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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Foster spent several years in journalism with weekly trade papers, finally as assistant editor of a leading printing industry magazine and as editor of a quarterly journal on platemaking for print production.

He subsequently held public relations posts with Pira International, the technology centre for the printing, paper, packaging and publishing industries, and with the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) which represents the interests of UK advertising agencies.

He has written, edited and produced a variety of printwork, from house journals and books to posters, brochures and leaflets plus writing news releases, speeches, film scripts, slide presentations and exhibition panels. For the past nine years, as a specialist freelance journalist, he has written on management and technical issues in the printing industry. He has also undertaken public relations projects in the field of healthcare.

A keen advocate of good, consistent style in the written and spoken word, John Foster is a regular contributor to the IPR magazine Profile. He is a Fellow of the IPR and holds the CAM Diploma in Public Relations. A member of the Institute since 1954, he has served on the Council, Board of Management and Membership Committee, and was Programme Director from 1979–81. He is an honorary member of the IPA, a member of the CAM Education Foundation and an associate (journalist) member of the Foreign Press Association.
FOREWORD

Writing good English must be one of the most difficult jobs in the world. The tracking of a developing language that is rich, diverse and constantly evolving in use and meaning is not an easy task. Today’s rules and uses quickly become outdated, but this book captures English as it should be used now.

There have always been books on grammar and most of us, if we are honest, have to sneak the occasional look to check whether an apostrophe is in the right place or where a quote mark goes.

This book by John Foster gives invaluable advice, not only on the rules of English grammar, but on how to make the language come alive. How do you make people excited by your writing style and keep them reading on? How do you delight and surprise them, even if the topic is essentially dull?

Of course there’s writing and there’s writing. Writing for the press is very different from writing for the office. John takes us through the basics of style for all occasions, right down to pronunciation.

Also included in this second edition are three useful appendices: definitions of grammar with good practical examples, similar pairs of words that are often confused, and a short glossary of everyday terms in IT and publishing.

The book is written in a lively, imaginative style and is suited not only for the new practitioner who is eager to improve their mastery of the English language, but for the more experienced practitioner who needs a quick checklist of the essentials of grammar and some hints on how to pep-up their writing style.

Effective Writing Skills for Public Relations is intended to be a no-nonsense guide for busy practitioners. It avoids the traps of being so comprehensive and detailed that it confuses, or so superficial as to be of no use at all. It covers all the major grammatical constructions that we use day-to-day with the one objective in mind: writing good readable English. Every PR practitioner should have one.

Anne Gregory
Series Editor
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I have referred to several titles published by Oxford University Press in the preparation of this work and thank them for permission to quote information, references and examples from Fowler’s Modern English Usage, The Oxford Guide to English Usage, The Oxford Dictionary of Grammar, and Hart’s Rules for Compositors and Readers. Acknowledgement is also given to Headline Book Publishing Ltd for permission to quote examples from Debrett’s Correct Form.

JF
June 2001
Style is the crucial ingredient for everything we say and do: in writing, it is the way sentences are structured, the choice of words and the way they are used, plus punctuation. If the style is outmoded and all over the place, the reader will soon lose interest and might not even get beyond the first few lines. Style calls for clarity, brevity coupled with the use of plain language, and the avoidance of clichés and jargon. It means making sure spellings are correct and that words are not misused. Above all it means consistency.

This book has been designed for students and others entering the communications industry, in particular for those intending to follow a career in public relations. It will also be helpful for those already employed in the public relations profession either in consultancies or as in-house practitioners — in fact for anyone earning their living by their writing skills.

The advice in these pages is based on the authority of established style guides, in particular the *Oxford Guide to English Usage* and *Hart’s Rules for Compositors and Readers*, and also on personal experience. This has covered many years of close involvement in writing, editing and producing publications of many kinds; from technical and scientific material to professional and trade journals,
news releases, and general printwork including booklets, brochures, manuals and leaflets.

*Effective Writing Skills* deals not only with the printed but also the spoken word: for messages to be properly communicated and understood, clarity of speech is essential and a chapter is included for those giving audio-visual presentations and taking on public-speaking assignments.

While readers will benefit from reading this book from cover to cover, some will doubtless wish to dip into individual chapters as needs dictate. If some sections, such as the positioning of apostrophes, appear to be elementary, there will always be someone not far away who is getting it wrong!

This is not a book of grammar, but does serve as a reminder of some of the basic principles. The emphasis throughout is on those style points which are frequent causes of argument and disagreement: for example when and where to put capitals, how to deal with figures and abbreviations, plus the editing skills such as hyphenating, punctuating and paragraphing.

Other chapters cover the essential requirements for handling headlines and captions, as well as the basics of news releases and the need for concise language coupled with the readability of the printed word. These and other chapters will provide practitioners with a useful reference source for their day-to-day work. Most chapters in the first edition have been updated and expanded, with new material added where appropriate.

Every organization should have a house style, and that very often calls for a ‘style policeman’ to make sure that the rules are followed by everyone, from director and manager to all support staff. If that is achieved, and if as a result there is closer interest and awareness of style, then this book will have met its objective.

For this new edition fresh chapters cover the skills needed for successful presentations and the language of information technology. It does not cover the technicalities, or the equipment needed, for these are beyond the scope of this book.

The observant reader with an eye for consistency may notice that style for capitalization, particularly in Chapter 16, differs from the author’s opinions. He bows, of course, to the publisher’s own house rules and to the style adopted for other books in this series.
The importance of style: an overview

Effective communication demands clear, consistent style. Everyone in public relations – whether in-house or a consultancy practitioner – should put style at the top of their priority list. This book is about the various characteristics of the written and spoken word, or the manner of writing and speaking; in other words the style, the ultimate hallmark of professionalism. It is not about English grammar, although it touches upon some of the hotly argued rules that tend to be the territory of the pedant. The basic terminology of grammar is explained in Appendix 1 to enable the reader to check upon the technicalities and to provide a refresher if needed.

The following chapters enlarge upon the topics discussed in my regular column in the *IPR Journal* since 1993 and in the IPR’s *Profile* magazine from November 1999. The interest generated by these articles led me to embark upon this work which, it is hoped, will lead to a greater awareness of the importance of style. First, pay close attention to what newspapers and magazines do, and also to developments in book publishing. As soon as a new book comes out on style and usage, get a copy and start a collection. This will
be invaluable when you want to establish a set of house rules, to update an existing one, or just for day-to-day reference. Suggestions for further reading will be found later in this book.

**STYLE ON THE MOVE**

Style changes fast. Compare, for instance, a magazine or newspaper printed only a few decades ago with one of the 1990s: over-use of capitals, stilted phraseology and solid slabs of type unrelieved by subheadings were all commonplace in the 1950s and 1960s. Even now, it is not hard to find press releases ridden with banalities, boring headlines, ‘label’ headings devoid of verb and verve, poorly punctuated reports and letters; and, probably worst of all, inconsistencies in spelling (let alone howlers like ‘one foul swoop’ from a BBC newscaster early in 1997).

The ignorance which surrounds modern style trends emanates through lack of interest in the subject. For young people entering the competitive world of communications it is essential to have a grasp of the basics: to know, for instance, that *media* and *data* are plural nouns, to understand the difference between a colon and a semi-colon, to appreciate that a dash and a hyphen are not the same thing. (It was this last point, incidentally, which led to the first ‘Verbals’ column in the *IPR Journal.*)

Some will no doubt wonder what all the fuss is about. But the hyphen masquerading as a dash is symptomatic of the lax attitude towards style; few word-processor operators bother whether style is consistent, or even know what it means. So it is up to the public relations executive – in fact all professional communicators – to get the message across that style matters in everything an organization does.

Style changes fast. New technology has brought scores of new words. Newspaper and magazines have led style shifts: hyphens are dropped, capitals replace small letters, two-word phrases become one. Unless we keep up with trends we soon become outdated, out of step with the rest.

**APPRECIATING STYLE**

Acquiring a grounding in grammar is not enough: the finer points
of style and presentation will often make all the difference between a good and a mediocre publication – between a stodgy leaflet or complex, wordy brochure and one which is lively and appealing. This means printwork that promotes a product or service and turns a glancer into a reader; that tells a story succinctly and in plain language; and is consistent in every respect. If this is achieved then the style has worked, communication has done its job and the public relations effort has paid off.

It is essential for everyone in PR and communications to have an appreciation of style so that the reader, or receiver of the message, is on the side of the sender from the outset. Just as important is visual presentation style: well-crafted slides where the logo is always the same size and colour, and text mirroring the typeface, are but two essential requirements for a corporate identity – the hallmark of a successful and profitable company or organization.

Packs and display panels with a recognizable type style are instantly identified with the company and product. If that happens, the PR effort has worked and produced tangible results. Clear, unambiguous, concise copy written in a newsy way is usually the best means of getting your message across and making it work for you, your company or your client. There are other times, however, when a more measured style is appropriate – much depends on the target audience and the marketing objectives.

YOUR ORGANIZATION’S STYLE

Style extends beyond the confines of print presentations and the printed word in packaging. It applies to the livery for your delivery van or lorry; to news releases; to film; to audio-visuals; to how your story is put over in speeches at conferences and seminars; to the platform arrangements; to product labelling and design; to office stationery; to the layout and wording of the Web site; and even to the way your receptionist answers the telephone. Stick to the style you have adopted in absolutely everything concerning your company or your client’s products and services. Think about it in all the tasks you perform. Is it consistent? Is it doing justice to your endeavours? Is it, in fact, good PR?

There are a number of style guides to assist you and some of the best known are mentioned in later chapters. They deal mainly with
the printed word, for that is where style is most important and where guidance is often needed. As journalists are inculcated with a sense of style from the moment they joint a newspaper or magazine, it is helpful to see how newspapers and magazines treat the printed word. Most newspapers produce style guides for their editorial staff and it is worthwhile asking for copies.

There is, for instance, wide variation between one newspaper or magazine and another in the use of titles, the way dates are set out, and how abbreviations are handled. When writing articles for the press you should preferably type the copy in the publication’s style, so check on the way figures are set; how names are written; when and where capitals are used; how quotes are dealt with; whether copy is set ragged right or justified with both edges aligned; whether -ise or -ize endings are used. A public relations executive who writes material specifically for a target medium and follows its style has a far better chance of getting material published than one who ignores it.

Press releases should follow the general style adopted by newspapers for the treatment of quotations, for example double quote marks rather than single, with short sentences and paragraphs. If points like these are all followed then the sub-editor will be on the writer’s side, and your copy is less likely to be changed. A bonus for the public relations executive if the chairman’s favourite phrase remains unaltered!

KEEP IT CONSISTENT

Yet there is nothing sacrosanct about style: it is constantly changing, with spellings, ‘vogue’ words and phrases falling into disuse, to be replaced smartly by new ones. Favourite sayings become clichés, and myths that infinitives must not be split, that sentences must never end with a preposition, and that words that once were capitalized can now be lower-cased with abandon, are now mainly discarded.

On the other hand, some style rules like never starting a sentence with a figure, or numbers up to and including ten always being spelt out unless they are part of a table or figure are still firmly established in style books. But whatever you decide on, keep it consistent throughout the whole piece.
POINTS TO WATCH

Be on your guard against repetition, or using the wrong word and putting your reader off for good. Perhaps it won’t be noticed, but mostly it will. Imply is not the same as infer; there are no degrees of uniqueness (something is either unique or it isn’t); fewer than is often used for less than and vice versa (fewer is not interchangeable with less); and so on. Keep it simple and understandable: use short rather than long words, write snappy sentences, cut out jargon and over-worked words, and leave foreign words to the specialist journal. But don’t hesitate, occasionally, to launch into ‘Franglais’ (le Channel Tunnel) or German-English (Die Teenagers) or even ein steadyseller (for the bookshop) to provide a breather and a spot of humour.

Usage differs enormously: English is spoken by over 300 million people throughout the world, while several million more speak it as a second language. Writers have at their command more than half a million words (there are some 640,000 in the latest edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), yet it has been estimated that most people go through life with only some 2000 words at their command. This limit on the average person’s vocabulary shows there is good reason for avoiding long or little-used words: not only do they fail to communicate, but the writer is felt to ‘talk down’ to the reader.

A number of rules for style and usage have been proposed by journalists, lexicographers and others, but few are set in stone; the advice and examples given in this book are based on current best practice, although allowance must be made for individual taste. English is a living language always on the move: today’s style will soon be yesterday’s.

The guidance in these pages will help public relations practitioners and other communicators to lay down effective style rules for their own companies and organizations. Once these have been established, they should be rigorously followed. If they are not, then style becomes inconsistent and that is always as bad as not having any rules at all. All the work that has gone into establishing the style will be wasted. But not for long: it will be revision time again before you know it!
GOOD STYLE IS GOOD MANNERS

Good style means good work. It also means good manners: letters being answered promptly, returning telephone calls, sincerity in everything you say and do. If you cannot do something, say so – don’t just leave it and hope that the problem will go away. And when Christmas comes, don’t send out an unsigned card, even if your company’s name and address is printed inside.

Style is just as important with the spoken word. Few speakers at a conference would think of muttering and mumbling their way through a talk. Carefully enunciated speech without clichés or jargon is essential for avoiding slipshod presentation and ensuring effective communication. Some hints and tips on pronunciation style will be found in Chapter 14. And as Sir Trevor McDonald, the ITN newscaster, confirms, well-articulated speech can raise someone from humble origins to the very top. McDonald advises young people aiming for wider horizons to speak their language well. Diction and grammar really do matter. This is particularly true when most people entering the PR profession soon find themselves making presentations – sometimes to packed conferences – and frequently appearing in radio and TV interviews.

Appreciate the need for style – be aware of style trends – and follow it through relentlessly and consistently. This book will help you to do that.
How many times have you seen attempts to make words ending in -y into plurals just by adding an ‘s’ and ending up with daisys? Or even worse – tomato’s, a familiar notice in the high street? Errors like these would be immediately spotted by professional communicators, and staff in PR departments making them would not last for long. But there are plenty of difficult plurals and it is not always easy to tell from the office dictionary how to deal with them. Similarly, there is often confusion about how to handle possessives: not just to know whether an apostrophe should be there, but where to place it. Again, how frequently have you seen the possessive its with an apostrophe shouting at you, pretending that it’s is OK?

**PLURAL MATTERS**

**Common problems**

Most nouns require an ‘s’ to make them plural. Because of the
needs of pronunciation, with some words it is necessary to put in an ‘e’ to give an extra vowel (branches), with different rules for changing vowel sounds (stomachs). Particular difficulty is encountered with words ending in -o: embargoes but mementos. A useful rule here is that -e is never inserted when another vowel comes before -o: an instant answer to any thought of putting an ‘e’ in ratios. Note that there are roofs, not rooves; wharves but dwarfs; scarves but turfs.

Compound words made up of a noun and adjective, or two nouns connected by a preposition, form plurals by a change in the main word as in courts martial, heirs presumptive, poets laureate and in sons-in-law, hangers-on, runners-up, passers-by and men-of-war. Note, however, that there are brigadier-generals and sergeant-majors. And there are run-throughs, set-ups and forget-me-nots, handfuls, stand-bys and spoonfuls.

Care is needed with plurals for words of foreign origin and it must be noted here that media/data are plural nouns and take a plural verb. However, the new edition of Fowler’s Modern English Usage says ‘we are “still at the debating table” on the question of the media is/are’, but nevertheless recommends the use of the plural when in doubt. (In informal writing, or speech, only the purist will object to the media is/data is.) Misuse of criteria and phenomena is common as they are mistaken for being collective, singular nouns: the singular forms are criterion and phenomenon. It should be noted that graffiti is the plural of graffito, termini of terminus, viruses of virus and bacteria of bacterium.

Some other plurals: analyses, appendices, basis/es, bureaux (but often Anglicized to bureaus), indexes (but indices in mathematics), memorandums (but memoranda in a collective sense), moratoriums, referendum, quorums (but addenda, curricula), stadiums (try saying stadia/syllabi and you are in danger of being pedantic and bowing to the purist); also synopses, syllabuses, theses. An extensive list of foreign words in their singular and plural forms will be found in Hart’s Rules.

**Singular or plural for collective nouns?**

There is a problem for the writer using a collective noun: should it take a singular or plural verb? The choice will depend on whether the noun is considered as a single entity or as a group of people or things. Thus, whether to write the committee is or are, agrees or
agree can be answered simply by saying to yourself does it refer to the committee as a whole or to the views of separate members? Similarly, the mass noun audience can take either the singular or plural as in ‘the audience was seated, ready for the speaker’ or as in ‘the audience were all clapping madely’. The same applies to other mass nouns like board, cast (of actors), committee, company, family, group, government, staff.

It is important to decide if the emphasis lies on the individual or the group with a word like board, to take one example. If it lies on the individual members of the board, then write the board ‘who broke off for lunch’ but if the sense is collective, the construction would be ‘the board which made a decision’. The singular always follows if the noun has a qualifier like this, that, every as in ‘every manager has a part to play’.

As a general rule, it is better to have a singular verb with a collective noun, and to treat names of companies and organizations as singular entities. The plural form tends to smack of informality: ‘XYZ company are announcing’ is a relaxed and friendly style, but loses crispness. Avoid a mixed style of singular verb and plural pronoun as in ‘the committee has made their decision’ (‘the committee has made its decision is preferable). In the end, however, house style will decide – another reason for every company to have a set of rules for basic style points such as this.

Whether to write is or are for companies with more than one name, such as Legal & General, is somewhat of a conundrum, and one faced sooner or later by everyone. While it is largely a matter of house style, Marks & Spencer and the multi-name styles for PR consultancies and advertising agencies mostly take the singular verb, thus adhering to the general rule of ‘keep it singular’.

Watch out for company or brand names ending in ‘s’. They will invariably be singular as in Boots is, PA Tips makes – again a matter of house style. The same applies to organizations, such as the United Nations and US Congress, which always takes the singular, and this is so even in the case of the United States.

Note, however, that a pair and a couple take the plural, as do two singular nouns linked by and unless the conjoined words form a single idea as in wining and dining. Conversely, note that the number is, public relations is. Other nouns taking a singular verb include advice, equipment, furniture, knowledge, machinery, stationery, traffic. There are a number of nouns which only take the plural: people, police, clergy and some others recognizable by their -s
endings, notably *briefs*, *clothes*, *congratulations*, *glasses*, *goggles*, *outskirts*, *pants*, *pliers*, *remains*, *riches*, *scissors*, *thanks*, *tights*. Nouns with a plural form which do take a singular verb are *billiards*, *measles*, *news*. Trousers, on the other hand, have not always been a plural. Gone are the days when the assistant in a menswear shop might have declared ‘A good *trouser*, Sir’.

The crucial point in any singular/plural dispute is to maintain consistency throughout the piece as a whole, through each sentence and each paragraph. If that consistency is lost, news releases may be rubbished, and printed documents and contact reports will mostly fail to command the reader’s respect.

**Communication or communications?**

Difficulty also arises in distinguishing between the terms communication and communications. Even public relations practitioners have a problem with this and argument rages: both refer to the act of communicating, the latter relating to the technicalities or the hardware of communicating – e-mail, faxes, telephones and so on. Confusion is compounded by the fact that there are courses in communication management, and that communications can be managed. In reality, there is little difference in meaning. So, take your pick!

It is relevant to note that the titles communications manager/consultant have largely replaced the title public relations officer which has now become somewhat outdated. But whatever the title – whether for undertaking the mechanics of communications or for advising how a company communicates with its public – the context will usually clarify job descriptions. Again, consistency is the watchword.

**APOSTROPHE PROBLEMS**

**Trouble with possessives**

The missing or misplaced apostrophe was once dubbed by a newspaper columnist ‘that errant tadpole’. True enough. It seems that knowing where to put the apostrophe in possessives – indicating possession or ownership – causes as much difficulty as any other mark. Kingsley Amis in *The King’s English* says that if it hasn’t been
mastered by the age of 14 then the chances are that there will always be the possibility of error. There is often confusion between its (in the possessive) and it’s, the shortened form of it is. And the apostrophe is further misused when denoting the plural – the so-called greengrocer’s apostrophe as in potato’s (or perhaps even potatoe’s!) – or when letter(s) have been omitted.

First, take the basic rules for positioning the apostrophe for a possessive. When the thing or person is in the singular then the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’ as in the boy’s tie. If, however, there is more than one boy, the apostrophe goes after the ‘s’ as in the boys’ ties. Another example: in the cat’s paws there is one cat and as the paws belong to the cat it is the cat that is in the possessive, and since it is one cat the apostrophe goes before the ‘s’. You talk about the campaign’s objective (where there is one campaign and one or more objectives); John’s brother (or brothers, it doesn’t matter) there is one John and the name is in the singular. When there are several journalists, you talk about journalists’ needs.

For singular words ending in ‘s’, just add ‘s as in the boss’s office. To form the plural possessive, add ‘es’ apostrophe after the ‘s’ as in the bosses’ bonus, the Joneses’ dog. With plural words that end with an ‘s’, simply add the apostrophe as in the ladies’ room, the Smiths’ house. For nouns that are already plural as in children, men, women add an apostrophe ‘s’ in the same way: children’s, men’s, women’s, people’s. Never write childrens’, mens’, womens’ or peoples’ or leave out the apostrophe altogether, even though you might be tempted to do so.

It is quite common to see four weeks holiday wrongly written as a matter of course. While the clumsy holiday of four weeks would be pedantic in the extreme, it is far better to write four weeks’ holiday with the apostrophe correctly positioned than not having one at all and risk offending the reader. And, of course, you go on a fort-night’s cruise. In distinguishing the difference between its and it’s, two examples will help: its in the possessive – the dog wagged its tail; it’s as the shortened version of it is – the client said ‘it’s a good presentation’.

Many other purposes, but don’t put one if not needed

The apostrophe is a multi-purpose mark: it can signify omitted characters as in isn’t, doesn’t, and the verbal elisions I’m, I’ll, you’ll,
we’ll. It indicates the plural of single letters: A’s and B’s, p’s and q’s. Note that the apostrophe is omitted in the plurals of groups of letters and numbers as in MPs, 1990s and in whys and wherefores. It would, however, be used to show an omission as in the ’90s.

There is, of course, no apostrophe in hers, ours, yours or theirs (an apostrophe is needed in one’s), but care is needed in distinguishing between the relative pronoun whose and who’s, the shortened version of who is.

Leaving it out when it should be there is bad enough, but putting one in when it is not needed is worse still: not only is there the illiterate use of the apostrophe for plurals as in the greengrocers’ signs for carrot’s and pea’s – there are now ‘garage’ apostrophes in advertisements for Fiesta’s and Mondeo’s and there are headlines for Suzuki’s but, curiously, they advertise at the same time Range Rovers and Cavaliers, while cafés have notices for tea’s and coffee’s, and roadside restaurants displaying signs for lunch’s and dinner’s. Ouch! It happens more often than you might think.

Much of the problem comes from designers who either don’t know or don’t care whether there should be an apostrophe: Grannys (a shop), Henrys Table (a restaurant); but it is gratifying to see that Sainsbury’s has stuck with tradition. And the apostrophe is often at the mercy of the designer who readily turns it into a dagger, pen or heart without a qualm, diminishing its importance and contributing if not to its demise, to uncertainty about positioning.

It is a tenet of ‘netiquette’ to drop the apostrophe, along with capitals where they are normally needed. Such disdain for usual practice can mean trouble: an important yet pedantic client could deliver a sharp rebuke in return for a sloppy message!

Inconsistencies to watch for

Organizations drop their apostrophes without hesitation, perhaps in an attempt at making them user- and customer-friendly. Thus we see Chambers English Dictionary, Debenhams and Barclays Bank; but also Earls Court and St James’s Square; or Queens’ College (Cambridge) but Queen’s College and All Souls (Oxford), which all add to the inconsistencies. Some of the above can easily be checked in telephone directories, but where writers struggle is in knowing where to put the apostrophe in words ending in -s in names like Charles. Hart’s Rules says: ‘Use ’s for the possessive case whenever
possible.' The guidance here is that the 's should appear in all monosyllables and in longer words accented on the next to last syllable as in Jones’s, Thomas’s, St James’s Square. In multi-syllable words like Nicholas, it is equally acceptable to put the apostrophe alone as in Nicholas’ or Nicholas’s, but if in doubt always add the ‘s. For goodness’ sake always think where it should go.

It would be unwise to put public relations in the possessive. Try it, and the result it awful if not a tongue-twister: public relations’ or public relations’s are equally ugly; a better way would be to treat public relations as an adjective and so achieve, for example, the public relations objective, or the wordier objective of public relations.

While no apostrophe is needed when writing ‘He will be taken to the cleaners,’ it should appear in such constructions as ‘He is going to the butcher’s’ when there is ellipsis of the word ‘shop’. However, to say (or write) ‘I am going to the doctor’s’ with the ellipsis of the word ‘surgery’ would offend many an ear or eye. In these and similar examples, it would be better to omit the ‘s’ altogether.

There are, shown above, a number of inconsistencies in the use of the apostrophe, and it seems that incorrect usage is increasing both where the apostrophe is omitted or where it is included when it shouldn’t be. The Oxford Guide to English Usage, as well as Fowler’s and Hart’s Rules should be consulted whenever in doubt. Dictionaries do not help much for dealing with these matters.

Responding to an appeal for its abolition by Guardian columnist Matthew Engel, the Queen’s English Society points out that the apostrophe aids clarity. ‘If we had no apostrophes someone reading Mr Engel’s article would not know if he was Engel or Engels’, says Dr Bernard Lamb of the QES. Linguists agree that the apostrophe does have a purpose and should be retained so long as we have possessives.
Taking care over punctuation shows that the writer has the reader in mind. Putting the correct marks – and making sure there are no unnecessary ones – aids understanding and avoids ambiguity. The comma, stop, colon and interrogation mark are not there just to satisfy the rules of construction. They have a real and active purpose: to give the reader a breather, to give a pause and, at intervals, to provide a change of pace or thought.

Too many people think that punctuation is just another chore: get on with the words, never mind the irritations of having to bother with brackets, dashes or hyphens, let alone using quote marks properly or typed the right way round. On the other hand, it is easy to over-punctuate and end up with complicated, obscure sentences and a ‘spotty’ page. Look now at the various marks and how they should be used and presented.

**BASIC PUNCTUATION**

‘Punctuation is made for man, not man for punctuation,’ declares *The Times Guide to English Style and Usage*. ‘It is a courtesy designed to help readers to understand a story without stumbling, not a fire-
works display to show off your dashes and gaspers.’ That is the basic principle.

**The full stop**

This is the writer’s best aid to crisp, clear copy. That, after all, is what the public relations practitioner should aim for when writing for the press, and indeed for most forms of communication. But that does not mean that a piece of copy should be littered with stops like currants in a pudding. A full stop (or full point to the printer) brings a sentence to an abrupt halt, ready for the next one and an expansion of thought. No stop is needed when ending a sentence with a question mark, exclamation mark or if ending a sentence with a quotation which itself ends with a full stop.

But there are other uses: for instance, a set of three is used to show an omission (use three and only three, but if they come at the end of a sentence insert a concluding one). It will soon be noticed when the incorrect number has been used – there are plenty of examples of the writer not having the faintest idea of how many stops to put and sometimes finishing up with a line of them! Full stops are rarely seen these days in sets of initials for organizations (put them between the initials IPR and it will immediately look old-fashioned).

Stops are fast disappearing from initials of company names, but they can be used with great effect and impact in advertisement display heads. They should not appear in headings for press release stories for the simple reason that they are hardly ever seen in newspaper or magazine headlines. Do not put them after abbreviations like Mr, Mrs, Ms, or in lb or ft, unless of course they come at the end of a sentence.

**The comma**

This is one of the most common marks, but often misused: either it is put in when not needed or it is in the wrong place. Typically, the comma is used to encase a job title or descriptive phrase after a name. But a very usual mistake is just to put an opening comma, leaving the rest of the description dangling and yelling out for a companion comma.

The comma separates adjectives qualifying a noun as in a small, profitable consultancy but there is no comma when one adjective
qualifies another, for example a bright red tie. They are useful for breaking up a long sentence, but take care not to put in too many and cause greater confusion than having none at all.

Some dos and don’ts. A comma would only go before and in a list of items if one of the items includes another and. Do not put commas in dates or round adverbs and adverbial phrases unless special emphasis is required. They do not normally go before or after therefore and accordingly, but they always encase however when there is a change of thought. And do not, at least in copy for press or printwork, put a comma before a direct quote – a colon should be used here.

The colon

This is a useful mark for the writer of news releases, and copy for articles and house journals. It is normal journalistic practice to use a colon to introduce a quote as in Joe Bloggs said: ‘This is the best way of doing it.’ (Teachers and college instructors, who seldom have any knowledge of, or interest in typography, usually insist upon a comma before the quote – perhaps this is why this style is seen so often.) The colon is useful for starting a list, but do not put a dash after it as in :– where the dash is superfluous. It is also handy for leading the reader to fresh fact or thought or to follow the expressions such as, for example, namely, the following.

The semicolon

This little-used mark deserves greater awareness of its attributes. While in no sense a substitute for the comma, the semicolon provides a far stronger break and a longer pause, and it can perform some of the comma’s functions. It can separate two or more clauses of equal importance and is useful for listing words and phrases that cannot neatly be separated by commas. In a lengthy sentence, it can bring a thought to a halt, enabling a new one to be started, so aiding clarity. Some writers will prefer to use a full stop instead; perhaps this is why the semicolon is falling into disuse.

Exclamation and interrogation marks

These marks normally count as a concluding full stop and take a
capital letter afterwards. But they are sometimes seen after a supporting clause in brackets within a sentence. Exclamation marks express surprise or dismay: don’t use them for emphasizing simple statements. Use sparingly and keep them out of formal documents, even if you put them in quote marks. If you must put more than one, reserve them for e-mails to give extra force.

The interrogation (question) mark never follows indirect speech, or statements that pose a question; only direct questions – as used in quotes.

Brackets, round and square

When using round brackets to enclose a complete sentence, put the full stop inside the closing bracket as in (This is the way to do it.). It goes outside only if the last part of the sentence is in brackets. The square bracket is used to denote comments or explanations added to the original text, usually by the editor or someone other than the author.

The dash

This is used to add an afterthought or, if used as a pair, to replace commas if there are already too many in the sentence. Many writers are getting into the habit of using a hyphen instead of a dash. This on the face of it seems to matter little, but there is a distinct difference between the two marks: the dash (known to the printer as the en-dash) is twice as long as the hyphen and when they are both used in the same piece – as very often happens – something is clearly amiss. The hyphen masquerading as the dash is a common fault, but seldom seen in newspapers and magazines and in well-designed house journals and printwork.

Today’s keyboards do not always have a dash key and that is how the trouble starts. To print a dash with some computers two keys are usually needed and reference should be made to the operating manual or to the software supplier for advice on achieving a proper en-dash. Don’t take the easy way out and type a hyphen when a little effort will show how to produce a dash. It’s the sign of a professionally produced publication if your dashes are right!

A final word: journalists on The Times are advised to avoid dashes which, says their style guide, ‘often indicate that that a sentence is badly constructed and needs rewriting’. Other newspa-
pers take a more relaxed stance and there can be no arbiter of style points such as this. If dashes are employed, they must be used sparingly and certainly only once in a paragraph.

The hyphen

Hyphens indicate when two or more words should be read together and taken as one. A check with the dictionary will quickly tell whether a word is hyphenated or not. They will enable the reader to distinguish between, for example, recover (from an illness) and re-cover (with material). Modern style soon overturns established practice, and words that were once hyphenated are now seen as one: payphone, feedback, multinationals, wildlife for instance. Few in PR would think of writing lay-out or hand-out!

Once a hyphenated word assumes everyday usage, it is not long before the hyphen disappears. The closed up form usually looks and ‘feels’ better; a hyphen in the middle looks a touch pedantic and ugly to some eyes.

Hyphens are happiest when used in numbers (twenty-one) or as fractions (two-thirds). And they are useful for separating similar vowel sounds (co-ordinate/co-operate for instance). The main purpose of a hyphen is to avoid ambiguity as in five-year-old children. But always ensure that if you do use a hyphen it has a job to do. A consultancy once asked me whether their client should say ‘state-of-the-art facility’, followed by ‘easy-to-use products’ and even a further hyphenation ‘to-the-point solutions’. Avoid such abominations: sets of compounds in the same sentence should be re-written. Do it once and once only.

Whether or not to hyphenate is hardly a subject of breathtaking importance. Study current style and decide for yourself.

The apostrophe

The main use of the apostrophe is to denote the possessive case, a subject discussed at length in the previous chapter (see pages 12–15). It is also used as a mark of omission: it can signify omitted characters as in isn’t, doesn’t, I’m; it distinguishes between its and it’s; it indicates the plural of single letters, A’s and B’s.
WHEN YOU ARE QUOTING...

Quotation marks often give trouble. The writer who knows that a word or phrase is not the right one gets over the problem by enclosing it in quotes; at other times, there may not be a need for quote marks at all. Further, there is often uncertainty about whether to use single or double quotes, and on the placing of punctuation within them. Consider now some of the pitfalls.

Try not to use them for facetious, technical or slang words. Their proper, and most usual place, is for direct speech quotations: hence the term quotes or quote marks. (The phrase ‘inverted commas’ is old-fashioned and not the way journalists would describe them.) They should be used for words or phrases not yet in everyday use – but only sparingly. Include them for titles of articles in magazines or chapters of books, but again avoid over-use. Do not use them for house names as there is no logic or merit for doing so.

Single or double?

Most publishers nowadays use the single quote mark for direct quotations, inserting the double mark for quotes within a quote. This does not, however, apply to newspapers whose editors will favour double quotes for quoted speech and for the single mark for quotes within. Consequently, the double quote style should be used for press releases and news-type publications. For example, a chairman’s address to an AGM might contain a quote from the marketing director; in which case the release would be typed with double quotes for the main statement and with single quotes for the marketing director’s comments inside it.

Misuse occurs when there are several paragraphs of quoted speech. Quotes get closed at the end of each paragraph and opened again at the next paragraph. But the opening quote marks should go at the beginning of each paragraph and only appear at the end of the quote. If the text reverts to reported speech at any point the quote should be closed, and only opened again when direct speech restarts.

Punctuation marks go inside the quote marks (single or double as style dictates) when they refer to the words quoted, as in the managing director said: ‘When will dividends be sent out?’ but outside if they are part of a longer sentence carrying the quotation: the chairman commented on the company’s ‘excellent year’. If the
complete sentence is a quotation the final point goes inside, as follows: ‘The marketing director wants greater effort by the sales staff.’

Guidance on the relative placing of punctuation and quotation marks will be found in most style books, with Hart’s Rules giving detailed advice and a variety of examples. And take a look to see how newspapers deal with this point; they provide an excellent guide to the treatment of quotations, and they are at your elbow every day.

Unless the piece contains a number of direct quotes, general guidance gives that quotations marks be used sparingly. You can often avoid them altogether by indenting the paragraph (or paragraphs) and setting the type in a smaller size. Take special care when using direct quotes: make sure they are verbatim. The last thing you want is the person to whom the quote was attributed later denying the words were ever said! And it goes without saying that the writer must be sure the quoted words were not in any way defamatory.

Finally, when proofreading, ensure that the quote marks are the right way round. They are easy to spot and you will surprise yourself when you see how many word processor operators get them wrong. They can be corrected easily by typing the key twice and then deleting the unwanted one. The pity is that so many typists cannot be bothered to do that. But they usually remember that a capital letter follows all punctuation marks except a comma, colon, semicolon and quote marks within a sentence. When and when not to use capitals will be the subject of the next chapter.

Quotes in news releases

Journalists love quotes. Aim for one or two in a release to follow the first or second paragraph of a news story. Quotes can be inserted in feature articles to good effect – perhaps a series of them throughout the piece. These would give it pace and energy.

Speeches can give significant and newsworthy quotes. In a release, you can usually include a significant quote in the intro. But don’t open with a quote: it will be written out by the sub-editor or placed lower down where impact will be lost.

Above all, ensure accuracy. Unless you have a tape-recording, check the source every time. Once a release has gone out and you spot a mistake, there’s little you can do. Except pray.
Down with capitalism!

Only journalists and those committed to style principles appear to know or care where or when initial capital letters should be used. Whether to capitalize a word or not is one of the most hotly argued points in any office, particularly when preparing copy for publication. The only rule that most people can remember is: capital letter for the particular, small for the general. That is all right as far as it goes, but where is the dividing line? Is there too much capitalization anyway? What, if any, are the guidelines?

CONSISTENCY IS THE ESSENCE

Dictionaries are helpful when you are uncertain whether to capitalize, and they should be consulted before reaching for the style guide or entering into a heated discussion. Uncertainty exists over words that have dual meanings. For example, a few years ago it was fashionable to give the word ‘press’, when referring to the media, a capital ‘P’. Current style now demands a
small ‘p’ which is logical since context will always make the meaning clear.

Similarly, new technology has bred new terms and expressions. The word ‘Internet’ began with a capital. Nowadays most newspapers and trade papers (including *PR Week*) give it a small ‘i’ simply to follow the trend for lower-case whenever possible. A cleaner and less cluttered look results. See also Chapter 16 on styles for IT.

Consistency is of paramount importance. Nothing looks worse than a publication displaying irregular capitalization; this looks haphazard. If the name of a firm’s department is used first with a capital letter and soon after with a small initial letter, the reader is immediately confused. On top of that it looks as though an amateur has been at work. If you are unsure whether to use a capital, it is better to retain consistency rather than risk style absurdities with some words of similar meaning given a capital and others not.

Always aim to keep capitals to a minimum. Too many spoil the appearance of the page, look old-fashioned and fail to follow modern style. Imagine a line of type with the ‘up and down’ look; the eye is quickly distracted, making reading difficult. Such was the style of many of the books and magazines published up to the 1950s. Compare today’s style, and the difference is staggering: a continuous flow of small characters is easy on the eye and modern-looking.

Problem words, particularly when it comes to preparing copy for desktop publishing, are those which sometimes take an initial capital and other times do not. It is important for every organization to have firm rules for the capitalization of commonly used words. The fewer the capitals, the easier it is to be consistent and the better looking the printed page. In short, down with the capitalists!

**WHY LOWER CASE, UPPER CASE?**

Another way to describe capitals is to call them ‘upper case’ and small letters ‘lower case’. These terms are now universally accepted and derive from the time when printers’ compositors kept their small type characters in low cases, close to hand, while those characters in less frequent use were stored in a higher (upper) case. Thus, if a line of type is set with a mixture of small
and capital letters it is said by the printer to be in ‘upper and lower case’ and marked u&lc, as opposed to text set completely in capitals, or very rarely in lower case only (a style for just a few words for display purposes for example).

WHEN TO USE CAPITALS

A capital is used for the first word in every sentence. It follows a full stop, question and interrogation marks, is used at the opening of a quote if it begins a sentence, and also for months and days of the week. Capitals should be used for proper nouns or names (words referring to a particular person or place), for formal titles, names of companies and organizations, political parties, titles of newspapers and magazines, titles of newspaper and periodical articles, books, films, trade names, names of ships and aircraft types. They are usually used for abbreviations, although some organizations adopt a lower case style in order to reflect advertising or product branding.

Don’t be influenced by the dictum that says a word must have an initial capital letter because there is only one of it. There’s only one world – and it always has a lower case ‘w’.

WHERE DIFFICULTIES OCCUR

Job titles

This is where a lot of difficulty arises. The advice here is to follow newspaper style which generally uses lower case where the title is descriptive as in managing director, marketing director or communications manager. Some will no doubt find it hard to accept a lower case style for job titles, but once used to it the small letters look right and objections diminish. It is seen often enough in the press.

For titles that are both formal and descriptive, such as President, use capitals for a full reference, as in John Smith, President, of XYZ Association. Subsequent mentions could just be John Smith, the president. The same applies to royalty: Prince Charles becomes ‘the prince’ and the Princess Royal ‘the princess’ in subsequent references. A following reference to Her Majesty the Queen should
be written as either *Her Majesty* or *the Queen*. Check with *Debrett* and *Who’s Who* when naming members of the Royal Family, the peerage and principal personages.

Further examples will be found in *Hart’s Rules*, which notes that ‘monarch’ and ‘sovereign’ can be set lower case if used in a general sense.

**Capitals for a company?**

Stockbrokers, thankfully, no longer refer to their partnerships as ‘the Firm’. Nevertheless, many executives insist upon using a capital initial letter for ‘company’ in the mistaken belief that the capital somehow bestows importance. The only time for a capital is when the name of the firm or company is spelt out in full.

**The Government**

When you refer to the Government keep the capital to make it clear that you are referring to the Government of the country. However, Acts of Parliament only carry upper case when their full titles are used; the same applies to bills and white papers. Use lower case for the ministry and minister, but capitals when putting the title in full. Note that if the office holder is referred to only by their office, the titles prime minister, chancellor of the exchequer, foreign secretary and so on are in lower case in some national newspapers. Most will use capitals when the complete name and formal title are given. You will never be criticised if you always put such titles in capitals. But you will soon be in trouble with the purists if you don’t.

Use upper and lower case for the House of Commons, House of Lords, Department of Trade and Industry; but the department or DTI in subsequent references. Put left/right (wing), the speaker, the opposition, the cabinet.

When referring to political parties, the name of the party should be in upper case as in ‘the Labour Party’, while retaining the capital for general references when the word ‘party’ is not used. However, when used as a normal adjective, write lower case as in conservative outlook, socialist objectives. Members of Parliament are capitalized to MPs, not MP’s, and certainly not MsP.
The seasons

Some writers feel that somehow the seasons are so important that they must be capitalized. This is nonsense and is not supported by style guides. But note that religious festivals such as Easter take capitals. So does Christmas, but new year or new year’s day need not.

Geographical regions

Recognizable regions such as Northern Ireland carry capitals, but are lower case if referring to northern England for example. Capitals are well established for the North-East, the North and the West Country, but here again it would scarcely cause offence if these regions lost their capital letters.

Derivatives

Adjectives derived from proper names carry capitals, for example Christian, Catholic. But note that you wear wellingtons (hence wellies) and a jersey; and that we have amperes and volts. Use lower case when connection with the proper name is remote, as in arabic (letters), french (chalk, polish, windows), italic (script), roman (numerals). Use lower case for gargantuan and herculean, but with less familiar words use a capital, as in Draconian.

Events and periods

Names of events and periods of time should be capitalised: the First World War, Second World War (or World War I or II), but for general references use the 1914–18 war or the last war.

Trade names

All registered trade names must carry a capital letter. A frequent error is to give lower case ‘s’ to Sellotape, an ‘h’ for Hoover, a ‘k’ for Kodak. Note capitals for Filofax, Marmite, Pyrex, Vaseline, Xerox. To find out whether a word is, in fact, a trade name and needs a capital, check with the Kompass Register of Industrial Trade Names, available in public reference libraries, or with the Register of Trade Names held at the Patent Office in London, Newport and Manchester.
**Committees**

Names of committees, particularly those of an official nature should be in capitals. Style will vary from one organization to another, but so long as the writer is consistent and follows house style, there can be little argument.

**Headings in publications**

As a rule, use upper and lower case letters for headings. A line in full caps is not so easy to read as one in lower case. All-cap headings are seldom seen in newspapers these days, and less frequently in magazines and newsletters. Feel free, however, to use underlined and capitalized headings in news releases – they stand out much better.

**THE TREND IS TO KNOCK IT DOWN**

The above examples are included to show the narrow divide between choice of capital or small letter. Style is constantly changing and words that were once always capitalized will soon be lower-cased. Even if you don’t notice the ‘knock it down’ trend, and still want to use capitals when no one else does, do use lower case until to do so would look stupid and out of place. The general rule is to capitalize titles of organizations, not those of people.

Do not use capitals for words one after the other in a line. This is often done in the belief that a fully capitalized line will have added emphasis and the reader will take more notice of it. While a few capitalized words might stand out, too many or a line-full will be self-defeating; they will offend the eye and not be read.
Clichés, jargon and other worn words

Originality of expression is the keynote to good writing style. It is the stale, worn-out phase – the cliché – which can spoil otherwise well written and crisp copy. Likewise, jargon words which are meaningless and unintelligible fail to communicate. Avoiding clichés and jargon is not always easy. In fact there are occasions when they can be used to good effect, so long as the reader knows they are deliberate. At other times they present the only way of getting over a specific point or idea.

The word cliché (French for a duplicate printing plate, stereotype or electrotype), means a hackneyed, overworked phrase or a saying that has lost vigour and originality. In fact the word ‘stereotype’ is itself a cliché as it is now taken to mean a role model (also a cliché!). The difficulty for the writer is to identify such expressions and then to find others to take their places which won’t turn out to be yet more clichés. Effort to express new ideas in a different way will be well rewarded. The writer will be refreshed, as will the reader.

It is important to cultivate sensitivity to the hackneyed phrase; if you can see that you have just written a cliché, this is a good sign...
for you can now replace it with a fresh thought. If a cliché is deliber-
ate, or cannot be avoided, then one solution is to let the reader
know you are aware of it: say so and put the word or phrase in
quotes.

Catchphrases and metaphors, many of which have become
firmly embedded in the English language, soon become stale if
overused. Yet there can still be room for the idiomatic expression to
liven up otherwise dull text – if used sparingly.

**RECOGNIZING CLICHÉS**

To help you recognize tired phrases, here are a few in current use:
*put on the back burner, bottom line, low/high profile, having said that,
passed its sell-by date; stock similes like as hard as nails; pompous
phrases including wind of change, or a sea-change development
should all get the blue pencil treatment. Some sayings demand
instant excision: address a problem, conventional wisdom, take on
board, a wide range of issues, put on hold, a whole new ball game,
lifestyle, in this day and age, when it comes to the crunch, quantum leap,
up front money. These examples – they slip off the tongue as easy as
wink – are only just the tip of the iceberg.*

More recently we have had Cool Britannia, a wake-up call, all over
bar the shouting, level playing field, the great and the good, back to the
drawing board, mind management, learning curve, ballpark figure.

One of the most common expressions is *at this point in time; this
is not only a tired phrase, but tedious when a perfectly good word
for the same thing is now. Here, it should be noted that moment in
time is not so much a cliché as tautology since moment already
means point in time. Other stock phrases to come from tongue or
pen with ease are at the end of the day, no Brownie points, career girl,
between a rock and a hard place, now for the good/bad news, not to
mention some that have stood the test of time and make us as sick as
a parrot. It’s as simple as that, yer know what I mean? Ah right! Guard
against what Sir Ernest Gowers in his *The Complete Plain Words*
calls the ‘Siamese twins’ or *part and parcel, to all intents and
purposes, or swing of the pendulum.*

But Gowers points out that writers would be ‘needlessly handi-
capped’ if they were never allowed to use such phrases as *strictly
speaking, rears its ugly head or even Hobson’s choice. Context coupled
with judgement will indicate whether it is necessary to rewrite the
sentence. But what is new is not necessarily better; the old saying that there’s many a good tune played on an old fiddle still holds true today. Be on constant guard against writing clichés: when you think you are radiantly happy by leaps and bounds or want to rule the roost, check with Eric Partridge’s A Dictionary of Clichés, for you will find these overused phrases listed among hundreds of other worn and tired expressions.

Business clichés are used extensively: some like please find enclosed are worn and faded and, thankfully disappearing. In public relations, a client presentation, new business pitch, account win, corporate hospitality, target audience, focus group, spin doctor, methodology (why not just method?), on/off message, sound bite, and overkill are stock expressions and hard to avoid. The dividing line between commonly used phrases and jargon is a fine one: both kinds are so frequently used that it is impossible to do without them.

**JARGON: HELP OR HINDRANCE?**

The word jargon was used in the late fourteenth century to mean ‘the twittering of the birds’ or as the latest edition of Fowler’s Modern English Usage puts it: ‘a term of contempt for something (including a foreign language) that the reader does not understand… any mode of speech abounding in unfamiliar terms... eg the specialised vocabulary or bureaucrats, scientists, or sociologists’.

Jargon is jargon when words are so technical or obscure that they defy comprehension. They contribute nothing to sense or meaning and might just as well not be written at all. Public relations and advertising jargon soon slide into the vernacular, as opposed to formal or literary English, and is used without hesitation just because everyone else speaks or writes it. That is all very well, but if it fails to communicate to those outside ‘media villagespeak’, then there is a case for reducing it as much as possible.

There is little to choose between public relations jargon (networking, publics, press kit/pack, coverage, perception) and marketing idiom (positioning, conceptual, target, focus, strategic planning). It does not take long for jargon like this to drift into cliché and for readers quickly to tire of it: upmarket, downsizing, downshifting, niche marketing, layered management, interface/interact, state-of-the-art
are all firmly in the language of communications. Phrases and words like *in-depth*, *on-going*, *user-friendly*, *cutting edge*, *parameters*, *definitive* and *conceptual* should be used sparingly or preferably avoided altogether.

Jargon is often embedded in public relations terminology. Take this example from a trade directory entry: ‘Well researched communication messages, disseminated through appropriate influence channels to target professional audiences are the hallmark of an approach which...’ Quite what the writer expected the reader to glean from that defies imagination.

A recent example of jargon getting out of hand is the use of *upskilling* to mean improving performance through training. Although understandable, this is jargon that is unlikely to last or ever find a place in a dictionary along with *can-do*, *core business*, *critical mass* and *eye contact*. But some jargon words can provide an element of fun and are likely to last longer, for example: *yuppie*, *dinkies* (double income, no kids), *woolfie* (well-off older person), *wrinklie*, along with *bimbos*, *foodies* and *toyboys* all of which have earned a place in the English language. Soon we are to have *mouse potatoes* (computer addicts), *netizens* and *cybernauts* (regular Internet surfers) as firm entries in the *OED*.

Christine Walker, of Walker Media and one of the most influential women in British advertising, brings these snappy acronyms: *Panses* (politically active, not seeking employment), *Sinbads* (single income, no boyfriend, absolutely desperate), *Yappies* (young affluent parents), *Sitcoms* (single income, two children and oppressive mortgage). We also hear about *Nipples* (New Irish professionals living in London), and *Puppies* (Punjabi upwardly mobile professionals). Few are, however, likely to attain *OED* status.

Apart from the specialized jargon of the legal fraternity, it is in the area of information technology where technical words are used freely in the belief that they will always be understood. For example, news releases on computer technology are notorious for being packed tight with jargon. That is acceptable for journalists from computer publications who know and understand the technical terms used, but those writing for the popular press or broadcasting will have difficulty in putting over the information and giving clear and unambiguous explanations.

Two contrasting examples of typical jargon illustrate the point: ‘the stylistic expressiveness of vector based brush strokes with the
speed and resolution independence of an advanced drawing application’, and ‘automatically generated site map using HotSauce MCF (Meta Content Format Files)’. The first assumes the reader knows exactly what is meant, but leaves room for mistake and misinterpretation, while the second makes an attempt at explanation within the body of the text, while also giving full details of the technical terms used as a footnote. If there is no alternative to a jargon word or phrase, then explain the terms in straightforward language, perhaps inserting a word or two of explanation in brackets.

Foreign words are also jargon to most readers; steer clear of them unless context demands their inclusion. The occasional foreign expression gives a lift to articles and speeches, but they should not, repeat not, go in releases. Examples are Schadenfreude (malicious enjoyment of other people’s misfortunes), from the German schade (harm) and freude (delight), and Zeitgeist (spirit of the time). More familiar, perhaps, are bête noire (disliked person or thing) and de rigueur (required by custom). Words and phrases like these soon find their way into volumes of clichés. Use sparingly.

Jargon baffles the reader and specialist writers should never use it for audiences outside their own field.

**CATCHPHRASES QUICKLY BECOME STALE…**

Like clichés, catchphrases quickly lose originality: the source of catchphrases is mostly the entertainment industry (films, radio and TV shows in particular), but some also come from advertising and public relations campaigns such as *It’s good to talk* (BT), *Professional advice for the life you don’t yet know* (Allied Dunbar), *We deliver you more* (ASDA home delivery service), *A to B it, we RAC to it* (Royal Automobile Club). These have only a limited life, but others like *virtual reality* are more likely to find a permanent place in the language. Popular catchphrases such as *mind-set, nice little earner, or have a nice day*, and catchwords like *loadsamoney* and other permutations of *loadsa* should be avoided since any originality has long since vanished.

It is advisable, when drafting press releases and articles in particular, to watch out for the catchphrase that might be used unwittingly and lead to editorial deletion. If catchphrases are
overdone, predictability takes over and the writer is not able to take the reader by surprise and attract attention.

... SO CAN METAPHORS AND SIMILES

A metaphor is a figure of speech, a way of describing an object or action imaginatively and without being directly related to it (a glaring error), enabling the writer to convey thoughts briefly and without having to resort to lengthy explanation. But they can easily be overworked. As Sir Ernest Gowers points out, ‘sometimes they are so absurdly overtaxed that they become a laughing stock and die of ridicule’.

Avoid mixed or inappropriate metaphors, where incongruous and incompatible terms are used for the same object: We have the key to the 21st Century as quoted in the Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar. Gowers gives further explanation and examples.

A simile, also a figure of speech, compares one thing with another of a different kind and is usually identified by insertion of as or like (cold as charity, deaf as a post, blush like a schoolgirl, look like grim death). As with metaphors, guard against overuse.

MAKE ROOM FOR THE IDIOM

Readers soon become bored by dull, continuous text; there is always room for idiomatic expressions. Attempting to find a suitable idiomatic expression to fit the flow of thought is not easy and dictionaries are not much help. Useful collections will be found in the Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms which contains 7,000 idioms and their variant forms plus examples in modern writing. Or there is the Wordsworth Dictionary of Idioms which also has several thousand examples with meanings cross-referenced by head words and first words, in three distinct categories – formal, informal and slang. Lastly there is Chambers Idioms, which contains several thousand entries.

In the region of (formal), hit the headlines (informal) and pack it in (slang), offer a few examples. Often defying grammatical and logical rules, idioms can give colour and vitality to a piece of writing without risking faded and overused phrases. The English
language is particularly rich in idiom, but use it sparingly – slang expressions are fine in speech but should be avoided in writing.

**BEWARE OF SLANG**

Slang can, however, offend. Most of it comes from cant, the jargon of a trade or business. If you say something is awesome when you mean very good or excellent, that is slang at its worst if used by a professional communicator. Snail mail is the e-mailer’s slang for mail by post, but usage has put it in everyday vocabulary. Nevertheless, there is no place for ginormous, coach potato, fab, must-have (a must-have bag) in any formal sense.

Much modern-day slang owes its popularity to the advertising copywriter. Night is spelt *nite*, you is *U*, clean becomes *kleen*, flow sides to *flo*. Slang has contributed to confusion about spelling and yet despite the protestations of purists, much of it is finding its way into the language. Computer technology, multimedia, interactive television, even healthcare have all provided their own slang expressions, much of them pure jargon, intelligible only to those working in the field. Slang is for the voice, not for the pen. If you must use it, then keep it only for informal writing – the sales leaflet, correspondence or staff memos; but never for the release, the annual report or the corporate brochure.

Many examples will be found in *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* (John Utah and John Simpson, Oxford University Press, 1992).
The words are as you want them, you have got rid of clichés and jargon, the punctuation is right – in fact the style so far is just about spot on. But there is more to it than that. No matter how much effort has been put into the text, it will be wasted if it is hard to read. Readability is a complex subject and is the province of the designer and typographer. There are, nevertheless, some basic principles to be considered now that desktop publishing (DTP) is so widely used. And when the copy goes off to the printers for a publication or document you want to be sure that when the proof comes back it will be right both textually and visually.

Even if the work is going to an outside consultancy before printing, the copy must be prepared in such a way that the presentation style will be followed at the final stages of typographical design. For internal documents, too, care must be taken to see that the visual style is going to help the reader – in short, be easy on the eye. For if it isn’t then there is an instant barrier to communication.

This section covers important factors in readability and concentrates on the overall appearance, whether you have a straightforward word-processed document or a print job from DTP.
origination. The pros and cons of one design against another will not be considered here, nor will guidance be offered on how printwork should be designed, as these are subjective and beyond the scope of this book.

EDIT WITH THE READER IN MIND

Always consider the appearance of the page when editing. Avoid the ‘grey’ look which results when slabs of typematter are unrelied by paragraph breaks or subsidiary headings and illustrations. Depending on the subject matter, make headings as lively as possible so that they not only drive the text forwards but make the page look attractive.

One sure way of achieving interest is to start the text with a drop initial letter, usually larger and bolder than the rest of the copy. This can increase readership by as much as ten per cent. Some designers specify fancy and seldom-used typefaces for the drop initial letter, but these are usually unnecessary – the text type will normally suffice unless it is an ‘arty-crafty’ publication. If the opening paragraph can be kept to a dozen or so words then interest is sharpened and the reader is on the writer’s side from the start.

AIM FOR SHORT SENTENCES

Short sentences aid readability; anything up to thirty words is easy to follow and assimilate. There are obviously occasions when this can and should be exceeded, particularly for technical and scientific subjects; but even here, aim for brevity unless detailed explanation is required.

Keep your paragraphs short if you are writing for the popular and tabloid press. Five-word lines – sometimes even shorter – will be seen in The Mirror and The Sun, but for general publication work – leaflets, brochures and the like – the aim should be for perhaps three or four sentences in each paragraph. Even the occasional one-line sentence of a few words would not be out of place in a sales leaflet.
GUIDELINES ON PARAGRAPHING

One of the main factors affecting readability is the length of paragraphs and where they are placed in the text. Short paragraphs (pars or paras to journalists) attract and hold the reader’s attention, while excessively long ones tend to be unreadable and fail to communicate. Just look at a page of typescript that is unrelied by paragraph breaks: it immediately seems to be indigestible and stuffy. Compare that with a page broken up by lively headings which straightaway appears more interesting and inviting.

Paragraphs allow the writer to change tack or subject and, equally important, give the eye a rest. When the text moves from one point to another that is the time for a par break. However, much will depend on the style of the publication or document and on the column width. For news-style print jobs, using double or multi-column format, paragraph breaks are usually needed after every second or third sentence – say about every 50 to 70 words. At make-up stage, this will allow subheadings to be inserted and columns to be equalized or space filled with displayed quotes. For single-column reports, books, manuals, leaflets and brochures, it is usually better to have longer paragraphs with perhaps four or five sentences. There should be at least two par breaks per column, otherwise you are back to that grey look again.

Short paragraphs are best for news releases; if each has a significant fact, then the release will stand a much better chance of being used than a long, stodgy one. The same applies to speeches which may be issued along with the release. An occasional single-sentence paragraph can have an electrifying effect on the text, especially if it is a technical or heavy-going subject. But, on the other hand, too many jerky, staccato paragraphs can distract and confuse the reader. As with everything else, it is a case of moderation.

Where to place the par break? This requires some skill: it is no use hitting the return key and hoping for the best. A paragraph is a unit of thought, not of length, says Fowler. But in news-style publications and certainly in news releases, it is the other way round: the paragraph is essentially a unit of length with maybe six or seven par breaks per page of copy, possibly more in some cases.

The best place for a break is where the text can be neatly divided without upsetting the word flow, say three or four per page of
typescript, with one linked to the other in a seamless way. If a natural link is not there, then use an appropriate conjunction like but, moreover, however; otherwise recast the sentence at the break and refer back. But you will usually be able to find suitable points to break the text without editing. Aim for a mix of short and slightly longer sentences to produce a change of pace and give colour to the copy. Too many short ones can irritate the reader, but too many long ones can bore and tire the eye.

Some final points in relation to computer typesetting: try to leave at least three words on the last line of a paragraph; avoid starting a new paragraph on the last line of a page. Indents for typescript and typesetting should not be more than three or four characters’ width; if they go in too far the par break will be over-emphasized, although some designers may prefer to do this deliberately for special effect. Intros and first paragraphs after headings usually go full out (to the full column width) with subsequent par breaks indented. Don’t leave a ‘widow’ with a few characters or words dangling at the top of a page: -ed or -der hanging overhead look awful. Try to fill the line out by adding words, or cutting and taking the overhang back.

**LINE WIDTH AND TYPE SIZE**

As for column width, try not to have more than 45 characters per line, including spaces and punctuation; anything above that tends to give a ‘stringy’ look. If the copy is set across the page, aim for between 70 and 80 characters per line. But remember that lines with only a few characters, those that run round a photograph or display heading for example, will be awkward to read and look messy.

Be careful when considering the relationship between line length and type size. Much will depend on your design objectives and the purpose of your printwork. As a general guide for ease of reading, type should not be much smaller than 10pt, or perhaps 9pt at a pinch if well line-spaced. A line of 45 characters of 10pt Times, for example, gives a very readable 70mm column width.
Figure 6.1  Comparison between a serif type (Baskerville) and non-serif (Gill Sans) in medium and bold styles, 8pt to 32pt sizes
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Figure 6.1 continued
CROSSHEADS AND SUBHEADS

If you want to divide off copy into sections, if you are short of a line or two at the bottom of a page, or if there is a mass of grey text then you’ll need the humble crosshead – probably several. For an A4 page in two columns, four or five are usually enough. But all depends on the style and layout.

Solid lumps of type will put the reader off. If for some reason you cannot break up the text with par breaks and/or illustrations, insert subheadings (also called crossheadings). These are of inferior weight to the main heading or title and give the eye a break from line after line of characters. They also add interest to the piece by flagging up new points the writer wishes to bring out.

Subheadings should be either in a larger size and/or perhaps in bold so as to stand out from the rest of the text. Make sure there are not too many on a page. If they are scattered about willy-nilly they look untidy, and might even look as if they are just there to fill space (which they might well be!). When you insert headings, balance them so as to avoid ‘rivering’ with one adjacent to another. In news-style publications, one-word subheadings look best, preferably of not more than seven or eight characters.

The best time to insert subheadings is at first proof stage; if they go in too early you will not know where they will fall when the type has been set and the layout completed. If the job carries a second colour, you can use it for crossheads at no extra cost.

Avoid having a subhead above the last line of a column: put it in higher up or cut it out. Headlines can also go in at proof stage. It is useful to have a working heading when the copy is written to help with identification later on.

LINE AND LETTER SPACING

Space between lines is called ‘leading’ (pronounced *leading*) from the time when a strip of metal – usually a casting in lead – was inserted between each line of hand-composed type, or automatically added to the line in machine typesetting. Leading is said to increase readability by 12 per cent as it introduces what the designer calls ‘air’ into the solid text, making it easier on the eye.

But avoid too much space between lines: that can be as bad as not enough, for the text will be harder, not easier, to read. And the
wider the text is set, the more leading is needed for good readability. Where there is no leading at all, the text is said to be ‘set solid’. The spacing is specified in point sizes (for example, 1pt or 2pt, with 72 points to the inch). Make sure that this line-by-line spacing is consistent; this is particularly important when setting text for reproduction.

Software packages enable the computer operator to select line spacing leading in point sizes and to perform many other typographical settings like line justification and widths, variable type sizes and a wide selection of faces, as well as extended and condensed styles. Underlining is another option, but care is needed in order to avoid it ‘colliding’ with the line underneath.

Pay close attention to the spacing between characters, or what the printer would call letterspacing. This is another software option and some computers and word processors will insert letterspacing automatically in order to fill out the line, particularly when copy is set justified with both edges aligned. Letterspacing can be adjusted for readability and aesthetics or to fill a certain area, and is most often used for lines of capitals for display. Special typographic effects can be obtained by removing or adding space between characters to produce what is known as ‘kerning’.

WHERE TO BREAK

End-of-line word division often causes trouble, and words can get misread if they are broken at the wrong place. Once the prerogative of the compositor, word breaks are now mostly computer controlled but they can still go wrong: at worst a single character gets turned over; at best a typographical eyesore. When the copy is keyed in, the operator tells the computer to hyphenate and take over a set number of characters for a given line width. Some software options allow the operator to override automatic hyphenation and insert word breaks manually.

Computers sometimes get it right but more often do not. And then the word processor operator shuts off the automatic mode and goes to hyphensearch, relying on fading memories of how to break words at the right place. According to Hart’s Rules which gives a number of examples, word breaks should be avoided. One way is to set copy ranged left and ragged right; this will mean fewer word breaks than if the type matter is justified with both
margins aligned and with the ends of the lines ranged with one another.

Unless you have lines ending with longish words (ten or more characters) there is seldom any need for a break when using ragged right setting. At proof stage avoid hyphenated line endings by simply taking a word over to the next line. Avoid uneven word spacing, when the computer struggles to complete a line and thus breaks where it can.

Where word breaks are unavoidable, etymology and pronunciation are the main determinants. Divide words at obvious syllable breaks, as in atmosphere or transport, or where two consonants come together like forgetting, minister and establish. If there is one consonant at the break point, that character is normally taken over as with European, popular.

Do not divide two consonants forming one sound (calmest, feather). The endings -ism, -ist, and -istic are usually taken over and so are -ing present participles like targeting. (But note puzzling, trickling.) Do not carry over -ted or -ded. Be careful to reject divisions that could confuse or change the meaning: legends not legends, re-adjust not readjust. A divided word should never end a page, especially a right hand one. A word should not be broken at the end of a paragraph to leave the last line with a hyphen and a few characters. Many more examples will be found in Hart's Rules and in the Collins Gem Dictionary of Spelling and Word Division.

**CHOICE OF TYPEFACE**

Choosing the appropriate typeface is quite complex as much depends on the subject matter and style of the work. However, here are some ground rules worth considering: one is that serif types (those where the letter strokes are finished off like Times or Bodoni) are easier to read line after line than sans serif typefaces like Gill and Helvetica.

Set type so that it reads with the minimum of effort and eyestrain; each job presents different problems depending on the type style being used. The professional designer or typographer will gauge the most appropriate typeface for any given job by taking into account the target audience and subjects covered.
PRINTING CONSIDERATIONS

Without going into the broad – and subjective – subject of design, it is important to remember that ideas that might look great on a visual sometimes fail to work when they get into print. For instance, it is next to useless reversing large amounts of text out of a solid colour (say white out of black) or out of a photograph as this guarantees non-readability. A few lines of display type set fairly large can be read without difficulty, but when it comes to lines of text set solid in 10pt or smaller, there will be an immediate switch-off.

Similarly, don’t try to print a tinted typeface over a tinted page of equal strength. And don’t try to print yellow type on white paper, or any pastel shades on white for that matter. Tinted papers often give readability problems and it is generally better to stick to black on white, using colour either as solids or as tints for headings and display panels.

INCLUDE ILLUSTRATIONS IF POSSIBLE

If the job is text-intensive and in danger of looking ‘stodgy’ it is advisable to include illustrations – either line drawings, photographs or perhaps explanatory panels which can be overprinted in colour. All illustrations should of course be captioned unless they are simply for decoration. The reader will often ignore the text and only look at the photograph or drawing. Captions are read twice as much as the text and turn glancers and page-flippers into readers. Annual reports are a typical example of this.

Break up the monotony of long blocks of copy by using the ornaments and symbols provided by most software packages. If there is a series of facts it is better to number them rather than trying to interconnect them. Always try to think of ways to attract the reader’s eye, in ways appropriate to the content.

JUSTIFIED OR RAGGED RIGHT?

Both styles have their advantages, and all designers have their own ideas on whether the one is more readable than the other. It
Figure 6.2  Stylish annual report cover for the WPP Group, designed by David Hughes. The creative concept was followed for the literature and staging for the 2000 AGM.
depends largely on the style of publication: if it is a ‘newsy’ one then the justified style would probably be better for that is the way most newspapers set their type. On the other hand, brochures and leaflets usually look more attractive and are easier for the reader to follow when set ragged right. But there are no firm rules and it is up to the designer to produce an acceptable style directed at the target audience and within the house style pattern of the publishing organization.

PUTTING ON THE STRESS

Bold type helps the reader to identify subject changes and gives the printed page visual interest. It provides focal points among roman and non-bold typefaces. But again it is a case of everything in moderation: too much bold type destroys the impact of a few carefully positioned subheadings. As a general rule do not use bold type in any great quantity, except perhaps for a display panel. Nearly all typefaces will have fonts in boldface, and most computers and word processors will have the facility to change from ‘plain’ type to bold or italics, and to some other type styles as well.

Individual words in a run of text should not be set in bold just for stress, for that is the job of italics. But if too many words are italicized, or even whole sentences or complete paragraphs, this method of providing emphasis ceases to work. Fowler is scornful of overuse: ‘Printing a passage in italics, like underlining one in a letter, is a primitive way of soliciting attention’, says the second edition.

Bold to the rescue

Likewise, boldface is easy to produce on your word-processor or PC from any font. Use it to give weight to a quote or announcement. Put titles of seminars or conferences in roman unless it’s a promotional leaflet. Use bold for headings, captions and drawdown quotes. But over-bolding fails to add force. Its best use is for limited runs of text especially if reversed out of a colour. It is easiest to read when white out of black, worst when white out of a pale tint.
Main uses for italics

Long, italicized paragraphs are out of place and look dated. In a release, troubles start: sub-editors will not attach more importance to passages in bold or italics. Let the words, not typographical tricks, make the point.

Too many italicized words together upset word-flow, and at worst, confuse the reader. An otherwise neat newsletter can easily be spoilt this way. Excessive use of underlining, too, fails to add stress or emphasis. Underlining is the traditional mark for italics and looks awful when printed.

Foreign words and phrases not fully naturalized in English are usually italicized, but commonly-used phrases like ad hoc, de rigueur and en masse are set in Roman (or plain) type nowadays. Once a foreign word gains wide currency in English, italics usage diminishes. This is particularly noticeable in titles of foreign publications.

For media titles carrying the definite article, write The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Economist, The Mirror, The Sun but Daily Mail, Daily Express, Evening Standard. If there is The in the masthead, italicize that too. If in doubt check your media guide. When used adjectivally, drop the definite article as in ‘Telegraph reporters investigated…’. For textual references to titles of house magazines, use italics; the same goes for releases. Use sparingly everywhere.

The main uses of italics are listed in Hart’s Rules. These include titles of books, names of ships, newspapers and magazines, titles of TV and radio programmes and films.

When you want to use bold and italics, let your designer decide where they will work best.

USING THE DESIGNER TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE

Choice of designer is crucial: get the wrong one and you have wasted valuable time and probably spent money you could ill afford. Take two views on this important subject – one from a communications consultant and the other from an organization with its own studio. The first comes from consultant and Profile editor Peter C Jackson:
Any editor worth their salt should have a basic knowledge of the most effective way to present their words to the reader. But sooner or later they must commit their precious sentences to the expert hand of the graphic designer.

It is always worth taking time and trouble to seek out a designer who will be sympathetic to your overall objectives. There are those who have a purely visual approach to publication design; they see your deathless prose as merely slabs of grey matter to balance illustrations and white space. Use them at your peril.

Seek out (by example or recommendation) those designers with a flair for words themselves. They will be able to meld words, pictures and display type into an imaginative and satisfying whole. There is no finer working partnership than a writer and a designer who each appreciate and respect the other’s experience and skills. That is a combination worth pursuing.

Designers will tell you that before a single word is read, the layout, colours and typography must form an immediate impression that will entice and excite the eye. And it is that first impression that counts more than anything else.

It is crucial that the designer is properly briefed on the objective, tone of the message and target audience of the publication, brochure or leaflet – no matter what it is. If the typography and layout reflect and support the message conveyed then the text stands a much better chance of being read. A ‘busy’ layout, possibly with a combination of complementary typefaces, would be suitable for a leaflet describing a new product; whereas a brochure describing an expensive management training course would project a more ‘upmarket’ image by using a sans serif typeface printed on high quality paper with plenty of white space.

A page of text without headings is uninviting and disorientating to the reader. Signpost headings in a different typeface or bullet points are effective in directing the reader to changes of thought or subject.

Readability is probably the most important factor in the design of any publication no matter how it is printed. Paying attention to it is the communicator’s first priority.

**NOW IT’S PROOF MARKING TIME...**

The job of the PR professional is to spot the mistake, or ‘literal’,
everyone else misses. Diligent proof-reading spells well-produced, fault-free printwork. And that largely depends on using the proper correction marks. You can avoid printing errors, usually known as ‘typos’, by marking proofs in the standard way universally understood by printers and their keyboard operators. Non-standard corrections only confuse and lead to more errors. Follow the marks approved by the British Standards Institution (BS 5261) – see Figure 6.3.

Typical typos: mis-spellings, wrong punctuation and transposed words or sentences; end-of-line breaks where a hyphen wrongly divides a word; layout faults such as mis-positioned text, headings, captions; style slips like italics or bold instead of roman, capitals instead of lower case.

Mark all corrections clearly in ink, preferably by ballpoint pen. Use different colours to distinguish between errors made by the printer and your own corrections – red for printer’s errors and blue or black for yours. Printers usually charge heavily for alterations, or alts for short; ensure you are not charged for theirs!

Put the change in the adjacent margin and a text mark showing the position. Where there are several marginal marks these should go from left to right in the same order as the textual marks. Put a diagonal stroke ( / ) after each marginal mark to show the end of the correction.

Where new copy replaces existing text line-for-line, count the number of printed characters in a line (including spaces) for the number of typescript characters needed to fill it. Get someone to read the copy while you check and mark the proof. Mark alphabetically each additional item of copy; check cross-references and the contents lists against page numbers. Take special care with headings and captions.

For heavy corrections, retype and attach a separate sheet clearly marked for position. Read and re-read, checking as you go. Remember that you read what you want to read. The BSI marks and useful tips on proofing are in Authors’ corrections cost money and cause delay, available free of charge from the British Printing Industries Federation (020 7915 8349).

Standard proof correction marks

Extracts from BS 5261 Part 2: 1976 (1995) are reproduced with permission of the British Standards Institution under licence
number 2001SK/0003. Complete standards can be obtained from BSI Customer Services, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL (tel: 020 8996 9001). These extracts are also reproduced by permission of the British Printing Industries Federation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textual Mark</th>
<th>Marginal Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correction is concluded</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave unchanged</td>
<td>under character to remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push down risen spacing material</td>
<td>Encircle blemish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin</td>
<td>New matter followed by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert additional matter identified by a letter in a diamond</td>
<td>Followed by for example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delete</td>
<td>/ through character(s) or through word(s) to be deleted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.3**  *Standard symbols for correcting proofs (continued over)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Textual Mark</th>
<th>Marginal Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delete and close up</td>
<td>![Close-Up Symbol] through character (or ![Close-Up Symbol] through character e.g. character character)</td>
<td>![Note Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)</td>
<td>![Close-Up Symbol] through character (or ![Close-Up Symbol] through word(s))</td>
<td>![New Character Symbol] or ![New Word Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong font, Replace by character(s) of correct font</td>
<td>Encircle character(s) to be changed</td>
<td>![Wrong Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change damaged character(s)</td>
<td>Encircle character(s) to be changed</td>
<td>![X Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set in or change to italic</td>
<td>Under character(s) to be set or changed</td>
<td>![Underline Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set in or change to capital letters</td>
<td>Under character(s) to be set or changed</td>
<td>![Equal Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set in or change to small capital letters</td>
<td>Under character(s) to be set or changed</td>
<td>![Equal Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set in or change to capital letters for initial letters and small capital letters for the rest of the words</td>
<td>Under initial letters and ![Underline Symbol] under rest of word(s)</td>
<td>![Equal Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set in or change to bold type</td>
<td>Under character(s) to be set or changed</td>
<td>![Underline Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change capital letters to lower case letters</td>
<td>Encircle character(s) to be changed</td>
<td>![Equal Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change italic to upright type</td>
<td>Encircle character(s) to be changed</td>
<td>![Equal Symbol]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.3  continued**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Textual Mark</th>
<th>Marginal Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invert type</td>
<td>Encircle character to be inverted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute or insert full stop or decimal point</td>
<td>through character or where required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute or insert semi-colon</td>
<td>through character or where required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitute or insert comma</td>
<td>through character or where required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start new paragraph</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Run on (no new paragraph)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>enclosing matter to be centred</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel indent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move matter specified distance to the right</td>
<td>enclosing matter to be moved to the right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3  continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Textual Mark</th>
<th>Marginal Mark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Take over character(s), word(s) or line to next line, column or page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take back character(s), word(s) or line to previous line, column or page</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise matter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over matter to be raised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under matter to be raised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower matter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over matter to be lowered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under matter to be lowered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct horizontal alignment</td>
<td>Single line above and below misaligned matter e.g.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close up. Delete space between characters or words</td>
<td>linking characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert space between characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between characters affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insert space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between words affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce space between characters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between characters affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce space between words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between words affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make space appear equal between characters or words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>between characters or words affected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6.3  continued
Headlines are a crucial element in printed communication. Short, punchy headings attract attention and take the eye to the text. However well the words have been crafted, they will not be read if the reader isn’t encouraged to move on. That is the job of the headline: style will depend on the audience and type of publication. Newspaper format house journals and periodicals demand a brisk, urgent approach. Leaflets and brochures require a different kind of headline, as do internal and contact reports.

Whatever the type of publication or report, the headline must encapsulate the main points of the text in an interesting and eye-catching way. In fact, the livelier the better. Space will always be a limiting factor, and this is why it is often difficult to achieve a newsy yet informative headline within the constraints of the column or page widths. That, of course, is where skill and experience come in.

House journals must be in tune with the audience to which the publication is addressed. A study of the many journal styles to be seen today will help you when you edit and produce publications whether current or new. Newspaper and magazine headings
Figure 7.1 Use of lower case type for the headline in this staff newspaper shows a modern approach to style. It was a class winner in the Communicators in Business Awards, 2000
reveal many contrasting forms, with the tabloids shouting the news and the ‘heavies’ taking a more staid and thoughtful line. The trade press, professional and scientific journals each adopt differing styles to reflect the varying needs and interests of their audiences.

There are no set rules for writing headlines, as every publication requires different treatment. The following basic guidelines for creating and presenting headlines will provide the foundation for a usable and flexible style which can be adapted according to individual needs.

**PRESENT TENSE PREFERRED**

The headline is essential for effective communication and to arrest the reader’s attention. Its job is to take the eye to the story, to whet the appetite, to excite and inform. In-house newspapers or newsletters headlines should contain a present-tense verb, and thus generally follow newspaper style. Participle -ing endings should be avoided as in ‘XYZ company is launching a new product.’ It is much better to write ‘XYZ company launches…’ While the former is passive, slow and boring, the latter is vibrant and active. Most people read newspapers, and so it makes sense to follow their style whenever possible.

Headlines must be both impartial and accurate. They must give the news (or tell a story if a feature), not the opinions of the writer. They must not embellish the facts, but present them accurately and succinctly. If the story is about a person, name the person unless he or she is unknown to the audience. Brevity is your first priority, but don’t sacrifice crucial detail on which the story hangs.

Headlines work best when they have an active, ‘doing’ verb, preferably single syllable ones like calls, tells, says, goes. The heading should say what the story is about in a few short words, enough to make the reader to want to find out more, and there are plenty of examples of two- or three-word headlines that work well.

But there are occasions when just one word can have a dramatic effect and take the reader to the heart of the story like GOTCHA! (during the Falklands war) and GRABALOT (pay rises and bonuses for Camelot directors). Headlines like these, which appear regularly in the tabloid press, take much thought, but are extremely effective in telling a story in a punchy, pithy way.
Figure 7.2  Category-winning monthly newspaper in the 2000 CiB Awards. Editor Ken Runicles is regularly featured in the awards
It is important that headlines should stand on their own and not become part of the following copy, for example a house journal headline might read ‘John Smith, new managing director of XYZ company,’ with the first line of the copy running on directly from it saying ‘Has plans for expansion...’ Headlines should never do that.

QUESTIONS AND HUMOUR

Another way to spark interest is to write question headings from time to time, starting with Who, Why, Where, What, or constructions like Is it, Was it. For publications containing mostly feature material, take a softer line. You can use longer headings and perhaps even leave out the verb. Jokey headlines, like HELLO TO GOOD BUYS in women’s pages, work best in tabloid-style newspapers and house journals, but can dilute the meaning of a serious message. If used sparingly, headings like PURRFECT ENDING for a story about cats about to use up their nine lives, and MONEY TO BYRNE for a news item announcing a two-million pound pools winner can get a story over far more effectively than a straightforward heading. Look for headings with a play on words, the double entendre. But avoid being facetious, and while there can be no objection to the occasional pun, attempts at being funny can cause a groan and be seen as a poor form of wit. It is all a question of balance, and fitting headlines to the audience and message. There is always room for humour.

Figure 7.3  Clever typography for a poster announcing a meeting of Institute of Practitioners in Advertising members
AVOID ‘LABEL’ HEADINGS

‘Label’ headings make a bland statement without verb or verve and hold little interest for the reader. They produce an effect of dullness and monotony. A heading which announces the winners of an awards scheme SMITH WINS TOP AWARD is so much better than the bland statement AWARDS ANNOUNCED – a typical label heading.

Do not use label headings above feature articles in house magazines or in newsletters. They can, however, be used as signposts for sectioning off a publication: labels like Latest publications or Future events are quite acceptable for this purpose.

Sometimes a label is unavoidable, particularly if space is short. In this case, use key words that are potent in themselves: anger, big, career, cute, gain, job, profit, loss, lose, new, win work well. Look for words that will arrest – and keep the reader reading.

HEADINGS IN SALES LEAFLETS AND BROCHURES

Sales leaflets, company brochures, catalogues and manuals require hard sell and persuasive messages. You can borrow a lot from the language of advertising. David Ogilvy, founder of the Ogilvy and Mather agency, writing in Confessions of an Advertising Man, says that five times as many people read the headline as the text. He goes on: ‘The wickedest of all sins is to run an advertisement without a headline.’ And then he adds something that could cause the writer of a sales leaflet to take a deep inward breath: ‘If you haven’t done some selling in your headline, you have wasted 80 per cent of your client’s money.’

The two most powerful words in a headline are free and new. Other words and phrases useful for headlines are: advance, advice/help on, bargain, big/great/huge, development, easy, fast/quick, gain, hurry, important, just out, profit/loss, quality, says/tells, win, want/need. Avoid superlatives like amazing, magic, miraculous, revolutionary, sensational, superb, startling unless they are for an advertisement.

Emotion can play a significant part in a successful and memorable headline: Ogilvy suggests that headlines can be strengthened
by words like darling, love, fear, proud, friend, baby. He quotes a headline of a few decades ago for a range of soaps and moisturizers with a girl talking to her lover on the telephone: DARLING, I’M HAVING THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE... I’M HEAD OVER HEELS IN DOVE as being one of the most provocative headlines ever to come out of O&M. More recent examples of memorable headlines include CATISFACTION (Whiskas petfoods) and CHANNEL FUNNEL (P&O) and, more recently, THE FUTURE’S BRIGHT, THE FUTURE’S ORANGE.

For sales leaflets and other promotional material, a good headline is one which makes a stated promise and a well-defined benefit, is not set at an angle so that the reader gets neck-ache trying to read it, and is set in easy-to-read type. Headlines using an unfamiliar typeface and those that are buried in the text and printed upside down just to satisfy a creative whim should be ruled out immediately.

**STYLE AND PRESENTATION**

While short, snappy headings are suitable for news-style publications, longer ones are sometimes more appropriate for sales leaflets and brochures. According to Ogilvy, when the New York University School of Retailing ran headline tests for a big department store, they found that headlines of ten words or more, and containing news and information, consistently sold more merchandise than short ones.

Presentation is important. Bold type, at least seven or eight sizes larger than the text type (or up as subs would say) makes the headline stand out from the rest of the text. For instance, if the copy was set in 10pt, 2pt leaded, headings of 18pt or larger would provide sufficient contrast. Although it is a matter of individual style and taste, most headlines look better if set upper and lower case rather than in full capitals. A long headline of four or more words in capitals adds nothing to the effectiveness of the message. Do not underline or put capitals in an attempt to add emphasis: this will not have the desired effect and will look old-fashioned and clumsy.

Don’t put a full stop at the end of a headline. Make sure that if a headline runs to more than one line that the first is not broken with a hyphen: that looks not only ghastly but thoroughly unprofessional. Either shorten the line so that there is no need to break the
last word or rewrite the whole heading. Try not to exceed three-line headings for newspapers-style publications (three-deck in journalese) although a four-deck heading in a large size, say 42pt or more, would not look out of place in a tabloid format.

Nowadays, computer typesetting allows great flexibility in choice of headline styles and sizes, and there is no limit to the creative possibilities that can be achieved. The time taken on the writing and presentation of headlines is well worthwhile and deserves as much care and attention as the story itself. Subheadings, or crossheads, are just as important as their bigger brothers and demand just as much care in their wording and presentation.

**SUBHEADINGS**

Subheadings (also called crossheadings) can be centred or ranged left and are a good way to break up long stretches of type. Pages look better with subheads and they can be handy for filling space, for instance when you have difficulty in equalizing column depths. Too many subheads will look messy, particularly if the page is no larger than A4.

Subheads should consist of one or two words of not more than seven or eight characters each; they should never go into a second line. Do not have them in the same type style as the text. They work best if they are in bold type or in italics. Sometimes they look well in a second colour: it will not add to the cost if printed in one of the colours already being used. Like headlines, subheads do not require full stops at the end, but there is no objection to question or exclamation marks.

Stuck for an idea? Take a single, but significant, word out of the text and put it as a crosshead. A few of them judiciously placed can make a dull page look interesting and alive.

Extra emphasis can be given to a passage by inserting side-headings in the margins. Insert these at layout stage and do not attempt to write them in when the body copy for the text is written. Style and layout design will dictate how many there should be and where they should be positioned.

Never overlook the wording and presentation of headings. Time and trouble spent getting them right will always pay off: improved communication will inevitably result.
A memorable slogan is the mainstay of successful advertising campaigns: but it is not always the panacea that agency and client expect it to be. Often it is the slogan that is remembered, not the product, and with slim relationship to sales. Even so, slogans like Guinness Is Good For You, Go To Work On An Egg, Drinka Pinta Milka Day and the wartime security slogan Be Like Dad, Keep Mum worked brilliantly.

**SLOGANS FOR BRAND RECALL**

**Figure 7.4** Helvetica medium in sizes suitable for headlines
Research showed that wherever people went, they thought that Guinness actually *did* do them good (the slogan was dropped in 1963 as it was a claim that could not be adequately substantiated); the Egg Marketing Board ran their slogan for decades and it became advertising folklore. Despite objections by purists, the National Milk Publicity Council’s slogan 40 years ago soon found its way to respectability, eventually gaining entries in dictionaries.

The snappy slogan, like a news headline, can bring lasting recall and has a significant influence on the target audience. But extra sales are hard to prove.
The best slogans are those with words of one syllable, as the first two examples illustrate. Another critical factor is choice of typeface: it should follow that used in advertising and in all printwork for the company’s products. If colours are used, they should also follow those in promotions and corporate literature.

Figure 7.6  Broad use of the easy brand: easyJet (top), easyEverything; also in easy.com and easyvalue.com (bottom)
Lettering style, whether in bold or italics, should be consistent – from signs on vans and lorries to display cards and posters. And the slogan can go on releases as well, providing it is not too obtrusive. It should never overshadow the headline, and should be positioned well away from the story itself.

Above all, slogans must be simple and clear. Once they become over-wordy and clumsy, they will not be remembered and it would be better to use other forms of publicity. The slogan that produces instant recall is the one that is short and to the point, that is repeated and repeated, that makes you laugh, the one that is emotionally charged. That is the one to aim for.

**ELEMENTS OF CORPORATE IDENTITY**

Recognizable corporate identity depends on the design and execution of the communications process in all its aspects. That means a consistent type style and colours for everything from vehicles, Web site, printwork of all kinds from letterheads, memos, visiting cards to the annual report and publicity material, to press and TV advertising, to packaging, to the sign outside office or factory – easyJet is a good example of how a strong brand identity can lead quickly to marketing success.

Building an effective and memorable corporate identity of a company and its brands is largely the responsibility of the advertising agency, but at the design stage and for subsequent publicity, the PR practitioner has a critical role to play.
Dealing with figures and abbreviations

FIGURING OUT THE NUMBERS

Style for numbers is as important as for words. A mixture of numeral styles can confuse the reader and make the production look amateurish. A set style for numbers should be a priority for everything produced whether for print, presentation, release or correspondence.

Style books set out a number of guidelines. These mostly follow Hart’s Rules which gives plenty of examples. Individual publications adapt and expand on these to suit their own needs and audiences. While rules of this nature are open to interpretation, they provide a starting point and this section draws attention to some of the important points for house style.

Basic considerations

The first rule is not to start a sentence with a figure. Spell it out instead. The reason for this is that the style is followed almost universally in newspapers and magazines and in most profession-
ally produced publications. It is something we have all become used to and any diversion immediately stands out and looks ‘wrong’. But it would be clumsy to spell out a multi-digit number; either write out *The year 1997* or else recast the sentence completely. However, there are occasions when it is difficult to avoid a figure at the beginning and when this happens, say in an annual report or in giving statistical data, then there may be no alternative but to start with a figure.

The second rule – and this is for numbers *within* a sentence – is to spell out numbers up to and including ten; above that write figures. But if there are sequences of numbers, some of which may be higher than ten, use figures throughout for the sake of consistency and clarity. Write out *hundredth* but after that put *101st* and so on. For decimals, use a full stop on the line as in 1.5, and do not attempt to centralize it as if writing a decimal by hand. (In other languages a decimal comma is used.) There is no point in putting a single zero after the decimal point unless it is called for in tabular matter, but a nought should go before the point as in 0.75. Numerals should be used for page references, currencies and for groups of statistics.

**Symbols, abbreviations and punctuation**

Next: avoid using the % sign in text; spell out *per cent* as two words, but use *percentage* of course. The symbol should be kept for tables and charts and for text where figures predominate. Fractions should be hyphenated (*two-thirds*) and do not mix (or compare) fractions with decimals. When both a whole number and a fraction are spelt out, only hyphenate the fraction as in *one and three-quarters*. It is better to write (in formal text) *twentieth century* rather than *20th*. Note that *one in three* is singular but *two in five* are plural. Some newspapers will prefer to write *a mile and a half* instead of *one and a half miles*, but seldom, if ever, print *1 1/2* miles!

Avoid a combination of the *to/from* style (when comparing years, for instance) with hyphens as in *from 1997–98*; put *from two to three*, or *from 12 to 13*, but not a mixture of the two styles. Reserve hyphens or dashes for numerals and never use them for spelt-out figures.

*A billion* at one time meant a million million but modern usage suggests that it means a *thousand million* – a definition accepted by most, if not at all, national newspapers. It is better to spell out a
million and a billion, but if *m* and *bn* are used do not put a full point after the abbreviations unless they come at the end of a sentence. Full points should not follow units of weight and measurement (*cm, ft, kg*), and do not put hyphens in combinations like *half an inch* or *half a dozen*. With temperature put the degree symbol immediately before *C* or *F*. No punctuation is necessary in dates (*12 March 1997*). In compounds, put a hyphen in *half-hour* and *two-day*.

**Nouns of measurement and quantity: singular or plural?**

All nouns of measurement remain singular when used attributively: *a six-foot man, a five-litre can*. But plural feet or inches are used where an adjective follows, as in *he is six feet tall, she is five feet six inches*. Similarly, *stone* stays singular in plural expressions, as in *she weighs nine stone*. Unless used attributively metric measurements always take the plural form as in *the tank has a capacity of ten litres*.

Nouns of quantity – *score, dozen, hundred* – take the singular form if qualified by a preceding word: *two thousand will be sufficient*. But they will be plural when denoting indefinite amounts as in *the company publishes hundreds of publications*. Measurements of quantity and distance containing a plural noun can be taken as being singular and therefore take a singular verb: *twenty pounds/miles is too expensive/far*.

It is worth noting that the word ‘number’ takes a plural verb when it refers to a quantity or group as in *a number of people were…* but when it means a figure it takes the singular: *two hundred pounds is the number I quoted*. So much for figures.

**ABBREVIATIONS: THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT**

Now let’s look at abbreviations and how to deal with them. First, the abbreviation everyone uses without hesitation: *OK*. What do the letters stand for? Unless you have seen it in my ‘Last Words’ column in the IPR magazine *Profile* or made a study of the subject, the chances are that you don’t know – and that is the trouble with
using abbreviations: readers may not know what a given set of initials stand for and that means communication not working.

OK, here are some answers. Take your pick: originating from the nineteenth century, it could come from Old Kinderhook, the upstate New York birthplace of eighth American president Van Buren who used the initials as an election slogan; or perhaps a contraction of American slang Orl Korrect, or of Orrins-Kendall crackers, according to Bill Bryson in Mother Tongue. Even though the origin may be obscure, we all know what the letters mean.

Few abbreviations are as familiar and instantly understandable as OK. Abbreviations are often used without hesitation, but are meaningless to the reader, simply because the writer is used to them and they have become part of the company’s jargon. Get them wrong and your message fails. So what are the rules for dealing with them?

Avoid overuse

The first point, to quote a well-known saying, is familiarity breeds contempt. If you overuse abbreviated sets of initials they quickly tire the eye. Unless the initials are sufficiently familiar to be part of the language (BBC, CBI, TUC) the name should be spelt out in full before using abbreviations. It would be equally tiring to see a repetition of the full name when a contraction would be more suitable and convenient. On the other hand, there would be little point in explaining the initials BMW, because besides being a well-known brand, there is usually no need for the reader to know what they mean.

Do not continue to use the same set of initials. For example, in references to the BBC use ‘the Corporation’ or possibly for informal speech or tabloid publication, ‘the Beeb’. Again, for the CBI, it could be called after the first reference ‘the employers’ organization’ or just ‘the organization’. In other cases, use a shortened form such as institute/association/federation/body or, in the case of firms, company/consultancy/firm/group/shop/store, or name by product or service type. But keep clear of slang words like outfit/shop for public relations or advertising firms.

Be careful of ambiguities

Watch out for ambiguities like PC which could mean personal
computer, Police Constable or Privy Counsellor. You may be in PR, but you are not a PR. You see an ad but not an advert, you join a demo and you get flu not the (and no apostrophe). Ensure that descriptions are accurate. A common mistake is for BSI to be written out as the British Standards Institute instead of Institution. Writers wonder how to write PLC (Public Limited Company). It is up to the company: it can be shown in caps, or lower case or a mixture of the two, although it seems that the all-capitals style, either in roman or italics, in the one generally favoured.

Capitals and full stops

Most house styles require all abbreviations to be set in capitals, but some organizations are read as acronyms and take lower case (Aslef for instance), while others are set upper and lower case for the sake of clarity (BSc, Dr). In general, full stops are not needed in abbreviations of company names, titles and civil honours, academic qualifications, and the courtesy titles of Mr/Mrs/Ms.

No full point follows numerical abbreviations (1st/2nd), units of length, weight or time (cm/ft/cwt/lb/kg/min/sec); am/pm; days of the week (Mon/Tues); months (Aug/Dec); or in points of the compass (NE/SW) unless used separately (N.S.E.W.). They are seldom necessary in acronyms (laser) and if there is no way of avoiding etc (never &c) don’t put a point after it.

Make sure your text or office-produced documents have all abbreviations typed or set in a consistent way without (or with) full points as may be dictated by house style. Get out of the habit of using eg, ie, pa – they are what might be termed ‘lazyisms’. For etc write a short listing of what the items are; for eg/ie just put a comma, for pa spell out per annum or annually or every/year.

Ampersands and definite articles

The ampersand is a useful and convenient abbreviation for and, but it should be restricted to company names (Marks & Spencer) and never used as an alternative to and in text. A check with the telephone directory will confirm whether or not a company name contains an ampersand.

The omission of the definite article has caused heated debate: the Queen’s English Society has blamed this on advertisers, headline writers and bad teaching. But it is not something to be too
bothered about unless *the* is there to describe a specific thing or event. It would be tedious to describe Joe Bloggs as *the* managing director of XYZ company. Drop it and you make the copy run faster. Name plus title in lower case is all you need.

*The* is certainly not needed when talking about branded products: you would say, in a release or article, *Ford* motor-cars, not *the* *Ford* motor-cars, in a general context, but *the Ford* when referring to a specific model, say in comparison with other vehicles.

When a title such as *The Times*, or the IPR for that matter, is used attributively, you can drop the *the* as in *Times* reporters investigated…., IPR policy decisions were made…. There is no objection to using *the* with *less* and *more* (*the less/the more* you have); but note nonetheless (*not none the less*) is preferable to *not any the less*.

You need *the* when referring to the particular, the specific. Keep it for titles of books, plays and films when it is part of the recognized title and when mentioning a person by title as in *The Prime Minister, Tony Blair*, not the American way *Prime Minister Blair*.

If a shortened word is pronounced, do not put a definite article before it (*the IPR* but not *the M&S*). Hence the rule: *the* goes with abbreviated organizations but not the company names. You wouldn’t write *the ICI* would you? Be careful in exchanging *phone* for *telephone*, *photo* for *photograph*, as both contractions are more comfortable when used informally and in speech.

Use *facsimile*, *telephone* in full for printed address details, *fax/phone* as a verb (*I will fax/phone you*). In formal contexts write *telephone*.

A full guide to abbreviations (but only those covering the larger commercial organizations) will be found in *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors*; advice on setting abbreviations for printed material is given in *Hart’s Rules*. Most dictionaries will indicate what abbreviated titles, honours and qualifications stand for. And, by the way, *ODWE* prefers OK to *okay* or *ok*. 
Some of the strictures of purists who insist upon rigid adherence to rules of grammar are little more than mythology and have no place in everyday usage. Those who believe that it is always wrong to split an infinitive, end a sentence with a proposition, or start with a conjunction are in a linguistic straitjacket and unable to communicate as well as they might. Likewise, unnecessarily long words, complex sentences and lengthy paragraphs confuse the reader. Double negatives, needless jargon, faulty or misplaced punctuation, and constant repetition of words and ideas can all lead to nonsensical, hard-to-follow text. And that means that the reader quickly loses interest in the face of endless waffle.

Plain English, written in a simple and straightforward way, is the recipe for clarity of expression. More than that, it is the basis of good style. Earlier chapters have discussed some of the ingredients for securing and keeping the reader reading, and, without trespassing on that territory, this chapter looks at writing with economy of language, a crucial factor in getting your message understood.
AIM FOR BREVITY

Brevity is the essence, particularly for the media. Complicated constructions and lengthy, unwieldy sentences not only bore the reader, they provide an instant barrier to effective communications. More important still, brevity spells time saved for the reader. Copy must be clear, concise and unambiguous. Whether the piece is for publication in a newspaper or periodical or for a brochure or leaflet, it should be written so that it grips the reader from start to finish. What are the best ways of achieving this?

First, use short words rather than long, and plain language instead of complex terminology. Try to keep sentences down to 25 to 30 words, fewer if you can. Use full stops liberally: they are the writer’s best friend. Aim for not more than three sentences per paragraph for releases and news-style publications. But variety is the spice: an occasional longer paragraph gives colour and balance to a piece. And the one-liner can be effective – it jerks the reader to attention.

Sentences can of course be much longer than this; indeed, those of up to 60 or so words are acceptable for technical or legal contexts where detailed explanation is required. If a sentence is starting to ‘look’ too long, and tops the 60 mark, break it up with stops, or insert quotations if appropriate. With feature articles and corporate brochures you can be more generous with words. But even then, be aware that the longer the sentence the more likely the reader will tire and skip the copy you have tried so hard to get right in terms of style and fact.

As you write, get into the habit of asking yourself ‘Is there a shorter word that means the same thing? Is there a better word? Are any words sheer verbiage and should be cut out? Is every word doing a job and telling you something?’ In short, write tight to write well.

PLAIN WORDS

Your search for plain words and the removal of unnecessary ones will be aided by using The Plain English Guide by Martin Cutts. There are, he says, three main techniques for dealing with ‘dross’ to allow your information to ‘shine more clearly’: strike out useless words and leave only those that tell you something; prune the
dead wood, grafting on the vigorous; rewrite completely. Cutts gives many examples of the overlong word or phrase, the useless word, and the officialese that defies understanding; as well as advice on how to rewrite lengthy and tedious text. When making cuts it is essential not to alter the sense in any way and to follow the basic rules of grammar.

With a little thought it is easy: see how ten words in the following sentence can be lost without altering the meaning:

*XYZ company had as its main objective the need (wanted) to increase output by at least 10 per cent in this current financial year.*

Here, the words in italics can be deleted without changing the meaning. The single word ‘wanted’ takes the place of seven needless ones. Verbiage like this throughout a piece of several hundred words would turn off the reader after only a few paragraphs. Expressions that can easily be shortened include: *the question as to whether, (use whether); there is no doubt that (put no doubt or doubtless); in spite of the fact that (replace with though); owing to the fact that (write since or because).

Cutts includes helpful lists of plain and short words and phrases. For example, he advises *facts/details* not particulars; *help* not facilitate; *idea* not concept; *buy* not purchase; *start/begin*, not commence. Do not let long-winded phrases get the better of you: for instance, write *although* or *despite* instead of ‘despite the fact that’. Sir Ernest Gowers in *The Complete Plain Words* demonstrates that simple prepositions can often replace wordy phrases: *if* for ‘in case of’ and *to* for ‘with a view to’.


Look for the shorter, simpler word: check for alternatives in the *Penguin Dictionary of English Synonyms*, *Roget’s Thesaurus* and similar reference books.
WATCH OUT FOR TAUTOLGY

If you use another word or words meaning the same thing in a single sentence or phrase, that’s tautology: free gift, new innovation or that well-used cliché at this moment in time are typical. Repetition is seldom, if ever, desirable unless it is used deliberately for dramatic effect, perhaps for a speech or article. If you say you are going to eat lunch that is tautologous because what else would you do but eat it?

If you say someone died of a fatal dose, wrote a pair of twins, full and total exposure, or if you put ‘he had nothing further to add’ you are repeating yourself. Tautology abounds: early beginnings, added bonus, inside of, meet together, mutual co-operation, over again, past history, repeat again, revert back, unite together, whether or not easily reach type and tongue.

Don’t risk repetition: it will never get past the good newspaper sub-editor.

LOOK FOR ACTIVE VERBS; AVOID CONTRACTIONS

The verb drives the text forward. First, look for single syllable verbs: go, not proceed; send, not transmit; show, not demonstrate. You pitch rather than compete, know rather than comprehend, let not permit. To think is better than to believe, to ask is better than to enquire. And so on. Choose active-voice verbs by putting the ‘doer’ – the person or thing doing the action – in front of the verb. It is much better to write ‘XYZ consultancy wants new clients’ instead of ‘new clients are wanted by XYZ consultancy’.

Try to avoid using too many adverbs as qualifiers. ‘They are an indulgence, often a sign that noun and verb are not working properly,’ says The Times Guide to English Style and Usage. Much the same can be said for adjectives; avoid those that are flowery and expansive: rather, very, little (unless referring to size), pretty for example – especially in news stories. Never use them in releases, unless they are part of a quote, and even then it is better to cut them out if you can.

When you need to save words and shorten copy, do not fall into the trap of using contractions of modal or auxiliary verbs like
will/shall/would; and so write you’ll/you’d, or you’re/you’ve, I’m. This is fine for speech and informal writing but not for formal contexts; it looks sloppy and chatty. (On the other hand, n’t is an acceptable contraction of not for all but very formal usage.)

**AVOID FOREIGN WORDS OR PHRASES – AND LATIN**

Another barrier to understanding is using foreign words or phrases when an English one will do just as well. While it is true that many verbal imports are often just the words or phrases you want because there is no exact English equivalent, do not write above the head of the reader, who might think you are showing off.

Don’t go Latin unless you have to: put among others not inter alia; yearly or annually not ‘per annum’; about, not circa; regarding, not vis-à-vis. Other Latin words to be avoided where English equivalents are available include ad hoc (for this purpose), a priori (from cause to effect), bona fide(s) (good faith), caveat emptor (let the buyer beware), et al (and others), ex officio (by virtue of official position), ex gratia (voluntary contribution), mea culpa (my fault) and quid pro quo (something for nothing). In use, these words would not be italicized. As a general rule, don’t go Latin and be safe! And be on your guard against pomposity: write before not ‘prior to’; ultimately not ‘at the end of the day’; but or however rather than ‘having said that’.

Foreign words should not appear in releases. Put them in house journals and speeches, provided you think they will be understood. One or two will usually be enough. Once a word has become Anglicized (as in role) it is not italicized and loses its accent(s).

**LOAN WORDS NEEDING CARE**

Loan words and phrases include, from France, the italicized bon mot (clever saying), déjà vu (with accents, tediously similar), de trop (not wanted) and tour de force (feat of strength or skill). From Germany come the lesser known but useful Sturm und Drang (storm and stress), Zeitgeist (spirit of the times); Anglicized words
include achtung, angst, blitzkrieg (or just blitz), diktat, to join kindergarten, rucksack and waltz.

Italy brings us ciao (hello, goodbye), conversazione, espresso, in camera, incommunicado, prima donna – all well known, but not alter ego (intimate friend) to the same extent. Greece lends hoi polloi (the masses), Russia perestroika (reconstruction, reform) and glasnost (openness), and Spain the slangy vamoose, pronto, olé and the more formal adios, fandango, grande, armada, machismo and quixotic.

Every writer’s vocabulary should make room for these Jewish words, none of which have a direct English equivalent: chutzpah (shameless audacity), mazeltov (good luck), nosh (food, to enjoy food), schmaltz (chicken fat, sugary sentimentalism), shalom (peace be unto you), shlemiel (fool, inept person).

DOUBLE NEGATIVES

Guard against double or multiple negatives with too many unwords like unnecessary or unless; or putting more than one avoid or cease or phrases such as less than and not more than in one sentence. Don’t use constructions like hardly or almost followed by without, or there were no trees neither instead of either. If you do, the meaning can become obscure and the reader has to struggle with negatives (or too many positives for that matter) in order to understand what you mean.

BEWARE ‘MYTHS’

According to Cutts in The Plain English Guide, some of the so-called ‘rules’ of grammar religiously followed by purists and scholars are little more than myths. It is these myths that are a further barrier to clarity of communication. They are the territory of the pedant and do not have a place in everyday writing and speech. The top-of-the-list myth says you should never split an infinitive. While most commentators agree that it is better to avoid a split, by putting an adverb or another word between to and the infinitive verb as in to boldly go, ‘no absolute taboo’ should be placed on it (Fowler’s Modern English Usage). Cutts himself says: ‘If you can’t bring yourself to split an infinitive, at least allow others to do so.’ There is
nothing to stop you splitting an infinitive but be aware that it will irritate some people.

Another myth is the long-held theory that sentences must never end with a preposition. Cutts says a few ‘fossils’ still believe this, but agrees that some sentences do need to be recast, not because they break any rule but because they ‘sound ugly’. It all depends on the degree of formality the writer wants to achieve: it would be pedantic to write or say ‘To whom am I talking?’ when ‘Who am I talking to?’ would be more natural. If the preposition looks stranded and unrelated to the word to which it belongs (or belongs to!) then rewrite the sentence and put it where it sounds natural. The more formal the piece, the earlier the preposition goes in the sentence. But do not move it back just because you think you should follow the schoolroom rule.

A third myth is that sentences must never begin with and or but. Authors throughout history have ignored this so-called ban: Cutts notes that Jane Austen begins almost every page with but, and OED gives several examples of sentences in English literature beginning with and. In fact, sentences starting this way tend to have a sparkle absent in others, and are an effective way of adding emphasis to a point already made.

**TIPS FOR WRITING TIGHT**

Writing tight in a plain, easy-to-read style is hard work and demands ruthless pruning. Try to keep cross-references to a minimum; divide complicated copy into vertical lists rather than having a succession of semi-colons or commas; don’t bury key words or phrases in slabs of text unrelieved by headings; don’t confuse the lay-reader with jargon or technical terms and don’t use slang words in any formal sense.

Cut unnecessary words and choose various verbs. To be and to have are often the only ones you need to achieve crispness. Make the punctuation work for you by dividing the copy into short manageable sections with liberal use of full stops. Create interest by asking questions – a technique more commonly found in articles and feature material than in news items – and include quotations if appropriate. Keep your sentences short, and have plenty of paragraph breaks. In a report or internal document organize points under headings.
Be careful not to duplicate words and phrases in the same paragraph. Repeating technical words may be unavoidable, but nothing is more off-putting than reading the same word over and over again. Look for alternatives in *Roget’s Thesaurus*, the *Penguin Dictionary of Synonyms* or *The Wordsworth Dictionary of Synonyms & Antonyms*. Sometimes you can find the word you want in a good dictionary.

**THERE IS STILL MUCH TO DO…**

Don’t think that once you’ve finished the piece that is the end of it. The work should not get anywhere near your OUT tray until you have edited and polished it over and over again and convinced yourself there is no way it can be improved. The whole piece might need rewriting.

Sometimes you will be rushed and get no chance to recast a piece. But don’t despair – if you are quick you will undoubtedly have time for a bit of editing. Unless you are working on a news release or are up against a tight deadline, there is usually time for another draft. And don’t think, ‘Oh well there is still time to look at it again at proof stage.’ That is fatal and can lead to mistakes, particularly for rush jobs.

**Out with redundancies**

Don’t allow redundancies (unnecessary words in italics): *advance planning, brand new, concrete proposals, divide up, join together, filled up, follow after, general public, penetrate into, limited only to, petrol filling station, total extinction, revert back, watchful eye.* Many more are in *Essential English for Journalists, Editors and Writers* (Pimlico Random House).

**Cut wasted words**

Cut out those wasted words: *actually, basically, hopefully, really, kind of/sort of and that favourite ploy of speakers starting a new thought with Well…’* Phrases like *lodged an objection, in many cases,* and *tendered his resignation* can be replaced with *appealed, often and resigned:* in each case one word is doing the job of three. And
there’s ‘then’ after everything, or ‘to be honest’, almost as bad as the favourite terminator ‘ah right’. Plenty more wasted words are in James Aitchison’s *Guide to Written English* (Cassell).

Be aware of confusables – words that look and sound alike but have different meanings (Appendix 2).

**Revise and revise again**

Even when close to deadline give your copy one more read. Take a break and come back to it: there will always be a fact to check again, a word to lose, a better, shorter one to find. Every minute you spend on revision will be rewarded by brighter, brisker copy. And I bet you will have saved at least one mistake!

Swapping paragraphs, changing words, even rewriting whole passages, are easy. Writing takes time and effort: here are 10 rules for making it better:

- In headings, use the present tense and an active verb.
- Check the facts; put them in a logical order and rewrite non-sequiturs.
- Edit to cut, not add. Put in plenty of paragraph breaks.
- Confirm that there are no ambiguities.
- Replace long words with shorter ones; avoid repetition, redundancies.
- Correct grammar but don’t be pedantic.
- Delete clichés and jargon.
- Watch for legal pitfalls, particularly libellous statements.
- Check that there is no vulgarity.
- And ensure that spelling and style are consistent throughout.

You may not have a chance to see your copy again before it appears in print: check, check and check again. Only when you have satisfied yourself that all the above rules have been met, do you hit the PRINT button.
There are special requirements for preparing written material for publication in newspapers, consumer magazines and trade journals, and also for broadcast in news outlets. The news release – whether e-mailed, faxed or issued as a video news release (VNR) – is still the basic form of communication between an organization and its audience, and there are various rules and conventions that should be followed to ensure the material gets published and does not end up in the bin. In this chapter I uncover important points concerning the writing and issuing of news releases, and then turn to commissioned articles.

**NEWS RELEASES: BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

When you send out a release you want it to be published. Remember that national and regional newspapers, consumer magazines and trade journals, all receive hundreds or perhaps thousands of news stories every day all vying with press releases for every inch of space. Broadcasting media – BBC and ITV programmes and the many national and local radio stations – also have huge demands on their airtimes for new items and, like the press, need information presented in a succinct way.
Press Release

Institute of Practitioners in Advertising
44 Belgrave Square London SW1X 8QS
telephone: 020 7244 3900 fax: 020 7244 3904
e-mail: tessa@ipa.co.uk website: www.ipa.co.uk

Date: 17th January 2001

IPA appoints Hamish Pringle as next Director General

The IPA has announced today that Hamish Pringle will succeed Nick Phillips as Director General when he retires in August 2001.

Pringle, 49, is currently Director of Marketing Strategy on a consultancy basis at the IPA, as well as a director of a music dotcom company and a successful business author. Previously he has worked in senior positions at major agencies including Saatchi & Saatchi, Leagas Delaney, Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO, Publicis, BMP DDB and his own agency Madell Wilnot Pringle.

Pringle was selected after a thorough and exhaustive search conducted by Spencer Stuart (the firm who also headhunted Nick Phillips for the IPA). The IPA selection panel consisted of current President Rupert Howell, former President John Bartle, President-elect Bruce Haines, and former Chairman of the IPA Media Policy Group, Ray Kelly.

Note to editors:
The IPA is the industry body and professional institute for UK advertising, media and marketing communications agencies and was established in 1917 as a serving body and to negotiate on behalf of its members with media bodies, government departments and others. The IPA’s 250 corporate members represent the major part of the advertising agency business, handling advertising with an estimated value of over £7,000 million per year (over 60 per cent of advertising placed by agencies) on behalf of thousands of their client companies and organisations nationwide.

For further information
Rupert Howell, IPA President
Nick Phillips, IPA Director General
Hamish Pringle, IPA Director General Designate

Issued by:
Tessa Gooding, Head of Communications

Figure 10.1  This benchmark release follows all the rules. Contact details from the second page are included for the purposes of illustration
What the press don’t want

The release that is wrongly targeted or lacks news value is worse than useless. If you send a release for a new kind of shelving or for a breakfast beverage to a national daily, there is no chance that either will be used: you have wasted time, not to mention postage and printing costs. The only hope for the shelving story is a paragraph in a DIY magazine; for the drink, a paragraph in a catering paper. And even that’s doubtful if there are similar products on the market.

Targeting and news value are critical factors. So is timing. Popular nationals will look for a ‘human’ storyline with the accent on people rather than things. Broadsheets need items that stretch the intellect, specialist papers the subjects they normally cover. Anything else will be binned. Journalists receive hundreds, possibly thousands, of releases daily but few will be printed. Even those getting as far as the news desk will be rewritten or used as background material.

Never telephone or e-mail editors or their staff to find out if they are going to use your story. Even worse would be to ask why not. Did they want more information? They top the horrors. If journalists want to follow up a story, they won’t be long contacting you. That’s the time to start adding to the facts you have given, or suggesting someone to interview.

Your news will be in competition with information from many other sources, not least stories coming in from staff journalists, freelancers and news agencies. The essential points are that releases must be worthy of publication and able to attract the journalist’s attention. Here are the main points to watch.

Headings

The release should be clearly identifiable as a communication for publication or broadcast, and should carry a heading such as ‘News Release’, ‘Press Release’, ‘Press Notice’, ‘Press Information’, ‘Information from XYZ’ or just ‘News from XYZ’. If sent out by a consultancy, it must be made clear that it is issued on behalf of the client company or organization.

Such headings should be in capitals or upper and lower case of not less than 18pt so as to stand out from the mass of other material on sub-editors’ desks. Print the heading in the corporate colour, typeface and style of the issuing organization.
Essential information

Put the full name and address of the issuing organization, with telephone, fax numbers and e-mail/Web site address (if there is one) in a prominent position. Type the date of issue. Give a contact name for further information, together with his/her telephone/fax numbers if different from the main switchboard numbers. Give also the contact’s e-mail address.

Always include an out-of-hours telephone number since many journalists are still working when you have left the office. It is not necessarily good PR for the managing director or chairman to get your calls when you should be talking to the media in the first place!

Figure 10.2  Part of a release produced by Ogilvy PR Worldwide for PrimeLearning.com; note contact details positioned for easy reference

Titles

The title of the release should be typed (or word-processed) in bold capitals but not underlined. (Don’t write a too-clever-by-half or facetious heading – it won’t work!) It should say in as few words
as possible what the release is about, and should not, if possible, run to more than one line. Use a present tense verb. If secondary subheadings or side-heads are needed, then these should be in upper and lower case, either in plain or bold type.

Some ideal examples of release titles are: GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES NEW USER-FRIENDLY CROWN COPYRIGHT LICENCE FOR ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING SECTOR (Cabinet Office); BLUNKETT CUTS RED TAPE (Department for Education and Employment); WALKERS CRISPS KICK OFF SCOTTISH SPORTING HEROES PROMOTION (Walkers Snack Foods); NEW PREMISES HERALD A NEW IMAGE FOR BPIF (British Printing Industries Federation); VIRGIN PLUGS INTO THE ENERGY MARKET (Virgin Energy); CONSUMER REALITY EXPOSES FINANCIAL SERVICES MYTHS (Deloitte Consulting).

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**NEWS**

*Department for Education and Employment*

111/97  21 May 1997

**BLUNKETT CUTS RED TAPE**

Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett today promised teachers the new Government would work with them to cut red tape and make more time to raise standards.

At a summit meeting today with representatives from all six teacher unions Mr Blunkett said:

‘Whenever I meet teachers I hear cries to cut the bureaucracy to let us do out jobs. Today I am announcing a working group with the task of cutting the bureaucratic mountain and freeing teacher time to pursue our crusade to raise standards.’

Press Enquiries: Charlotte Redman 0171 925 5105

Public Enquiries: 0171 925 5555

**Figure 10.3**  Example of a news release from a Government department: note details are given for further information
Writing for the press

WALKERS CRISPS KICKS OFF SCOTTISH SPORTING HEROES PROMOTION

Walkers Crisps is to launch its first ever Scottish instant win promotion, featuring Scotland’s top ten sporting celebrities. Commencing on May 5th for eight weeks (see note 1), Walkers Sporting Heroes Promotion will offer school children and students the chance to win one of the ten top prizes of a training session with a Walkers Sporting Hero at their school.

Notes to editors:
1. The promotion will be launched in impulse outlets on May 5th and in grocery outlets on May 19th.
2. All winners must be aged 18 or under, and in full time education at a Scottish school in December 1997.
3. Ally McCoist is a centre forward for Rangers FC, Gavin Hastings has captained British Lions and Scotland rugby teams, Yvonne Murray is a 10,000 metre runner and is a Commonwealth champion, John Robertson is a centre forward for Heart of Midlothian FC, Jackie McNamara is a wing back for Celtic FC and is a regular in Scotland’s national team, Jim Leighton is a goalkeeper for Hibernian FC, Rob Wainwright is the current Scottish rugby captain, Derek Frame plays centre for City of Edinburgh and is also in the Scottish basketball team, Sandra Frame is a Scottish netball player and has competed in 3 World Championship and 2 World Games and Tony Hand is an ice hockey player and is acknowledged as the most talented UK born ice hockey player.

Issued on behalf of Walkers Snack Foods
For further information please contact::
Tara Byrne/Jackie Kelly
Hill & Knowlton (UK) Ltd
0171 413 3000

Figure 10.4 A release for a consumer product from Hill and Knowlton (UK)

Content

Be brief and factual and keep sentences short. Two sentences per paragraph is about right, and often just one sentence will be enough to get a point over. The opening paragraph should contain the essence of the story and display the news. Here you must answer who?/when?/where? questions in the same way that a reporter is required to do. For example, if a company chairman has
made a statement, give his name and position, the date (if you say ‘today’ put the date in brackets afterwards so there can be no mistake), where the statement was made, and, if at a hotel, name it.

A trick here is to put the last two details in a second paragraph saying Mr So and So was speaking on (date) and (where) to save cluttering up the opening paragraph with detail that might easily obscure the point of the story. Never write ‘recently’ but always give the date.

Following paragraphs should expand on the story. Try not to let the copy run over to a second page. It will make the sub-editor’s job much easier if you start with the main point, fill in the detail in the succeeding paragraphs and end with the least important point. Your news release can then be edited down with far less trouble.

Write in a factual style without flowery adjectives and superlatives or emotive words when you are describing products and services (exciting development). Don’t put recently in a release if you can’t be precise: say last week/month with the date in brackets. Avoid clichés, jargon words and comments as expressions of opinion. If you wish to make a comment about something, put it as a quote from someone in the organization. Just stick to the facts and let them stand on their own without embellishment. It will be up to the journalist to put his or her interpretation on the story you are issuing.

If there is a lot of technical data to be included put this as an attachment. Similarly, you can attach a verbatim speech, providing reference to it is made in the covering release.

**Layout and style**

The copy must be typed double-spaced. The reason for this is to give the sub-editor plenty of space to make changes.

Put at least a couple of lines between the heading and the first paragraph. Put extra space between paragraphs.

Do not underline any of the copy. This is the universal mark used by printers for copy to be set in italics. Do not set any of the text in italics or bold in the forlorn hope that it will be seen as more important. If a title of a book, film or article is used within the text, put it in single quotes.

Type on one side of the paper (white, A4) and if there is a continuation sheet, type ‘More’ at the foot of the page. Do not break a paragraph at the end of a page; if necessary take the whole para-
Figure 10.5  Sothebys have got their act together for this announcement. Note e-mail contact details
graph over to the second page rather than leave a few words dangling (as a ‘widow’, the printer would say) at the top of the second page.

Leave a decent margin on each side, about 30mm (1⅛ inch). Do not try to achieve justified type when both sides are aligned. It is a waste of your time!

Use double quotes for direct quotations (the actual words spoken); this is standard newspaper style. For reported speech follow the style in this extract from The Times: Eddie George [now known as Sir Edward George] admitted yesterday… he suggested there were some signs…

At the close of the copy, type END or ENDS in capitals. If there are special points to be made for the attention of the editor, such as explanations of technical terms or how to obtain follow-up infor-

**Figure 10.6** Well-produced release with special interest for the trade press
mation, put these against a side-heading ‘Note to Editor’. If possible, give a word count. This is usually easy to ascertain with reference to the spellcheck facility provided by most software packages. The sub-editor can then easily calculate the amount of space the copy will occupy when it is typeset.

**Embargoes**

Journalists dislike embargoes – which is a request to withhold publication until a specific time and date. Avoid them if possible, as they are not binding on the media and are there to give the journalist time for research or follow-up before a speech, or in advance of an announcement by a company or organization. If you decide to issue a release under embargo, make this clear above the title of the release. A suitable form of words would be:

**EMBARGO: THIS INFORMATION IS ISSUED IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE. IT IS NOT FOR PUBLICATION, BROADCAST, OR USE ON CLUB TAPES BEFORE (TIME) ON (date).**

The wording of embargoes for releases giving advance information on winners of awards requires care to ensure that details do not leak out in advance of the presentation event. An example is the wording for the Charter Mark Awards 1996 issued by the Office of Public Service, the Cabinet Office:

**EMBARGO: THIS MATERIAL IS PROVIDED SO THAT RECIPIENTS MAY APPROACH THE NAMED CONTACTS IN ANY OF THE 1996 AWARD WINNING ORGANISATIONS FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR WIN, PROVIDED THERE IS NO PUBLICATION OR PUBLICITY IN ANY MEDIA, ELECTRONIC OR WRITTEN, BEFORE 0001 HOURS GMT ON MONDAY 2 DECEMBER, 1996.**

A simplified embargo notice can also be used so long as the restriction is absolutely clear and unambiguous.

**Issuing the release**

Timing the release is fairly critical. If you are mailing it, don’t forget that the post can take at least a day, and a release to a trade paper or magazine posted on a Friday night will not be seen until
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

HOUSE OF COMMONS, 7 MILLBANK, LONDON SW1P 3JA
Telephone: 020 7219 1223  Fax: 020 7219 2891  e-mail: indcom@parliament.uk
Internet site: www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/indhome.htm

PN38.99/2000  3 November 2000

PRESS NOTICE

PUBLICATION OF NINTH SPECIAL REPORT:

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE NINTH REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE,
SESSION 1999-2000:
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EC DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

The Committee reported on “The Effectiveness of EC Development Assistance” on 8 August 2000 (Ninth Report from the Committee, Session 1999-2000, HC 669). The Government Response to the Report will be published on Tuesday 7 November at 11.00 am as the Ninth Special Report from the Committee, Session 1999-2000 (HC 949).

The Report will be available for collection by Government Departments, witnesses and the press from the Reception Desk at 7 Millbank, London, SW1A 3JA and from the Press Gallery from 11.00 am on Tuesday 7 November.

The published Report can be purchased from the Stationery Office Bookshops (tel: 0345 58 54 63). The full text of the Report will also be available on the Internet: www.parliament.uk from 3.30 pm on the day of publication.

Enquiries to Ian Thomson, Committee Assistant, on 020 7219 1221.

Figure 10.7  International Development Committee announcement: note e-mail and Web site addresses at the top
the following Monday morning. It’s better to send it by messenger or to fax it, providing you are not sending photographs. E-mail is another possibility, but be aware that you are relying on someone to switch on their computer. A telephone call to the news desk saying a release is coming and will be on their screens (or has been sent) might help. Try it and, if it works, use it regularly. But there is little to beat hard copy on paper.

**Is it news?**

There is no point in sending out a news release if it is not news. You will only annoy the journalist if you do and your hard work will be wasted. So has your release got news value? The short answer is: does the news editor think it will interest the reader? News is something not known before.

To quote Pat Bowman, former head of public relations for Lloyds Bank:

> News value is relative; minor stories make news on a slow day. Only big news counts on a busy day. A boring product story may be valuable news to a trade paper, but no publication with a general readership would look at it. How it is written will make all the difference in perception of a story: if it is written in a lively, interesting way it is more likely to be seen as important; if it is expressed in a boring fashion, using tedious, hard-to-grasp, waffly words and phrases then it will be considered dull. Then the only future for it is the waste bin.

Tabloids, says Bowman, are likely to be influenced by the entertainment and novelty value of a story, while the quality press will be more interested in stories that excite the intellect and imagination. Immediacy can also have an effect: it can outweigh importance in the assessment of news value, particularly for TV and radio. ‘Don’t try to bamboozle journalists into thinking that the story you are putting out is a good one when there is nothing new in it at all,’ says Bowman. It could be an utter waste of time.

Robert Hornby’s *The Press in Modern Society*, first published in 1965 but still relevant today, gives penetrating thoughts on news and news value. To summarize Hornby: what may appear as news in a provincial newspaper holding a dominant position in a city will bear little relationship in presentation to the same news splashed across the front page of a national daily. It is like
comparing a seaside revue to a West End musical. So what are the basic elements of a news story? First, it must be something new. Other factors can be grouped under three headings – importance, human interest and topicality.

Importance can mean a well-known person connected with the story, perhaps a politician or public figure, especially if they have been in the news before.

Human interest is exemplified by something that is interesting to the many rather than the few. Anything pathetic, or that causes indignation, and the topics of prices, crime or abuse of privilege gets read. Other people’s big financial gains, rags-to-riches stories, romances, children, animal welfare, good/bad luck items, the unexpected, the surprising and the unusual always attract attention. Most people prefer reading about people to things: many column inches of publicity can easily be lost if releases ignore the human angle.

Journalists’ requirements are changing in line with the instant delivery of news on television and radio. In consequence, newspapers are increasingly filling their pages with background stories and feature articles on such subjects as lifestyles, health, entertainment, sport, home and garden. These subjects are all fertile ground for human interest stories.

Topicality means facts about a subject of intense current interest, with excitement, danger and rapid movement (like chases and police hunts); well-known faces must be photographed in easily recognized places and backgrounds to provide maximum impact and make for easy recognition. A great deal of the trivial derives its news value from such topicality, especially in the popular press.

Study newspaper style

Look at newspapers to see how journalists write: whether broadsheet or tabloid, extremes of style determine the way different newspapers approach a given story. The former will probably give far more detail, while the latter will tend to oversimplify, leaving little room for intelligent interpretation.

Write to catch the eye of the reader in the same way as the journalist does. One thing is certain: a ‘new’ story or one that has not been published before has got news value; and if it is exclusive it will have an even better chance of publication.
30 NOVEMBER 2000

NEW PREMISES HERALD A NEW IMAGE FOR THE BPIF

The BPIF (British Printing Industries Federation) has moved into its new headquarters building at Farringdon Point in London.

Covering over 6000 square foot of modern office accommodation on a single floor, the new premises house both the BPIF head office staff, including the executive directors, and the offices of the South East Business Centre. The new accommodation provides an excellent working environment for the organisation as it faces up to the challenges of the future.

In declaring the offices officially open, BPIF President Roy Baille paid tribute to the professionalism of BPIF staff and looked forward to many successful years for the BPIF in continuing to meet the needs of its members.

The new address of the BPIF is:
Farringdon Point
29/35 Farringdon Road
London EC1N 3JF
Tel: 0207 915 8357

Figure 10.8 Clear and well-designed release by A D Communications for national trade body. Contact details are on the following page of the release
No puffs please

Releases must not become blatant advertising messages on behalf of the client company or other organizations. If you put out an advertisement under the guise of a news story it is sure to put the editor off and ruin your reputation as a public relations professional into the bargain.

These so-called ‘puffs’, which attempt to gain editorial space, should properly be paid-up advertisements. But a new product or service can of course be a news story for release to the specialist press covering the industry sector you are covering.

Releases to the specialist press

If you write a release containing technical matter there is no profit in using jargon meaningless to the average reader, or writing in a highbrow way to woo white-coated boffins.

Where releases to the national media are on scientific or financial subjects, write in simple, concise language that will be understood by a lay audience. The only place for the technicalities and jargon of the industry or business is the trade press. Few technical journalists are specialists and fully trained in the technologies they write about. If you provide copy that needs little editing your release is far less likely to be changed than if you give them gobbledygook, however well intentioned that may be.
Don’t forget the Internet

Most large companies and organizations now make their press releases available on the Internet, and they can be printed out if required. Leading organizations in the communications field, such as British Telecom, the Institute of Public Relations, the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, the Advertising Association and many of the national media organizations all have Internet sites from which their press releases can be downloaded. Again, it is important that contact names and day/night telephone numbers are included, as well as background information.

If you are setting up a virtual press office (VPO) to provide a 24-hour service for journalists on the Internet, ensure that access is simple and that contact details, including e-mail addresses, are included. Allow for pictures and graphics to be downloaded, and update regularly.

Video news releases – for broadcasting stories

Broadcasters need stories too. Airtime takes a lot of filling on a slow news day. But your story will be in hot competition with items from the station’s own reporters, news agencies and freelancers. To be of interest to a TV show, there must be strong visual appeal. The video news release (VNR) is usually presented in two forms: a short tape of only a minute or two, tightly edited and ready for transmission, and another containing interviews and background.

If you go to a specialist company to produce a VNR, costs can range from £5,000 to £15,000 for UK transmission, much more for broadcast abroad. Another route is to upload your VNR to the station’s Web site by tape or CD ROM. DIY videos or CDs have only a slender chance of success unless the story is a heart-stopping one. The production of a professional VNR is expensive and you may not always get the results you would like. Question the company carefully on their record of success before signing up.

Releases for radio transmission

Radio is equally demanding, if not more so. It is better to mail, fax or e-mail copy to radio stations rather than sending audio tapes, though if you have close personal contacts this helps to get your
story on air. The specialist VNR company can also arrange for syndicated audio tapes to be distributed to national and regional radio stations.

Again, research your audience well and try to provide items that will fit timewise in your chosen slot. Don’t send a 15-minute piece that would take up half the allotted time of a current affairs programme, or a news story of a minute for a slot of only a few seconds!

**COMMISSIONED ARTICLES**

If you are asked to write an article by a newspaper or magazine, or if you put up an idea for a feature, the content and prime thrust of the piece should be discussed with the editor well in advance. The brief subsequently agreed must be scrupulously followed. If it diverts, then it is likely that the editor will ask for amendments some of which may be substantial. Worse than that, changes may be made that you know nothing about until the article is printed – and then it is too late!

Write in the style of the publication and keep to the number of words requested. Nothing is more annoying for an editor if the article is well over the length specified and won’t fit into the space allotted for it. If that happens, then your copy will be cut, and that may defeat your objectives. Similarly, if you commission someone else in the organization to write the article, then be sure that the brief is followed, even if you have to exert some persuasion.

Don’t forget to include illustrations. Most editors will require photographs, drawings, graphs or tables to support the points you are making or just to catch the reader’s eye. Give the piece a title and put the author’s name – the by-line – underneath. Make sure the article has shape: a beginning, a middle and an end. And if you type the number of words at the end, the editor will be a friend for life. But above all, keep to the deadline!
Captions: how to handle them

Always provide captions for any photographs or illustrations accompanying news releases; these are used extensively in company annual reports and brochures. Care is essential in their preparation and handling: too often captions are left to the end, with the result that the caption lets down the illustration and the news story or article.

The important point about captions is that they lead the reader to the body copy. They provide an instant point of interest and will often turn a magazine ‘page flipper’ into a reader. Much thought should go into how a caption is written and presented, for if it misleads or contains errors, the communication can be irreparably spoilt.

PHOTO CAPTIONS WITH RELEASES

The caption to a photograph or illustration either accompanying a news release or sent separately as a caption story, is as important as the picture itself. If it fails to describe the person, product or
service, all the effort and cost involved can be wasted. It can turn into a public relations disaster waiting to happen: once the photograph with its caption has left your hands there is little you can do to put matters right if you have misnamed someone or misspelt their name.

Only when the picture is published do you realize that you have made a mistake – you go hot all over – but by then the damage is done. Although you may know who the people are in a picture, others may not, and will rely on you to tell them!

Caption content and style
Captions should be brief, certainly not exceeding 15 to 20 words, and reveal the content of the photo. Put a heading, typed double spaced, and give the name of the issuing organization, company or consultancy with date, contact name, address and telephone/fax numbers. Refer to the source organization, service or product.

If the photo shows a person or group of people, put job titles and names from left to right. When a well-known personality is featured, write the caption round the VIP, not someone else, even if you feel you ought to mention the chairman first! Photographic prints are expensive – so take care that the caption does justice to the story.

Captions for the press
Always use a stiff-backed envelope when sending out photographs or illustrations. Do not write on the back of prints as Biro or pencil marks can show through and make the picture useless for reproduction. Captions should be attached with strips of Sellotape. Never glue or paste them to the backs of photographs; just stick them on lightly so they protrude from the bottom of the print and can be read in conjunction with the picture.

Copyright issues
When you send out photographs to the press, always be aware of the copyright issue. News editors and picture desks will assume that photographs received from public relations people, especially when they accompany a release, will be free of copyright restrictions.
Photographs should be rubber-stamped on the back with a statement of the copyright position; ideally, similar wording should appear on the caption itself. Never issue a photograph or illustration unless you are sure who owns the copyright. (The owner of the copyright is the author or creator – members of the Institute of Public Relations can obtain advice on legal points such as this by logging-on to the ‘member-only’ area of IPR Web site (www.ipr.org.uk), which provides much useful information.

CAPTIONS IN PUBLICATIONS

Clear, concise captioning is the hallmark of a well-produced, stylish publication. In many cases, particularly with annual reports, shareholders get no further than the pictures. One way of getting the reader to take notice of the text is to have an arresting photograph with the caption leading on to a particular point.

Distinguishing captions from text

Set off captions from the text by using smaller type, different typeface, or by setting in italics or bold if the text is in plain or roman type. You can position captions in the margin, away from the bulk of the text. Sometimes it is possible to reverse out the caption on a photograph if there is a sufficiently dark area. There is a danger of the caption being unreadable if it is reversed out of a light toned part of the picture.

An effective way to make captions stand out from the text is to print them in a second colour, preferably using one of the colours chosen for corporate house style. But take care that the colour is a strong one: if it is a pastel shade then the wording will be lost on white paper! If you set two- or three-word headings as intros to captions then you give added visual impact.

Always describe the picture or drawing, unless it is purely for decoration. State essential details, but not what the eye can see for itself. If it is an action shot say what is happening. Even if you think it is obvious, it might not be so to the reader. It is infuriating, for instance, to see an interesting photograph featuring a new product and management team, and not know what it illustrates or who the people are. Don’t forget that a wrongly named person could mean a furious client, possibly a reprint, or even – horror of horrors – a libel action.
Draw-down quotes

The draw-down quote is a useful device for livening up a text-full page devoid of what is called ‘colour weight’ – ie with a total lack of light and shade provided by illustrations or headings. The editor takes a few words from a quote within the copy – usually a pithy or significant comment – and puts it in bold type positioned prominently on the page, perhaps between columns in the middle of the page, or at the top. This layout idea, which amounts to a caption or subheading to the text, also acts as a handy space-filler. But its prime use is to give sparkle to a drab page.

Lure the reader to the text

The caption should arrest attention and lure the reader to the text unless the photograph or illustration is there just to brighten up the page and not meant to tell a story in itself. Write crisply; you don’t want just a ‘label’ making a bland, boring statement.

The caption might be read and understood while the text may not: the reader may not get as far as that! Make sure it contains a verb, preferably in the present tense, and if possible some news value. Journalists often get stories from the captions in annual reports, and from house journals and brochures.

Captions for charts

The chart caption should describe the essential finding or purpose and lead the reader to the relevant part of the text. With graphs and tables ensure that legends and headings are clear and unambiguous. Make sure that graph axes are explained and show the appropriate units.

Captioning groups of photographs

When you have several photographs or illustrations to caption, arrange the captions together in a block and number them. If there are several photographs of people, it is convenient to have an outline line drawing showing people’s positions with a numbered key for identification.

Take time and trouble in the wording and presentation of captions. Increased readership and improved communication will inevitably result.
Good, consistent style is just as important for correspondence, forms of address, wording for invitations and correct use of courtesy titles, as it is for publications and other printed matter. Good style is good manners, and that means answering – or at least acknowledging – letters no later than two or three days following receipt, and returning telephone calls where possible the same day.

Presentation and layout are also key factors in getting your message across. Every letter, report, paper or printed invitation that goes out must reflect the style and corporate image of your organization. If it is not up to standard or specification, then your public relations effort could well be wasted. If there is no set house style, then now is the time to establish rules for everyone in the office to follow.

**SUGGESTED STYLE FOR CORRESPONDENCE**

Most firms and organizations have style rules for letters, envelopes
and other office stationery such as invoices, order forms, fax messages and internal memos. A properly addressed and signed-off letter is the first point. Here are some of the basics.

**Layout**

File reference and date should be ranged left and aligned with an element of the letterhead design. Do not put full stops, commas or other punctuation in addresses typed at the top of the letter. The following specimen layout style is commonplace:

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Mr John Smith
123 Any Road
Anytown
Kent AN5 1ZZ
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When addresses are set in a line, say in the body of a letter, then commas are used to separate the components as in Mr John Smith, 123 Any Road, Anytown, Kent AN5 1ZZ.

**Courtesy titles**

Titles at tops of letters and salutations are normally Mr./Mrs/Miss/Ms. When answering the telephone do not just say ‘Hello’ or even the modern but overused and insincere response ‘This is Mandy, how can I help you?’ Give just your surname or add your Christian name if you want. Do not give yourself a courtesy title and say ‘This is Mr Smith speaking.’

Despite some past objections to the use of Ms, there is little sign of its decline. It has the advantage of a simplified style, but there is a trend nowadays for all courtesy titles to be replaced by first name and surname only.

Men are mostly given the title Mr in correspondence, but Esquire, Esq for short, is almost dead. Banks, insurance companies, accountants and other professional bodies retain it for fear of upsetting clients. Once Esquire denoted social standing, but by the middle of the last century it ceased to possess any sense of rank. Nowadays, it is hardly ever seen in the communications business.

The modern styles of Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms are clean and uncluttered. But don’t be surprised if they disappear too.
Honours and qualifications

Where style calls for the inclusion of designations such as civil honours and qualifications, these should follow the established abbreviations, i.e., MBE, BA, BSc. No stops go between characters or after separate designations.

Dates

Separate the day of the week from the month, as recommended by Fowler’s: 1 January 2001, not the American style January 1, 2001. The comma needed to avoid collision with the year looks messy. The th/st/rd/nd style for dates has mostly been dropped in business correspondence and printwork, along with deep paragraph indents and punctuation in addresses and salutations. Nevertheless, the style persists, principally in the professions and where there is no PR person to give the right advice. Avoid nd/st/rd/th after the day numeral.

When referring to times of day, type these with no space between the figures and am/pm as in 9am, 9.30am. Do not put noughts after the figure: for instance 9.00am would look cluttered and pedantic. The signee’s name should be ranged left with the person’s title typed underneath when needed. Do not underline the name or title, or put either in capitals. Use a fountain pen to sign letters. If you do, it is a sign that you have taken the trouble to make your signature stylish and not just dashed off. Get into the habit of using a proper pen: keep your ballpoint pen or felt-tip for memos and note-taking.

Copies

Where copies of the letter are sent outside the organization, the addressee’s name should appear beneath the signature, ranged left as in:

Copy to: Mr John Smith, XYZ Company.

Details on people receiving blind copies, where the name(s) is not disclosed to the addressee, should ideally appear in a different position. Attach a compliment slip to the copy, with a note for that personal touch.
Letterheads

These should be printed in the same typeface, colour and style as all other in-house stationery. Postal address, telephone, facsimile and e-mail address and, if appropriate, the World Wide Web site address should all be shown in a prominent position. Public relations department headings should carry, where appropriate, out-of-hours telephone numbers, although many firms will prefer to show this information separately rather than have it printed with the heading.

OTHER STATIONERY

Style for invoices, statements, order forms, fax messages, envelopes and other printed stationery should all follow the house style with logo (if there is one), and typefaces and colour identical to those used for letterheads. Infinite variations in size are possible with computer-controlled typesetting systems. Your printer and designer will advise on how these can be employed to the best advantage from both a design and cost point of view.

STYLE FOR E-MAILS

Informality is the key to successful e-mailing. But it can be taken too far and messages written with poor punctuation and ghastly grammar can be forwarded to a client or your boss – with disastrous results. Stick to the usual rules but relax the style a little. Leave the CU4lunch message to friends and family. Chapter 16 has more on this subject.

HAVE CLEAR, CLEAN LAYOUT

If the layout of reports and documents has been well designed, then the message and information contained is more likely to be communicated and acted upon. The basic requirement for an effective layout is a legible typeface, following house style, and preferably the same as the one used for correspondence. If the typeface for correspondence is used for all stationery, and a uniform style of
headings and subheadings is adopted, then all paperwork is immediately identified with the organization. If it can follow the style for printwork as well, so much the better.

A distinctive ‘look’ to your correspondence and reports will be achieved if basic style is followed: width of margins, number of words per page, page size, uniform space between the lines (leading), type and weight of paper. Put a little extra space between paragraphs, but do not try to squeeze too many lines into one page. Do not use italics or bold type within the body copy in an attempt to give added emphasis.

**WRITING A PRÉCIS**

A systematic approach is needed. To produce a précis, first read the report or article through to see what it is all about. Set down the important points with a target length, so you will not give too much or too little information. (Don’t mark the actual document – you might want to make a photocopy and anyway the owner will not thank you for defacing it.) Do a rough draft, preferably on your PC, incorporating the main facts. Compare it with the original and fill in the gaps.

Check to make sure you haven’t exceeded your target wordage. Aim for between a quarter and a third of the length of the original. Read through the draft carefully to see that the matter flows freely and is grammatically correct. Check for any departures from house style.

If you include quotations, they should be short. Quotes should be in reported speech, using the past tense in the third person: ‘The committee/he agreed to do such and such’ or the future past ‘the committee/he would do…’. Don’t use the present (is/are) or simple future (will/shall) tenses. Treat quotes in the same way as journalists write reported speech. Give it a heading, with your initials and date at the end.

**WRITING REPORTS AND MINUTES**

A report can run from a short memo to any number of closely typed pages in a bound volume, perhaps an annual or interim
report to shareholders. Minutes, too, vary in length and style, from a contact report to notes of a meeting.

**Essentials of a report**

A report must contain the important facts and, ideally, end with a conclusion and recommendations. Open with a title page, moving on to a list of contents, including illustrations or charts, acknowledgements and a short abstract. The body of the report should give the key points from research or investigations, quotations where appropriate and again be written in the third person. Conclude with appendices, if any.

Keep to significant points and comments; otherwise the reader will skip the detail and jump to the conclusions and recommendations. That is what journalists do: only if there is something that appears to be particularly interesting or might need additional information will they go back to the full text.

Start with a draft, then flesh it out with the detail, but only that which is strictly essential to the purpose and objective of the report. Make sure that there is a title and that the author(s) is/are shown on the cover and/or title page. Put the body of the text into numbered sections. Produce the report on a word processor or PC and use bold type for headings.

**Restrict minutes to decisions**

Minutes should be written and circulated within a week of the meeting, earlier if possible. They should be concise and restricted to decisions unless there is good reason to go into details. They should not be long dialogues of who said what. Use reported speech in the third person, and past and future past tenses. For example, in reporting a committee decision, you would write ‘It was agreed that the company would pay a dividend’ and not ‘It is agreed that the company will pay a dividend’.

Set down the items in the order of the agenda. Distinguish between superior and inferior headings by underlining or using capitals, or by using bold or larger type sizes. Restrict italics to points of emphasis, though it is better to do without them if you can. Include an ‘Action’ column as a reminder for those who have agreed to do something.

Put the list of attendees, date of meeting and date of issue at the
top and finish with date of next meeting. And get the chairman trained in returning your draft promptly. If you fail to achieve a quorum, just produce notes of the meeting, making it clear that it was not quorate. These notes can subsequently be taken as minutes.

**FORMS OF ADDRESS**

Public relations people often have to decide how to begin and end a letter to royalty, and how to address government ministers, peers, MPs and civic dignitaries. Bad form – or at least insensitivity to tradition – can mean that your invitation to give a keynote speech or perform an opening ceremony will lead to a frosty reply. Care in addressing everyone with whom you are in contact, not just VIPs, is essential.

The British system of titles, forms of address and precedence is one of the most complicated in the western world. Nevertheless, most – if not all – answers are to be found in *Debrett’s Correct Form*, which covers every conceivable situation in correspondence and in sending invitations to social and business functions. A few examples may be helpful to the reader, but for full guidance refer to *Debrett’s*.

**Writing to firms**

When writing to firms, avoid ‘Dear Sir/Madam’. When you do not have a name – it is usually easy to find it in telephone or trade directories – address your letter to the position, ie to the chairman, managing director or secretary. When writing to the press, write Dear Editor if you do not know his or her name. But it is always worth taking the trouble to write personally if you can, although a name on the envelope and letter will seldom ensure a reply or even an acceptance!

**Royalty**

When writing to the Sovereign, all communications should be addressed to The Private Secretary to The Queen, to the office holder rather than by name, unless you know the person. For other members of the Royal Family, write to the Equerry, Private Secretary or Lady in Waiting as appropriate, the letter beginning
Dear Sir or Dear Madam, again to the holder of the office rather than by name. In direct communications, start with Dear Sir or Dear Madam, with ‘Your Royal Highness’ substituted for ‘you’ and ‘Your Royal Highness’s for ‘your’ in the body of the letter.

**Peerage**

When writing to the peerage, put (for example) ‘My Lord Duke’ in the formal form and ‘Dear Duke’ in the informal, or the ‘Duke of —’ if the acquaintanceship is slight. Verbal address is ‘Your Grace’ (formal), ‘Duke’ (social). Special styles are accorded to the wives and children of peers.

**Baronets**

With baronets, letters begin ‘Dear Sir John’ (for example) with Bt added on the envelope. A similar style applies for knighthoods where the title is held for life, but the surname should be added if you do not know the person well. Should you meet a baronet or knight in the street or at a function, he should be addressed as Sir John, never ‘Sir’ on its own. The wife of a baronet or knight is known as ‘Lady’ followed by the surname.

**Government ministers**

Ministers of cabinet rank and some other junior ministers are members of the Privy Council and have the prefix The Rt Hon before their names, with the letters PC after all honours and decorations awarded by the Crown. Privy Counsellors (the preferred spelling) are drawn from many other areas of public life, so watch out! Addressing letters to Government ministers is straightforward: Dear Sir (or Madam) for the formal style, Mrs or Miss for the informal with the option of Dear Minister when writing by his/her appointment.

**Members of Parliament**

Unless MPs are Privy Counsellors, they have just MP after their name plus any civil or military honours. They are addressed Mr/Mrs/Miss in the usual way. Members of the House of Commons do not have MP after their name once they lose their
Civic dignitaries

There are widely differing styles for civic dignitaries, depending on the particular town or city. The Lord Mayors of London and York are unique in that they are styled ‘The Right Honourable’ while the remainder are generally titled ‘The Right Worshipful’. They are addressed at the beginning of a letter ‘Mr Lord Mayor’ and the envelope should bear the wording ‘The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of —’. Mayors of cities and towns are addressed ‘Mr Mayor’ and the envelope should carry the words ‘The Right Worshipful the Mayor of (City of—/(Royal Borough of)’ or ‘The Worshipful the Mayor of —’. Letters should be signed off ‘Yours faithfully’ (or ‘Yours sincerely’ if a social occasion).

Debrett’s should be consulted for checking titles of church dignitaries, officers in the armed forces, ambassadors, and for deciding precedence for table plans and guest lists.

INVITATIONS TO FUNCTIONS

Printed invitation cards should be sent for most functions, although in many cases – say for press conferences and for informal or social events – a well presented letter will suffice. Gold-edged cards are best and use of a script typeface is particularly suitable for formal occasions. The card must state the name (or office) of the person making the invitation, the nature of the function, where it will be held, the date and time and the dress. It should also state if decorations should be worn. The card must provide enough space for the name of the invitee, and an RSVP name and address, plus telephone number if appropriate. If possible, provide a prepaid reply card. The invitee’s name should be handwritten in black ink.
**REPLIES TO INVITATIONS**

Replies should be sent out on the organization’s usual printed letterheads and ideally be written in the formal style, stating either acceptance of the invitation or regret at being unable to accept. State the reason for non-acceptance, examples being ‘owing to a previous engagement/absence abroad/out of town that day’. Whether accepting or declining, the name(s) of the invitee(s) should be given, together with details of the function. If replying by telephone, send a written follow-up.

**ACKNOWLEDGING CORRESPONDENCE**

Good style means good manners. And good manners is good PR. Nothing is worse than not replying to a letter. It is usually possible to send a reply within a day or two. If you are too busy to post a typed letter, then a handwritten one will do just as well, even if you have to handwrite the envelope yourself.

An acknowledgement card is also helpful and should be sent as a matter of routine for all correspondence where a detailed and immediate response is not possible. This might simply state ‘(name of person of company/organization) thanks you for your communication of (date) and is receiving attention’. It takes only a minute or two of your time to get off a reply of some sort: a telephone call or faxed note will often do the trick.

Replying to e-mails promptly is a courtesy not to be forgotten. It is not so important in inter-office memos, but essential for other messages – particularly those to clients and customers, if only a simple OK. Ensure that someone monitors your mailbox regularly for outstanding correspondence.

**SETTING OUT DOCUMENTS**

The layout for reports, documents, agendas and minutes calls for a consistent and well-ordered style. A printed heading should give the name, address and telephone/fax numbers of the organization on all documents. Date and reference numbers to aid identification should be included. Insert extra space between items and leave
generous margins (at least 25 mm on the right-hand margin, more on the left). Call in a professional designer to give you a template for computer and word processor operators to follow. That way everybody will produce documents to a consistent style, an essential requirement for developing a recognizable corporate image.

**WRITING A CV**

Style for presentation of a curriculum vitae (CV) is important and could affect an applicant’s chances of securing employment. It should be clear and concise, consistent in style, accurate without spelling errors or wrong punctuation, use plain English and should concentrate on skills and achievements. A CV must be typewritten or word-processed on two sheets of plain white A4 paper, with plenty of space so that the words and headings are not jammed up tight. Always address the CV to a named person, never Dear Sir or Dear Madam. It only takes a minute or two to find the right name. Do not use coloured paper or ink and pay particular attention to the way it is laid out. It could mean all the difference to getting the job or not.

A CV should provide the following information: name, address, date of birth, marital status, nationality, education and qualifications, career history and the names of two referees.

There are numerous books on preparing a CV, *The Jobsearch Manual* by Linda Apsey being particularly suitable for younger people starting out on their careers. *Super Jobsearch* by Peter K Studner is appropriate for those seeking management positions. Both are published by Management Books 2000.

There is a new method, the Talking-CV!, of putting your personal details in text, voice and picture on a CD ROM which can then be sent to potential employers and headhunters, and also uploaded to the Internet. See Chapter 16.
Appropriate choice of words is of paramount importance for imparting the sense and tone of any message. But for that message to be properly understood, and for it to be clear and unambiguous, not only must spellings be correct but the writer must avoid slang in formal texts, guard against overusing fashionable but sloppy phrases, and know whether words are hyphenated or not, or spelt as one word. This chapter examines some of these traps which can lead to mistakes or even howlers which make your hair stand on end when you see them in print.

**SPELLING POINTS**

Difficulty often arises with *adviser* or *adviser*: the preferred spelling is *-er*; *-or* is pretentious, even old-fashioned. A useful rule is that unless preceded by a *‘t’* or *‘ss’* verb (or less frequently noun) endings are usually *-er*. In order to avoid a spelling hiccup (not *hiccough* nowadays) you have to be on guard for mistakes like *prac-
tioners – or literals and typos as printers like to call them. There is no ‘d’ in allege, it is contractual, not -ural, flotation not floatation, hurrah/hurray not hoorah/ay unless you are talking about a Hooray Henry; idiosyncrasy not -acy; minuscule not -iscule; nerve racking, not -wracking. It is a gentlemen’s agreement, not -man’s.

Confusion often occurs between passed and past. The past tense and past participle of the verb to pass is passed as in it passed from you to me, whereas past as an adjective describes things or events that have occurred (past times); it can also be a preposition as in first past the post and a noun (memories of the past).

For words of more than one syllable ending in -ed or -ing and with the stress on the last syllable, the final consonant is doubled as in permit/permitted. But where the last syllable is unstressed, as in target and focus, the final consonant is not doubled: thus any argument on how to spell focused/focusing and targeted/targeting is instantly resolved. In the same category go other favourite words in the PR vocabulary such as benefited/ing, budgeted/ing. Another way of telling whether you are right or wrong is to pronounce such words with a stressed double final consonant and so get focussed and targetted. Or say to yourself marketing, with a double ‘t’ and the emphasis on the second syllable; it is obviously wrong and you will instantly recall the rule. (Get into the habit of looking out for a double ‘s’ or ‘t’ in these words – you won’t have to wait long!)

With suffixes of words ending in a single ‘l’, the last consonant is usually doubled whether or not the final syllable is stressed as in labelled/travelled, but not appealed/paralleled.

Spellings of similar sounding or pairs of words frequently cause trouble. Take these examples: canvas (to cover with) but canvass (solicit votes); dependant (relative) but dependent (upon). How many times have you seen these words misused and misspelt? Then there is the draughtsman (of a specification) but someone who drafts a document, the official who makes a formal inquiry, but a person who questions and makes an enquiry. Further has quite a different meaning from farther: the former suggests something additional to say or do, the latter increased distance.

Install becomes installation but instalment (sometimes with a double ‘t’), all three having a totally different meaning to instil. A common mistake is to mix up licence (noun) with license (verb): how many times do you want to tell a shopkeeper to correct licenced to licensed? (In America, it is the other way round and ‘practice’ is both noun and verb.)
How often have you asked someone whether the first ‘e’ should be dropped in *judgement*? The rule here is that when a suffix beginning with a consonant (-*ful*, -*ling*, -*ly*, -*ment*, -*ness*, -*some*) is added to a word with a silent ‘e’, the -e is retained – but not always (exceptions include *argument*, *fledgling*). *Judgement* usually loses the first ‘e’ in legal works. In American spelling, the ‘e’ is dropped before a suffix beginning with a consonant as in *abridgment*, *judgment*. Another rule worth noting is when adding *in-* and *un-* to the beginning of a word; there is only one ‘n’ unless the word itself begins with an ‘n’ as in *inseparable*, *unending*, *innumerable*, *unnecessary*.

Other confusing spellings are *principle* (basis of reasoning) and *principal* (main); *stationary* (still) and *stationery* (paper stocks) – a way to remember this is ‘e’ for envelope. Note that the start of the last syllable in *supersede* and *consensus* is often misspelt with a ‘c’. Keep a *colander* for straining and a *calendar* for giving the date; reserve *program* and *disk* for computer terminology, and resist the temptation to put an ‘e’ in *whisky* (whiskey is for the American and Irish, but never Scotch whisky – the Scots wouldn’t hear of it!).

More examples are in Appendix 2.

**BE CAREFUL WITH FOREIGN WORDS**

Take special care with foreign words. They are easily absorbed into English, but can just as easily be wrongly spelt. Even in newspapers we see fruits *du* mer instead of *de*, *hors d’oeuvres* (not plural) for *hors d’oeuvre*, crime *passional* for crime *passionnel* and *bête noir* for *bête noire*. Keep foreign dictionaries handy, particularly those covering English–French and English–German and vice versa for checking phrases like *couleur locale*, since computer spellchecks are not much help for other languages.

Errors can occur simply because you have seen the same words wrongly spelt before. It is easy to think you have got it right, but it’s easy to miss, for example, the first u in *de rigueur*. Familiarity breeds contempt.

While occasional foreign words can liven dull copy, keep them out of releases. When used in print, the reader will quickly tire of them, particularly if the expressions are unfamiliar. Keep to Anglicized words, otherwise you might be seen as showing off. *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* will confirm
spellings of commonly used foreign words and phrases, and will show, by italics, those that are not yet accepted in everyday English.

**USE YOUR DICTIONARY**

It is difficult to remember different spellings for similar-sounding words, but being aware of the similarities and possible spelling errors encourages the writer to reach for the dictionary.

Before leaving the subject of spellings, one sure tip is always remember to use the computer’s spellcheck for everything – releases, articles, reports and letters; not only will it pick up errors that might otherwise not be noticed, it will often provide a word count by recording the number of questionable words. This is extremely useful information for both the writer and editor, saving the tiresome task of counting up copy word by word to estimate the length when set in type. More examples are in Appendix 2.

**-ISE OR -IZE VERB ENDINGS**

Both spellings are common in the UK, while the -ize ending is usual in North America. There are some words which must always end with -ise. Words which must always end with -ise include advertise, appraise, apprise, arise, chastise, comprise, disguise, excise, exercise, franchise, improvise, incise, merchandise, premise, promise, praise, raise, supervise, televise. Few style gurus will object to -ise throughout, although the use of capsize/sterilize/familiarize will seldom be criticized.

In the UK until a few years ago -ize endings were commonly seen in *The Times* and elsewhere, but as both the Oxford University Press and the Cambridge University Press switched to -ise, so newspapers tended to follow suit and thus another style trend was born. Even so, -ize appears to be as firmly embedded in America as ever. However much you may hate nouns becoming verbs, you have to realize that services are privatized, but most of us will object to being hospitalized or having plans prioritized.
ONE WORD OR TWO?

Many words once happily hyphenated, or some two-word phrases, soon found themselves living together, joined without remorse. Thus we have seen railwayman/paybed/turnout enter everyday usage as examples of lost hyphenation. Many still persist in using alright (‘Gross, coarse, crass and to be avoided’, says Kingsley Amis in The King’s English) instead of the preferred all right.

The American tendency to write underway as one word has few followers here. But who is to say that it is no different from anyway. Then there is the frequent confusion between forever (perpetually) and for ever (for always), as in ‘He is forever complaining’ against ‘He will be in the same firm for ever.’ Amis again: ‘I’m forever blowing bubbles to be outlawed altogether.’ But few will condone the modern trend for anymore or anytime which cry out for their original two-word forms.

Many hyphenated words eventually end up as one for the simple reason that the style is modern and favoured by the popular press. We are used to them and no longer worry whether they are hyphenated or not. However, it is advisable to check with the usual reference sources such as the Oxford English Dictionary for recommended style for individual word-sets.

PUZZLES AND POSERS

When you accede to something you give assent to an opinion or policy; do not use it to mean grant, allow, agree. Rather than write accordingly, put so or therefore; adverbs like hopefully, admittedly, happily are usually unnecessary. It is better to write you plan or intend to do something than hope to do it, which suggests doubt that it will ever be done. Rather than adjust something, change it; you appraise it when you judge its value, not apprise which means inform.

Among is often confused with between. When writing about more than two things or people, among is usually needed. But when considered individually, between is preferred. Contrast ‘food was shared among six people’ with ‘cordial relations between the UK, France and Germany’.
Avoid hackneyed words like *factor* which can usually be omitted without loss of sense. You can dispense with it easily, for example, ‘in an important factor in the company’s success’ by recasting and writing simply ‘important in the company’s success’. *Feature* (as a noun) is another word that adds nothing and can easily be dropped. *Meaningful* has lost all meaning and is another candidate for excision. Also cut out *one of the most*, *respective/respectively*, *currently*, *the foreseeable future*, *the fact is*… and other words that contribute little except waffle.

Don’t be old fashioned and write *amongst* and *whilst* when *among* and *while* will do just as well. You should *try to* do something, not *try and* do it. Instead of writing *practically* all the time put *almost*, *nearly*, or *all but*. The world is populated by *people*, not *persons*; but that is not to say that there is no place for *person*. The noun *person* is normally only used in the singular as in ‘he was a person of character’. Avoid using *persons* when *people* would be more appropriate.

Be careful not to add a qualifier to ungradable words like *unique* or *perfect*. You cannot have degrees of uniqueness or perfection: either something is unique or perfect or it is not. Other words like this are *peculiar*, *sole*, *single*, *spontaneous*.

Watch out for *get/got*. While there is nothing actually wrong with them, they appear informal and should be avoided. Use *obtain* or *possess* instead, or consider rewriting. Also take care with *to lay*, *to lie*: the verb *to lay* takes an object while *to lie* does not (I *lay* my body on the floor as I *lie* resting). But you never have a *lay down* which makes a noun of it!

*Like* is another pitfall. Used parenthetically, to qualify a following or preceding statement, as in ‘like I was going to tell you something’ is a vulgarism of the first order, Fowler says. But resistance to its use as a conjunction and as a substitute for *as if* or *as though* is crumbling.

Keep clear of *nice*. Fowler says: ‘It should be confined in print to dialogue… ladies have charmed it out of all its individuality and converted it into a mere diffuser of vague and mild agreeableness.’ It is better to forget *nice* and choose a synonym for it, unless you are in America and use the catchphrase ‘Have a nice day.’

Arguments abound on whether to write (or say) *compared to* or *compared with*. The first is to liken one thing to another as in ‘I prefer apples compared to,’ while the second points to differences or resemblances between two things as in ‘comparing the
speaker’s notes with what has been written’. Use different from in writing, keep different to for speech.

Is it compared to or with? Mostly interchangeable, but there’s a subtle difference: when likening one thing to another and to draw attention to similarities between them use to but when discussing points of dissimilarity, or making a direct comparison, write with. Another poser is the placing of ‘only’ in a sentence. Put it as close as possible to the word or words it qualifies: when it strays too far away, it can be obscure or remove the element of exclusivity. If, for example, you say you had only two drinks, that is better than saying you only had two drinks.

Avoid imprecisions such as lots of, many or things when figures or definitions can be given. Keep an for words beginning with a silent ‘h’ (an heir, an honour, an honorarium); otherwise it is a hotel, a harbour, a hero, a hope. Introduce a list of items with such as or for example, not etc.

Note that anybody and anyone are singular (anybody is able to visit the museum), as are every, everybody, everyone (every dentist has information on care of teeth; everybody is able to discuss his or her problems with a lawyer). Each is singular (each contributor should check his or her paper), and so is nobody or no one (no one is certain).

**VOGUE WORDS AND PHRASES**

Numerous words are not only overused or become clichés but suggest the writer has not bothered to think of anything better. Top of the list must be or whatever when it means in effect ‘including many other things’. Don’t say it and certainly never write it.

Then there are the clichés of having said that, at the end of the day, in-depth, ongoing and ongoing situation, geared to, in terms of, I’ll get back to you, name of the game, no problem, take on board, track record; and words like feedback, concept, consensus, lifestyle, viable, syndrome, validate, interface, scenario. Some, if not all, of these words are current coinage in the communications business and it is virtually impossible to avoid them. Try to find synonyms.
GETTING IN THE MOOD

If you fail to distinguish between auxiliary (modal) verbs and between relative pronouns, verbal inelegances and even mistakes arise. While sometimes interchangeable without loss of sense, look out for pitfalls. Here are a few examples.

Modal verbs shall/will, should/could, can/could, may/might each possess different shades of meaning, expressed as moods or modes of action. Also within this category are must and ought. Unlike ordinary verbs, modals do not have -s or -ed added in present and past tenses; there can be no shalls, mighting or oughted apart from being willed to do something.

The general rule is that shall and should go with first person singular and plural; will and would the others. Thus, should accompanies I and we; and would goes with he, she, it and they. Both express simple future tense; will showing intention or determination, especially a promise to do something. You are more likely to be taken seriously if you say ‘I will be in the office on Sunday.’ ‘Shall be’ somewhat dilutes the intention.

Care is needed in choosing should or would for there is a subtle but important difference between them. Should has moral force behind it, whereas would acquires mild conditionality. Should expresses three future possibilities: conditional, probable, and a less likely outcome as in, respectively, ‘I should be grateful if you would answer my letter’; ‘she should avoid the angry client’; ‘should you see him, remind him about the meeting.’ Could, like should/would, indicates a conditional or future possibility, while could/can, used interrogatively, suggests seeking permission.

Difficulty often occurs in using may/might. Permission is expressed through may as in ‘may I’, but both imply simple possibility in ‘the client may/might come’ and are indistinguishable. In some contexts might hints at uncertainty and suggests less optimism than may as in ‘they might use the release’ against ‘they may be able to edit it’. Thus, may/might are often interchangeable where the truth of an event is unknown, but if there is no longer uncertainty, use might.

James Aitchison in his Guide to Written English neatly expresses ought and must as ‘duty, obligation and necessity’; ought, he observes, suggests likelihood of fulfilment, while must indicates strict or absolute necessity.

Another trap can arise in writing which and that. These pronouns
are normally used with non-human nouns, otherwise write who or whom. While which/that can often be interchanged or even omitted without loss of sense, distinctions exist, particularly when sub-clauses beginning which are enclosed in commas. It is rare to punctuate that clauses in the same way. That defines, which informs.

It is a sound rule (says Sir Ernest Gowers in The Complete Plain Words) that that should be dispensed with whenever this can be done ‘without loss of clarity or dignity’. Consult The Oxford Guide to English Usage or Fowler for examples of current which/that usage.

**GENTEELISMS**

Substitution of a normal, natural word for another that is considered by some as less familiar, less vulgar, less improper or less apt is defined by Fowler as a genteelism. For instance, assist for help, ale for beer, endeavour for try, odour for smell are all genteelisms, along with ladies for women and gentlemen for men. A word that is simple and unpretentious is to be preferred to one that has a high-sounding, euphemistic ring to it. Words that were once listed as genteelisms (chiropodist for corn-cutter for example) have long since gained acceptance for everyday usage, and are no longer indicators of social class.

Here is a short but easily extendible list of other genteelisms for you to be aware of and preferably avoid: euphemisms such as conceal for hide, corpulent for fat, ere for before, demise or passed away for died, dentures for false teeth, donation for gift, lounge for sitting-room, perspire for sweat, retire for go to bed, reside at for live at, sufficient for enough, take umbrage for take offence, toilet for lavatory. And so on.

**KEEP CLEAR OF SLANG**

Unless part of a direct quotation, say in a speech delivered at an event other than at an AGM, avoid slang words in formal writing. But you need to appreciate that today’s slang is tomorrow’s idiom. Slang words for ‘publicize’, drawn from the Wordsworth Thesaurus of Slang, include the following: promote, hype, plug, push, pitch, splash, spot, boost, build up, puff, ballyhoo, beat the drum for, tub-thump,
hard/soft sell. If you are a publicity seeker, you are a hot dogger, publicity hound, showoff. Slang for ‘publicity’ includes hoopla, flack, flackery, big noise, ink, get ink.

While state of the art and cutting edge began as slang, these phrases have now found a place in the everyday language of communicators. Doubtless, many other spoken slang words will eventually find a final resting place in formal writing.

DON’T FORGET THE IMPRINT

My collection of annual and interim reports from major companies includes 20 or so that do not give the printer’s name and location – in other words their imprint. Failure to include it could mean a hefty fine: under the Printer’s Imprint Act of 1961, the penalty is now up to £200 for every copy printed. Just try multiplying that with the print run and see what you get!

Although prosecutions are rare as proceedings can only be taken with the approval, and in the name of, the Attorney General or Solicitor General, or in Scotland the Law Advocate, within three calendar months after printing, its main purpose is to ensure that the person responsible for publication can be traced easily. There are exemptions for specific items such as business cards, price lists, catalogues and advertisements for goods and property for sale.

Election posters and leaflets must bear the address of the printer and publisher. Anyone contravening these provisions is liable on conviction to a maximum fine of £2,000.

Further information is available from the British Printing Industries Federation (020 7915 8300).

TOP 10 TIPS FOR WRITERS

1. **Brevity.** Restrict sentences to 25 to 30 words, three per paragraph maximum.
2. **Repetition.** Never repeat a word in a single passage. Look for synonyms.
3. **Clichés.** Kill stale, overused words and phrases. Consult a thesaurus.
4. **Jargon.** Cut out mumbo-jumbo. Will the reader understand?

5. **Facts, Facts.** Give facts, not waffle or comment, unless it’s a quote.

6. **Qualifiers.** Write with verbs and nouns, not adjectives and adverbs.

7. **Accuracy.** Ensure the accuracy of everything. Watch for non sequiturs.

8. **Punctuation.** The full stop is your best friend. Use it liberally.

9. **Readability.** Make sure your copy is easy to read; does it look boring?

10. **Consistency.** Keep style consistent throughout.
The way words are spoken is just as important as the way they are written. Well enunciated speech, pronounced according to established guidelines, can help platform performance, aid communication between an organization and its audience and make a significant contribution to the public relations effort.

Corporate image is not just the logo and visual impact of literature – the typeface, colours and house style. Much also depends on word of mouth and the mental picture of the speaker that is built up by tone of voice. And that picture is the one which can make all the difference between success and failure at a client presentation, a shareholders’ meeting, a conference speech, or even a job interview.

No one wants to hear slipshod, careless speech like ‘See yer layer’, dropped or wrongly stressed vowels and syllables, missed consonants, a high-speed mumbo-jumbo of words shortened to the extent that they become almost unintelligible. Here are some
basic points of pronunciation and some verbal mishaps that are so easily made, but seldom corrected.

**RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION**

Among the many varieties of English, Received Pronunciation (RP) is the standard most dictionaries follow. This is said to be ‘the least regional being originally that used by educated speakers in Southern England’ (OED), and *The Oxford Guide to English Usage* takes it as ‘the neutral national standard, just as it is in its use in broadcasting or in the teaching of English as a foreign language’. The new edition of *Fowler’s Modern English Usage* makes specific recommendations based on RP and the pronunciations given are largely those of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary (COD)*. It is from these, and other sources such as the BBC guide *The Spoken Word*, that examples have been taken for pronunciation where uncertainty exists.

It is useful to differentiate between pronunciation and accent. As Kingsley Amis points out in *The King’s English*, ‘everyone’s accent [his italics] is a general thing that depends roughly on a speaker’s place of birth, upbringing, education and subsequent environment whereas pronunciation is a question of how individual words are spoken’. It can thus be deduced that pronunciation of a given word can be considered ‘correct’ while another may be ‘incorrect’. RP provides a useful but limited yardstick by which pronunciation may be judged correct or not.

One of the most argued points is the placing of stress. If you know where it falls, the pronunciation of vowels can be determined. Look for the stress accent ´ (like the French acute) after the stressed syllable or vowel sound which is shown in almost every word in the COD and in most popular dictionaries, even the well-thumbed pocket editions to be found in most office drawers. The stressed syllable (or vowel) is italicized in the following examples.

RP speakers will put the stress first in *adult, applicable, controversy, communal, brochure, integral, formidable, kilometre, mischievous, patent (pay-tent), preferable, primarily, reputable, temporarily;* but second in *banal, contribute, demonstratable, dispute, distribute, research, transferable,* *Interesting loses the second syllable to become intr’sting, comparable to compr’ble.* Stress on the third
syllable occurs with apparatus (as in hate), composite (as in opposite), internecine (as in knee).

Make sure there is not an intrusive ‘r’ in drawing room (not drawing), an idea of (not idea-r-of). Avoid the American habit of stressing -ar in necessarily (not necessarily) and temporarily (not temporarily). Remember that cog in recognize and don’t let it become recernize, the short ‘i’ in privacy and don’t it become eye, and that the final ‘t’ is silent is restaurant. Sound the ‘u’ in popular, don’t say pop’lar.

While ‘h’ is silent in hour, it is aspirated in hotel and so therefore takes the ‘a’ indefinite article. While it is wrong to use ‘n’ for ‘ng’ in length/strength and so get length/strength, the sound lenkth/strenkth is acceptable.

A long ‘o’ goes before ‘ll’ in poll (vote) and before ‘lt’ in revolt, but there is a short ‘o’ in resolve/dissolve/solve/golf as in doll. Either as in eye or in seize – both are acceptable (the Queen is said to prefer eye). Envelope starts -en as in end (-on is disliked by RP speakers). Data has a long first ‘a’.

In formal speech, say before an audience, avoid dropping the ‘r’ if it is closely followed by another ‘r’ as in deteriorate to get deteriorate: similarly, February can slip to February, temporary to temparry (but temp’rary OK), honorary to honary (hon’rary is preferred), itinerary to itinery, library to libr’y, probably to prob’ly. Avoid dropping the fourth syllable in particularly to get particuly but the elision of the middle syllables of adjectives of four syllables ending in -ary makes the words easier to pronounce as in milit’ry, necess’ry.

Watch out for syllable elisions in chocolate, police, mathematics to get the sloppy choc’lte, p’lice, math’matics. Don’t let fifth become fith, months drop to ‘munce’, camera to ‘camra’; make lure rhyme with pure not ‘poor’. Articulate railway: don’t let it become ‘ro-way’. Don’t let conflicts sound like ‘conflix’. And don’t lose the ‘e’ in create and let it sound like crate. Take care with the ‘u’ sound in some words: it should be uh in uncle, multi, adult not owcle, mowlti, adowlt.

GET THE WORDS RIGHT TOO

In speech, the rules that apply in written work can be eased a little, otherwise you could sound stilted and unnatural. Where there are
uncertainties, like ending sentences with prepositions and split infinitives, forget about offending anyone. Don’t worry too much about whether it is different from or to; but where only goes in a sentence can make a big difference to the meaning.

Never make grammatical errors like there’s two cars in the garage, every one of the delegates were present, the object of her articles are to inform, between you and I and so on, or colloquialisms like he was sat there. Follow the advice in earlier pages on style and construction. If you do that, you won’t be far wrong when you are on your feet.

For more about speechwriting and delivery, see Chapter 15.

When speaking quickly, pronouns and auxiliary verbs easily disappear. Avoid gonna/wanna, kinda, doncher (don’t you), innit, wannit (isn’t it/wasn’t it), ‘spec/spose’ (I expect/suppose). Careful speakers will retain the ‘t’ in facts, acts, ducts, pacts; otherwise the listener hears fax/axe/ducks/packs. But it is silent in often as in soften.

American pronunciation differs markedly from the British. Some examples from The Oxford Guide to English Usage: the ‘r’ is sounded by American speakers wherever it is written, after vowels finally and before consonants, as well as before vowels, like burn, car, form. The sound of you (as in u, ew spellings) after s, t, d, n, is replaced by the sound of oo as in resume (resoom), Tuesday (Toosday), due (doo), new (noo).

Americans pronounce asthma (ass-ma in RP) as az-ma; detour (dee-tour not day-tour in RP) as de-tour; gala (a as in calm in RP) as gale. They will say trowma as in cow whereas RP speakers will say trauma (au as in cause).

Some forms of pronunciation are to be especially avoided. Among these are Arctic (do not drop the first ‘c’); et cetera (not eksetera); don’t let garage (with stress on the first syllable) sound like garridge; do not drop the first ‘n’ in government or the whole second syllable; do not say pee for pence in formal speech; avoid making people sound like peeple; ensure plastic rhymes with fantastic; sovereignty is pronounced sov’renty, not sounding like sov-rain-ty; a suit is now pronounced with an -oo sound although the you sound is still frequently heard. Secretary is pronounced sek-re-try not sek-e-terry or even worse sukk-a-terry. January should sound like Jan-yoor-y, not Jan-yoo-ery (except in America). You take your pet to the vet-er-in-ary practice, not vet’nary. You buy jewel’rey not jool-ler-y. You look at a pic-ture not a pitcher and
you make a *fort*-une, not a *forchoon*. And it is all a matter of 
pronunci*ation*, not pronunci*ation*!

There are probably more regional forms of speech in the United 
Kingdom than anywhere else in the world, and it is in no sense 
suggested here that everyone should follow RP; adjustments have 
to be made as circumstances demand in various parts of the 
country. Just as much depends on *how* you say something as *what* 
you say. RP provides a useful guide.
Sooner or later everyone has to speak in public. PR practitioners are no exception: as organizers, they soon find themselves on stage; even the youngest recruits will be presenting to clients and customers before they know it. And there is always the staff meeting with a room-full of blank faces waiting for that important announcement, perhaps the seminar, the conference or after-dinner speech.

The ability to express yourself clearly with confidence and style is a key business skill. And the better you are, the more likely you are to land a better job or even reach the conference circuit, with attendant financial rewards.

Public speakers are made, not born. Even fast talkers with the ‘gift of the gab’ are not necessarily going to be good on their feet. If you can develop the skills of presentation, use body language effectively and deliver with force and aplomb, you are on the way to becoming a star on stage.

We have all suffered from after-dinner speakers too nervous to say anything but platitudes, lecturers fidgeting and waving their hands around like a windmill, technical boffins reading
word-for-word from a prepared script, grim-faced production executives looking and sounding petrified, glaring at the audience, and the chairman who hisses into the mike ‘Can you hear me at the back’. Avoid anything like this and at least you will have made a start.

Even if the speaker performs well, success or failure will depend on the organizer. If the mikes don’t work, if the slides are upside down or if the session overruns, that is what is remembered; if the press handouts are inadequate, if anything major goes wrong, there’s the possibility of lost business and, horror of horrors, a ‘See me in the morning’ message on your desk.

So, what makes a good speaker and organizer?

FIRST STEPS FOR SPEAKERS

When you are invited to give a speech, there are several things you must know: the audience, title, length, timing, visual aids facilities, how the discussion will be handled, and the publicity plans. If you are advising executives on public speaking, or an event organizer, these are all crucial factors. Let’s look at them.

Know your audience – and the facilities

First, find out all you can about the audience: who they are, what they do, where they come from, their average age. Establish likely attendance, whether there will be media coverage. If you are the organizer, make sure that the event is widely reported unless there are special reasons for it to be off the record. Find out if the delegates will be sympathetic or critical, the prime questions they will ask, the one you will have to answer.

Be prepared to involve the audience: arrange for someone to put up another flip chart and work between the two. Ascertain the name of the chairperson and who the other speakers will be, especially those just before you. And while you are at it, check the technical facilities, lighting, stage set and platform plan. Get to know the production crew. Ensure every seat allows an uninterrupted view of the stage. Check the lighting – and find out where the switches are! And make sure the doors don’t squeak; take an oil can with you!
Title

Is the title you have been given right or do you want to suggest something else? Unless the talk has to follow a certain theme, you can probably agree a change with the organizer. If so, ensure that it is provocative, not a ‘label’ devoid of punch and verve. Keep it as short as possible. Many years ago a leading advertising agency creative director called his pleas to production executives ‘Why can’t I get what I want?’ That title worked extremely well and was quoted for years afterwards. Make sure you have a say in the ‘blurb’ about the subject of your speech; provide a colour photograph of yourself.

Length and timing

Agree to speak for no longer than half an hour, with a further ten to fifteen minutes for questions. Forty minutes would be the absolute maximum, otherwise the audience starts to get fidgety. For specialist seminars 20 to 30 minutes plus a short discussion period would suit most people. The shorter it is, the better the chance of your holding the audience’s attention.

The worst time for any speaker is the session immediately following lunch. Avoid it whatever you do. Simply refuse that slot: it is when the audience is the least receptive to any serious, in-depth presentation. The organizer will appreciate your dilemma. The best time is a morning session, but not at the very beginning because there will always be latecomers. If you are stuck with it and there is nothing else you can do, use the ‘wake-em up’ tricks of a noisy tape, a snappy video or an eye-catching slide or stage prop.

The same timing principles apply to smaller meetings and seminars. In-house sessions don’t present such a problem: staff don’t dare to nod off! No matter what kind of event, you cannot expect much response at question time if you are the last afternoon speaker. Keynote speakers usually take one of the first morning slots.

Visual aids

Slides generated by a computer program such as PowerPoint, overhead transparencies (OHPs), videos and audio tapes all help
to pep up a presentation. Don’t show horizontal and vertical slides one after the other; keep to one format and include plenty of photographs or drawings. Ensure that images fill the slides and overheads as much as possible. Keep text to bullet-points and don’t exceed 25 words – use fewer if possible.

If there are a number of statistics, keep the slides simple with a minimum of figures. For AGMs in particular, don’t have more than five or six figure-slides; any more will have nil recall. Use bold type so that text and figures can be easily read; put bar charts in strong, contrasting colours. Keep to house style throughout and repeat the company logo on everything. PowerPoint computer-generated slides from Microsoft allow maximum creative possibilities. Provide delegates with all the statistical data as a handout – but only afterwards.

Questions

Be ready for the awkward question that comes from the back. If you can’t answer it straight off, there’s always the ‘See me afterwards’ ploy. But don’t use it more than once if you can help it. You can always ask ‘What do you mean by that?’, which can silence the questioner for good. Or you can change the question to one you can deal with. Or, as a last resort, you can refer to a book or publication, even the handout material. Run through the questions you are likely to get beforehand and have your answers ready.

Publicity

Find out the plans for publicizing your speech. Important points will lead to headlines, but be on your guard against leaks. (A deliberate leak can often help to spark interest.) The organizer will give you a deadline for a summary and for the completed paper with visual aids requirements.

The summary, which should contain the salient points in not more than around 150 words, will be used for the conference or seminar programme and also for advance press releases. Provide photocopies of the slides with the text of the speech, which can be made available to the press during and after the event. Consider VNRs (video news releases) to give broadcasters footage of important segments. Ensure all information in the publicity material is
accurate and does you and your subject justice. Consider putting your speech on your Web site afterwards with access to charts and statistics.

**GETTING READY FOR THE SPEECH**

You have decided on what you, your client and/or your boss want to say and have supplied a summary to the organizer. You’ve decided on the title, you know how long the speech will be and you have a pretty good idea of what visual aids you are going to need. Now comes the crunch. It’s writing time.

**Preparation**

The longer you can spend on preparation the better. Unfortunately, there is not always much chance for detailed research: start to gather notes, put basic ideas together. Don’t forget the Internet: it could provide much additional information – but check sources. If you are writing about a familiar subject, say a company development, service or product, the information will be to hand. But if you are dealing with a fresh topic, perhaps an after-dinner speech, then it’s not so easy. You’ll have to devote time to digging out interesting, yet relevant, things to say.

Look for facts and figures that will in themselves tell a story. But try to restrict yourself to statistics that have direct relevance to the subject. Unless they are essential background or are needed to substantiate a financial or technical subject, don’t let statistics predominate. Don’t try to be funny and start off with a joke. It could fall flat. Or someone will have heard it already! But take heart from the audience that *pretends* to laugh.

**Structure**

Like a report or feature article, your speech should have a beginning (an introduction), a middle (the body of the talk) and an end (a conclusion). The introduction should include something about yourself, who you are, what you do, followed by a quote or attention-grabbing fact, what the talk will be about and your main message.

Build on this for the main part of the talk, with the significant
points and ideas you want to put over. For the conclusion, summarize the main points and finish on a high note with a recommendation for action of some sort. If there is no action as a result of what you have said, there was not much point in saying it.

**Writing the script**

For your speech to impart the desired message, for it to be well received and remembered, polished writing skills are essential. Go back to the earlier chapters 5 and 8–10 in particular, for help in getting the words and style right. Now for the rest.

**Brevity**

Ensure that no unnecessary words creep in. This demands extreme self-discipline, but the tighter the copy the better. The script should be more like a press release than, say, a long, fully reasoned article in a learned journal. Keep to plain English (see Chapter 9) and avoid clichés and jargon (Chapter 5), also avoid pleonasms (two concepts or words containing an element of redundancy, *e.g.* frozen ice, young child).

**Be factual**

Use the ‘you’ factor. Keep to facts or else you are likely to bore the audience stiff. Concentrate on new developments, services, the advantages and benefits of what you are going to talk about. If you have a comment or personal view to express, then use the personal pronoun ‘I’ and not the royal ‘we’. But don’t overdo the ‘I’, otherwise you will be seen as egotistical. Sprinkle your talk liberally with ‘you’; if the ratio of ‘you’ to ‘I’ is not 10 to 1 in favour of ‘you’, rewrite your speech.

**Repeat important points**

Avoid repeating a word or words in close proximity to one another. It is, however, sometimes helpful to recall a point to give it extra emphasis. The audience will understand this.

**Keep to the rules of grammar**

Nothing will irritate your audience more than sloppy English. But don’t worry about those myths of split infinitives and ending sentences with prepositions – in fact your speech could well sound
a lot better, more natural, if you are not in the straitjacket of school-
room strictures. Don’t succumb to pedantry.

Avoid foreign words and phrases. Don’t try to impress with your knowledge of foreign languages or you could be seen as showing off. Stick to plain English: avoid *ad hoc, quid quo pro, raison
d’être, nom de plume*, for example.

*Be controversial*

Controversy sparks interest but be careful with sharp criticism. If you must find fault with somebody or something, make sure you present your arguments succinctly and back them up with solid evidence. In any case you could have lawyers at your door!

*Keep anecdotes pithy*

Beware of humour, which might not be appreciated by all your audience. If you have a joke up your sleeve which might offend one person in the audience, don’t tell it. Rarely is anyone other than a professional comedian good at being funny on stage!

*Be active and positive*

Keep to subjects you care deeply about. Use the active, ‘doing’ tense, not the passive: choose verbs like *go, tell, make, show*. Once you allow *as/were/have been/being* in your presentation, you’re stuck in the slow lane. Use single-syllable verbs when you can: they give punch and push. Don’t write ‘keep you abreast of’ instead put ‘Tell you’ (see Chapter 9).

*Kill double-talk*

Tautology – saying the same thing again in another way (*free gift, new innovation*) – offends. It’s the enemy of tight, crisp delivery.

*No slang, bad language*

Never use bad language no matter how informal the presentation. Be careful with slang: too many *geeks, spiels, luvvies, gizmos* or *techno-nerds* lower the tone. Don’t use abbreviations, acronyms or technical jargon that might not be understood. Catch the mood of the audience and don’t talk down to them.

*Draft and redraft*

Never think that the first attempt at putting the speech into final
text will do. Your effort will need several drafts by the time you have cut the verbiage, deleted useless words, and cut out confusing double-negatives and meaningless abbreviations. Type it double-spaced, not in capitals. And don’t forget to run it through your spellcheck, not once but twice or once again for luck. And when you do, be careful you don’t introduce more errors: they can easily happen!

**Getting ready**

Unless you plan to memorize your speech (which rarely works), put the salient points on cards with key words and phrases clearly marked. Have the typescript at your side (in loose sheets paper-clipped together, not stapled) in case of panics. Prompt cards should be numbered and of a convenient size; postcard-size is ideal.

Text should be in fairly large type, so that it can be easily read in dark conditions. Just a few bullet-points, not all the words, otherwise you will be tempted to read them out! Visual aids should be in the right order and be sure to rehearse and re-rehearse with the production team beforehand, ending with a full run-through. Ensure the lectern is at an appropriate height; if not ask for adjustments. Don’t tap tap the mike when you are about to start – all that should have been taken care of.

**WHEN YOU’RE ON STAGE**

You’ve patted your pocket to make sure you have your script or notes ready. When you go to the platform or make your way to the lectern from the speakers’ table, here are a few tips.

**Making the speech**

Don’t read it out word for word, turning the pages over one by one. That’s boring. Put passion in your speech. Use those prompt cards and back up with visual aids or other props like books or objects relevant to your talk. Don’t bellow into the mike. Keep your hands and arms still unless you want to point to a chart, and then preferably use an electronic pointer. Fix points in the audience and make eye contact in several places.
Always stand up when you address an audience, even at question time. The only exception is a break-out discussion session, when informality is usual. Your goal as a communicator is for people to understand and absorb your message. Pauses contribute substantially to the power of your delivery.

Silence before a particular point adds depth. Take a lesson from the way you write: punctuate the spoken word with pauses – long for a full stop, short for a comma.

If you have a standing mike, always keep it between you and the audience: if, for instance, you are looking towards the left, move slightly to the right so that the mike is directly between you and them. Otherwise, your voice might drift away. If, on the other hand, you have been given a clip-on mike, it won’t matter where you are, but remember to take it off when you leave the stage.

**Appearance counts**

Look happy, confident and, most important, look good. Use body language: a wooden, stiff speaker will put off an audience before a word is said. Don’t adjust your hairdo, and keep as still as you can with your eyes on the audience. Don’t fold your arms, don’t fiddle with coins, don’t grimace. Deliver your presentation as if your whole world depends on it.

**Dealing with fear**

Everyone suffers to a greater or lesser extent from fear when speaking in public; however much effort you’ve made in getting the words right, the visuals spot on, it’s of no avail if you’re frozen stiff with stage fright. Take every opportunity to be on your feet. Offer to take part in the next client presentation or staff meeting; it will give you first-class practice for the real thing in a packed conference hall. Don’t drink alcohol before a speech or presentation; this slows reaction at the very point when you need to be on your toes and alert.

Take some tips from Roy Topp, public speaking coach. He advises:

Breathe deeply and slowly. This controls the heart rate. Also, strange as it may seem, roll the soles of your feet from heel to toe, on the floor under the table. No one will notice and although it sounds
improbable, it certainly helps. Look round the room. Concentrate on the broad picture.

Move slowly and do not let anyone rush you. When you stand up or move across the floor to approach the lectern, move easily and at leisure. This will not stop you being nervous, but it will control that anxiety and give the impression that you are in full control.

Do not flap your hands. Keep them out of your pockets. Let them rest by your side. Keep your fingers off the lectern unless you are making a point; don’t wave your arms about. Take your speech at a reasonable pace. Count slowly to three when pausing. Do not rush it. Pause, and look at your audience occasionally (you are in control). Do not talk over laughter or applause. You have earned it.

Further help on dealing with stress and on many other aspects of speech-making will be found in Sarah Dickinson’s *Effective Presentation* (Orion Business Books).

**In conclusion**

Sum up the important points of your presentation – not more than 10, as above that they’ll be forgotten. Make a recommendation, or a series of them, for action to make something happen. End on a high note. Thank the audience for their attention.

**At question time**

Note down each question and listen to all of it. Thank the person asking it. Repeat it for the benefit of those who may not have heard it. If you get a difficult question, you can possibly refer it to another person in the audience. And there’s always that get-out ‘See me later’ or ‘I don’t have the facts with me right now’ – time to find a satisfactory answer after the session.

**POINTS FOR ORGANIZERS**

**The programme**

A well-designed, printed programme is essential. It should give the title of every session, the speaker, with a photograph, the chairman and a brief summary of the subject, as well as the fee, registration details and information about the organization running the event.
It should be widely distributed to the target audiences and the press, and be accompanied by a supporting letter from the organizer. This is the main ‘selling’ medium for the event and it should not be skimped. The print run should allow for at least two mailings. Design should follow style for the company and the logo should appear prominently. Put the programme on the company Web site.

**Conference papers**

It is important that copies of conference papers are available not only to the press but also to delegates. However, ensure that delegates are only able to obtain copies after the speech; otherwise, they will be turning over the pages one by one and not listening or watching the screen, or – worse still – might skip the session altogether! Conference papers can be made available afterwards as a printed book – and add to the revenue.

**Publicity**

*Press releases*

Restrict press releases to reporters and other editorial staff. Copies of speeches, background information, the programme and other administrative material should be available in the press office. Follow-up releases, giving important recommendations and findings, should be issued.

*The press conference*

If you are responsible for press conferences and briefings, take a low-profile stance and let those responsible for making announcements take the stage. Your job is to introduce the speakers, see to the administrative details and make sure the journalists have the information they need. The principles outlined in this chapter apply to press conferences and briefings in the same way as to any other presentation.
At a glance…

● The organizer’s role is crucial for a slick, professional event.
● First priorities are to decide on the objectives and theme, visual aids and timings.
● Employ a professional conference organizer, designer and production company for best results.
● Look for opportunities for financing an event through sponsorship and exhibitions.
● Decide on whether to open the meeting to the press and to publish the proceedings.
● Estimate print costs for the programme, tickets and the delegate list.
● Allow for costs of celebrity chairman or after-dinner speaker and speakers’ fees, and travelling and accommodation expenses.
● Then work out the registration fee.
● Choice of venue is the most crucial decision for organizers: should it be a hotel, conference centre, perhaps even abroad? Look for unusual venues, especially those relevant to the subject.
● Delegates will remember the event for what went wrong, not what was good about it.
● Build in plenty of time for rehearsals when booking the venue.
● Establish clearly at the time of booking the period of notice if cancellation is necessary.
● Ensure that all written material is in the company style: visual aids should carry the company logo and follow house colours, the badging and programme; the stage set should be well designed and stylish. Consult your designer at all times.
About 378 million people were online worldwide by the autumn of 2000: in the UK alone, according to NOP, some 11.9 million adults were using the Internet every month. By mid-2001, these figures will have jumped by, what, 25 or even 30 per cent? No one knows. What we do know is that information technology (or IT) has transformed the way we work, the way we write, the way we deal with clients/customers, the way we communicate with media, and how we reach our target audiences.

Accuracy and consistency of language is essential. That much is obvious: but presentation is equally important. Whatever the message, its style must reflect a corporate image, whether for an Internet Web site, an e-mail message or an electronic communication system.

An Internet presence is a public relations tool second to none. The job of public relations is to ensure that the Web site is clear, understood and used by each of an organization’s publics. There can be meaningless jargon, the logo might be missing, or if there is one it’s in the wrong colour, there’s bland design, sloppy English, poor navigation from the home page, e-mails with poor spelling, or missing punctuation.

All these things – or any one of them – can ruin the best of
campaigns. Enthusiasm to complete the site and get it on the Web can transcend everything else; reputation suffers and the PR effort is wasted. There’s a hall of horrors. So what are the crucial points? Here’s a round-up.

**STYLE MATTERS**

Variations abound because of the number of new words in day-to-day diction. Inconsistencies occur everywhere from humble e-mail to in-depth Web site: wrong use of capitals is typical. Look at some examples:

- **Internet.** Dictionaries say that Internet should have a capital ‘I’, and that is the style throughout this book. However, many leading newspapers give it a small ‘i’, and this is preferred by many public relations practitioners. If you see ‘internet’ often enough, you will soon get used to it. The small ‘i’ is, in the author’s opinion, cleaner and less cluttered, especially if there are a number of references to it. Be consistent in all printed work, as well as in press releases, printwork and stationery.

  The lower-case style is also preferred by many public relations practitioners for the shortened version *net*; context usually avoids confusion with other meanings. The term *intranet* always has a small ‘i’.

- **World Wide Web.** Again, in public relations *worldwide web* and *web* are often preferred.

- **Online.** No hyphen, one word.

- **Dotcom**, as in a dotcom company. One word; don’t insert a full point.

- **E-mail.** Retain the hyphen for all ‘e’ prefixes, *e-commerce*, *e-PR*, *e-tailing*, etc. You need the hyphen to avoid confusion with words starting with a vowel.

- **CD ROM.** In public relations the preferred style is caps with a *hyphen*, though the hyphen is not used in this book. Again, you should be consistent and extend the style to derivatives such as *CD R*, *CD RW* (CD recordable/rewritable).

*Style for ‘old’ technology*

Use *facsimile*, not the informal *fax*, for address details in letterheads.
and other stationery, but use fax/phone as a verb (‘I will fax/phone you’).

Abbreviations generally

As a general rule, keep the caps (no points) for the numerous sets of initials for the jargon of the Internet: for example, DVD (Digital Versatile Disc), FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions), ISDN Integrated Digital Services Network), HTML (HyperText Markup Language), URL (Uniform Resource Locator, often called the Web address or domain name).

Other words

Unless an abbreviated name, use lower case throughout, with an initial capital for proper names such as Archie (software tool), Gopher (menu-based server, derived from go for), Mega/Gigabytes (Mb/Gb for short), Netscape, Outlook Express and so on.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF E-MAILS

E-mails provide a fast and efficient means of communication. As a marketing tool e-mail is brilliant: no matter how many messages you send out at one time, the cost is the same – just one call to your service provider. And if it is included in your Web site, the potential marketing benefits and opportunities increase substantially. We all use e-mail. But there are dangers lurking ‘twixt keyboard, screen and printer that could spoil or diffuse your message. Here are some of them.

No room for ‘Weblish’

Since e-mail is informal, punctuation, grammar and spelling suffer. A message to a colleague with no capitals and lacking apostrophes, commas and colons, with missing or wrong characters and with sloppy construction could easily go to a client. You wrote ‘Weblish’, the language of the couldn’t-care-less. And that could be disastrous for the client/agency partnership.

While e-mails can be breezy and friendly, there’s no excuse for downright bad English. Never write an e-mail in all lower case;
think what the client might think if his favourite product fails to get a cap! Equally poor is the e-mail with words fully capitalized: that in terms of ‘netiquette’ is shouting.

Keep to proper paragraphing, follow the basic rules of grammar, and retain the apostrophes (because they aid sense and clarity), brackets and minor punctuation marks like commas, semicolons and hyphens when you would normally include them.

When addressing someone, it is old-fashioned to put ‘Dear so and so’. Don’t worry about courtesy titles Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms, just open with Hi, Hello or similar.

For inter-office memos, you can relax: use short-cuts like BFN (bye for now), BRB (be right back), BTW (by the way), GTL (gone to lunch), thx (thanks), IMHO (in my humble opinion), and 4 for four/for if really pushed. There are lots more to help you to speed up office life in www.chatdictionary.com – but keep them there.

The occasional ‘smiley’ can be useful. Some of the popular ones are: :-) happy ;-) wink :-( sad ;- (chin up ) hugging :-x I’ll say nothing x-) I see nothing. See www.netlingo.com for more.

Keep clear of trouble

Get your company’s policy on e-mails and Internet usage in writing to avoid misunderstandings. If there are no established rules, ask for guidance. If you follow company practice for personal telephone calls, you won’t be far wrong.

WRITING AND DESIGNING WEB SITES

Basic principles

The Internet Web site demands short copy. Give an overview to start with on the home or introductory pages, then the detail. You must first know how the site is going to fit together, the level at which the copy will feature – on the home page, on the primary section page or buried in a niche content area?

According to June Dawson, managing director of Net-Wise Communications, a leading Web site design company, the writer must be clear about the target audience. Producing appropriate
links that take the reader to the longer copy requires a clear understanding of what will attract attention. She comments:

You may find that you require two writers, one for news stories with punchy, factual, short pithy copywriting skills and the other capable of producing compelling, but longer copy. This is key because the two – like magazine journalists – each need to adopt a different approach.

Generally, short news stories are key: people are busy, time is money, so deliver the important points quickly and efficiently or they will move on and not come back.

When you start to think about a Web site, familiarize yourself with the technicalities so that you can talk to the designer on equal terms. Much help will be found in *Creating web pages for dummies* by Doug Lowe (IDG Books, 1999) and *Creating killer web sites* by David Seigels (Hayden Books, 1997).

**Getting started**

The Internet has, as we all know, the http:// prefix to every Web site. Through a collection of documents produced in a program language such as HyperText Markup Language (HTML), the user navigates through the pages with links called HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP). Navigation throughout the site is achieved with simple clicks of the computer mouse on text or graphics. The way pages and links are written and designed significantly affects the usefulness of the site and the information available.

It is the designer who spells success or disaster for every Web site. Freelance Barry Skeates says a good site is the one that quickly and easily communicates information to its target audience. That could be achieved with a printed brochure, newsletter, sales aid, or catalogue; but the Web site could be all of these things – and more – at lower cost and with a wider penetration. But it will only work if users are encouraged to navigate through it.

It is the designer’s and writer’s job to make sure this happens. Colour, graphics, creative use of typefaces and animation can all help to make written statements stand out above others. Words should be kept to a minimum with lively, short headings and liberal use of bullet points.
Building a Web site

Once you have chosen and registered a domain name – through your ISP (Internet Service Provider) for example – you will have your own Uniform Resource Locator (URL). This is your Web site’s connection to the Internet and the worldwide network of computers. Start with a site plan for navigating from the entry point, the home page. Then create a site map to provide links to other pages.

PR strategy

Most companies these days have a presence on the Internet. Advice will be needed on the style of the site in much the same way as it would for a corporate brochure or house magazine. Moreover, Internet strategy must fit in with the organization’s overall business plan. Making the Web site work for the user in the most effective and profitable way should be the prime objective. PR objectives must, therefore, be settled at the outset.

You must decide how much information should be freely available, how much should be restricted through a password and, if appropriate, how to handle payments. And you must agree policy on the provision of media information – press releases, biographies, and details about the company structure, history, staffing and contacts.

Working with the designer

Your IT specialist must not be allowed to take charge of the design. Look for a graphics designer with broad experience of setting up Web sites for a range of companies and products, plus a knowledge of print typography.

Ensure that the site is compatible with current browsers and with current sound and video software. Take account of any material subject to copyright and make sure that your logo and house style are followed throughout. Pay special attention to the home page: if it’s a yawn, the user will give up and go elsewhere. Be wary of the design that looks pretty-pretty at first sight, but with a content so complicated that it is slow to load. That could be frustrating and a good reason to click off.

The central object is to provide information – but not too much in one go – and with no spelling or grammatical errors. It must be updated regularly. Above all, the site must look good, sound good and read well.
Getting the pages right

The home page will set the tone. It must explain the site in a few words, preferably in bullet-point form. If there are house colours, use them; put the company logo on all pages.

Every page needs a title, and a link back to the home page. Headlines must be lively, short and pithy. Look for active, ‘doing’ verbs and put them in the present tense. Don’t overdo the text, concentrate on graphics to tell a story in themselves; use snappy, two/three-word headings, give detail in short paragraphs of not more than two sentences. Susan Wright, a freelance technology journalist, says ‘Devise a menu that stays with you throughout the site so that you don’t have to keep on going back to the home page. Make the type easy to read and reasonably big and don’t drown the page in words.’

Keep all pages consistent in appearance: if there is a colour scheme, follow it religiously. Style sheets are available for typography, colours and for formatting different elements of the page, including background sounds, videos and graphics images.

Figure 16.1 Winner of 2000 Communicators in Business Award in employee communications category: Newsday home page for CGNU Plc (formerly Norwich Union). Written, designed and produced within CGNU
Essentials of site typography

Web site typefaces and styles are as much the ‘voice’ of your company as those for printwork and press advertisements. Correct choice of typestyle is crucial to the link between word and message.

There is no point in, say, an engineering company using a delicate, slender typeface when a strong, bold one would be more appropriate. There are hundreds of typefaces available from software suppliers: only your designer will know which one would work best.

Keep to the typefaces you normally use for brochures, house journals and stationery. However, since type can be manipulated electronically, departure from house style is likely. See that the designer’s zeal doesn’t spoil visual impact and the company’s image. For this very reason, where possible give your usual designer the task of creating the Web site.

Aim for simplicity of layout and ease of navigation. Make the pages lively and appealing: out with the bland page, lacking strong colours. But don’t use combinations that tire the eye: words reversed white out of black or red, and green on yellow are hard to read. It is better to have more pages and less text; increased links make the site easier to use. Text looks best black on white, with colours for headings. Don’t set the type too small; think of the viewer with poor eyesight. But make it attractive, snappy and full of facts. Don’t let it look dated: look up the new sites for ideas.

Basic rules for typesetting

Set your copy ragged right where the text is aligned to the left. If it is justified, or flush on both sides, irregular letter- and word-spacing will result. Do not break words if just two or three characters would go over to the next line (see also Chapter 6). Never use hyphens for dashes; computer keyboards distinguish between the two marks (see Chapter 3).

Avoid over-hyphenation: rewrite or space out. Few designers specify paragraph indents; insert extra space instead. Most other general rules for typesetting as set out in Hart’s Rules should be followed for Web sites.

The reader is looking at a screen, not a printed page; text is easier to assimilate in bite-sized chunks. Aim for brief sentences of not
more than 20 words, and no more than two sentences to a paragraph. Go for short line lengths of 30 or so characters compared with the more usual 65–70 characters.

Susan Wright, who has viewed thousands of sites, says that there’s nothing worse than lines that stretch right across the page. Put the text two or more columns if necessary – anything would be better than a line of 8pt or smaller lettering going from one side of the screen to the other. Type size should be no smaller than 12pt for ease of readability. Don’t forget that the eye tires after prolonged exposure to the computer screen, just as it does when watching TV continuously.

**Use clear language**

The language should be clear, plain and to the point. Put important conclusions and summaries at the beginning, so as to attract attention from the start. Avoid slang, but don’t be afraid of humour. Make sure everything you say is believable. Keep the need to maintain brand loyalty uppermost. Keep strictly to the logo shape and colour: any departure will be immediately noticeable.
Adding pages and graphics

Put in new pages regularly: users will go for good if you don’t update. Your designer will advise you on all aspects of adding pages and graphics; but if you want to have a go yourself, full information will be found in Creating web pages for dummies. In a couple of clicks you’ll have the site up and running. That’s exaggerating, but you know what I mean.

Avoid that jargon

Don’t use buzz words; they may not communicate the message in the way you intend. Out with the jargon; don’t baffle your online users with words and phrases that are meaningless to the vast majority. Only use general expressions, not the vocabulary of the specialist. As has already been stated in Chapter 5, jargon could spoil your carefully designed site simply because it fails to communicate.

Don’t put a string of initials together and expect the user to know immediately what they stand for; some, however, will be known and understood by most if not all users, like CD RW (CD rewriter). Not everyone will know what ISDN (integrated services digital network) means. When referring to sets of initials, explain them at least once.

Publicity

Your Web site is an unsurpassed communication tool. A well-designed, fact-full, look-good Web site can be a dream come true. But it will only be so if your customers – current and potential – know about it and use it. While a search engine should lead a stranger directly to your site, aim for easy and quick access. Print the address on business cards, office stationery, press releases, all printwork including brochures, leaflets and the house magazine, and show it on TV advertisements, posters, direct-mailers and shop displays. Give it out on radio ads. Put it on the firm’s CD ROM, if there is one, on presentation slides, on company videos. Everywhere.

Count the number of site visitors regularly, and when they reach a record, say so. Mention it in interviews for the press and broadcasting media, at conferences and at seminars. Brief your staff
when it is updated, and make sure the receptionist can go online and show it off to visitors!

**LANGUAGE FOR THE TELEPHONE**

Consider the way in which your telephone system is used, or perhaps abused. The operator is often the first point of contact. One bad experience can leave a lasting impression: business can be lost to a competitor simply because of ineptitude on the part of the receptionist.

If the operator is rude, offhand or at worst clueless about the firm and who does what, the organization could suffer irreparable damage. Imagine a visitor having to compete with a gaggle of gossipers at the reception desk! Sloppy telephone technique and indifferent treatment of visitors can ruin corporate image faster than anything else.

**Dealing with calls**

Calls should be answered in no more than five or six rings, then automatically routed to an answering device if the line is busy. Better still if the call is answered in two or three rings, but unlikely. If the caller is holding on, the operator, or automatic answering service, should return every 30 seconds or so to check that the person hasn’t been forgotten.

Modern systems take you through a list of touchtone options like ‘If you know the extension you want, press it now’. This is a daft instruction because there can be few callers who know the number of the extension they want: much better to give numbered departmental options. Even so, these need to be kept to a minimum. Nothing can be more frustrating than having to listen to a long list to reach the extension you want. Worse still if it is a journalist seeking the press office for information on an important story!

**Answering techniques**

Operators should answer cheerfully, but without overdoing it and give the name of the organization or its initials if well-known. Don’t say ‘Hello’, or ‘Mr so and so’, just give your name. Don’t
allow staff to say something like ‘This is Tracey, how can I help?’. That’s overused and insincere.

Voicemail messages should be brief, warm and welcoming, not bark at you like an angry dog. Check messages regularly and return calls the same day. If you are answering for a colleague, note down messages and take the number even if you think you know it – the call might be coming from somewhere else.

Provide a monitor at reception for Web site and e-mail access; let visitors use it. Circulate press releases, news bulletins, house journals and reports to the receptionists, so that they are aware of new products and services. Don’t let other people make your calls and tell you the person is waiting on the line. It’s not only a waste of time, it’s discourteous.

MAKE YOUR CV TALK

Chapter 12 touched on some of the points to consider when writing and producing your CV on paper. Now there’s a new way: on CD ROM through a special country-wide service. It’s called Talking CV! – a software package providing a CD with your history in text and with your voice and picture beside it. You go to an assessment centre (there are several in London and will be some in regional centres later in 2001) where they will interview you according to your job and position.

The service costs £39.95, including preparatory notes, the recording process, Web page and password-protected URL for an initial three months, plus a CD ROM for potential employers or recruiters. For details go to www.talkingcv.com or call 01225 460345.

Another route is DIY: use a web cam, a miniature camera (about £60) and a CD rewriter (around £100–£400) to create your CV with the multimedia program included with the camera, type in any further information and then copy your CV to CD. You can also produce a video with text and pictures, but it could cost more. E-mail alexmay@mac.com for advice.

NOW TALK TO YOUR COMPUTER

If you want to dictate a release straight to your PC or get an instant print job in type you can do it with voice-recognition technology.
You can start off with speech software such as Conversa Web (www.conversa.com) which you download to control and simplify access to Web pages with voice commands. Unlike some specialist systems, you don’t have to spend time ‘training’ the program to recognize your voice as it only has to ‘understand’ a few words. You install it and start talking.

More ambitious programs, such as IBM’s ViaVoice (www.ibm.com/software/speech) or Dragon’s Naturally Speaking (www.dragonys.com), are probably the better bet since they can control your PC with your voice and perform complex tasks without you having to touch the keyboard. The programs are surprisingly inexpensive: the standard version of ViaVoice costs around £40, including a microphone headset which is plugged straight into the sound card and integrates with Microsoft Word. Windows and Apple Mac versions cost slightly more. It has vocabulary of about 100,000 words. The system is available in high street stores such as PC World or can be ordered online from Dabs (www.dabs.com) or Simply (www.simply.co.uk).

Figure 16.3 Winner of an American Society of Association Executives Gold Circle Award for Communication Excellence 2000: the internationally acclaimed IPR Web site, produced by the Institute of Public Relations
Appendix 1: English grammar – some definitions

**WHAT IS IT? WHAT DOES IT DO?**

Brief definitions of the terminology used in English grammar are given here as a help in using this book. Examples are shown in brackets where appropriate.

*Abbreviation:* A shortened form of a word or phrase, company name, product or service (BBC, IPR, ad for advertisement). No full stops between the characters nowadays.

*Acronym:* A word formed from a set of initials (NATO). NO full stops.

*Active voice:* Attributes action of a verb to a person or thing from which it logically follows (the ship *is* sinking, the man *hits* the ball). Intransitive verbs can only occur in the active voice (the client *laughs*). See entry for verbs.
Adjectival noun: An adjective used as a noun (the young).

Adjective: Describes or qualifies a noun (a big firm).

Adverb: A word that qualifies or modifies a verb (drove quickly), an adjective (terribly bad) or another adverb (very sadly). Care needed in use and positioning. See later entry for split infinitive.

Apostrophe: A mark to indicate the possessive case (the firm’s staff, men’s shirts) and the omission of a letter or letters (shan’t, can’t), or contractions of words (’phone).

Article: Definite article is the name for the; indefinite for a and an.

Bracket: Paired typographical marks to denote word(s), phrase or sentence in parenthesis, usually round ( ). Square brackets [ ] denote words inserted by someone other than the author.

Case: The role of a noun or noun phrase in relation to other words in a clause or sentence (in the boy’s knees, boy is in the genitive case; similarly boy is in singular case, boys plural).

Clause: Part of a complex sentence usually with its own subject and verb; three main types – nominal clause when functioning like a noun phrase (the name of the game); relative clause like an adjective (the man you love); or adverbial (don’t do it unless you’re sure). Inferior to a sentence, superior to a phrase.

Collective noun: A noun referring to a group of people or animals (audience, committee, family, herd, staff, team, majority, parliament, the clergy, the public). Whether it takes a plural or singular verb depends on whether the group is considered as a single unit or as a collection of individuals (the audience was in its place but were clapping madly, the family is large; the board is meeting, but are going out to lunch).

Conjunction: A connecting word to join two clauses, or words in the same clause (and, but, or); also for introducing a subordinate clause (although, because, since).

Consonants: Letters of the alphabet other than the vowels a, e, i, o, u.

Count nouns: Nouns that can be used with numerical values (book/books), that can form a plural or be used with an indefinite article and usually refer to objects (table, ship, pen) as distinct from non-count nouns (adolescence, richness, scaffolding).
**Dangling participle:** Also called hanging participle, or dangler; a participle clause usually contains no subject and is unattached to the subject of the main clause. Considered ungrammatical rather than a style fault. (*Now broken, Fred Jones can remember what the teacup looked like.* Clearly, Mr Jones was not broken even though his memory was perfect.)

**Determiners:** Words that precede nouns to limit their meaning in some way (*all, both, this, every*).

**Double negative:** Two negative words in a sentence can confuse the reader. (*I haven't got nothing; I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't come.*)

**Elision:** Omission of speech sound or syllable as in *wrong, listen, hymn*. In each example the elided character is italicized.

**Ellipsis:** Omission of word or words from speech or writing usually recoverable from the context; useful in formal contexts for avoiding repetition. (*We are as keen to help as you are.*) Ellipsis of *to help* avoids duplication, aids flow and sharpens style.

**First person:** Pronouns and determiners denoting the speaker or writer in contrast to the addressee or others. (*I, me, myself, my, mine in the singular; we, us, ourselves, our, ours in the plural.*)

**Gender:** Nouns and pronouns representing natural distinctions of sex. The masculine gender denotes persons and animals that are *male*; feminine, those that are *female*.

**Genitive:** The case of nouns and pronouns indicating possession of something or close association of something (*possessive case, the cat's paws*).

**Gerund:** The -ing part of a verb when used in a partly noun-like way as in *No parking* as opposed to the -ing as used in a participle ending, *everyone was parking*. Sometimes called a verbal noun.

**Headlines:** The grammar of newspaper headlines where articles and other words are omitted for reasons of space and where present tense verbs are used for past events (*soldier shoots terrorists*).

**Hyphen:** Mark to join words or to indicate word division, to separate figures or groups of figures. Many uses: in compound nouns as in *air-conditioning*, but *air force*; in compound adjectives
as in a two-page report; with a prefix as in the votes have been recounted.

**Idiom:** An expression with a meaning that cannot be guessed from the meaning of the individual words as in ‘his mother passed away (died) this morning’. A peculiarity of expression or phraseology in language (over the moon, under the weather) which sounds natural to those born and bred in England, but incomprehensible to foreigners.

**Indirect question:** A question as reported in indirect speech. (I asked when he could attend the meeting.)

**Infinitive:** The form of a verb when used without direct relationship to time, person or number, often preceded by to. (I wanted to laugh.) See entry for split infinitive.

**Interrogative:** A word or sentence used to ask a question. (What do you do?)

**Mass noun:** Never takes the indefinite article a and seldom has a plural (bread, capitalism, clothing, dust, equipment, leisure, traffic).

**Modal verbs:** Auxiliary verbs to express mood (can/could, may/might, shall/should, will/would, must).

**Modifier:** Words which modify other words: very + badly (adverb); really + useful (adjective).

**Noun:** The name of a person, place or thing whether material or immaterial, abstract or concrete. Inflects for plural and functions as subject or object of a sentence. Common nouns (cat/car) are distinct from proper nouns or names (names of people, cities, months, days of the week and which carry a capital initial letter).

**Number:** Contrasts between singular and plural; in nouns (girl/girls), pronouns (she/they), verbs (says/say; was/were).

**Object:** The object of a sentence follows a verb and is normally a noun or noun phrase (the car hit the wall; the car hit the wall, bricks and all).

**Paragraph:** A short passage in text, at the start of a fresh line of thought, sometimes (but not always) indented. A unit of thought, not of length.
Parenthesis: A word, clause or sentence inserted as an afterthought and marked off with brackets, commas or dashes as in ‘This is a useful book (it should be kept for reference).’ Plural parentheses.

Participle: A form of the verb normally ending in -ing or -ed. Present participle (being, doing/is going/looking); past participle (been/done/has gone/looked).

Passive voice: Where the object of the sentence ‘receives’ the action of the verb (fast drivers will be prosecuted). Only transitive verbs can have passive forms. See entry for verbs.

Person: Classifies whether pronouns and verbs indicate the speaker, the addressee or a third party as first, second or third person, singular or plural. (First person: I am/we are going to the theatre; second: you are going to the theatre; third: he/they are going to the theatre.)

Phrase: A short expression, a group of words of lesser weight than a clause forming a unit in itself; part of a sentence that is not the subject (I refuse to do it).

Plural: More than one (cats and dogs, but sheep and deer).

Possessive: A word or case indicating possession or ownership; the possessive case of nouns is also called the genitive case (John’s hands, girls’ fingers).

Predicate: That part of a sentence that is not subject (I decided what to do).

Preposition: Words that relate word sets to each other and that generally precede the words they govern. Usually short words (by, in, for, to, out, up). Traditional prejudice against ending a sentence with a preposition is now fading, especially for informal contexts.

Pronoun: A word that replaces or stands for a noun without naming a person or thing already known from the context (I/you/they asked a question), and sometimes replaces a clause as in Why did you ask that?

Proper noun: A noun referring to a particular person, place, month, day of week, etc and carrying a capital initial letter (Smith, London, March, Monday).

Second person: Denotes the person addressed as distinct from the speaker or writer or other person (you, yourself, yourselves, etc).
Sentence: The largest unit in traditional grammar; a set of words complete in itself containing subject and predicate (all that part that is not the subject). Usually contains a verb; starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, and also with question or exclamation mark, as in ‘The client heard a presentation.’ Here the client is the subject, heard the verb and presentation the object.

Singular: A word or form referring to a single person or thing.

Split infinitive: Where an adverb is placed between to and the infinitive form of a verb (to boldly go). Nowadays it’s considered a myth that to must never be detached from the verb. Generally, it is better not to split but avoidance can sometimes cause awkward constructions. (‘Do you want to really help them?’ is preferable to putting really before to, impossible after help.)

Subject: That part of the sentence which usually comes first and governs the verb, often defined as the ‘doer’ of the verbal action. See entry above for sentence.

Syllable: Unit of pronunciation; a word or part of a word uttered with a single pulse of the voice and usually containing one vowel sound with or without consonant(s) preceding or following it. Pro/nun/ci/a/tion has five syllables.

Synonym: A word or phrase having the same meaning (or virtually the same) as another. Some synonyms for care are (nouns) anxiety, caution, charge, burden; (verbs) be anxious, be disposed, have regard.

Tense: A form taken by the verb in a sentence to indicate the time at which the action is viewed as occurring. Past (something that has happened), present (is happening) and future (will happen) tenses. In media usage, present tenses can refer to the past (PRO resigns).

Third person: Denotes the person or persons spoken or written about as distinct from the addressee, speaker or writer (he, him, they, theirs, etc).

Verb: The core of a sentence or clause, the ‘doing’ or ‘action’ word. Major types are transitive, intransitive, auxiliary. Using a transitive verb, the meaning passes from subject to the object of the sentence (he built the house); using an intransitive verb the meaning is complete without the addition of an object (she laughs). Auxiliary verbs form tenses, moods and voices of other verbs (be, do, have) and modals (may, might, etc). Verbless, or incomplete, sentences are
common in sports commentaries and in broadcasting (*And now the news*).

*Voice*: Mode of inflecting verbs as being active or passive (the cat *ate* the food; the food *was eaten* by the cat).

*Vowels*: Letters of the alphabet producing simple vocal sound by continuous passage of breath (*a, e, i, o, u*). All English words contain at least one vowel.

**Note**: Source material for Appendices 1 and 2 has been drawn largely from the 1994 edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* and from the 1974 edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* by permission of the Oxford University Press.
LOOKALIKES: DIFFERENCES AND DISTINCTIONS

Many pairs of words look and sound alike, but some are exact opposites, while others have different shades of meaning. Get them wrong and you could have a verbal disaster on your hands: at best an embarrassing telephone call to rectify what is really meant, at worst a press release or print job that has to be corrected and reissued. Here are some of them.

Adaption/adaptation: While both mean the same thing, adaptation is preferred. Adaption is eventually expected to supplant adaptation which is slowly on the way out.

Adverse/averse: Close in meaning. Adverse suggests being hostile or contrary to somebody or something, while averse means being opposed or disinclined to do something.
Alternate/alternative: Alternate as a verb means interchanging one thing with another; as a noun it means things of two kinds coming one after the other. Alternative as an adjective means offering choice between two things; as a noun denotes an option to choose between two or more things.

Biennial/biannual: Biennial means once every two years, biannual twice a year or, if preferred, twice yearly. Similarly, bimonthly means every two months, not twice a month. With this pair, it is often better to write it out in full rather than risk ambiguity.

Brochure/pamphlet: A brochure is normally taken to mean a wire-stitched or square-backed, illustrated colour-printed production used for promoting an organization’s products, services or activities. There is little difference between a pamphlet, usually just a folded sheet produced in larger numbers at low cost, and a leaflet.

Complement(ary)/compliment(ary): The former means completing, supplying a deficiency, two or more things complementing each other; the latter an expression of regard or praise as in ‘with compliments’.

Compose/comprise: Compose means to constitute, to form or make up a list by putting two or more things or parts together; comprise means to include or contain the items on the list.

Continual/continuous: A close pair. Continual means frequently happening and without cessation, again and again; continuous means joined together, or going on non-stop without interruption.

Counsel/council: Counsel is usually taken to mean giving advice to someone; council is a body of people or an authority.

Delusion/illusion: A delusion denotes a false idea, impression or belief as a symptom of insanity, someone who is genuinely convinced of what is not the case (a delusion of grandeur); an illusion denotes a false impression as to the true nature of an object, a misapprehension of a true state of affairs (an optical illusion).

Derisive/derisory: Derisive means mocking, scoffing; derisory equals ridiculous, laughingly inefficient.

Especial(ly)/special(ly): Little difference. Especial the adjective now replaced by special without much trouble; especially/specially the adverbs expected to survive in contexts where in particular, or even more is meant.
Disinterested/uninterested: The former suggests impartial or unbi-
asied while the latter means indifference. Most writers prefer to
write ‘lack of interest’ rather than disinterested.

Effect/affect: Effect means to accomplish something; affect means to
have an influence upon something. The difficulty is compounded
by the fact that both can be used as nouns and verb, although affect
is more commonly used as a verb and effect as a noun.

Flout/flaunt: To flout means to violate a rule, show a contemptuous
disregard; to flaunt means to show off, to make an ostentatious or
defiant display.

Forgo/forego: To forgo is to abstain from or do without; to forego is
to precede in place or time.

Fortuitous/fortunate: furtuitous means by accident or chance; fortu-
nate equals lucky.

Imply/infer: To imply is to hint or state something; to infer is to
draw a conclusion from what has been implied. A useful rule to
remember is that the writer or speaker implies, while the reader or
listener infers.

Inapt/inept: The former means not apt or unsuitable, the latter
unskilful.

Less/fewer: The distinction between these words is often lost: less
goes with singular ‘mass’ nouns (population/difficulty) while
fewer with numbers or quantities capable of being counted or listed
(people/things).

Magazine/journal: Both are periodicals, but a journal is usually the
more serious, professional publication, like the IPR’s magazine, Pro-
file.

Masterful/masterly: Masterful means domineering, wilful; masterly
means executed with superior skill.

Militate/mitigate: To militate against something is to have a signifi-
cant effect against it; to mitigate is to create conditions for reducing
the severity of something.

Number/amount: These two words are very close in definition, but
be careful to distinguish between them: the distinction is whether
they go with ‘count’ or ‘mass’ nouns, as in the number of releases
sent out compared with the amount of work in writing. As in this
example, number is usually constructed with a plural.
Practical/practicable: Practical (suitable for use) and practicable (able to be done). What, for example, is practical is to mail 100 news releases before the office closes, but not necessarily practicable in that there may not be the staff to do it.

Refute/deny: Both verbs dispute the truthfulness of a statement; deny says it is false, refute proves that it is.

Regretfully/regrettably: The former means an expression of regret, the latter something to be regretted, unwelcome, worthy of reproof.

Scotch/Scottish: Scotch is for whisky made in Scotland (-ey for varieties made in Ireland and the USA); Scottish for those from north of the Border.

That/which: Again close and often interchangeable pronouns. The important distinction between them is that which can never refer to people. That defines as in ‘the PR firm that was formed’, while which describes as in ‘the PR firm, which was formed in 1990, is still operating profitably’. The careful observer will note that which usually follows a comma, while that doesn’t need one before it.

Under/underneath: While there is a slim distinction between them, the simplest way to show it is to write underneath meaning ‘directly covered by’ while under means below or beneath. A sentence can end with underneath far more easily than it can with under.

Note: Further examples of confusing pairs will be found in the Oxford Guide to English Usage.
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

*Archie*: Software for finding information on the Internet.

*ADSL*: Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line, a new modem technology, converts existing twisted-pair telephone lines into access paths for multimedia and high-speed data communications.

*Bluetooth*: Short-range (10–100 metres) digital communication without connection by cables or wires.

*Broadband*: Communication network carrying a large amount of data, including voice and visual information.

*Byte*: Unit of measurement of digital data.

*CD ROM*: Stands for Compact Disc Read Only Memory.

*CD RW*: CD rewritable. CDs that can be recorded over and over again.

*Convergence*: Combining personal computers, telecommunications and television.
Domain name: Name of an internet Web site, or Web address, the URL (uniform resource locator).

Download: Transfer of data from computer to computer, ie from Internet to PC.

DVD: Digital Versatile Disc. Popular way to view movies, giving higher quality picture and sound than video.

e-tailing: Electronic shopping or teleshopping using programmes within television schedules.

Ethernet: Name of local area network and accompanying technical specifications and products.

Freeware: Software that can be downloaded or distributed free of charge although under copyright.

FAQ(s): Frequently asked question(s).

FTP: File Transfer Protocol. Means of transmitting via the Internet or local area network from computer to computer.

HTML: HyperText Markup Language. For creating a document on the Internet.


ISDN: Integrated Services Digital Network. For speedy transfer of digitized information by digital lines. Ideal for transferring graphics and text and fast downloading of Internet files.

ISP: Internet Service Provider. Examples: Freeserve, AOL.

Java: Computer language.

Link: Takes the user from one point on a Web site to another.

Log-on: Synonym for going online, or connecting to the Internet or to a network operating system.

Megabyte: Mb (abbr). Unit of data storage (a million bytes).

Multimedia: Combination of computerized data from, eg, audio, video, text, CD ROM.

Netiquette: From Internet and etiquette – a standard code: eg, no messages in capitals, users should check with FAQs before asking a question.
Newsgroup: Discussion group on the Internet.

Online: Being connected to the Internet.

Portal: Term for a Web site used as a ‘gateway’ or starting point for those planning to enter the Internet.

RAM: Random Access Memory measured in Megabytes (Mb). Used to store data and details of programmes currently being run.

Server: Powerful computer storing digitized information for Web sites and e-mails.

Shareware: Software sent through the Internet free of charge or included on CD ROM disc distributed free with printed publications. Can also be downloaded from the Internet.

Smiley: Also called an emoticon, a contraction of emotion and icon. Smileys are read sideways: eg :-) for smiling, :-( for sad.

STB: Set-top box. Enables an ordinary TV set to receive cable, and all digital transmissions.

Upload: Reverse of download. Transfer data from PC to Internet Web site, another PC or server or to wide area network.

URL: Uniform Resource Locator. The address of a Web site.

Voice recognition: Technology that permits copy to be voice-recognized and set in type.


Webcam: Miniature, low-cost camera mounted on top of a TV set or computer monitor to capture images for digital transmission.

PRINTING AND PUBLISHING

Author’s: Corrections to copy after it has been set in type; usually charged extra.

Bleed: When images, usually illustrations, extend beyond the trimmed edge of a sheet; allowance must be made for this when sizing photographs to be bled off the page.

Crosshead: Small heading placed in text, to liven the page (and fill space).
Display type: Type used for headings, in larger size than text.

Draw-down quote: Significant phrase or statement from a quote used within the page as a heading. Useful for filling space and enhancing look of the page.

Halftone: Printing term for continuous tone artwork such as a photograph; reproduces as series of dots of various sizes.

Lower case: Small characters of a typeface, abbreviated to l.c.

Makeup: Arrangement of type and illustrations on a page.

Measure: Width of typesetting, or line length, usually expressed in ems or picas (one em = 0.166044 in).

Moiré (pattern): When halftone images, usually photographs, are printed over one another, a moiré pattern can occur through different screen angles used; can occur, for example, if a newspaper photograph is screened for use in a magazine which uses paper needing different screen angle.

OCR: Optical Character Recognition. The scanning of text for subsequent typesetting.

Overlay: Transparent covering for artwork for instructions or corrections to avoid spoiling original images.

Overset: More text set in type than is needed for a given space.

Page proof: Proof of a page for OK before printing.

Point (size): Printer’s unit of measurement, used principally for designating type sizes. There are 12 points to a pica, approximately 72 points to the inch; 1pt = 0.013837 in or 0.351 mm.

Printer’s error: Mistake by the printer. Should not be charged to the customer.

Progressives: Progressive proofs, sometimes called progs, made from separate plates in colour work, showing the sequence of printing and the result after the application of each colour.

Ragged left: In typesetting, where the left-hand edge is ragged and the right-hand edge is aligned.

Ragged right: Reverse of ragged left: here the type is aligned on the left.
Ream: Five hundred sheets of paper. Paper for short-run work is normally bought by the ream.

Register: When two or more printing images are printed in exact alignment with one another they are said to be in register.

ROP: Run of Paper. Material printed in a magazine or newspaper as part of the main text.

Running head: A title repeated at the top of each page of a magazine or book.

Serif: Short lines at the ends of main letter characters in some typefaces. Typefaces without them are sans serif types.

Set-off: This occurs when the ink of a printed sheet rubs off and marks the next sheet.

Sidebar: Panel of text, usually in colour or white reversed out of black, alongside feature article giving supporting detail or illustrations.

Small caps: Small capital letters, about the same size as lower case characters.

Showthrough: Where the printing on one side of the sheet shows through to the other side.

Stock: Another word for paper or printing material. Also called substrate.

Subhead: Inferior to main headline.

Transpose: When a letter, word or line is exchanged in position for another.

Trapping: Where a wet ink film is printed over a previously printed ink, or where dry ink is used over a wet ink. When the colour is held then trapping has occurred.

Web press: Printing press which prints on reels of paper, as used in long-run newspaper and magazine printing.
Further reading


Further reading


Note: There are very many books and guides available on style, including several published by newspapers for their own staff, for the reader to consult. The titles in this bibliography, and others mentioned and acknowledged, form a selection recommended by the author to be of special interest and use in day-to-day writing and editing.
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