

Considerations on Style & Substance

CFI Press

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Whilst most rules on style (whilst/while) constitute but subjective guidelines and are, as such, highly debatable, following certain conventions does allow for a uniform read. As a general rule, CFI Press follows the sage advice of the *New Oxford Dictionary for Writers & Editors*. Here are a few preferences itemised in random order reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the editor.

Capitalisation

CFI Press does not capitalise words for emphasis – ever.

Acme Bank reported record profits. The bank met the market's expectations. Whenever someone writes Bank, I feel an urge to shout: "bank is a noun and not a proper name! Are you perchance German? Germans capitalise nouns. We do not."

Likewise, titles or job descriptions are never capitalised unless they form part of a name.

The bank's managing director expects profits to drop. Yesterday, Acme Bank Managing Director John Doe issued a profit warning. Tomorrow, Acme Bank managing director, John Doe, is to unveil his plans for a corporate reorganisation.

Please employ capitalisation only for proper names and titles that form part of a proper name.

Regrettably, I must allow for some exceptions when referring to persons occupying high public office: Lord Privy Seal, Master of the Rolls, Queen of England, or Emir of Dubai. However, if we are referring to the job, rather than the person, lower case is used.

This may seem rather confusing but is largely based on common sense and a desire to minimise the use of capitals – to within reason.

Please remember Emerson's words: "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

Words and Verbs Arbitrarily Banned by Editorial Edict

- Utilise – Just say no to the verb 'to utilise'. It is ugly and I do not wish to see it in print.
- Persons – Have a good reason to use 'persons' instead of people.
- USA – Whilst the correct description of the country, we much prefer US.

Repetition of Words / Verbs

Please don't repeat nouns or verbs – or their conjugations – in a single sentence for this looks horrendous and usually points to sloppiness.

Unless aiming for some special effect 'outspoken outsider' and similar doubles are, well, out. Why not write 'opinionated/vociferous/frank/plain-spoken outsider' instead? Be careful with synonyms, though, for some words just don't have that many useful synonyms: whilst a ball may be described as a sphere, orb, or even – going out on the proverbial limb – ovoid, none of these synonyms has any place in an article on football.

He / She Proliferation

While some deviation from this rule is welcome, I much prefer to alternate between Mr John Doe / Mrs Jane Doe and he/she. At times a title may be interspersed such as minister / queen / professor, whatever. It doesn't look very good to see a long series of he/she strung together. After a little while, the reader may start wondering who that he/she is, needing to scan way back to find a clue.

Names: Spelling and Accents

Please pay proper attention to the correct spelling – including all exotic letters and symbols – of names. A good way to ensure that a complicated name is consistently spelled correctly is to double check its spelling at the first occurrence.

The spellchecker will undoubtedly flag this as a word it doesn't know. Since the spelling is known to be correct, right-click and instruct the spellchecker to Ignore all occurrences of that name.

As a result of the above procedure, the properly spelled name will not be flagged. However, as soon as you get it wrong, the name will again be flagged.

Names & Titles

Please introduce the protagonist with his/her full name. Thereafter, refrain from using the character's first name unless there is a specific reason to do so such as when he/she is a child. Once properly introduced, we like to use Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Prof, whatever. Since, CFI Press employs UK English as the language of choice, it does not employ the (annoying) American dot. Hence it is Mr Doe and not 'Mr. Doe'.

Should someone happen to be a lord or dame, we are happy to employ that title as in Lord Owen or Dame Mirren. It is always good fun to give the full title of a life peerage – e.g. Baron Owen of the City of Plymouth – at least once. Conversely, and rather arbitrarily, we avoid mention of the many orders of chivalry, e.g. GBE, KBE, DBE, CBE, OBE, and the rather modest MBE. Feel free to ignore this rule in the pursuit of some special effect, but do not fail to mention class details between brackets (e.g. Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire).

CFI Press employs italics for titles of books, recordings, etc.

Orwellian Wisdom

Ask four questions about every sentence:

1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will express it?
3. What image or idiom will make it clearer?
4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

Let's add one more:

5. Have I written something that looks ugly or ungainly?

Please see George Orwell's 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*.

Clichés

Do not abuse the cliché. In fact, ban it altogether. If feeling particularly adventurous, use clichés sparingly. See Orwell's rule four. Clichés are usually annoying. Overused, they become downright irritating.

Smarts

CFI Press tries to be thoughtful and considerate. However, it does not habitually try to outsmart the reader. Wisecracks have no place on the website.

Open Doors

Please be sceptical of all you read and challenge yourself to answering nasty questions. Perhaps you have written that the management of Bank X attaches great value to security. Once such an assertion is made, it needs plenty of detail. Otherwise, the sceptical reader may well think, "great for Bank X and so different from all other banks that just don't care to dissuade robbers."

Exclamation Marks

Simple rule: do not use them unless in a direct quote of someone upset for some reason. That said, people speaking in short bursts of anger are generally not welcome on our pages.

Quotes

Please always use double quotation marks (“...”) for direct quotes. Use single quotations marks (‘...’) for indirect quotes of a few words only and for words that employed beyond their literal meaning.

Numbers

Numbers one to twenty are always written out. Round numbers (thirty, fifty, hundred, thousand, etc.) are also written out. The exception occurs when a round number appears in the same sentence as a ‘broken’ number.

The inflatable boat carried 10 Syrians and 21 Afghans to relative safety.

Percentages are expressed as ‘percent’ when used in a sentence. The appropriate sign (%) is used whenever preceded by a number expressed in digits.

Please round off non-essential numbers. Should a bank report a profit of \$11,984,305.96, please use a phrase such as “almost twelve million dollars.” Do not refer to a rounded number as an absolute. The bank did not report a profit of twelve million dollars: it reported a profit of about twelve million dollars.

Likewise, the UK does not have 64.1 million inhabitants. It has about/more than/approximately 64.1 million inhabitants. Denominators of big numbers (million, billion, trillion, etc) are not abbreviated.

Series Comma

We like and use the Oxford Comma, aka The New Yorker Comma.

Breakfast consisted of croissants, marmalade, coffee, and scrambled eggs.

A list of choices (... , or ...) is treated the same way.

Please acquire this most elegant of habits.

Depth

CFI Press stays clear of convention and political correctness (‘wokeness’). However, this does not imply that its editor is blind to the few positive sides of the aforementioned (he/she said, etc.). Also, while CFI Press is not in the business of offending people, it has little patience with the overly sensitive.

CFI Press has an instinctive dislike of – or scepticism to – people and things that are widely celebrated, preferring instead a constructive, yet critical, approach. Thus, it is that celebrities (think: Sir Richard Branson, Elon Musk and others residing in the pantheon of holier-than-thou bigwigs, especially those proclaiming to do good) are treated with both provisional respect and distrust – guilty until proven innocent. The likes of Warren Buffet and Bill Gates have indeed been proved innocent and thus gained admittance to our select cast of heroes.

In fact, on the editorial side CFI Press is in the business of challenging established notions and wisdom. This explains why it can, at times, be sympathetic to bankers (e.g. Rothschild), big businesses (e.g. Unilever), and generally despised or mistrusted entities such as the European Union whilst also being critical of laissez faire principles, the adulation of billionaires, and the mindless celebration of free trade (e.g. TTIP) as opposed to a less dogmatic and more sensible approach rooted in fact rather than flights of ideological fancy.

Context

Whatever CFI Press publishes needs to be balanced (and not in the way Fox News understands the concept), well researched and reasoned, distinctive, and factually beyond reproach.

CFI Press aims for depth and context. The philosophy is simple: contemporary events seldom occur outside a well-defined historical framework. We need to find and describe the contours of that framework and use the resulting picture as a lens through which events may be observed and described. This allows the website to place events in their proper perspective and offer readers a take that, hopefully, differs from the mainstream without taking leave of reason.

This outside-the-box approach allows CFI Press to be refreshingly novel and, as a bonus, undermine (refute) conventional views. CFI Press wants to offer a surprising read, ideally making an outrageous claim (e.g. Mahatma Gandhi condemned millions to poverty) and proceeding to explain the reasoning behind it (e.g. Mr Gandhi's love of the spinning wheel discouraged economic development for decades on end).

Excellence and Where It Dwells

Great reportage is, thankfully, not in short supply. Here are some of our all-time favourites.

Reportage

Ryszard Kapuściński

Travels with Herodotus

Black Stars

Shah of Shahs

The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat

Joan Didion

Miami

Salvador

Tom Wolfe

The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby

Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

James Fenton - *All the Wrong Places: Adrift in the Politics of Southeast Asia*

Hunter S Thompson

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas Gonzo Papers (4 volumes)

Fear and Loathing at Rolling Stone

Hannah Arendt - *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

George Orwell

How the Poor Die

The Road to Wigan Pier

How to Shoot an Elephant

James Fallows

The Fixer

Blind into Baghdad: America's War in Iraq

Jack London

The Abyss

The Road

A few publications that inspire

- The Atlantic Monthly (US)
- The Literary Review (UK)
- Rolling Stone (US)
- Granta (UK)
- Le Monde Diplomatique (F)
- New York Review of Books (US)
- The New Yorker (US)
- Der Spiegel (D) A few newspapers that inspire
- The Christian Science Monitor (US)
- The Times (UK)
- The New York Times (US)
- The Guardian (UK)
- Frankfurter Allgemeine (D)
- Le Figaro (F)
- Le Monde (F)
- NRC (NL)
- El País (ES)
- Clarín (AR)

A few books of reportage with samples of great writing

- *The Granta Book of Reportage* (plus Granta's series Classics of Reportage)
- *The Faber Book of Reportage*
- *The Road, Life and Fate, Everything Flows, Armenian Sketchbook* by Vasily Grossman
- *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1959-1969* (Library of America)
- *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1969-1975* (Library of America)
- *Reporting World War II: American Journalism 1938-1944* (Library of America)
- *Reporting World War II: American Journalism 1944-1946* (Library of America)
- *Reporting Civil Rights: American Journalism 1941-1963* (Library of America)
- *Reporting Civil Rights: American Journalism 1963-1973* (Library of America)

- *Kaputt* by Curzio Malaparte
- *Prejudices* (all six series) by HL Mencken
- *The New Journalism* by Tom Wolfe
- *Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe: How New Journalism Rewrote the World* by Marc Weingarten
- *The Gonzo Papers* (all four volumes) by Hunter S Thompson
- *William Russell: Special Correspondent of the Times* edited by Rodger Hudson
- *A Capote Reader* by Truman Capote
- *The Portable Beat Reader* edited by Ann Charters
- *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* by Samuel Johnson
- *The Lawless Roads, An Impossible Woman: The Memories of Dottoressa Moor of Capri* (the basis for *Travels with My Aunt*) by Graham Greene
- *Notes from the Underground* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- *Advertisements for Myself & Of a Fire on the Moon* by Norman Mailer
- *Naples '44 & A Dragon Apparent* by Norman Lewis
- *Scoop, Ninety-two Days: The Account of a Tropical Journey...*, and *Robbery Under Law* by Evelyn Waugh
- *All the President's Men, Bush at War/Plan of Attack/State of Denial* trilogy, *Wired* by Bob Woodward
- *Bandits* by Eric Hobsbawm
- *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck
- *Betjeman's Britain* by John Betjeman
- *Dispatches from Pluto* by Richard Grant
- *The War Commentaries* by George Orwell
- *The Oxford Book of Modern Science Writing* edited by Richard Dawkins
- *On the Road, Big Sur & The Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac
- *A Rumour of War* by Philip Caputo
- *Telegram from Guernica: The Extraordinary Life of George Steer, War Correspondent* by Nicholas Rankin
- *The 40s: The Story of a Decade* (Anthology The New Yorker)
- *The 50s: The Story of a Decade* (Anthology The New Yorker)
- *The 60s: The Story of a Decade* (Anthology The New Yorker)

