of the name of someone who spells it differently)
Nursultan Nazarbaev
Binyamin Netanyahu
Saparmurat Niyazov
Gaafar Numeiri
Andrej Olechowski
Mullah Mohammed Omar
Karl Otto Pöhl
Velupillai Prabhakaran
Viktor Pynzenyk
Muammar Qaddafi
Burhanuddin Rabbani
Yitzhak Rabin
Ali Akbar Rafsanjani
Cyril Ramaphosa
Prince Ranariddh
Reichmann brothers
Edzard Reuter
Nikolai Ryzhkov
Andrei Sakharov
Ali Abdullah Saleh
Wolfgang Schäuble
Gerhard Schröder
Yitzhak Shamir
Mohammed Zahir Shah
Edward Shevardnadze
George Shultz
Haris Silajdic
Banharn Silpa-archa
Mario Soares (Portugal)
Javier Solana
Alexander Solzhenitsyn
Franz Josef Strauss
Adolfo Suarez (Spain)
Aung San Suu Kyi (Miss Suu Kyi)
Jean Tiberi
tsar
Karel Van Miert (Mr Van Miert)
Hans van den Broek (Mr Van den Broek)
Otto von Habsburg
Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Hans-Jochen Vogel
Siegmond Warburg
Caspar Weinberger
Grigory Yavlinsky
Vladimir Zhirinovskiy
Goodwill Zwelithini
Gennady Zyuganov

Places

Use English forms when they are in common use: Cologne, Leghorn, Lower Saxony, Lyons, Marseilles, Naples, Nuremberg, Turin. And English rather than American—

Rockefeller Centre, Bar Harbour, Pearl Harbour—unless the place name is part of a company name, such as Rockefeller Center Properties Inc. But follow local practice when a country expressly changes its name, or the names of rivers, towns, etc, within it. Thus Almaty not Alma Ata; Chemnitz not Karl-Marx-Stadt; Chennai not Madras; Côte d'Ivoire not Ivory Coast; Mumbai not Bombay; Myanmar not (alas) Burma; Nizhny Novgorod not Gorky; Yangon not (alas, alack) Rangoon;and St Petersburg not Leningrad.

Zaire has now reverted to Congo. In contexts where there can be no confusion with the ex-French country of the same name, plain Congo will do. But if there is any risk of misunderstanding, call it Congo-Kinshasa. The other Congo should always be Congo-Brazzaville. The river is now also the Congo. The people of either country are also Congolese.

Do not use the definite article before Krajina, Lebanon, Piedmont, Punjab, Sudan, Transkei, Ukraine. But it is the Caucasus, the Gambia, The Hague, the Maghreb, the Netherlands—and La Paz, Le Havre, Los Angeles, etc.

Do not use the names of capital cities as synonyms for their governments. Britain will send a gunboat is fine, but London will send a gunboat suggests that this will be the action of the people of London alone. To write Washington and Moscow now differ only in their approach to Havana is absurd.

Although the place is western (or eastern) Europe, euphony dictates that the people are west (or east) Europeans.

SOME PLACENAMES

Abkhazia

Argentina (adj and people Argentine, not Argentinian)

Ashgabat

Azerbaijan

Baden-Württemberg

Baghdad

Bahamas (Bahamian)

Bahrain

Bangladesh

Basel

Belarus

Beqaa

Berlin Wall

Bermuda, Bermudian

Bophuthatswana

Bosporus

Brittany, Breton (but Britannia, Britannic)

Cameroon

Cape Town

Caribbean

Cassel (not Kassel)

Chechnya

Cincinnati

Colombia (South America)

Columbia (university, District of); British Columbia

the Comoros

Côte d'Ivoire (not Ivory Coast), Ivorian

Cracow

Czech Republic; Czech Lands

Dar es Salaam

Dhaka

Djibouti

Dominica (Caribbean island)

Dominican Republic (part of another island)

Dusseldorf (not Düsseldorf)

El Salvador, Salvadorean

the Gambia

Gaza strip

Gettysburg

Gothenburg

Grozny

Guatemala City

Gujarat, Gujarati

Gurkha

Guyana (but French Guiana)

Gweru (not Gwelo)

Hanover

Harare

Hercegovina

**Hong Kong (unless it is part of the name of a company which spells it as one word:
Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation)**

Issyk-Kul

Jeddah

KaNgwane

Katmandu

Kazakhstan

Kirgizstan

Kolkata

Krajina

Kuwait City

KwaNdebele

KwaZulu-Natal

Kwekwe (not Que Que)

Luhansk

Luxembourg

Lyons (not Lyon)

Macau

Mafikeng

Marseilles (not Marseille)

Mauritania

Mexico city

Middlesbrough

Mpumalanga (formerly Eastern Transvaal)

Mumbai (not Bombay)

Myanmar (not Burma)

Nagorno-Karabakh

Nizhny Novgorod

New York City

North Rhine-Westphalia

Nuremberg

Odessa

Ouagadougou

Panama City

Philippines (the people are Filipinos and Filipinas)

Phnom Penh

Pittsburgh

Putumayo

Pyrenees, Pyrenean

Quebec, Quebecker (but Parti Québécois)

Quebec City

Quezon City

Reykjavik

Rheims

Romania

Rwanda, Rwandan (not Rwandese)

St Antony's (college)

St Petersburg

Salonika (not Thessaloniki)

Salzburg

Sao Paulo (Brazilian city)

Sebastopol

Sindh

Srebrenica

Sri Lanka

Strasbourg

Suriname

Taipei

Tajikistan

Tehran

Teesside

Tigray, Tigrayan

Transdnestrria

Uffizi

Uzbekistan

Valletta

Württemberg

Yangzi

Yugoslavia

Zepa

Zepce

Zurich (not Zürich)

Titles

The overriding principle is to treat people with respect. That usually means giving them the title they themselves adopt. But some titles are ugly (Ms), some misleading (all Italian graduates are Dr), and some tiresomely long (Mr Dr Dr Federal Sanitary-Inspector Schmidt). Do not therefore indulge people's self-importance unless it would

seem insulting not to.

Do not use Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms or Dr on first mention even in bodymatter. Plain George Bush, Tony Blair or other appropriate combination of first name and surname will do. But thereafter the names of all living people should be preceded by Mr, Mrs, Miss or some other title. Knights, dames, princes, kings, etc, should be given their title on first and subsequent mentions. Many peers are, however, better known by their old names. Those like Paddy Ashdown, Laurence Olivier and Margaret Thatcher can be given their familiar names on first mention. After that, they should be called by their titles.

Titles are not necessary in headings or captions (surnames are: no Kens, Tonys, Newts, etc). Sometimes they can also be dispensed with for athletes and pop stars, if titles would make them seem more ridiculous than dignified. No titles for the dead, except those whom you are writing about because they have just died. On the obituary page, therefore, titles are required. Dr Johnson and Mr Gladstone are also permissible.

Ms is permissible though ugly. Avoid it if you can. To call a woman Miss is not to imply that she is unmarried, merely that she goes by her maiden name. Married women who are known by their maiden names—eg, Aung San Suu Kyi, Benazir Bhutto, Jane Fonda—are therefore Miss, unless they have made it clear that they want to be called something else.

Take care with foreign titles. Malaysian titles are so confusing that it may be wise to dispense with them altogether. Do not, however, call Tunku Razaleigh Hamzah Mr Razaleigh Hamzah; if you are not giving him his Tunku, refer to him, on each mention, as Razaleigh Hamzah. Avoid, above all, Mr Tunku Razaleigh Hamza.

Use Dr only for qualified medical people, unless the correct alternative is not known or it would seem perverse to use Mr. And try to keep Professor for those who hold chairs, not just a university job or an inflated ego.

If you use a title, get it right. Rear-Admiral Jones should not, at least on first mention, be called Admiral Jones.

Governor X, President Y, the Rev John Z may be Mr, Mrs or Miss on second mention.

Life peeresses should be called Lady, not Baroness, just as barons are called Lord.

On first mention use forename and surname; thereafter drop forename (unless there are two people with the same surname mentioned in the article). Jacques Chirac, then Mr Chirac.

Avoid nicknames and diminutives unless the person is always known (or prefers to be known) by one: Dick Cheney, Tony Blair, Bill Emmott, Newt Gingrich, Tiny Rowland.

Avoid the habit of joining office and name: Prime Minister Blair, Budget Commissioner Schreyer. But Chancellor Schröder is permissible.

Omit middle initials. You may have to distinguish between George Bush junior and George Bush senior, but nobody will imagine that the Lyndon Johnson you are writing about is Lyndon A. Johnson or Lyndon C. Johnson.

Some titles serve as names, and therefore have initial capitals, though they also serve as descriptions: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Emir of Kuwait, the Shah of Iran. If you want to describe the office rather than the individual, use lower case: The next

archbishop of Canterbury will be a woman. Use lower case, too, in references simply to the archbishop, the emir, the shah: The Duchess of Scunthorpe was in her finery, but the duke wore jeans.