

Writing and Editing Style Manual

A Quick Reference Manual for Business and Report Writing



The North Carolina Department of Public Safety

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INTRODUCTION

Relax.

This manual isn't intended to make you tremble with anxiety because you misplaced a modifier in the last letter you wrote; nor will it tear asunder all the English you learned in high school or college. Its sole purpose is to jog your memory of some useful tools of the written English language that may be rusty from lack of use.

Simple, descriptive words are ignored in favor of longer and impressive words. Taxpayers don't want to be impressed. They want to be informed.

Most of us who work for government are authors whether we intend to be or not. We compose correspondence, develop reports, dictate policies, explain procedures and create copy for publications. The pace of everyday business sometimes forces us to rely on habit and expedience. Proper grammar gets lost in the shuffle. This has become especially true in the e-mail age.

The manual steps cleanly through the elements of writing and editing and is sprinkled generously with examples of usage, both good and bad. An occasional, "Oh, yeah...I remember that now," will signal the manual works.

K.I.S.S. (Keep It Short and Simple) is stressed throughout the manual. Short doesn't have to mean dull. The focus will be on how clearly you express yourself. Strong verbs, tight sentence structure, creativity in the use of clauses and phrases, correct punctuation, coherent paragraphs, and determination to be a good speller makes K.I.S.S. work FOR you.

Prose composition is not governed solely by rules. Rules are only sensible recommendations for general application. What governs most is the desire to communicate...clearly and precisely; and to do so with a style that is uniquely your own.

Use this style manual for both e-mail as well as printed correspondence and documents. The only difference between sending someone a letter printed on agency letterhead via the U.S. Postal Service or the same information in an e-mail is that it costs the price of a first class stamp and takes several days to get to the recipient. Whether e-mail or snail mail, follow the same format and use spell check. It is the difference between being professional and being sloppy.

Let this manual guide you. Use it regularly and you will begin to recognize and eliminate gobbledygook and jargon. That DEFINITELY will put you in a class by yourself!

I - EFFECTIVE WRITING

Effective writing is clear, concise, correct, complete and appropriate in tone. It saves time and money and contributes to your personal image and that of your agency.

The questions below will help you evaluate your own writing and other writing you must review.

A. IS IT CLEAR?

- Is the purpose stated clearly?
- Will the reader know what response you expect or understand precisely what you say?
- Is it clearly organized? (Chronological order, sequence, by subject, etc.)
- Are the ideas organized in a way which would persuade the reader to accomplish your purpose or understand the sequence of events?
- Have you used language that the reader can readily understand?

B. IS IT CONCISE?

- Are most of your letters/reports less than a page long?
- Is your average sentence about 17 words?
- Do you try to keep paragraphs short – between seven and 10 lines?
- Have you eliminated all information which is unnecessary to your reader's ability to understand and act on the purpose?
- Have you eliminated all redundant or unnecessary words and phrases?

Preparation should take 50% of your time, and writing and revision 50%.

C. IS IT CORRECT?

Have you checked the accuracy of your information and of your spelling and grammar? (Always use your computer's spell check feature.)

D. IS IT COMPLETE?

Does it contain all the information the reader will need to accomplish the purpose?

E. IS IT APPROPRIATE IN TONE?

Is the tone appropriate to the reader's needs, the image you want to convey, or the context and form of your communication?

Do you avoid beginning a letter with Reference is made or This office is in receipt of your letter? (These are very bureaucratic.)

Are your letters/reports written in the first person *we/I shall appreciate*, rather than the third person *This Bureau will appreciate*?

When you have a choice, do you choose little words (pay, help, mistake) rather than big

ones (remuneration, assistance, inadvertency)?

Whenever possible, do you refer to people by name, (Mr. Jones, Miss Smith) rather than categorically (the claimant, the veteran, the applicant)?

Whenever possible, begin the letter pleasantly.

If there is a yes answer and a no answer,
give the yes answer first, then the *no* answer.

F. 4-S FORMULA

The 4-S Formula for effective writing is shortness, simplicity, strength and sincerity.

1. SHORTNESS

The length of a letter or report is not measured by the number of lines or pages. A two-page document may be short, while a ten-line document may be long.

There are two tests for judging whether a letter or report is too long: (1) does it say more than needs to be said; (2) does it take too many words for what it must say?

- a) DON'T make a habit of repeating what is said in a letter that you answer or a report that you write.

Avoid stilted openings such as "Reference is made to our letter" or "We are in receipt of your letter."

Use a subject or reference line for a brief statement of the subject. The date of the inquiry may be added to the end of the subject line.

- b) AVOID needless words and information.
Leave out words that do not add to the reader's understanding or to the sentence structure.

- c) BEWARE of roundabout prepositional phrases.

USE THESE

INSTEAD OF THESE

By, From	On the basis of
About, In	With respect to
When, On	On the occasion of
As to	In reference to

- d) WATCH out for nouns, adjectives and adverbs that derive from verbs.

Many words may be used as a verb, a noun, an adjective or an adverb. Sometimes the verb and noun forms of words are the same. Other words derive their noun and adjective forms by adding the endings -ion, -tion, -ing, -ment, -ent, -ance, -ize, -ancy and ency.

The verbs make, take, give, hold, have and be are used with the noun and adjective forms of words. These words take the place of the basic verbs that might be used in this sentence: When we held the meeting (met), the division chief made the decision (decided) that Mr. Hatcher should take action (act) on the case at once.

- e) DON'T QUALIFY YOUR STATEMENTS WITH IRRELEVANT IFS.

After writing that something is (or more likely may be) so, it is easy to think of the ifs that stand in the way. If sentences and clauses are often essential to the reader's understanding or to the government's protection, but they can also become a confused mass of useless detail. Eagerness to be on the safe side can lead a letter writer to confuse the conditional with the problematical. That's what happened to the writer who closed his letter with this sentence:

EXAMPLE: You are advised that this information is furnished on the assumption that there will be no changes in the law prior to the time you become eligible for benefits.

One of the best ways to avoid pointless ifs is to avoid explanations that begin by saying The law provides or Regulations provide. In any general statement under a law or regulation, you may be forced into a series of ifs to be strictly accurate.

2. SIMPLICITY

One of the complaints about government writing is the use of oversized and showy words. For example: to do is to effectuate; to issue is to promulgate and to try to find out is to endeavor to ascertain.

Gobbledygook is the term coined by a former congressman who thought that government writing sounded like the gobbling of turkeys. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines gobbledygook as, "Unclear, often verbose, usually bureaucratic jargon."

The list below will help you identify common gobbledygook:

Affirmative	yes
Facility	plant or building
Formulate	make
Initiate	start
Negative	no
Prior to	before
Remunerate, compensate	pay
Subsequent	next
Substantial	large
Terminate	end
Transmit	send
Utilize/usage	use
In view of the fact that	since, because
In the event of	if
In connection with	about, regarding
In relation to	about, regarding
In the matter of	about, regarding
With regard to	about, regarding
In order to	to
For the purpose of	for

Use the following four rules to simplify letter and report writing:

- a. KNOW YOUR SUBJECT.
- b. USE SHORT WORDS, SHORT SENTENCES AND SHORT PARAGRAPHS.
- c. BE COMPACT.
- d. TIE THOUGHTS TOGETHER.

3. STRENGTH

A letter with strength is entirely different from a strong letter. A strong letter makes its points with unpleasant emphasis. The noun strength is almost the same word as strong, but it does not have an unpleasant meaning. Strength is achieved through the choice of words.

The strength of a letter may be measured by the following points:

- a. USE CONCRETE, SPECIFIC WORDS.

Concrete words give the reader an exact picture, while abstract words name qualities, conditions, actions or relations. Choose words that express precisely the idea you wish to convey.

Look at the difference these concrete, specific words make:

BROAD

Structure
Employee
Program (in Government)
Reproduce

LIMITING

Building
Accountant
Public Welfare
Photograph

PRECISE

Pentagon
Auditor
Retirement Benefits
Photostat

b. USE ACTIVE VERBS

Another way to strengthen letters, and at the same time shorten sentences, is to use fewer passive verbs and more active verbs. The active voice is called the S-V-O pattern – the subject, verb, object pattern. When a verb is in the active voice, the subject of the sentence does the acting. In the passive voice the subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb.

Example: “I shall always remember my first hurricane” uses an active subject-verb combination, “I remember.” “My first hurricane will always be remembered by me” uses the passive “remembered by me” verb-subject combination.

c. GIVE THE ANSWER, THEN EXPLAIN

Answer the reader’s question in the first paragraph, and then follow with an explanation if one is necessary.

d. DON’T HEDGE

By hedging, a letter-writer gives himself a loophole to escape from statements that are slightly doubtful or not fully inclusive. Hedged statements lose forcefulness.

Try to avoid using: APPARENTLY, GENERALLY, NORMALLY

4. SINCERITY

The last S is sincerity and it is the most difficult to discuss. No one can tell you how to be sincere, but we can point to things we do unwittingly that muffle the tone of sincerity.

There are four suggestions for improving the tone of a letter:

a. BE HUMAN

Write in human terms. Use personal pronouns like you, he, she, we and I. Use the proper names of the people you write about, James Smith, Mr. Jones and Mrs. Green. Use names that stand for human beings – child, father, mother, son and daughter. Use words like these frequently whenever it is natural and fitting to do so.

Write in the active voice with I or we as the subject; or, as a last resort, make your agency the subject.

I believe
We understand
This board recommends

b. ADMIT MISTAKES

The writer who admits mistakes in plain language can earn the goodwill and respect of the reader. Don't try to ignore, gloss over or rectify mistakes by using meaningless words. Admit the mistake and let the reader know what you are doing to correct the error.

c. LIMIT INTENSIVES AND EMPHATICS

Words that intensify the meaning of a sentence are not as effective in writing as they are in speech. Intensives include adjectives and adverbs like highest, deepest, very much, extremely and undoubtedly.

Emphatics call special attention to a statement. Emphatics used in government letters include it is to be noted, we would like to point out, an important consideration, is a well-known fact and we call your attention to the fact. An occasional well-chosen emphatic, like an occasional intensive, will have the desired effect. But useless and repeated emphatics give the reader the impression you are laboring to get your facts across.

d. DON'T BE SERVILE OR ARROGANT

Strive to express yourself in a friendly way with a simple dignity befitting a governmental agency.

Don't appear to argue by point-blank statements that the reader is wrong, misunderstands or has not made himself clear. Avoid implied criticism and don't talk down to the reader.

Don't make high-handed statements that appear to tell the reader to shut up. Don't say with scathing aloofness this office has no jurisdiction over. If you know who has jurisdiction, tell the reader. If you don't, tell him you are sorry you can't help.

II. SENTENCE STYLE

A. EFFECTIVENESS

EFFECTIVE SENTENCES: An effective sentence must have unity, coherence and emphasis.

1. UNITY requires that the sentence express connected thoughts. The relationship of thoughts must be clearly shown.

WEAK: Fred Smith visited me last summer, and he once lived in France.

BETTER: Fred Smith, who visited me last summer, once lived in France.

2. COHERENCE requires that the connections between different parts of the sentence be perfectly clear.

CONFUSING: Betty returned the book which she had borrowed last week this afternoon.

CLEAR: This afternoon, Betty returned the book which she had borrowed last week.

3. EMPHASIS, or force, is given to the main ideas of a sentence by placing them properly in the position of greatest emphasis – the beginning and the closing. Force is given by arranging ideas in order of climax, by repetition of words, by the use of figures of speech, by the addition of modifiers, by conciseness of expression and by variety.
4. A more CONCISE EXPRESSION sometimes adds force. Conciseness, in a statement, may be gained by changes in form or style.

An appositive may be substituted for a sentence:

John Doe addressed the meeting. He is our president.

John Doe, our president, addressed the meeting.

A participial phrase may replace a clause:

The man who is standing near the desk is the president.

The man standing near the desk is the president.

A participial phrase also may be used to replace a sentence:

The beautiful building was destroyed by fire. It was completed only a year ago.

The beautiful building, completed only a year ago, was destroyed by fire.

A noun clause may replace a sentence:

George is ambitious. The fact is self-evident.

That George is ambitious is self-evident.

A gerund may make a sentence more concise:
It is my ambition to achieve merited success.
The achieving of merited success is my ambition.

An infinitive may make a sentence more concise:
That I may win merited success is my ambition.
To win merited success is my ambition.

B. STRUCTURE AND STYLE

1. CONFUSING REFERENCES: a sentence may be faulty because a pronoun is placed where it may refer to more than one word: There should be no uncertainty as to what word is the antecedent of a relative or a personal pronoun.

Confusing reference of the relative pronoun:

CONFUSING: She left the book on the table which she had just bought from the publisher. (The which seems to refer to the table, though it should refer to the book.)

CLEAR: She left on the table the book which she had just bought from the publisher. (The which clearly refers to the book.)

Confusing reference of the personal pronoun:

CONFUSING: Harry told John that he would become a great musician. (It is not clear whether he refers to Harry or to John.)

CLEAR: Harry said to John, "You will become a great musician." OR, Harry said to John, "I will become a great musician."

An indefinite antecedent of the pronoun:

CONFUSING: She asked me to help her, but I paid no attention to it. (The it has nothing definite to refer to.)

CLEAR: She made a request that I help her, but I paid no attention to it. (The antecedent is request.)

As a rule, avoid using which to refer to a clause:

INEFFECTIVE: My sister came to see me, which pleased me greatly.

BETTER: I was pleased because my sister came to see me.

Do not misuse them for those:

I think those (not them) roses are lovely.

Do not misuse they with indefinite reference:

People (not they) say he is honest.

2. UNRELATED IDEAS: Unrelated ideas should not be placed in the same sentence.

DISCONNECTED: Fred won the race, and he likes chocolate candy.

3. RUN-ON SENTENCES: A serious and common writing error is the run-on sentence in which two sentences are written as one without punctuation.

INCORRECT: We rambled through the woods all day we did not reach home till late.

CORRECT: We rambled through the woods all day. We did not reach home till late.

4. COMMA BLUNDER: Two independent clauses not joined by a conjunction should not be separated by a comma unless they make up a series. They should be separated by a semicolon or written as two sentences.

INCORRECT: We spent the summer in Colorado, we had a good time.

CORRECT: We spent the summer in Colorado; we had a good time.

CORRECT: We spent the summer in Colorado, and we had a good time.

CORRECT: We spent the summer in Colorado. We had a good time.

5. PERIOD FAULT: Through the misuse of the period, students sometimes write fragments for sentences.

INCORRECT: We returned home. Hoping to have another picnic soon. (A participle phrase is written as a sentence.)

CORRECT: We returned home, hoping to have another picnic soon.

INCORRECT: They liked all kinds of games. Especially football.

CORRECT: They liked all kinds of games, especially football.

INCORRECT: We had a good time. When we were in Colorado. (A dependent clause is written as a sentence.)

CORRECT: We had a good time when we were in Colorado.

6. AND-AND CONSTRUCTION: It sounds childlike to join many sentences by and as if all the ideas were of equal rank.

CHILDISH: We finished our work, and we went fishing, and we had a good time.

IMPROVED: After we had finished our work, we went fishing and had a good time.

7. OMISSION OF NECESSARY WORDS: This common fault occurs in several ways.

Subject of sentence omitted: The subject should be expressed in a declarative sentence in order to make the meaning clear.

FAULTY: Went to the football game yesterday.

CORRECT: I (or He, They, etc.) went to the football game yesterday.

In the imperative sentence the subject is correctly omitted.

CORRECT: Lend me your book.

Subject of dependent clause omitted:

NOT CLEAR: When in Chicago, my father sent me a watch.

CORRECT: When I was (or he was) in Chicago, my father sent me a watch.

NOT CLEAR: When 10 years old, his mother died.

CORRECT: When he was 10 years old, his mother died.

In elliptical sentences, the omission (ellipsis) of words gives strength rather than weakness, especially in the answers to questions:

Welcome (You are welcome.)

Where have I been? At school. (I have been at school).

Do you like Shakespeare's plays? Yes. (Yes, I like Shakespeare's plays.)

8. PARALLEL STRUCTURE: Parallel thoughts should be expressed in terms that are grammatically parallel.

FAULTY: Swimming is more enjoyable than to row. (One is a gerund and the other is an infinitive.)

BETTER: Swimming is more enjoyable than rowing. (Both are gerunds)

BETTER: To swim is more enjoyable than to row. (Both are infinitives).

9. **DANGLING MODIFIERS:** Modifiers should not be left dangling – with nothing to modify. A participial phrase or a prepositional phrase at the beginning of a sentence relates to the subject of that sentence and is followed by a comma.

FAULTY: Walking down the street, the beautiful building was admired. (The building did no walking.)

CLEAR: Walking down the street, we admired the beautiful building.

FAULTY: On entering the room, the picture is seen. (There is nothing for the phrase to modify; the picture does not do the entering.)

CLEAR: On entering the room, one may see the picture. (The introductory prepositional phrase which contains a gerund modifies one.)

10. **MISPLACED MODIFIERS:** Modifiers – whether they are words, phrases, or clauses – should be placed so that their meaning is immediately clear to the reader.

CONFUSING: She almost spent a hundred dollars.

CLEAR: She spent almost a hundred dollars.

CONFUSING: We saw a man on a horse with a wooden leg.

CLEAR: We saw a man with a wooden leg on a horse.

CONFUSING: Jane saw a hat in a window which she liked.

CLEAR: Jane saw in a window a hat which she liked.

11. SHIFTS IN STRUCTURE

Avoid needless shifts in *person*:

One must work if one (not you) would succeed.

Avoid needless shifts in *number*:

One should do one's (not their) duty.

Avoid needless shifts in *voice*:

As we went up the path, we saw a snake (not a snake was seen).

Avoid needless shifts in *tense*:

The hunter went into the woods and there he saw (not sees) a deer.

Avoid needless shifts in *subject*:

Ted's letters are interesting, for they are cleverly written (not he is a clever boy).

Anticlimax: The sentence may lose effectiveness from anticlimax, the reverse of climax, arranging ideas in the order of descending importance.

Flood has brought to these people death, disease, hunger.

EFFECTIVE REPETITION: Repetition of words may either strengthen or weaken a composition, depending upon whether important or trivial ideas are repeated.

A sentence may be strengthened by repetition of important words or ideas.

MONOTONOUS REPETITION: Avoid the careless repetition of words.

Monotonous: Autumn is the most enjoyable time of year, for it is in autumn that the weather is most enjoyable.

Improved: Autumn is the most enjoyable time of the year, for it is the season when the weather is most pleasant.

WORDINESS: A sentence may lose some of its effectiveness through wordiness – lack of economy in the use of words.

Wordy: He spoke in a very enthusiastic manner to the boys and girls of the high school about the wonderful opportunities of the future which lay ahead of them.

Concise: He spoke with enthusiasm to the high school students about the opportunities of the future.

REDUNDANCY denotes the use of unnecessary words:

Example: Joe, he works fast. This here book is good.

TAUTOLOGY is the needless repetition of an idea in different words:

Example: She is a widow woman. It is an ancient, old castle.

ARTIFICIAL EXPRESSION: A sentence may lose strength because of artificial

expression.

Artificial: A vast concourse of those amicably inclined toward him assembled to do him honor on his natal day.

Natural: Many of his friends came to celebrate his birthday.

Check for Ease of Understanding

Many computer word processing programs have the capability of evaluating what you have written and will tell you how easy, or difficult, it is to understand. Some of these programs use Gunning's Fog Index; others use the Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level or Flesh Reading Ease indicators. The principle is the same – they analyze what you have written and draw attention to potential problems in grammar and syntax.

In Microsoft Word, click on Tools, then Word Count for the number of pages, words, characters, paragraphs and lines in your document.

Also, when Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it can display information about the reading level of the document. Each readability score bases its rating on the average number of syllables per word and words per sentence.

Flesch Reading Ease score

Rates text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of approximately 60 to 70.

The formula for the Flesch Reading Ease score is:

$$206.835 - (1.015 \times \text{ASL}) - (84.6 \times \text{ASW})$$

where:

ASL = average sentence length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences)

ASW = average number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words)

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score

Rates text on a U.S. school grade level. For example, a score of 8.0 means that an eighth grader can understand the document. For most documents, aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.

The formula for the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score is:

$$(.39 \times \text{ASL}) + (11.8 \times \text{ASW}) - 15.59$$

where:

ASL = average sentence length (the number of words divided by the number of sentences)

ASW = average number of syllables per word (the number of syllables divided by the number of words)

Robert Gunning's Fog Index

Robert Gunning's Fog Index also measures the readability level of written material, and is a little easier to use than the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula. To determine the Fog Index of a section of writing, choose a sample of 100 words, or more, that is free of quotations from other writers, then follow this simple formula: (average number of words per sentence) + (number of words with three or more syllables) x .04 = Fog Index. The Fog Index is the approximate grade level the reader must have to understand what you wrote.

Keep It Simple

An average sentence should have 17 words and an average paragraph should have three sentences. Some government documents have contained sentences that ran for 45, 50, 60 and even 80 words, and had single paragraphs that were longer than a page. Be sure your documents don't do that!

Remember, someone with a Ph.D. can understand what is written for an eighth grader; but the person with less than a high school education will probably not comprehend what is written at the Ph.D. level. (And even if all the members of your intended audience each have four masters and two doctoral degrees, why make it hard for them to read and understand your writings?)

III – PUNCTUATION..., -; : ! % & * ' " ' / ? \

We write to communicate.

Not much punctuation in that sentence – one period and you can move on to the next thought. But, if that sentence were spoken, the eye would register the facial expression, the ears would pick up tone and dialect, and the brain would sort out innuendos.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had all those tools working for us when we write?

We don't. When we write, we make a sound in the reader's head. That sound can be a joyful noise, a sly whisper, a throb of passion or a dull rumble (like so much of the government prose that puts people to sleep).

Learn to listen to the sounds your words make. One of the most important tools for making paper speak in your own voice is punctuation. We rely on punctuation to do for us what pauses, stresses and inflections do for talking. Recognizing that reality underscores the necessity for correct punctuation, all punctuation serves one of four purposes:

To terminate, use a period, a question mark, and exclamation point, or sometimes a dash, ellipse or colon.

To introduce, use a comma, a colon or a dash.

To separate, use a comma, a semicolon or a dash.

To enclose, use a comma, a dash, full quotation marks, a single quotation mark, a parenthesis or a bracket.

Knowing which punctuation mark does what and when to use which one is the signature of a good writer. Knowing the effect any punctuation mark has on a sentence marks an even better writer.

Let's sketch the basic punctuation marks one by one.

- A. The period is simple – it ends a sentence.
- B. The comma is used for brief pauses in thought, to separate short groups of words.
- C. The semicolon accentuates word groups more forcibly than a comma, divides a sentence into logical clauses or separates items listed.
- D. The colon sets up what is to follow (and what follows elaborates, emphasizes or explains what went before).
- E. The dash summarizes or echoes whatever precedes it.

- F. The parenthesis encloses a word or groups of words as a point of emphasis, explanation or repetition.
- G. The ellipsis indicates a word or words omitted. The words replaced by an ellipsis must be one or more of those in the same sentence. Use the ellipsis sparingly. Several ellipses in a sentence or paragraph look bad; they also talk down to the reader, as if you know something he doesn't. Be sure those ellipses don't hide more than the customary inane words and phrases they replace.
- H. The exclamation makes a point as forcibly as possible.

We can dispense with any discussion of the period, parenthetical marks and the exclamation point. Their use is so specific, they beg no clarification.

Most of the punctuation problems focus on the comma, the semicolon, the colon and the dash. They deserve the most attention.

1. The comma(,)

Few things will do more to improve your writing than confident, correct use of the comma. Its misuse, on the other hand, can obscure and confound like no other punctuation mark. Gather any number of people in a room. Give them a series of long sentences to punctuate. When the dust clears, half will have used too many commas, the other half not enough. It boils down to when to and when not to.

Review these basic guidelines to help you find the balance.

a) Use a comma to separate lengthy, independent clauses in a compound sentence.
Ex: They have not responded to our orders, nor do I think they ever will.

b) Use a comma to set off a lengthy introductory phrase or clause (usually a prepositional phrase) from the subject of the sentence.
EX: Although they obviously intend to follow company policy, they have yet to complete their filing for the month.

c) Use a pair of commas to set off a word or group of words which serve to emphasize.
EX: On that occasion, it seems, he was careless. (Remember, it's always a pair of commas.

d) Use commas to divide elements in a series.
EX: She blushed, stammered, sneezed, shook her head and burst into tears.
The English language is forever changing; so go with the flow, not against it. Most of us were taught in school NOT to use a comma before conjunctions (and, but, because & as).

In today's writing, comprehension is nudging aside strict adherence to that comma rule. Here's how it works today:

If the number of words following the conjunction are few (1-7) then you do not need to put a comma before the and, but, because or as. (The OLD way of doing things.) If the number of words following the conjunction are NUMEROUS and likely to involve one or more phrases or even a clause or two, a comma before the conjunction helps comprehension. So, use one.

*The goal of punctuation is comprehension.
If you have to bend an old rule to make that happen, so be it.*

e) Use commas with transposed initials, with titles and always in dates.

EX: Dexter Lenci, M.D. or Jones, B.W. The boys sailed for Europe on June 22, 1962.

f) Use a comma, or commas, to prevent misreading.

EX: The morning after, a policeman came to the door. In 1942, 361 men from this town entered the Army.

That's a basic example of when to use commas. Let's look next at when not to use them.

g) Don't use a comma before the first or after the last member of a series.

EX: (Correct) The forest ranger was looking for tree stumps, fallen branches, trampled flowers and loose rocks. (No comma after *for* and none before *and*.)

h) Don't use a weak comma when a stronger semicolon or colon is needed. The stronger form of punctuation is appropriate when you list several thoughts or if you are making an emphatic point. A comma simply won't do that effectively.

INCORRECT: The orders were specific, keep the motor running, remove the tarpaulin from the truck bed, raise the lift and secure the wench to the bumper.

CORRECT: The orders were specific: keep the motor running; remove the tarpaulin from the truck bed; raise the lift; and secure the wench to the bumper.

i) Don't use the comma to separate a word in apposition that really needs to be strong, i.e., no comma is needed before or after Margaret in: My sister Margaret is a lovely woman. (That may not be the way you were taught in school, but it is today's approach to good grammar.)

j) Don't use a comma to replace such pronouns as it, they, who, whom, which.

k) Never use a comma and a dash in combinations; they do different things in a sentence.

l) Never use a comma before the ampersand (&).

m) No comma is needed between a month and its year; i.e. March 2008, NOT March, 2008 or when using military dates; i.e. 14 March 2008.

Entire books have been written about when and when not to use the comma. Most of us will never encounter many of those conditions; so don't worry about them.

Take a different, and more effective, approach to the use of commas. Recognize that a comma breaks the flow of thought, if only briefly. Since reading comprehension demands consistent thought with as few interruptions as possible, keeping the number of commas per sentence to two or three is a good rule.

2. The semicolon (;)

The semicolon is nothing more than a mark of separation or division – stronger than the comma, but weaker than the period. Use it wisely, but be cautious not to over-use commas.

A suggestion was made in the discussion about commas – use no more than two or three commas per sentence. Comprehension survives by keeping the number of semicolons in a sentence **at that same level** – two or three. The logic for that relates to comprehension.

Create a sentence using several semicolons, and listen as the mind jumps from clause to clause. Too much of that and the original point of the sentence becomes hazy. It's far easier on the reader to digest another sentence rather than struggle over a string of semicolon phrases before the period comes into view.

If what you have put inside a semicolon phrase is strong enough by itself, toss in a period and begin a new sentence. The changeover could work like this:

FROM THIS: The agency's policy on travel is based on necessity; the necessity to be outside the office to carry on state business; the impracticability of such business being conducted in the office; and the availability of funds to cover travel expenses.

TO THIS: The agency's policy on travel is based on necessity and the availability of funds to cover expenses. Travel expenses are paid when agency business requires the work be done outside the office.

A semicolon is effective when used to separate two or more complete thoughts (make sure the two are close in meaning or provide similar information). That creates a strong compound sentence.

Example: Don't guess at spelling; you rarely win.

Use a semicolon to divide complete statements tied together by a conjunctive adverb (also, anyhow, besides, otherwise, etc.)

Example: Don't guess at spelling; otherwise, you open yourself to correction.

3. The colon (:)

The colon is the best warning signal we have in writing. The colon anticipates; it says watch for what is coming. What is coming usually is explanatory or illustrative material set up by a word or words which precede the colon.

The colon can be an effective punctuation tool, but use it sparingly. Don't set one up, then follow with a string of semicolon phrases that stretches line after line before you stop. Do that, and it's guaranteed that long before you get to the period, you've already forgotten what the sentence was going to say in the first place.

Use the colon:

To introduce something

Example: Several things could have caused the damage: heavy winds blowing from the sea, termites, an explosion or sabotage.

To separate

Example: 10:45 a.m. or John 3:16

For clear writing, avoid a love-hate relationship with the colon. Don't use the colon in lieu of a dash. Remember the difference – the basic use of a colon is to anticipate, while a dash summarizes or accentuates what has gone on before.

- a) Don't use a colon if only one clause or phrase follows before the period ends it all. You'll discover that usually is the perfect spot for a semicolon, NOT a colon. Better yet, consider forming two sentences.
- b) Don't use the colon after namely or for instance. It is good grammar to set up *as follows* and *the following* with a colon.
- c) Do not use a colon directly after the conjunction *that* or *which*.

Any discussion of the colon leads to its proper use as a listing tool. Once you set up a sequence of information with a colon, separate each item with a semicolon, use and after the last phrase and close it out with a period.

Example: The division's goal is:
to provide sufficient services to the public;
to establish and enforce regulations which govern mining operations;
to record all permits requested and granted for mining operations; and
to report annually the results of services provided.

Remember – the colon is strong medicine and should be used carefully. It automatically causes a break in reading, so be sure that's what you intend.

4. The dash(--) and hyphen (-)

The dash is a good punctuation device. A dash summarizes or accentuates what has been said in the first part of the sentence. Use it correctly, but seldom.

Example: The hurricane was awesome – expanding and increasing in intensity.

The hyphen looks somewhat like the dash. But it is only one dash (-) and it serves a primary purpose, e.g., to break a word at the end of a sentence. Of course, you also use a dash to connect compound words; e.g., spell-binding, 66-year-old man, well-written.

Use hyphens:

a) to avoid confusion.

Example: He recovered his health, but couldn't re-cover the leaky roof.

b) for compound modifiers that **precede a noun**.

Example: full-time job.

bluish-green dress

first-quarter touchdown.

Do not use a hyphen when the compound modifier **follows the noun**.

c) for compound modifiers used **after** forms of the *to be* verbs.

Example: The man is **well-known**.

The play was **second-rate**.

d) to express two thought compounds.

Example: socio-economic

e) to separate figures in odds, ratios, scores and numbers ending in y.

Example: The horse is running under eight-to-one odds.

UNC beat Duke 100-87.

The iodine is mixed with water in a four-to-one ration.

He turns twenty-one years old on Friday.

Do not use a hyphen with **adverbs ending in ly**.

Example: Her skills are markedly superior to his.

It is suggested that writers DO NOT hyphenate any of the words of a government agency, i.e. Department of Environment, NOT Department of Environ-ment. It's better to have a little extra white space hanging at the end of a sentence than to cause confusion. This holds particularly true for correspondence.

5. Quotation marks (“ ”)

Quotation marks precede and end. A few pointers are offered.

a) For the sake of comprehension, it’s best to break a quote into two or more paragraphs if the quote is lengthy. Begin the quote with (“), omit it at the end of the first paragraph, repeat the (“) as you continue to quote in the succeeding paragraph(s), then be sure and close the quote with (”).

Example: “As I said before,” Governor Easley told the mayors, “local and state governments must forge a partnership. “To fail to do so will unravel the good will and understanding that is needed for the programs demanded by the public.”

b) Quotes within quotes are tough. Remember that any computer has one or more single quote keys. Alternate between double quotation marks and single marks.

Example: She said, “I quote from AC Snow’s book, ‘I’m not ashamed to admit that some of my best friends used to be Yankees,’ a remark from *A Dust of Snow*.”

Inside or *Outside* – Deciding where to properly include quotation marks can be confusing:

The comma and period always are enclosed within the quotation marks; but the colon and semicolon are never enclosed with quotation marks.

Inside – “Men will walk on the moon before this decade comes to a close,” said the President in 1961.

“Our venture into space,” President Kennedy said, “is a test of will as well as science.”

Outside – “He moved the vehicle off the road after carefully removing the ‘dead and injured’: yet his instincts told him this was an exercise, not reality.”

6. The apostrophe (’)

The apostrophe indicates an omission of a letter or letters from a word. The most common use is as a contraction; e.g., *aren’t*. The apostrophe forms possessives of nouns and certain pronouns; e.g., men’s, or doctors’ (when it is used to apply to collectively plural nouns or pronouns). It indicates plurals of letters, numerals, symbols, and certain abbreviations; e.g., 8’s.

Writers are often confused about whether or not to use an apostrophe when expressing a decade or century. Most of us were taught to always express it as 1890’s or the 1900’s. Times change; and grammar flows with it. Style editors now say that use of an apostrophe in that case is outdated. The correct form is 1890s or the 1900s.

IV. ABBREVIATIONS

The best style advice about abbreviations is to avoid them. If you must abbreviate, be sure the abbreviation has universal understanding, don't make them up on your own. You, the writer, may know what you mean, but your reader probably won't.

If you feel compelled to abbreviate, keep these points in mind:

- A. Don't trust your memory of how a word is abbreviated – check the dictionary.
- B. If there's any doubt about the correct abbreviation of a word or title, spell it out.
- C. Stick to standard address abbreviations: Ave. (Avenue); Blvd. (Boulevard); Bldg. (Building); Ct. (Court); Dr. (Drive); Ln. (Lane); Pl. (Place); Rd. (Road); Sq. (Square); St. (Street); and Ter. (Terrace).
- D. It's best not to abbreviate county as co. (it could also mean company) ; and always capitalize it when it follows the county name (Lincoln County).

When you list several counties, that guideline changes, so be careful:

Example 1: The river meanders through the counties of Martin, Pitt and Bertie.

Example 2: The river meanders through Martin, Pitt and Bertie counties.

E. Consistency is the byword for abbreviating south, north, west, and east. You can abbreviate them as part of an address, e.g. S. Elm St. Beyond that, it's better grammar to spell them, e.g. *West Indies*, He lives *west* of here. To describe geographical regions, capitalize them, e.g. The *South* is known for its hospitality.

F. Be consistent in abbreviating academic titles and degrees: B.A. (Bachelor of Arts); B.S. (Bachelor of Science); M.A. (Master of Arts); M.S. (Master of Science); PhD (Doctor of Philosophy). To express academic achievement in terms of Master's Degree in Biology or Bachelor's Degree in Journalism, be sure and capitalize the subject of the degree.

G. For clarity, do not abbreviate days of the week or months of the year in text.

H. When referring to decades, spell out the period, E.G., *in the eighties*, or as contractions, e.g. *in the 1890s*.

I. For measurements, use figures rather than words; e.g., 100 miles. When estimating something, use the correct punctuation; e.g., *approx.*, or *av.* (for average).

The caution on use of abbreviations needs emphasis: **Don't abbreviate unless the abbreviation has universal clarity.**

Again, exercise great caution when using abbreviations: Don't abbreviate unless the abbreviation has universal clarity.

V. CAPITALIZATION

Correct capitalization requires common sense and knowledge of basic rules. Following are some capitalization pitfalls most often encountered in government writing.

Titles – *Director of* when it precedes the name, but not when it follows the name, e.g. Division Director Joe Smith; but Joe Smith, director of the Division of Criminal Investigations.

Agency descriptions – lower case department, division, section or branch in reference, e.g. work of the division. Capitalize when citing the full name, e.g. Water Measuring Section of the Division of Environmental Awareness.

State – capitalize only when the word is part of a formal title, e.g. The State Parole Commission, the Dept. of Crime Control and Public Safety. Lower case the word at all other times (even if it goes against the grain to do so). Example: state of North Carolina.

VI. ACRONYMS

An acronym is created by assigning letters to represent words. They enable quick reference to a collection of words that would otherwise be laboriously repeated ad nauseam. However, they can also make a document confusing when overused. Unfortunately, acronyms have become so imbedded in government writings that many documents are ineffective.

Our state government takes a back seat to no one in creating the using acronyms.
Alcohol Law Enforcement becomes ALE.
State Highway Patrol becomes SHP.

Since we can't completely avoid acronyms, at least we can make them manageable.

A. Spell out the words in the first usage and follow immediately with the acronym in all caps in parenthesis – Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

B. Once established, the acronym can subsequently be used in lieu of spelling the words each time.

Example: Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) competes for funding in the General Assembly like all other state agencies. DENR, however, is more successful than some agencies.

C. Write acronyms in all caps, never caps and lower case or all lower case letters.

D. Each letter of an acronym represents a word; e.g. in DENR, the D represents Department, E represents Environment, N is Natural and R represents Resources. The acronym should never include a, the, or and.

E. Not ALL running capital letters bunched together are actually ACRONYMS. Most are simply abbreviations.

A true acronym is an abbreviation that creates a word that must be pronounceable, i.e. APES and snafu. So, LPACRSF (Local Programs to Assist Children at Risk of School Failure) is NOT an acronym; it's simply an abbreviation. So is CCPS. Good editors recognize the difference. They never let an acronym nor an abbreviation stand without being explained.

VII – EDITING

A. Introduction to Editing

Editing is confirming, changing, cutting, expanding or rearranging words. To edit is to polish, to put in the best form possible. The instinct to edit is stronger in some people than in others. Some even turn that instinct into a fetish.

If you doubt that, type something and purposefully make mistakes in usage, punctuation or spelling. Tape it to your office door and see what happens. Long before the paper can become faded with age, some mysterious person or persons will have come by and marked up your words – confirming, changing, cutting, expanding or rearranging.

Editing requires knowledge of grammar and basic sentence structure, insight into what the writer intended to say, and the ability to improve the author’s writing. Editing embraces a little of everything in this manual. The principles of sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, and writing style – they all apply, whatever is being edited. In our work as information processors, two basic types of editing are involved – copyediting and substantive editing.

1. Copyediting

Copyediting is the most common editing process. It simply means to review a manuscript for grammar, spelling and punctuation. That’s usually the most attention we give to our writing or to that of others.

Copyedit with confidence and accuracy and most of the bad grammar will evaporate. But, if you’re still reading this manual and need help on communicating beyond accuracy, the next step opens the door to creativity.

Copyediting does not mean rewriting or reorganizing what someone else has written. That’s called substantive editing.

2. Substantive Editing

Substantive editing involves writing, editing and proofreading. It is the whole ball of wax. Substantive editing can include copyediting, rewriting, reorganizing, writing transitions and/or summaries, eliminating wordiness, reviewing content for accuracy and logic, and developing a consistent tone and style. It can even expand to planning the publication and supervising the production.

To be professional at substantive editing, author and editor must communicate. The author must give you full authority to improve what has been written. Without an understanding of what substantive editing entails – by both parties – conflicts arise and blame starts to flow. Once substantive editing has been completed, be sure to review the result with the author – before proofreading begins.

B. Editing Procedures

1. Prior Knowledge

- Do not begin editing until you have all of the information and it has been checked by the author for spelling of names and titles, facts, dates and figures.
- Know the purpose, the audience, the timetable for production and the intended use of the material BEFORE you begin to edit.

2. Editing Methods

- Editing is not easy. It requires concentration, an instinct for spotting errors, a conviction to make words work properly and a determination to make the copy simple and clear. Of all the above, none is more important than concentration.
- Read the copy through one time without applying the editing pencil. A first reading will let you know the degree of editing that will be needed. You most likely will spot some obvious errors that proofreading will take care of later.
- Keep a note pad handy to jot down points to raise with the author.
- As you edit, play each sentence very simply – subject, verb, object. Don't be misled by flowing prose. Hidden somewhere in there is a subject, verb and object. Any one of them may be implied from a prior sentence, but they still exist for the sentence with which you are working.
- Look for active, strong verbs in ANYTHING you edit. If they don't exist, it's your responsibility as a substantive editor to create them for the author. Passive expression not only wastes paper, it lulls the reader into boredom.

Example: Rather than say, "The meeting was called by the secretary," be far more active by saying, "The secretary called the meeting." Recognize the difference?

- Watch constantly for syntax pitfalls: misplaced modifiers; noun strings; subject-verb tense mismatches; personal pronouns that don't match; split infinitives; dangling participles; redundancies; or wordy clauses that run on and on and say nothing.
- Keep spelling and punctuation in mind at all times.

C. Editing tips

1. Concentrate. Good editing cannot be rushed; nor should it be. Develop a routine that allows for isolation or as few interruptions as feasible. Distractions while you are editing often allow mistakes to float by without being recognized.
2. Trust Your Instincts. As you read, listen to that alarm bell going off in your head, then stop and check it out. (Keep a current dictionary handy and learn to use the spell check feature of your computer.)
3. Talk to the author if you can't understand what you are editing. If YOU can't understand it, neither will the reader.
4. Look for the obvious: misspelled words, spelling of names and titles, punctuation and acronyms that go unexplained.
5. Use any and all reference guides you need as you edit (dictionary, thesaurus, spelling guide). Let them be the final authority – not what someone swears is right or wrong.
6. Don't change anything unless it is "broke." The copy belongs to the author. The author wants you to get it in the right shape, not alter the facts or change the purpose.
7. Ask someone unfamiliar with the copy to take a cursory look at your editing job. They just may see something you've missed.

VIII – PROOFREADING

Proofreading basically is comparing copy and marking corrections. Sounds simple enough, but it's a critical step because it usually is the final stage. Anything that slips through at that point will surely come back to haunt you. There are some basic remedies which will protect any proofreader.

- A. Be sure you have ALL the copy to be proofed before you start. Proofing, without copy to go by, limits the effort to check for typographical errors and obvious misspelled words.
- B. Concentration, as it is in editing, is the meat and potatoes of proofreading. Don't apologize for it; to allow interruptions as you proofread is to open the door to sins of omission.
- C. Trust your instincts. Typos, broken type, misspelled words and hazy punctuation should stare at you. Faith in your knowledge of grammar will give power to your instincts.
- D. If possible, make proofreading a two-person operation. One reads the copy while the other proofreads. (Let the best speller of the two proofread the manuscript.)
- E. If you proofread alone, place the copy and the proof sheet side by side. Then compare word by word or phrase by phrase.
- F. Don't let the copy's author do the proofreading. It's the author's natural tendency to read what the copy is supposed to say, rather than what it does say.

Proofreading Tips

- A. Let the author check the copy before you start proofreading.
- B. Avoid making lengthy notes in the margins. If copy additions or changes stretch to a dozen words or more, key the location with a letter or number and type the new words on a separate sheet of paper and attach it. Be sure and use the same key.
- C. PRINT corrections or additions. Unfortunately, most of today's cursive writing is pitiful. Remember, if the printer cannot read your changes, the printer will guess at it; and you can imagine what THAT will create.
- D. Sidestep the tendency to take small words for granted (prepositions, articles, etc.).
- E. Carefully proofread numbers in the text and in tables.
- F. Be consistent in proofreading. Don't mark a punctuation error one way on page two and a different way on page five.
Example: Use the # symbol to indicate space is needed or if space is to be deleted. Don't use # in one place, and write out the word space the next time it happens.

G. Look closely for mistakes in titles, headings and page numbers. Those miscues are the ones often overlooked.

H. Proof the table of contents against chapter headings, subheads and page numbers to ensure they conform.

I. If time is available, have someone unfamiliar with the copy read it before you pass it on to the printer or walk to the copy machine. Often, they can spot mistakes simply because they know nothing of the subject matter.

J. Don't assume spell check will catch and correct all errors. The copy still should be proofread. Eg. From and form are not interchangeable, yet spell check will not highlight the mistake.

Proofreading Symbols

Printers rely on standard proofreading symbols to interpret copy changes. They may look like hieroglyphics, but they do the job well. Become familiar with the most often-used ones and keep a list handy. The following two pages show the most often used symbols and how they are used.

Instruction	Mark in Margin	Mark in Type	Corrected Type
Delete		the good word	the word
Insert material		the word	the good word
Let it stand		The good word	the good word
Make capital		the word	the Word
Make lower case		The word	the word
Set in small capitals		See word	See WORD
Set in italic type		The word is word.	The word is <i>word</i> .
Set in roman type		the <i>word</i>	the word
Set in boldface type		the entry word	The entry word
Set in lightface type		the entry word	the entry word
Transpose		the word good	the good word
Close up space		the word	the word

Delete and close up space	the word	the word
Spell out	2 words	two words
Insert: space	theword	the word
period	This is the word	This is the word.
comma	words words, words	words, words, words
hyphen	word for word test	word-for-word test
colon	The following words	The following words:
semicolon	Scan the words skim words	Scan the words; skim the words.
Apostrophe	Johns words	John's words
Quotation marks	the word word	the word "word"
Parentheses	The word word is in parentheses	The word (word) is in parentheses
Brackets	He read from the Word the Bible.	He read from the Word [The Bible].
En dash	1964 1972	1964-1972
Start Paragraph	"Where is it?" "It's on the shelf."	"Where is it?" "It's on the shelf."
Run in	The entry word is printed in boldface. The pronunciation follows.	The entryword is printed in boldface. The pronunciation follows.
Move left	the word	the word
Move right	the word	the word
Align	the word the word the word	the word the word the word
Wrong font	the word	the word

IX- Report Outline

For most short reports and documents, numbering subject areas or paragraphs with simple 1, 2, 3 or A, B, C is sufficient. For long or involved documents a standard system of numbering is required. This manual is laid out using the numbering system recommended in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The numerals are aligned on the periods that follow them, and are either set flush with the text or indented. In either case, carryover lines are best aligned with the first word following the numeral.

In the following example from the *Chicago Manual of Style* note that the numerals or letters denoting the top three levels are set off by periods and those for the lower levels by single and double parentheses:

- I. Historical introduction
- II. Dentition in various groups of vertebrates
 - A. Reptilia
 - 1. Histology and development of reptilian teeth
 - 2. Survey of forms
 - B. Mammalia
 - 1. Histology and development of mammalian teeth
 - 2. Survey of forms
 - a) Primates
 - (1) Lemuroidea
 - (2) Anthroidea
 - (a) Platyrrhini
 - (b) Catarrhini
 - i) Cercopithecidea
 - ii) Pongidea
 - b) Carnivora
 - (1)Cresodonta
 - (2)Fissipedia
 - (a)Ailuroidea
 - (b)Arctoidea
 - (3)Pinnipedia
 - c) Etc.

In the example above note that roman numerals are aligned on the following period or parenthesis. Any run-over lines would be aligned as the copy is in this manual.

Many of the computer word processing programs in use are equipped with an outline feature. The key to successfully numbering a publication is **consistency!** Whether you use the system recommended here, one that comes on your computer or design your own, be consistent in its use.

X – BUSINESS FORMATS

BUSINESS LETTERS

Since the initial impression a reader receives is strongly affected by the appearance of a letter, the arrangement of the parts of a business letter on letterhead is important.

A. STATIONERY

Quality and simplicity are the major factors in choosing stationery for most business letters. Simplicity means the opposite of eye-catching –you do not want your stationery to catch the reader’s eye and detract from the message. Standard size of a business letterhead is 8 ½ by 11 inches. White is the standard color. Standard size of the envelope for standard letterheads is No. 10.

B. TYPE STYLES

There are many type-styles from which to choose. Probably the most-used is Times New Roman, Arial, Verdana and Courier. Unless you are preparing invitations, stay away script writing such as *Script MT Bold*.

Typefaces can be divided into two main categories: **serif** and **sans serif**. Serifs comprise the small features at the end of strokes within letters. The printing industry refers to typeface without serifs as **sans serif** (from French *sans*: without). Typefaces with serifs are often considered easier to read in long passages than those without. However, sans serif has been determined to be easier to read on a computer.

Here are four common type styles:

Arial is a sans-serif typeface.

Courier, also known as Pica, was designed to resemble a typewriter strike.

Times New Roman is a serif typeface, developed for legibility and economy of space. The font is a modern day pencil font.

Verdana, a sans serif type, was designed to be readable at small sizes on a computer screen. The letters are large, x-height (heights of lower-case letters, as scaled to the letter x being exactly equal to one), and have wide proportions and loose letter-spacing.

The size of typefaces and fonts is traditionally measured in points. The most popular is the Desktop Publishing point of 1/72 inches.

Write to inform, not impress

C. LETTER STYLES

The two preferred basic letter styles are: BLOCK and MODIFIED BLOCK. In the block style, all lines start at the left margin. In the modified block style, the date and closing lines are started at the center point and the paragraphs are indented or blocked.

D. THE PARTS OF A LETTER

1. THE DATE

When you use a letterhead, type the date at the left margin or begin at the center of the page (depending on the letter style). It should be at least a triple space below the letterhead and about four lines above the inside address, according to the policy of your department or the length of the letter.

a) When typing the date, do not use an abbreviated style, such as 5/12/2010. This may mean May 12, 2010 to you, but to a military person or a European, it means December 5, 2010.

b) Don't abbreviate the month, either in the date or in the body of the letter. Do not use th, st, nd, or d after the date. February 5, 2010, is clear and acceptable. Note that the comma must be inserted before the year. In the instances where the form is reversed, such as 5 February 2010 (military or European usage), the comma is omitted.

2. ADDRESSEE

a) Use a courtesy title such as Mr. Mrs., Miss or Ms. With the name of every person to whom you write, with one exception: If you do not know whether the addressee is a man or a woman, omit the courtesy title.

b) If the person has a business or an executive title, use the title in the inside address – Mr. William S. Thompson, assistant secretary, or Ms. Sally Harris, personnel officer. (This applies only when using titles in addressing correspondence).

c) Where possible, the lines in the inside address should be fairly equal in length. If the addressee's name is shorter than the firm name, type the title on the line with the name preceded by a comma.

Mr. Willis Goldston, President
Goldston Construction Company
6502 Taylor Lane
Bonlee, NC 27651

If the firm name is short, you may type the addressee's title on the second line preceding the firm name, with a comma after it.

Mrs. Sally Hellekson
Manager, Sally's Interiors

If the addressee's title is of such length that it would seriously unbalance the address, type the title alone on the second line.

Dr. Clifford B. Morrison
Supervising Resident Physician
Lane Memorial Hospital

For the company name, follow the style used in the addressee's letterhead. If abbreviations are used in the addressee's letterhead, they should be used in the inside address of your letter.

3. STREET ADDRESSES

The following styles are standard for street addresses:

- a) Write the house numbers without a prefix – 2058 Waring Road (NOT: No. 2058 Waring Road or #2058 Waring Road).
- b) Write street, **avenue** and similar designations in full unless you must abbreviate to save space.
- c) For easy reading, spell out street names from First through Tenth. Use figures for numbers from 11th on. Omit the ordinals st, d and th when a word like North or South separates the two numbers: 206 North 32 Street.
- d) In street names, write out North, South, East, West, Southeast and Northwest unless it is necessary to abbreviate to save space.
- e) Type abbreviations for sections of a city this way:

6156 Queen Avenue, N.E. (note comma).

4. CITIES, STATES AND ZIP CODES

In writing the city, state and ZIP Code, follow these recommendations.

- a) Always write the city, state and ZIP code on one line.
- b) Do not abbreviate the name of the city unless it is customarily written with an abbreviation. For example, St. Louis and St. Paul should be written with the word Saint abbreviated.

c) Write the name of the state in full or use the two-letter abbreviation recommended by the U.S. Postal Service and written without periods or space between the letters. A list of state names and two-letter abbreviations is given on page 39.

d) Do not use a comma between the state and the ZIP Code, but leave two spaces between them.

Moore's Gift Shop
818 Grace Street
Raleigh, NC 27612

ABBREVIATIONS OF STATE NAMES AND CANADIAN PROVINCES

US States and Territories

Alabama	AL
Alaska	AK
Arizona	AZ
Arkansas	AR
California	CA
Colorado	CO
Connecticut	CT
Delaware	DE
Florida	FL
Georgia	GA
Hawaii	HI
Idaho	ID
Illinois	IL
Indiana	IN
Iowa	IA
Kansas	KS
Kentucky	KY
Louisiana	LA
Maine	ME
Maryland	MD
Massachusetts	MA
Michigan	MI
Minnesota	MN
Mississippi	MS
Missouri	MO
Montana	MT
Nebraska	NE
Nevada	NV
New Hampshire	NH
New Jersey	NJ
New Mexico	NM
New York	NY
North Carolina	NC
North Dakota	ND
Ohio	OH
Oklahoma	OK

Oregon	OR
Pennsylvania	PA
Rhode Island	RI
South Carolina	SC
South Dakota	SD
Tennessee	TN
Texas	TX
Utah	UT
Vermont	VT
Virginia	VA
Washington	WA
West Virginia	WVA
Wisconsin	WI
Wyoming	WY
Canal Zone	CZ
District of Columbia	DC
Guam	GU
Puerto Rico	PR
Virgin Islands	VI

Canadian Provinces

Alberta	AB
Manitoba	MB
Newfoundland	NF
Nova Scotia	NS
Prince Edward Island	PE
Saskatchewan	SK
Labrador	LB
British Columbia	BC
New Brunswick	NB
Northwest Territories	NT
Ontario	ON
Quebec	PQ
Yukon Territory	YT

5. ATTENTION LINE

The attention line is not used frequently in business letters. When it is used, it is usually typed on the second line (a double space) below the address at the left margin. The word attention may be typed with each letter capitalized or with only the first letter capitalized and may or may not be followed by a colon.

Automobile Insurance Company
3927 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60640

ATTENTION: Mr. Sheldon R. Franklin

Gentleman:
First paragraph of your letter starts here.....

6. THE SALUTATION

The salutation is the greeting to the reader and helps set the tone of the letter. Gentlemen, Ladies, or Ladies and Gentleman is acceptable in greeting a company and Dear Mr. McGhee in greeting a person named Travis McGhee. If the reader is a personal friend, however, Dear Travis is acceptable.

In typing salutations for business letters, you will find the following suggestions helpful:

- a) Use a double space above and below the salutation,
- b) Abbreviate the titles Mr., Mrs., Ms. and Dr. Spell out titles such as Professor, Reverend and Major.
- c) Capitalize the first word and any noun or title in a salutation: Dear Sir; My dear miss Phillips; Dear Father Whitaker; Dear Senator Bryant.

7. THE SUBJECT LINE

A subject line enables your reader to grasp the content of the letter quickly. In one glance he or she can see what the letter is about. Since the subject line is part of the body of the letter, it is typed a double space below the salutation and is followed by a double space before the first paragraph of the message. The subject line may be typed in capital and small letters and underscored, or it may be typed all in capitals. It may be centered, begun at the left margin or indented (if the letter has indented paragraphs), depending on the letter style that you are using.

Miss Ann Parker
Martin Health Food
3601 Fuller Street
Fayetteville, NC 28132

Dear Miss Parker:

Subject: Federal Regulations on Food Labeling

The word Subject may be omitted. RE and In re are used only for legal correspondence. The subject line replaces the salutation in the simplified letter style.

Mr. Ivan B. Hill
Lockman's Shoe Store
6532 Lynnfield Road
Cary, NC 27632

Dear Mr. Hill:

SPRING SHOE LINE

8. THE BODY

Since you understand how important the appearance of the body of the letter is, you should observe these principles in typing the body.

- a) Keep the left margin of the letter even. Though not justified, the right margin should be as nearly even as practical without dividing too many words.
- b) Start the body of the letter a double space below the salutation; or if no salutation is used, begin the body a double space below the last line of the inside address.
- c) Single space all business letters. (Double-spacing is acceptable only in extremely short letters. Whenever you must double space, be sure to indent all paragraphs).
- d) Always double space between paragraphs in single-spaced letters.
- e) Either indent or block single-space paragraphs, according to the letter style you are using. If you indent paragraphs, the first line usually begins five spaces in from the left margin.

9. THE COMPLIMENTARY CLOSING

The complimentary closing should match the salutation in its degree of formality. If you have greeted your reader with Dear Jack, you will probably close with Sincerely. Here are some typical closings:

FORMAL: Yours truly
 Respectfully yours,

Yours very truly,
Very truly yours,

INFORMAL: Sincerely yours,
Cordially yours,
Sincerely,
Cordially,

Remember the following points when typing a complimentary closing.

- a) Capitalize only the first word
- b) Place a comma after the complimentary closing unless you are using open punctuation (in the open punctuation style, omit both the colon following the salutation and the comma following the complimentary closing).
- c) Start the complimentary closing at the center of the page, a double space below the body of the letter, unless you are using the full-block style. With this style, start the closing at the left margin.

10. THE WRITER'S IDENTIFICATION

The handwritten signature of the writer appears immediately below the complimentary closing or the typed department name, if used. At least three blank lines are allowed for the signature, below which is then typed the writer's identification, consisting of the person's typed name, title or department or both.

11. REFERENCE INITIALS

The reference initials are typed at the left margin on the second line below the typed name or official title.

Some popular styles are:

GRP: EMS	LVM/d
FBGray:rm	Celia Brown/d
nyb (typist's initials only)	JMB/CAM:dc

12. ENCLOSURE NOTATION

An enclosure is indicated by the word Enclosure or the abbreviation Enc. typed on the line below the identifying initials. If there is more than one enclosure, the number is usually indicated.

Enclosure Check enclosed

- a) Carry at least two lines of the body of the letter to the second page; do not type only the closing lines of the letter on the second page.
- b) If a paragraph is divided at the end of a page, leave at least two lines at the bottom of the first page, and carry at least two lines to the top of the second page. Do not divide a paragraph containing fewer than four lines.
- c) Never hyphenate the last word on a page.
- d) If the letter continues on a third page, the bottom margin of the second page should be the same as the bottom margin of the first page.

E. Memorandum

A memorandum is a short, informal, personal communication from one person to another within the same agency. As computerized local area networks, modems and E-mail become more common, the use of handwritten or typed memos has changed. The format used by these electronic messages was taken from the long accepted style: DATE, TO, FROM, and SUBJECT. Memos generally are written on plain paper. Save the department letterhead for the formal business letters.

1. Type the MEMORANDUM heading in all capital letters. For plain paper, center the heading on line 7 (leaving a one-inch margin at the top). If you must use letterhead stationary, center the heading on the third line below the letterhead.
2. On the third line below the heading MEMORANDUM, type the guide words *DATE*; *TO*:; *FROM*:; and *SUBJECT*: (plus any others you may wish to add) double-spaced and flush left margin. Use all capital letters, and follow each guide word with a colon. (See note at end of this chapter concerning addressees).
3. Type all entries that follow the guide words so that they are flush left, two spaces after the longest word (plus colon). If *SUBJECT*: is the longest guide word, a tab stop ten spaces in the left margin will give the proper vertical alignment.
4. Begin typing the rest of the memo on the third line below the final guide word.
5. Type the writer's name or initials on the second line below the last line of the message, beginning at center.
6. Type an enclosure notation, if needed, on the line below the reference initials, beginning at the left margin.

NOTE about addressees

After the guide words TO and FROM, the names of the addressee and the writer are usually given without personal titles (Mr., Miss, Mrs., and Ms.). When a memo is done to someone within your immediate unit, the use of initials or a first name may suffice. The way these names are treated will depend on the formality of the occasion.

If the memo is being sent to more than one person in another department, it may be possible to fit two or three names in the space following TO.

If it is not possible to fit the names of the addressees in the memo heading, then after the guide word TO, type Distribution. Then on the third line below the reference initials or the enclosure notation (whichever comes last), type Distribution. (Use capital and lower case letters, and underline the word for special emphasis.) Leave one line blank, and then list the names of those who are to receive a copy of the memo. Arrange the names either by rank or alphabetical order, and type them blocked in the left margin. If space is limited, names may be arranged in columns.

XI – Forms of Address

The information on the following pages is from the United States Office of Protocol and contains the accepted forms of address for everyone from the President of the United States, through a variety of state and local officials, plus members of the armed forces, various church dignitaries and college/university officials.

XII Associated Press Style

The following are a few helpful guidelines from the Associated Press Stylebook. Journalists, public information officers and other writers use the stylebook as their guide to clear writing.

Numerals

In general, spell below 10, use numerals for 10 and above.

Dates

Do not use military time, and do not reverse the numbers:

CORRECT: The seminar concluded at 3:46 p.m. on August 11, 2008.
INCORRECT: The seminar concluded at 15:46 on 11 August, 2008.

Capitalization

1. CAPITALIZE titles preceding a name: Commerce Secretary Sarah Finn. LOWER CASE title standing alone or following a name: Sarah Finn, secretary of the Department of Commerce. (Long titles should follow a name: John Jones, executive director of the commercial department of Sands & Co.)
2. CAPITALIZE common noun as part of formal name: Wylie Dam, Neuse River, Mecklenburg County Courthouse. LOWER CASE dam, river, courthouse, etc. when standing alone.
3. CAPITALIZE names of races: Caucasian, Chinese, Indian, etc. LOWER CASE black, white, red, yellow.
4. CAPITALIZE the first word of a quotation making a complete sentence after a comma or colon: Benjamin Franklin said, "A penny saved is a penny earned."

Quotation Marks

Do not use quotation marks to report a few ordinary words that a speaker or writer has used:

INCORRECT: The Senator said he would "go home to Michigan" if he lost the election.

CORRECT: The senator said he would go home to Michigan if he lost the election.

The period and the comma always go within the quotation marks.

Punctuation

THE COMMA

The Comma separates words: What the solution is, is a question.

In a series: The woman was short, slender, blonde, well-dressed and old.

X, Y and Z.

1, 2 and 3.

The Selma, Ala., group saw the governor.

Newspaper usage has, in most cases, eliminated the comma before “and” and “or” but this practice does not lessen the need for the mark in:

Fish abounded in the lake, and the shore was lined with deer.

THE SEMI COLON

The semi colon separates phrases containing commas to avoid confusion, and separates statements of contrast and statements too closely related:

The draperies, which were ornate, displeased me; the walls, light blue, were pleasing.

The party consisted of B.M. Jordan; R.J. Kelly, his secretary; Mrs. Jordan; Martha Brown, her nurse; and three servants. (Without the semi-colons, that could be read as nine people).

THE DASH

The dash indicates sudden change.

He claimed –no one denied it—that he had priority.

It can be used instead of parentheses in many cases: 10 pounds--\$28 –paid.

THE HYPHEN

The hyphen is used to form compound words: secretary-treasurer, south-southwest.

When used as an adjective the use must be clear:

The six-foot man eating shark was killed (the man was).

The six-foot man-eating shark was killed (the shark was).

NEVER use the hyphen with an adverb ending in ly: Badly damaged, fully informed, newly chosen.

Miscellaneous

There are policemen, troopers, detectives, deputies, investigators, etc., but not “lawmen.”

Redundancy – If a record is set it is new –“new record” is redundant.

If describing someone or something from Washington, make clear it is the city, state or District of Columbia.

Acknowledgements

This style manual was produced in 1988 by Ben Taylor who was a public information officer for what was then called the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development.

Ben, a former reporter for the Greensboro News and Record and a former magazine editor, retired from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources in 1999.

In 1996, Tom Hegele, public information officer for the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, updated and revised the manual.

Now, twenty years later in 2008, the manual remains nearly intact. Most references to typewriters have been removed.