DoctorsNS
Style, Caps and Spelling Guide

CONTENTS

WHY USE A STYLE GUIDE?

Using a standard style guide means that we're all playing by the same rules. Learning those rules can be cumbersome for the writer at first, but they will help us achieve our goal: to produce text that *isn't* cumbersome for the reader. Our goal is to make ourselves invisible and our writing transparent; the reader shouldn't be able to sense the hand of the author. Writing with good grammar and a consistent style means that the reader can concentrate on the content rather than being distracted by the form.

For example, if we were to issue a letter to the editor that included the sentence, "Over the past year, four emergency rooms in Queens County have been closed for at least 4 days each week," we risk the reader missing the crux of the message – that too many emergency rooms are closed too often – because they're too busy wondering why sometimes we write "4" and other times we write "four." (Note: In a sentence, always write "four.")

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

It's impossible to remember all the particularities of grammar and punctuation in general, let alone the special considerations of a house style guide. If you have a question, here are some resources.

- **Spelling:** Look at the DNS style guide, then *CP Caps & Spelling*, then the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*
- **Canadian style:** Refer to *CP Style Handbook*
- **Thorny grammar questions:** Refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*
- **Usage issues:** try the Google N-Gram Viewer, which shows you which version of a word or phrase is used more commonly **https://books.google.com/ngrams**

GRAMMAR BASICS

Person, voice and the singular "they"

FIRST PERSON VS. THIRD PERSON

- To prevent confusion, we ask all contributors, including DNS staff, to **write in the third-person** *unless* they're writing an opinion piece (that is, the President/CEO letter, a letter to the editor, or an article that will appear in the "Views" section)
- The basics:
  - **first person**: I, we
  - **third person**: Doctors Nova Scotia, the association

SINGULAR "**THEY"**

- Use the singular "they" when a pronoun is needed for a gender-neutral (or indefinite) antecedent, or make the construction plural.
- Avoid the awkward "he/she" and "he or she" or alternating gender in different paragraphs, which draws attention away from the material at hand to the issue of gender-neutral drafting.
- Note: The singular "they" (and "their," etc.) was in common use until 19th-century grammarians decided that it broke Latin-based grammar rules. Modern grammarians consider the singular "they" to be "old established good usage" and preferable to other means of avoiding the generic "he."
- The Department of Justice Canada includes the singular "they" as an acceptable option: http://justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/legis-redact/legistics/p1p32.html

VOICE

- Voice shows whether the **subject** acts or is acted upon
- **In general, it's better to use the active voice** than the passive voice

- The active voice keeps the reader engaged and interested
- **Active:** DNS representatives signed the contract on Sept. 9.
- **Passive:** The contract was signed on Sept. 9.
- People often interpret the **passive voice** as **dismissal of ownership** (think of the implications of Anthony Weiner saying "Mistakes were made"). To portray DNS as a strong, confident organization that owns its actions and operates transparently, use the active voice whenever possible
- **TIP: Not sure** whether you're using the active or the passive voice? Add "by zombies" to the end of the sentence. If it sounds right, you're using the passive voice and should re-cast the sentence.

PUNCTUATION BASICS
Use the right punctuation in the right place

- **Colons**
  - Introduces a list or a dependent clause
  - If used to introduce a list, the word following the colon is lowercase. For example, "She bought a full wardrobe: skirts, pants, blouses and a red feather boa."
  - If used to introduce a full sentence, the word following the colon is capitalized. For example, "It was unbelievable: The aliens had destroyed the planet."

- **Commas**
  - Commas are used to indicate a pause, link two clauses, set off parenthetical information and introduce an appositive
  - **Serial/Oxford comma** – this refers to the comma before the "and" or "or" in a list. (For example: "Please buy bread, eggs, and milk.") **We don't use the serial comma** (so the list above would read "Please buy bread, eggs and milk"), **unless the last item on the list includes "and" or "or."** (For example, "Breakfast included toast, eggs, and bacon or sausages.")
  - Commas go *inside* quotation marks and *outside* parentheses
  - **When in doubt, read it out**: if the location of the pauses sounds unnatural, the comma is probably in the wrong place

- **Hyphens**
  - Hyphens are generally used to join two parts of speech
  - Hyphens are used to join **compound adjectives** (that is, combinations of adjectives that work together to modify the same noun, such as "11-year-old child" or "yellow-purple bruise")
  - Hyphens also join **some prefixes** to the word they modify (such as anti-establishment)
  - Hyphens are also used in **phone numbers** (902-481-4988)

- **Ellipses**
  - Use ellipses to show that information has been omitted
  - Do not include ellipses to indicate a pause when quoting an interview subject

- **En-dash**
  - Use a standalone en-dash (–) to link a two clauses
  - Use two standalone en-dashes – like this – to set off parenthetical information
  - Occasionally, you can use a closed en-dash when using a non-hyphenated compound adjective to modify a noun. For example, "Chuck Berry–style lyrics"
  - A closed en-dash is also used to indicate a range of numbers or dates (for example: Sept. 9–11, 8–11 p.m.) in events listings.
  - NB for the sake of **parallel construction,** if the range is preceded by "from," use "to" rather than an en-dash (so, "she attended school from September to May")

- **Exclamation points**
  - Should be avoided unless in a direct quote or (very occasionally) in a first-person/opinion piece
- **Parentheses**
  - Use parentheses to set off material from the surrounding text
  - Like en-dashes but unlike commas, parentheses can be used to set off text that has no grammatical relation to the surrounding text
  - Commas, colons and semicolons go *outside* parentheses.
  - Periods, question marks and exclamation points can be inside or outside of parentheses, depending on whether they belong to the parenthetical matter or the surrounding sentence
- **Periods**
  - Indicates the end of a full sentence
  - May indicate initials or an abbreviation (for example, in "p.m.") but is not used in initialisms or acronyms
  - **Don't use periods in display copy** (heds, deks, cutlines or pull quotes)
- **Quotation marks**
  - North American style is to **use double quotation marks** ("like this") around quotations
  - **Terminal punctuation** (commas, periods) should be *inside* the quotation marks
  - Single quotation marks ('like this') are reserved for quotations within quotations (for example, "She yelled, 'I love pickles!' three different times," said Mary.)

- **Semicolons**
  - A semicolon joins a dependent clause to a dependent clause or separates items on a complex list

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FORMATTING
Preparing your draft for submission

ABBREVIATIONS & INITIALISMS

- **Avoid e.g., i.e., vs., etc.** unless you're writing something that will go in a small space, such as a table > instead, spell out "for example," "that is," "versus" and "and so on."
- In general, use the **full name followed by the initialism** in brackets on **first reference** (for example, "Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS)") and then use the initialism thereafter
- Some initialisms are OK on first reference (such as UN, NATO) – check Caps & Spelling
- Don't start a sentence with an initialism

CAPITALIZATION

- **Capitalize formal names** (buildings, events and government departments) and locations.
- **Capitalize these DNS titles**: President, President-Elect, Past-President, Treasurer, Board of Directors and names of sections, e.g., the Section of Paediatrics.
- **Lowercase all other formal titles** (unless directly preceding a name, for example: "Health Minister Chris d'Entremont" but "Chris d'Entremont, the health minister"
- **Lowercase general terms** standing alone, in **plurals** or in **descriptive** uses: i.e., members, residents, sections, the association, or the health department

DATES & TIMES

- Sept. 7 *not* September 7
- Sept. 10-12 *not* Sept. 10 to 12
- September 2007 *not* Sept. 2007
- Friday, Sept. 21 *not* Fri., Sept. 21
- 7 a.m. | 7:30 p.m. | 7–9 p.m.

DRAFT FORMATTING
Story title per spacebreak
<slug> OPINION
<hed> Title TK in sentence case
<dek> Dek TK also in sentence case
<by> By DR. TKTK in all caps
Illustration suggestions
<cutline> Caption
<pullquote> Pullquote goes here

ENDNOTES

- Use Arabic numbers; present as endnotes (end of document) not footnotes (end of page)
- For formatting concerns, see www.nlm.nih. bsd.uniform_requirements.html

NUMBERS

- Spell out one to nine
- Use numerals for 10 and over
- Except for No. 1, Year 4, etc.
- Spell out any number that begins a sentence
- Money is treated differently: $100 fee
- Fractions: spell out, hyphenate (one-half, three-quarters)
- Use per cent instead of %
- All N.S. phone numbers begin with 902, i.e., 902-XXX-XXXX

QUOTES & ATTRIBUTIONS

- Use the past tense ("said" not "says")
- Cite name, then title ("said Dr. Michelle Dow, President of DNS")
- Use honorific and full name on first reference, then honorific and last name after that. For example: Mr. Big Bird; Mr. Bird

WEBSITES

- Long URLs are a pain for magazine readers – and the harder the URL is to re-type, the less likely a reader is to visit the webpage
- Always omit the http:// and if the URL is more than 12 characters long, **use goo.gl** to shorten the URL to something more manageable
- If a *full* sentence ends with a URL or an email address, end the sentence with a period. (It's 2016, we know that there's no period at the end of either of those addresses.)
- If the URL or email address is not part of a full sentence, omit the terminal period
- If URL continues across line break, insert break manually to avoid adding a false hyphen

CAPS AND SPELLING: THE LIST

A word-by-word guide to DNS caps and spelling

anesthesia, anesthetist

Board of Directors

bylaws

Canadian Medical Association (CMA)

CEO

coordinator (no hyphen)

Dalhousie Medical School, Dal Med School

Department of Health and Wellness (DHW), the

Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS)

doctorsNS (magazine)

doctorsNS.com (website)

Great-West Life (BUT greatwestlife.com; if website continues across line break, insert break manually to avoid hyphen)

health care (noun)

health-care (adjective)

inpatient/inpatients

IWK

Kids' Run Club

medical assistance in dying (MAID) – *not physician-assisted death (PAD)*

MSI

MSI Physicians' Bulletin(s)

MSI Physician's Manual

Nightingale EMR

Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA), the

orthopedics

Past-President

Patient's Choice Award

Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)

physician-assisted death (PAD) – *use "medical assistance in death" instead*

President

President-Elect

provincial seniors' strategy

QEII Health Sciences Centre

Sections: names of sections are capitalized, e.g., the Section of Pediatrics

seniors' care strategy

Strive Award

Treasurer

well-being

YourDoctors.ca