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EDITING AND PROOFREADING



## Creating a Style Guide

Your writing needs to be clear and consistent so your sense is conveyed without the reader tripping up on basic errors in the way the text is written. It is of course essential to ensure the punctuation and grammar are correct, but there are many elements of style that are a matter of choices made, rather than a question of right and wrong.

This is where even a simple style guide can be a big help in ensuring consistency in the style choices taken. One of the first things to consider is whether you are using -ise or -ize spellings; what rules will you follow when deciding whether or not to capitalise words; when should numbers be written as words and when as figures. If you are writing fiction, your style guide might include a timeline – essential to keep track of the dates and events in your manuscript. A style guide can also include decisions taken on how the document is set out.

If you send your manuscript to an editor they will usually create a style guide for you based on the decisions you have already taken. If you have predominantly used -ise spellings they will alter any -ize spellings to match, for example.

## Style Guide Basics

Spellings	-ise or -ize endings
Hyphenation	Guidance on preferred use of hyphens, e.g. minimal use, prefer single words.
Quotes	Single or double
Commas	Use of serial (Oxford) comma
Possessives	Especially after names ending in 's'
Ellipsis	How to set out the three dots ...
Dash	Spaced en rule usual in UK style
Abbreviations	Normal UK style is for abbreviations to end with a full point (etc.) but contractions without (Dr). Should there be a comma after i.e. and e.g.? (Usual in US style, less usual in UK style.)
Capitalisation	Policy for using caps, for example for compass directions in place names.
Spacing (units, initials)	Should there be a space between initials? J.K. Rowling or J. K. Rowling. Similarly between figures and units: 1 mm or 1mm.
Numbers (words/figures)	Numbers in words up to ten, twenty or one hundred.

Thousands	Commas for figures over a thousand or only above ten thousand?
Dates	UK style prefers 29 July 2021. Centuries in words or figures?
Times	Format of times, e.g. spacing and use of points in 'am/a.m.'
Prelims and end matter	Order of Title page, Dedication, Acknowledgments, About the Author, and so on.
Layout	How will chapter breaks be signalled? The way chapter headings are set out, and so on.
Italics	Titles of books, foreign words, names of ships. Perhaps used sparingly for emphasis.
Spelling list	Include an alphabetical list of problematic spellings. For example, judgment or judgement.
Timeline	This may be useful in a novel that spans a period of time.

The above is a basic format that would be useful in fiction. For a non-fiction text you would need to consider such matters as the policy on notes, citations and references; how to set out lists; how figures are positioned and headed, and so on.

When creating a style guide, it makes sense to refer to other style guides or reference works. You can use a good dictionary, such as the *Collins English Dictionary*, as your authority file for spellings. This resource is available free online. *New Hart's Rules*. *The Oxford Style Guide* is a very useful reference source to base other style decisions on, such as rules on capitalisation, for example, and may be a worthwhile investment.