

Style Guide for Christian Schools

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Introduction and Acknowledgements

This style guide is designed to help international Christian schools follow consistent stylistic rules in professional correspondence and student publications.

Grammatical rules from the *Grammar and Composition* (A Beka Book Co.) series by James A. Chapman are used for portions of this style guide. The structure of this guide, as well as some style information, were derived using materials by Simon James Sharp from the course conducted in 2009 under the National Book Development Council of Singapore titled “Editing Essentials: The Complete Editorial Workout.”

All additional material by Cullen Hartley.

Please send corrections and requests for clarification to cullenhartley@icanjapan.org. Editable Open Document Format and Microsoft Word version of this guide are available at <http://www.cullenhartley.com/2009/06/style-guide-for-christian-schools/>

Feel free to adapt this document to your particular school, church, company, or location.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Titles prior to names

The titles *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Dr.*, and *Mme.* (Madame) require periods. Miss does not require a period.

Abbreviations denoting family history

The abbreviations *Jr.* (Junior) and *Sr.* (Senior) should be placed after a full name and their usage should be separated by commas.

Example: Floyd Mayweather, Jr., is an undefeated professional boxer.

If the name's concluding acronym is used at the end of a sentence, no additional punctuation is needed.

Example: Every American should admire Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Abbreviations for scholastic degrees

Abbreviations denoting a medical or scholastic degree are appended to the end of the name. The name and the degree are separated with a comma.

Examples: Joseph Beeson, Ph. D., will conduct a seminar on proper parenting.

It is never acceptable to use both the prefix *Dr.* and a scholastic designation following a name. One or the other should be used.

Organizational Acronyms

Organization acronyms such as FBI, CIA, and NASA do not require periods. If an organizational acronym is not commonly understood by the reading audience, after the first use of the complete organizational name an acronym should be presented in parenthesis.

Example: The Missouri State Teachers' Association (MSTA) was founded in 1856.
MSTA has helped teachers for over 150 years.

Capitalization

Use capitalization when referring to proper nouns. Only capitalize names of occupations when they are part of the name.

Example: I would like to schedule an appointment with Principal Jones, I don't need to meet with the superintendent.

Do not capitalize the names of occupations when they are not part of a proper name.

Example: Allen Jones is the principal of West High School.

The traditional exception to this occurs when discussing the highest office in any land, such as the President of the United States or the King of England; these titles should be capitalized in all circumstances.

Only capitalize the names of specific courses. Unless the subject is the name of a language, never capitalize subjects.

Example: Jane Doe is stressed by history class, but feels she must study more for English and AP Calculus 101.

When companies use non-standard punctuation in their product names and advertisements, the non-standard form should only be preserved when it is part of a registered trademark.

Preserving the English language is more important than advancing the name of a brand. For instance, if promotional material for Pepsi only refers to the product in capital letters (PEPSI), there is no need to preserve the capitalization when discussing the brand. Only the first letter of the proper noun Pepsi should be capitalized.

Hierarchy of Headings

To make editing easier, the “Styles and Formatting” identifiers (Heading 1, Heading 2, Text body, etc.) should be used when creating documents using Microsoft Word and OpenOffice.org Writer software.

No document should contain more than three types of heading style. Typeface, font size, and styling of headings is left to the discretion of the author. The most important principle to keep in mind is that all headings and titles with the same importance are given identical styling.

Content in the text body should be twelve point font. Italics and bold-face type should only be used when following specific formatting, stylistic, and grammatical rules. Under no circumstances should an entire document be presented in bold-face or italics.

Unless a numbered list is required, a bullet point list should be used.

When an outline format is required, use the following order for sequencing content: capital Roman numerals (I, II, III, IV), capital letters (A, B, C, D), Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3, 4), lowercase letters (a, b, c, d), lowercase Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv).

Numbers

Typically, numbers that can be written with one or two words should be spelled out. Use hyphens to join numerical words.

Examples: Fifty-two students, thirty-second place, Ninth Street

Never begin a sentence with a numeral.

Example: Forty-six of the 503 students did not enroll for next year's classes.

Book Sections

Numerals should be used when discussing chapters or parts of books.

Example: The professor asked the class to turn to page 325 in chapter 9 of the textbook.

Dates

When writing dates, use the following examples as models:

July 8, 1981

January 11-15, 2009

1985-89, 1973-2003

2000 (not "the year 2000")

1700s, 1960s, 2000s, the '40s

Measurements

In non-scientific discourse, fractions should be spelled. A hyphen should be used when the measurement functions as an adjective.

Example: The baker used one-third cup of flour to prepare the cookie dough.

A hyphen should not be used when the measurement is expressed as a noun.

Example: The baker used one third of a cup of flour to prepare the cookie dough.

Money

Always use numerals when discussing sums of money. An author has two options when discussing money, it is important that one style is selected and consistently used throughout the document.

Option 1: When using the symbol for the currency, place it before the numeral. Please note, there is no need to capitalize the name of the currency.

Examples: \$200, ¥5.2 million, £26.80

Option 2: When spelling the currency, place it after the numeral.

Examples: 200 dollars, 5.2 million yen, 26.80 pounds sterling

Time

Use periods when designating A.M. (*ante meridiem*, Latin: before mid day) and P.M. (*post meridiem*, Latin: after mid day).

Technically, 12:00 M. (*meridiem*) refers to noon, and 12:00 P.M. to midnight, but to avoid confusion use the words *noon* or *midnight* instead. When the minutes are unimportant, it is acceptable to write the hour and designation, as in 2 P.M.

Alternatively, when the portion of the day is understood it is acceptable to spell both words, as in two o'clock. However, never write *two o'clock P.M.*

Unless quoting from an official document that uses the twenty-four hour time system, do not use the twenty-four hour time system.

Punctuation

Ampersand (&)

Use the word *and* rather than an ampersand unless referring to a company name, musical group, or trademarked product that typically uses an ampersand.

Examples: Simon & Garfunkel, Marks & Spencer, Wilhelm & Associates

Apostrophes (')

Use an apostrophe to combine words into contractions. When people speak they frequently combine words. *Did* and *not* combine to become *didn't*. *Can* and *not* combine to become *can't*.

Contractions indicate informality and their use should be avoided in official documents and correspondence. Contraction use is acceptable in direct quotations.

Apostrophes are used to show that something belongs to someone.

Examples: Tom's pencil, Frank's television

When referring to ancient names that end in *s* the final *s* should be omitted.

Examples: Moses' staff, Jesus' nails

However, contemporary names should retain the final *s*.

Examples: Mrs. Charles's classroom, James's watch

When indicating possession of a plural noun, the apostrophe goes at the end of the word and there is no final *s*.

Examples: bats' night vision, sailors' boats

There is one common exception in contraction usage. The contraction *it's* is equivalent to *it is*, but *its* is used to show possession.

Example: The dog chased its tail.

Do not use 's to indicate the plurality of words. However, 's may be used to indicate the plurality of symbols.

Example: The children studied +'s and -'s in math class.

Brackets ([])

Brackets should only be used to indicate additions to quoted text that were not contributed by the original speaker.

Example: “The study of ichthyology [see definition] is a fishy adventure,” said Dr. Yu.

To indicate an error was preserved in quoted text the Latin word *sic*, meaning *as such*, may be italicized and inserted into a sentence.

Example: “Its [*sic*] unfortunate that I will not be working anymore,” wrote the unemployed grammarian.

Colons (:)

Colons are used to initiate lists at the end of sentences. Colons should never be used immediately after a verb. Colons are correctly used after nouns or phrases such as *the following*.

Example: The English teacher taught a lesson about the following punctuation marks: colons, commas, periods, and exclamation marks.

Colons are used between hours and minutes when indicating time; they may also be used between chapter and verse numbers when citing sacred texts or poetry.

Sometimes a colon is used between independent clauses when the second clause gives a fuller explanation of what is stated in the first clause. However, it is nearly always more succinct to combine two short sentences or use a semicolon.

Commas (,)

Commas may be used along with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, and yet*) to join two short sentences.

Example: The children misbehaved, and father sent them to bed without supper.

Please note, *so* is not a coordinating conjunction.

Use a comma to join three or more items listed in a series.

Example: Tarzan likes bananas, coconuts, strawberries, and grapes.

Though disputed by some sources, it is correct to use the final comma before the *and*; this is called the serial comma. It prevents ambiguity when considering items in a series.

Example: The children like spaghetti and meatballs, macaroni and cheese, and chips and dip.

Use a comma when two or more adjectives of the same category are used to describe a noun.

Example: Aaron is a kind, friendly person.

In this example the words *kind* and *friendly* are in the same category so a comma is required.

Example: Leo installed new computer cables in the workroom.

New and *computer* are describing different traits of the cables so a comma is not required. One test to know if the adjectives are in the same category is to reverse their order in the sentence. If the sentence meaning is unchanged by adjective reversal, the adjectives are most likely in the same category.

Use a comma to set off non-essential elements used to describe nouns in sentences.

Example: Burger World, one of the planet's largest franchises, produces unhealthy food.

Use a comma to set off direct addresses to people.

Example: Mr. Jones, when will you administer the test?

Use a comma to set off interjections such as *yes* and *no* that may appear at the beginning of sentences.

Example: Yes, purple mangosteen is a fruit.

Use commas when two or more prepositional phrases are used at the beginning of a sentence.

Example: Down the road by the river, I saw an old man fishing.

Use a comma to set off introductory modifying elements that begin a sentence.

Example: Fighting for her life, the injured cow struggled to leave the highway.

Dashes (–)

When typing, a dash consists of two hyphens; when handwriting, a dash should be twice as long as a hyphen. Do not use spaces before or after them.

Use a dash after a series of words or phrases that give details about the statement to follow. This is the opposite of how one might use a colon.

Example: Athos, Porthos, and Aramis—they were jolly friends and musketeers.

Use dashes to emphasize parenthetical information or set off elements that contain internal punctuation.

Example: The verdict has been issued—what a trial it was!—and justice was served.

When quoting, use a dash to indicate faltering speech or an unfinished sentence.

Example: “What if–,” asked the young boy.

Ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis should be used to indicate the omission of one or more words inside a quotation. An ellipsis may also be used to indicate a pause in speaking.

Exclamation Mark (!)

Exclamation marks should be used sparingly to indicate genuine exclamation. Never use more than one; do not place a space before the final word in the sentence and the exclamation mark.

Example: Help! The library is on fire!

Exclamation marks may also be used at the end of exclamatory sentences; these are sentences that begin with an interrogative word but are not asking a question.

Example: What an amazing gift!

Do not use exclamation marks to indicate humor. Do not combine an exclamation mark and a question mark.

Forward slash (/)

Use the forward slash only in network addresses and computer commands. Do not use *male/female* use *male or female*. Do not use *July/August* use *July to August*.

Hyphens (-)

When using a computer word processor, do not use hyphens to divide words at the end of a line.

When two words are combined to form an adjective, a hyphen is required.

Examples: eight-inch bratwurst, brown-eyed girl, two-thirds majority

When a prefix is added to a proper noun, a hyphen is required.

Examples: anti-Communist, un-Biblical, pro-Singaporean

The prefixes *ex-*, *all-*, *self*, and the suffix *-elect* always require hyphens.

Examples: all-American, ex-wife, senator-elect

Periods (.)

Periods should be used at the end of sentences. Do not use a comma to join two sentences together. It is preferable to create short sentences, but a semicolon may be used to join two closely related independent clauses.

Parenthesis ()

Parenthesis are used to include unimportant information, short illustrations, or personal opinions included in a document. Unless the material inside of the parenthesis is a complete sentence, a period never belongs inside a set of parenthesis. Do not use parenthesis when commas will also serve the same purpose.

Questions Marks (?)

Use question marks at the end of sentences requesting information.

Example: What time is lunch?

Polite requests do not require question marks.

Example: Will you please pass the salt.

Do not use additional punctuation after a title that ends with a question mark or any other type of punctuation.

Example: The graduate student finished reading *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Do not combine exclamation points and question marks.

Quotation Marks (“...”)

Use quotation marks only for the exact words of a speaker. Indirect quotations occur when a speaker's words are paraphrased, and sentences containing them do not require quotation marks.

Example: Socrates said, “I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing.”

Example: Socrates said that he is the wisest man alive, for he knew one thing, and that is that he knew nothing.

Always capitalize the first word in a direct quotation. Always place end marks inside of the quotation marks.

Titles of songs, poems, chapters, publication articles, and other short works should be placed inside of quotation marks. Titles of books, movies, albums, epic poetry, and other longer works should be presented in italics.

Example: The choir sang “Amazing Grace.”

Single quotation marks are only to be used when quotes are placed inside of quotes.

Example: “I heard Mother say, 'Don't steal cookies from the cookie jar,’” stated the young child.

When quoting a source for more than one sentence, a colon rather than a comma should be used to initiate the quotation.

When quoting dialogue consisting of more than one speaker, begin a new paragraph each time the speaker changes.

References

Writers have a moral and legal obligation to acknowledge when they are using the words or ideas of others. In informal correspondence when referencing books, the author's name and the title of the work must be included. When referencing newspapers and periodicals the date and issue number should be included. Writers should reference internet sources such as websites by including the author's name and the full URL (uniform resource locator).

For instance, if a writer were quoting from Susan Karrer's article titled “Time to Learn” from the NICS online magazine, that writer would need to include <http://magazine.nics.org/applesauce/time-to-learn/> somewhere in the publication text. Do not simply write *magazine.nics.org*.

Scholarly works and presentations require more rigorous referencing systems. For works in the humanities, writers should consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. For scientific works the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* should be used.

Spelling

All correspondence should undergo spell checking prior to publication. It is the author's responsibility to ensure that homonyms such as *their* and *there* are used correctly.

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition should be consulted when a spelling is questioned. The dictionary may be found on Yahoo! Education at <http://education.yahoo.com/reference/dictionary>

Language Style and Clarity

Active or Passive Voice

Transitive verbs can be used in either the active or passive voice. In the active voice the agent completing the action is stated before the verb in the sentence. In passive voice sentences the agent completing the action is contained in a prepositional phrase or is unknown.

Active example: The student gave the teacher an apple.

Passive example: An apple was given to the teacher by the student.

The passive voice should be avoided in most contexts. Using the passive voice tends to sound overly formal, obscures the meaning of the sentence, and helps people avoid responsibility in their language.

Active voice: The school board decided to increase salaries.

Passive voice: A salary increase was decided.

When distributing school-wide correspondence, the passive voice may be appropriate for protecting the privacy of a student.

Appropriate passive voice: Chicken sandwiches were stolen from the school cafeteria, and the principal is dealing with the situation.

Questionable active voice: Dorking Langshan stole chicken sandwiches from the cafeteria.

And/Or

Avoid using “and/or,” just use “or.” If you mean “or” but not “and,” use “either... or.”

Emoticons

Emoticons and smiley faces have no place in academic, educational, or professional discourse. If a sentence is humorous or lighthearted this should be expressed by the word choices of the writer and not an abruptly placed :-)

Gender Neutral Language

In order to prevent your writing from being perceived as sexist, avoid the use of singular masculine pronouns (he, him) that refer to hypothetical people.

When referring to groups that are predominately male or female, it is acceptable, but not always desirable, to refer to the gender the comprises the majority of the group.

Never use *they* or *their* as a singular pronoun.

Do not use *his/her* for *his* or *her*.

Spiritual Language

References to God in any monotheistic religion require capitalization. Unless a proper name is used, references to gods of polytheistic religions do not require capitalization.

Example: Jewish people believe God gave Moses a Law on Mt. Sinai; Hindus tell stories about their gods that have been passed down through the generations.

Capitalize titles referring to deity.

Example: Jesus is the Lamb of God and Prince of Peace.

In order to distinguish pronouns that refer to people from pronouns that refer to a singular God in a monotheistic religion, capitalize pronouns referring to the God.

Their/There/They're

Each of these three words serves a distinct purpose.

Their is used to show possession of something by a group of people.

Example: Is the Smith family here? Their car is in the parking lot.

There is used to denote the location of something.

Example: I heard it is a great place; I want to go there.

They're is a contraction for they are.

Example: I heard they're almost here!