

2 Some Mechanics of Style

Effective writing requires attention to conventions and rules for punctuation, spelling, syntax, and grammar. Summaries of basic issues are included in grammar and style guides, including in Day and Gastel (2006:188), Strunk and White (2000), and Williams (2007). Writers should:

- Check that pronouns agree with antecedents.
- Pay attention to case (*between you and me* is correct).
- Avoid ending sentences with prepositions.
- Check that verbs agree with subjects (*The data are included in the report*).
- Use consistent verb tenses.
- Avoid:
 - Double negatives
 - Split infinitives
 - Sentence fragments
 - Dangling phrases or misplaced modifiers
- Check for consistency in sentence structure.

2.1 Punctuation

Punctuation is used to clarify expression in writing and to make reading easier. Follow these general punctuation guidelines:

- Use only one space after all punctuation (including between sentences). Periods and colons should not be followed by two spaces.
- All punctuation marks should be in the same font (roman or italic) as the preceding text (*CMOS* 2003:241) (e.g., The man in the restaurant shouted,

“Fire!”). (Note: This is a departure from previous usage in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.)

2.1.1 Commas

Commas indicate a slight pause in a sentence. Use commas:

- **To separate items in a series.** When listing three or more words, phrases, or clauses in a series, use a comma before the conjunction joining the last two:
He gathered data on their cultural, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
 - **After an adverbial or participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence:**
Importantly, low-income women benefited from the program.
According to several studies, the employment rate grew modestly in the last quarter.
Grabbing a book off the shelf, she slipped out the door.
 - **After introductory phrases when needed for clarity:** Both of the following examples are understandable and correct:
In 1991, the GNP dropped once again.
In 1991 the GNP dropped once again.
 - **Before a conjunction that joins two independent clauses:**
The interviewers introduced themselves, and then they answered the subjects' questions.
- Note:* Do not use a comma before a conjunction joining two parts of a complex predicate:
The interviewers introduced themselves and answered the subjects' questions.

- **After certain abbreviations (i.e., e.g.):**

She attended a number of Africa-themed sessions (i.e., those highlighting the work of sociologists working on issues related to Africa).

The presentation explored the range of women's work in different areas (e.g., science, technology, service work).

- **To set off elements in dates:**

January 19, 1968

January 19, 1968, was the correct date.

But:

We collected data during January 1968.

2.1.2 Semicolons and Colons

Semicolons are used to separate major coordinating elements of a sentence, such as independent clauses in a compound sentence. A colon marks a major division in a sentence or is used to indicate an elaboration of what precedes it.

Use a semicolon to:

- **Separate two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction.** Semicolons connect two related clauses more powerfully than do conjunctions:
The results are unequivocal; the contemporary attitude toward the future is pessimistic.
- **Separate elements in a sentence already separated by commas:**
Of these, 80 percent were employed in institutions of higher education; 14 percent worked in federal, state, or local governments; and 3 percent owned businesses that employed others.

Use a colon to indicate that what follows is an amplification of what precedes it:

- **Separate elements or elements in a series amplifying what preceded the colon:**

The soldier was faced with the following problems: how to get rid of his parachute and how to contact an ally.

- **Begin the sentence after the colon with a capital letter when the colon follows a complete clause and introduces a complete sentence:**

The results were as follows: The men interrupted the women in 25 percent of the professional exchanges, but the women seldom interrupted the men.

But:

The codebook included four key variables: race/ethnicity, gender, age, and education.

- **Lists of important points are often numbered in the text.** Such lists typically are introduced by an independent clause followed by a colon and then by a series of numbered statements. Use commas to separate numbered lists consisting of simple phrases; use semicolons to separate numbered lists of complex phrases or clauses:

Three firm-level attributes distinguish one firm from another: (1) the size of the firm, (2) the age of the firm, and (3) whether the firm is connected to the financial or industrial sector.

Three firm-level attributes distinguish one firm from another: (1) the size of the firm, measured by number of employees in 1992; (2) the age of the firm, measured in 1992 by the number of years since incorporation; and (3) whether the firm is connected to the financial, industrial, or service sector.

- **Use a colon to separate year and page information or volume (and issue) and page numbers in text citations and references:**

Text: (Duster 2006:1–5)

Reference:

Duster, Troy. 2006. "Comparative Perspectives and Competing Explanations: Taking on the Newly Configured Reductionist Challenge to Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 71(1):1–15.

2.1.3 Hyphens and Dashes

A hyphen is indicated by a -, without spaces before or after, as in *cross-national*. A dash is indicated by two hyphens (--) or an em dash (—) without spaces before, after, or in-between, as in *He belonged to many organizations—ASA and APA among them*.

Use hyphens in:

- **Compound adjectives** (*never-married men, family-based finances, middle-class families*).
- **Compound nouns and numbers** (*great-granddaughter, thirty-eight*), unless they otherwise are more readable and understandable as a single word (*policymaker*).
- **Electronic resources following the abbreviation *e*** for *electronic* (*e-mail, e-commerce, e-journal*). (See Section 5.1 for additional guidelines and examples of hyphenation for electronic materials.)
- **To separate a campus name from an institution:**

University of Wisconsin-Madison

University of Illinois-Chicago

But: When the campus location is hyphenated, use the following form:

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Do not hyphenate:

- Words beginning with *non*, *pre*, and other such prefixes (*nonfarm*, *precontrol*) unless the prefix precedes a proper noun (*non-Hispanic*).
- Compound proper names designating ethnicity: *African American*, *French Canadians* (CMOS 2003:304, 325).

See *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2003:299–308) for additional examples and more information on using hyphens in compound words and with prefixes.

See Section 2.3 on how to capitalize hyphenated words in a title.

2.1.4 Em Dashes

An em dash is equal to the width of a capital *M*. Indicate an em dash by typing two consecutive hyphens or by entering the symbol from the character set in word processing software. Use an em dash to signify a break in thought that causes an abrupt change in a sentence, to add an explanatory clause or phrase, or to set off parenthetical elements. (See CMOS 2003:260–65.)

Each of the three variables—education, income, and family size—is considered separately.

Three em dashes followed by a period (———.) in a reference list or bibliography means the publication has the same author or editor as the preceding entry.

2.1.5 En Dashes

An en dash is equal to the width of a capital *N* (and is half the width of an em dash). (Check the word processing software documentation for instructions on how to key the en dash.)

Use en dashes in:

- **Citations and references to indicate ranges of pages in a book or journal:**

See Johnson (1994:122–35) for additional information.

- **Text or tables as a minus or negative sign:**

During the last two years, we have experienced an average annual temperature change of –2 degrees.

- **Tables, to indicate ranges of dates or variables:**

Income 1952–1960

In text, however, use *to* or *through* to express ranges of years, values for variables, and so on:

We used the income data from 1952 to [or through] 1960.

2.1.6 Apostrophes

- Form the **possessive** for proper names and singular nouns by adding an apostrophe and *s*, as in *student's*, *Congress's*, *Cox's*, and *Parson's* (exceptions include *Jesus's* and *Moses's*). See *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2003:281–86) for additional examples.
- Form the **possessive of a plural noun** that ends in *s* by adding an apostrophe only, as in *witches' recipes* and *students' transcripts*.
- Use apostrophes to form **contractions**—*can't*, *isn't*, and so on. Do not use contractions in formal writing unless they are part of quotations.
- Form the **plural of single lowercase letters by adding an apostrophe before the s**. The *s* is roman, even when the letter being pluralized is italic. Capital letters normally do not require an apostrophe in the plural

(CMOS 2003:295). (*Note:* This is new in the 15th edition of CMOS.)

How many *x*'s are there in Exxon?

2.1.7 Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks to:

- **Reproduce direct, verbatim text or other quoted material:**

“There are lots of challenges,” Major Murray said.

The president indicated that “the economy has improved in the last quarter.”

Note: No comma is needed after *that*, *whether*, or similar conjunctions.

- **Set off the title of an article or chapter in a book in a reference list:**

Martinez, Ramiro F., Jr. 1996. “Latinos and Lethal Violence: The Impact of Poverty and Inequality.” *Social Problems* 43(2):131–46.

- **Emphasize sarcasm, irony, or humor:**

The “furnished apartment” was one room with a bare light bulb over a mattress on the floor.

Note: Avoid overuse of this technique; if the irony or humor is obvious, there is usually no need to highlight it with quotation marks.

- **Denote invented terminology:**

The company restricted certain employees from “IMing” customers or suppliers.

See also Chapter 11 of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (2003:270, 444–71) for other aspects of use of quotation marks and how to cite quoted material.

Note: Generally, punctuation appears inside quotation marks, such as “*this*,” and “*that*.” Quotation marks appear before a semicolon (e.g., “. . . *this*”);).

2.1.8 Quoted Material

- **Quotations in text** begin and end with quotation marks; the author, date, and/or page numbers follow the end-quote and precede the period:

Wright and Jacobs (1994) found that “the variation in men’s earnings relative to their peers in the labor force was not a reliable predictor of men’s . . . flight from feminizing occupations” (p. 531).

or

One study found that “the variation in men’s earnings relative to their peers in the labor force was not a reliable predictor of men’s . . . flight from feminizing occupations” (Wright and Jacobs 1994:531).

- **Block quotations** are set off in a separate, indented paragraph and should be used for longer quotations (generally, 50 words or more). Block quotations should not be enclosed in quotation marks.

As stated by Wright and Jacobs (1994):

The variation in men’s earnings relative to their peers in the labor force was not a reliable predictor of men’s attrition. This finding is inconsistent with the prediction that declines in earnings are responsible for male flight from feminizing occupations. (P. 531)

Note: The author, date, and/or page number follows the period in a block quotation and the “P” for “page” is capitalized when the page number is cited alone without author and date information, as in the above example.

2.1.9 Parentheses and Brackets

Parentheses set off information that is interjected or less closely related to the rest of the sentence, while brackets enclose words added by a writer to distinguish those from the original author being quoted.

Use parentheses to:

- **Set off less important information:**

The proportion of children living in one-parent (mother-only) families increased.

- **Enclose acronyms or citations in text:**

The Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)
(Bursik and Grasmick 1993)

Use brackets to:

- **Enclose material included within parentheses:**

(See also the discussion in Bowers [1985] and Bureau of Justice Statistics data [1999].)

- **Enclose material inserted by someone other than the original author:**

“Higher rates of MS [multiple sclerosis] were found in cold climates.”

“[N]ationally representative social surveys . . . indicate that institutionalization is common.”

- **Enclose an earlier published source:**

Veblen ([1899] 1979) stated that . . .

2.1.10 Ellipses

The Chicago Manual of Style (2003:458–63) specifies several methods for placing ellipses. ASA style uses the “**rigorous**” method, in which one period signifies a true period, and any change to the original quote is indicated in brackets

(see also preceding Section 2.1.9). Observe the following conventions in placing ellipses:

- Insert a space after every period. (Do not use the ellipses character automatically set by word processing software.)
- Locate all periods on the same line if ellipses fall at the end of a line.
- Place brackets around any change in punctuation.
- Denote missing information with a space followed by a period. Therefore, in the example on the following page, the fourth period before the text beginning “Here I have lived a quarter of a century” is the true period. Also, the sentence following the first set of ellipses begins with a capital letter, indicating the beginning of a new sentence.

Use ellipses to:

- **Represent missing information, including whole sentences.**

The text of the “Farewell Address” by Abraham Lincoln to his friends and neighbors in Springfield, Illinois, on February 11, 1861, is as follows:

My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of the Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let

us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

The following sentences are shortened from the preceding text as follows:

My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. . . . Here I have lived a quarter of a century . . . [and] [h]ere my children have been born, and one is buried. . . .

- **Represent missing information at the beginning or end of quotations** (*CMOS* 2003:463). Use three ellipsis points for a quote that begins with a capitalized word (such as a proper name) that was not at the beginning of a sentence in the original:

. . . President Carter announced to his cabinet that he would find out what went wrong; in the meantime, the Commission continued its investigation.

If the final words of the quoted sentence are omitted, place 4 periods (all spaced, including the first) after the quoted material:

These findings are part of a larger mosaic of knowledge about the impact of immigration on children

2.2 Spelling

ASA uses the 11th edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2005) to determine correct spelling and usage. In general, writers are encouraged to use a standard dictionary when writing or preparing papers or presentations. (ASA editors may inquire about which dictionary an author used in preparation of a manuscript submitted to them.)

If the dictionary lists two or more spellings for a word, use

the first spelling (*benefited* rather than *benefitted*, *focused* rather than *focussed*, *toward* rather than *towards*).

Spell out words such as *percent*, *versus*, and *chi-square* in running text.

See Section 2.9 for foreign word usages.

See Section 5.1 for preferred spelling for electronic resources.

2.3 Capitalization

Use the following guidelines for capitalization:

- In the **titles of books and articles**, capitalize the first word in the title or subtitle and all words except prepositions (*of*, *onto*, *between*, *through*), articles (*a*, *an*, *the*), and coordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *or*).

“Provisional Distribution of the Population of the United States into Psychological Classes”

“Provisional Distribution of the Population of the United States: Psychological Classifications”

- Capitalize the **names of racial and ethnic groups** that represent geographical locations or linguistic populations (*Hispanic*, *Asian*, *African American*, *Appalachian*). (See *CMOS* 2003:325–26 for additional examples.)
- Do not capitalize **black** and **white** when designating racial groups.
- Capitalize references to **regions of the United States**, such as the *South*, the *North*, the *Midwest*, when referring to places. Capitalize *Southerners* and *Northerners* only when referring to the Civil War; lowercase groups such as *northerners*, *southerners*, and *midwesterners*. Do not capitalize *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* when referring to directions. The adjectival forms of words (*midwestern states*, *southern industry*) are not capitalized.

- In titles of works, **capitalize only the first element of a hyphenated word, unless the second element is a proper noun or adjective** (*The Dynamic Self-concept: A Social Psychological Perspective* but *Post-Vietnam War Reconstruction: Challenges for South-East Asia*). (Note: This is a new rule in the 15th edition of the CMOS 2003:358.)
- **Capitalize words associated with proper nouns:**

Council also appointed a Subcommittee on ASA Policymaking and Resolutions, chaired by Patricia Roos. . . . In January 2000, Council asked the Subcommittee to continue its work for another year.
- Do not capitalize the word *the* in running text for **institutional titles** such as *the University of Chicago*, *the University of Texas System*, *the University of Wisconsin-Madison* (CMOS 2003:338). When the campus location is hyphenated, use the following form: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Note: Institutional names are spelled out in full.

2.4 Italics

Use italics for emphasis (but be careful to use them sparingly) and to highlight terms in specific contexts, to identify certain foreign words, and for titles of books, periodicals, movies, radio and TV show names, and other formally published material.

2.5 Numbers

Questions frequently arise regarding conventions for spelling out numbers versus using numerals. Following are the general rules for use of numbers in text:

- Spell out numbers one through nine.
- Use numerals for numbers 10 or greater.

- Follow the same pattern for ordinal numbers. (Spell out numbers less than 10: *first*, *second*, *ninth*; but *10th*, *44th*.)
- Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. (If possible, however, do not begin a sentence with a number.)
- Use numerals for references to tables, figures, hypotheses, and so on (*Figure 1*, *Table 3*).
- Spell out centuries: *nineteenth century*, *twenty-first century*.
- Spell out common fractions (*two-thirds majority*; *reduced by one half*).

Note: The forms *2nd* and *3rd* are now generally recommended over *2d* and *3d* except in legal citation (CMOS 2003:381, 665).

Examples:

One hundred twenty-four suspects avoided capture by the 14 officers.

They completed nine interviews during the first morning.

Table 3 presents a summary of results.

the 95th percentile

In text citations and reference lists, indicate inclusive page numbers with an en dash (see 2.1.5). Most page references (except for *pp. 102–106*, *pp. 1101–1108*, and the like) should be elided (*pp. 132–48*, *pp. 1002–11*, *pp. 1054–82*). (See CMOS 2003:759.)

Some exceptions to the number rule:

- **Be consistent in the presentation when numbers are part of a pair or series of comparable quantities**—either spell them all or write them all as numerals. Usually, numerals are more understandable. For example:

There were 3 children in the car and 10 in the van.
8 of 50 responses

- **Always use numerals with percent:**

Of the 23,823 students registered for the first semester, only 3 percent were black.

Note: ASA style uses the word *percent* (rather than the sign) in text, including in parentheses:

In addition, black and Hispanic drivers were more likely to report being subjected to a physical search of the driver or having their vehicles searched (black, 7.1 percent; Hispanic, 10.1 percent; and white, 2.9 percent).

- **Express numbers less than 1 million in numerals; for numbers greater than 1 million, write a numeral followed by the word *million*, *billion*, and so on.**

We counted 10,500 birds.

The population increased by 4.2 million in 1982.

- **Express numbers that represent exact time, sample sizes, and sums of money as numerals:**

The program will run from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

a \$5 bill

N = 2,064

2.6 Dates

The following examples illustrate dates correctly presented in text:

nineteenth century

twentieth-century poets [include a hyphen when used as an adjective]

1930s; mid-1980s

January 19, 1968

On January 19, 1968, the council met for the first time.

April 1989 [no comma between month and year]

1928 to 1931 [in text, use *to* instead of an en dash between years]

Spell out the months in entries in a reference list and in text citations of newspaper and magazine articles (*January 19, 1968*). (See *CMOS* 2003:388–91.)

2.7 Abbreviations and Acronyms

Do not use **abbreviations** such as *etc.*, *e.g.*, and *i.e.*, in running text. Instead, use phrases such as *and so on*, *for example*, or *in other words*. However, use the abbreviations in parenthetical statements.

In other words, some terms used in specific areas of sociology (e.g., cultural capital, Blau space) are not readily understood by the general sociologist.

Use *U.S.* as an adjective, *United States* as a noun:

U.S. currency is the medium of exchange in the United States.

Acronyms

Acronyms are terms based on the initial letters of their various elements and read as single words (*NATO*, *AIDS*) (*CMOS* 2003:558).

When using **acronyms**, spell out the complete term the first time it is used and present the acronym in parentheses.

First use: The Current Population Survey (CPS) includes . . .

Later: CPS data show that . . .

For examples of acronyms of terminology relating to electronic resources and publishing, see Section 5.1.

2.8 Academic Degrees

Use the following abbreviations for academic degrees (and note the capitalization of PhD and EdD):

BA (or AB)	Bachelor of Arts
BS (or SB)	Bachelor of Science
EdD	Doctor of Education
JD	Doctor of Law
LLB	Bachelor of Laws
LLD	Doctor of Laws
MA (or AM)	Master of Arts
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MD	Doctor of Medicine
MS	Master of Science
MSW	Master of Social Welfare or Master of Social Work
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Dphil	Doctor of Philosophy (European form)

Plurals are formed by adding an *s* (*MA*s and *PhD*s).

As a general rule, ASA recommends omitting all periods in abbreviations of academic degrees, unless they are required for tradition or consistency. See the *CMOS* (2003:563–64) for a more extensive discussion and list of abbreviations for academic degrees.

When referring to a general degree, use *master's*, *bachelor's*, or *doctoral degree*.

2.9 Foreign Words and Language Usage

In general, foreign words in text should be *italicized*. Commonly used foreign words or terms, however, should appear in roman type (*CMOS* 2003:291–92):

per se, *ad hoc*, *et al.*, *a priori*

In references, follow the same rules for titles of foreign-language publications as for English-language publications (i.e., use the headline style as described in *CMOS* 2003:367). Alterations to capitalization, however, should be done with expert help if writers and editors do not have first-hand knowledge of a foreign language.

Example of references:

Chauí, M. 1979. *O Que é Ideologia*. São Paulo, Brazil: Brasiliense.

If translations are used, place them within parentheses immediately following the words to be translated or in brackets following a block quote (*CMOS* 2003:469–70):

Wegener, Berndt. 1987. “Von Nutzen Entfernter Bekannter” (Benefiting from Persons We Barely Know). *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 39:278–301.

Because many manuscripts are now being prepared with word processing systems that contain software with special characters (including diacritical marks and alphabetical characters that do not normally occur in English), use these characters when keyboarding foreign words. Try to maintain consistency throughout the manuscript: If special characters are used for some words, they should be used for all words that conventionally would be accented (*Québec*, *Montréal*, *Palais des Congrès de Montréal*, *l'Hôtel-Dieu*).

The Chicago Manual of Style (2003) includes guidelines on other aspects of foreign language usage (including use of quotations, pp. 469–71, and abbreviations, pp. 562, 565).