

FOCUS STYLE SHEET

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ACRONYMS AND ALPHABET SOUP. Avoid jargon uses of acronyms, and don't assume that your audience knows what the letters mean. Use letters for common agencies like FBI and CIA whose identity is unmistakable, but spell out the names of agencies like USPS (U.S. Postal Service) and USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture). For less common sets of letters, use this pattern: "Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)" for first reference and "OSHA" for subsequent references. Most acronyms are uppercase. Most uppercase abbreviations are likewise written with no periods. (CEO, RBI, KPMG, FDA, PHI.)

ATTRIBUTION. FOCUS generally does not publish unattributed quotations from unidentified sources. Exceptions are made in extraordinary cases to protect sources from harm. People making statements, in other words, must be prepared to stand behind the statements and permit us to use their names. This policy encourages sources to speak publicly and forthrightly. This way, sources won't feel betrayed when they read that another source was granted anonymity. The policy also discourages people from using the newspaper to circulate rumors and vilify their opponents. See QUOTATIONS.

BRACKETS. Use them sparingly to indicate a [missing] word you inserted in a quotation to make it understandable or coherent. There is usually no reason to substitute [Jones] for the word "I". If an extended quote requires more than one bracket, it should be paraphrased instead.

CAPITALIZATION. We generally follow a lowercase or "down" style, using capital letters sparingly. If it's a close call, choose lowercase. Generally use uppercase to designate the name of an institution and its major divisions, but not its smaller subdivisions. Outside the university, generic department names generally should not be capitalized, nor should job titles that do not precede a proper name. (Ex.: The human resources department of Xerox Corp. The public safety director reports directly to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. See COMMITTEES, DEPARTMENTS, TITLES.

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY. Use Carnegie Mellon on first reference. "University" is implied and need not be used. Use Carnegie Mellon or CMU for subsequent references within a story.

CITIES. Pennsylvania locations and major cities need not be identified by state or country. Paris, Harrisburg, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Moscow and Shadyside all stand alone. For the full list of cities that require no further identification, consult the Associated Press Stylebook in the FOCUS office.

CLUTTER. At this point in time it is, in effect, neither particularly outstanding practice, nor very advisable, to be using extra words in your sentences, paragraphs and pieces as a whole. The reason is because clutter is a very undesirable waste of words and an extreme burden on your reader's brain.

COLONS. Generally use a colon to introduce a list. Do not use semicolons and commas interchangeably. Beware of run-on sentences, aka comma splices. **INCORRECT:** My dog is a frisky creature, his name is Petunia. **SEE SEMICOLONS, PUNCTUATION.**

COMMAS. Use one comma in a list of three: Larry, Curly and Moe.

COMMITTEES. Most are subdivisions of larger administrative units. As such, their names are not capitalized. Do not write "Mack Jones, Head of the Picnic Committee for the Department." In the sentence, capitalize "Mack Jones" and lowercase the rest.

COURTESY TITLES. Refer to medical doctors with a "Dr." on first reference, and use titles for military personnel. Otherwise we generally avoid courtesy titles in **FOCUS**. Think about it: By using "Dr." to refer to one person with a Ph.D., we may inadvertently imply that other sources do not have Ph.D.s. In other cases, President Bill Clinton becomes Clinton on second reference; Mayor Tom Murphy becomes Murphy; and Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf becomes Schwarzkopf. Pope John Paul II becomes simply the pope. The late Mother Teresa, who was one of a kind, remains Mother Teresa on second reference. See **IDs, JOB TITLES, TITLES.**

DAY AND DATE. As a monthly newspaper, we refer to most past events by date, not by day of the week. Use "this month," "earlier this month" etc. to refer to the actual month of publication. Refer to the previous month and following month by name. When using a numerical date, abbreviate the first two months of the year and the last five. Do not abbreviate the middle five: March, April, May, June and July. Finally, use the number of the date (7, 21, 30) without suffixes ("-th," "-st."). If you're worried about doing this right, bracket the actual date in the first draft of the story. See **MONTHS, YEARS, TIME AND DATE.**

DEPARTMENTS. Capitalize the names of academic departments and major administrative divisions of the university such as Facilities Management, Housing and Financial Aid. Do not capitalize the word "department" as part of the title. Do not capitalize terms that are used generically (the dean's office, the central administration).

DISCLOSURE. The reader deserves to know about any personal connection between the writer and the people who appear in the story. This information is sometimes handled in an end note. ("Andrea Cook was briefly enrolled in rock climbing lessons taught by Martha Jones, the president of Outdoor Adventures Inc.) When the information is central to a reader's understanding of the story, bring it up early in the story. Don't wait for an end note to inform readers that Martha Jones is your mother.

E-MAIL. Lowercase and hyphenate the word. Contacting sources via e-mail is similar to contacting them via telephone, but is often a poor excuse for face-to-face or ear-to-ear contact. Reporters are discouraged from using e-mail as the sole source of gathering information for a story, especially if the story will rely heavily upon quotations. Quotations must sound like human speech, and the language of e-mail often looks stilted in print. E-mail statements tend to be long-winded and laden with digressions and qualifications. We strive to present real people in our

stories. This is difficult to achieve via e-mail, especially when you have never met the person who speaks in the story.

FIRST REFERENCE. The term refers to the first time in a story that a person's name is mentioned. Everyone this side of Madonna gets a first and last name on first reference. The first reference is also the customary place to include **JOB TITLES** (q.v.) unless you have a compelling reason to save the information for later in the story.

FRACTIONS. Use the words "half" and "quarter," but otherwise try to avoid fractions. Generally express complex numbers in decimals, not fractions. Ex.: 1.5 million hens, not one-and-a-half million.

IDs. Identify CMU faculty and staff with titles indicating exact rank: "Patrice Hajmi, assistant professor in Materials Science," not "... who teaches Materials Science at CMU." Avoid vague references such as "who works in Materials Science" or "who is a professor." Any title of more than three words should appear after the name, not before. Also, cumbersome titles may be streamlined. The purpose is generally to identify the person for readers, not to present an entire resume. It's lumpy and distracting on first reference to refer to "Patrice Hajmi, assistant professor ... associate dean in the College of Engineering, three-time winner of the Huntz Hall teaching award and 1994 Nobel Prize winner." A better way is to lodge the secondary details elsewhere in the story. Precise job titles are available in the current Faculty/Staff Directory, which is available in the FOCUS office and at the Hunt Library checkout desk. All titles need to be checked for currency. The person may have changed jobs or may have been promoted after publication of the directory. See **TITLES**.

ITALICS. We use quotation marks (instead of underlining or italics) to designate the names of books, articles, plays, films, paintings, sculpture and other imaginative works. Italics to show emphasis are used only in rare cases.

JOB TITLES. Generally capitalize job titles only when they appear before a specific person's name. When someone's title is long and unwieldy, choose the functional rather than honorific title. The person's title may be executive vice president, but her function as accounting manager is more to the point. If the title is one word ("Czar") it's generally capitalized and placed before the name. If the title is three or more words, place it after the name. ("Joe Ravel, American ambassador to Turkey.") Again, never use a title longer than three words before the name. For obvious reasons, don't make it "American Ambassador to Turkey Joe Ravel." See **TITLES**.

MILLION. Write it with the numeral and the word "million," "billion" etc. Examples: \$3 million or 1.8 million victims.

MONEY. Write \$1.83 million; \$1 million; \$387,556; 39 cents; \$1; \$1.38.

MONTHS. Write out the names of all months used without dates. When the month appears with a date, abbreviate the months from September through February. Never abbreviate the names of the five consecutive warm-weather months: March, April, May, June or July. See **DAY AND DATE**; **TIMES**; **YEARS**.

NAMES. Everyone has one and most people have two. On first reference, use the first and last name of each speaker and all other identifiable people, including the faces in photographs. Anything less is insulting. If you're referring to the chairman's husband, give him a name. (Future readers may otherwise wonder "Which husband was that?") Any identifiable actor in a public event should be named. ("Soccer captain Ray Raymond told the crowd ..." not "a student said." Use middle names and initials sparingly, except when the person is generally known by the longer name, like David Lee Roth, Anna Deavere Smith or Billy Bob Thornton. If the name is Joseph Smith, a middle initial can help readers in identifying which Smith he is. See **ATTRIBUTION**.

NEWSPAPERS. The name of a newspaper is what appears at the top of its front page. There is no "the" in Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and no "Cleveland" in The Plain Dealer, while there is a capital "T" in both The New York Times and The Washington Post. Our style is to write **FOCUS** in capitals. We do not underline or italicize the names of newspapers. The latter policy avoids a confusing thicket of italics when, for instance, we cite an [italicized] article taken from a certain edition of a newspaper. See **MAGAZINES**.

NUMERALS. Use numerals for all ages, exact distances, amounts of money (3 cents), times (8 p.m.), temperatures (66 degrees F.) and dimensions (a 2-by-4). Otherwise, write out all single-digit numerals ("seven tires"). Use numerals for all numbers of 10 and above. See **FRACTION**, **MILLION**.

PERCENTAGES. Use numbers to express percentages, even when the number is 1 percent or 2 percent. Use decimals if necessary, but never mix fractions with percentages. Use the word "percent" and avoid the (%) symbol. Convert percentages less than 1 to whole-number equivalencies (rather than ".002 percent of the population," write "two people out of 1,000." Be wary of using percentages to make comparisons: When the number of living people below the poverty line increases from 10 to 20 percent, the rate of increase is 100 percent -- not 10 percent. Better yet, say the rate doubled, or that twice as many people are living below the poverty line today, compared with 19--. Note that when something triples, it increases 200 percent, not 300 percent.

PHOTOGRAPHY. If you're a photographer, make sure to get an ID for all people who will be identifiable in the published photograph. By asking for a person's name and connection with the university, you're implicitly gaining permission to publish the photograph. Photos of unidentified people are generally unusable.

PLURALS. Generally avoid apostrophes to denote a plural. Here are examples of correct usage: "I ate lunch with the Potters." (at the Potters' house); "I earned all As and Bs last term." "I can't remember the 1960s." See **YEARS**.

PUBLICATIONS. Use quotation marks for the names of books, magazines, poems, lawsuits etc. [Note the change: Our house style until this year was to use italics.] See **ITALICS**.

PUNCTUATION. 1) Three dashes in one sentence is too many; 2) A question mark obviates the need for a comma or period, so never use any combination of the three consecutively. See COLONS, COMMAS.

QUOTATIONS. When reading any quotation in FOCUS, readers can assume that the speaker either made the statement directly to the reporter, or made it in a public place where others could hear it. We do not reprint (the jargon is "lift") quotes from other publications without fully identifying the publication – and even in that case a paraphrase is preferable to a direct quote. "Smith told the Post-Gazette he heard a loud noise just before the explosion..." Contact the source yourself. Unless that person is dead, comatose or in solitary confinement, never simply repeat what he or she told another reporter. The report may be inaccurate. See E-MAIL.

QUOTATION MARKS. Final punctuation goes inside the quotation marks. ** If there are no quotation marks at the end of a quoted paragraph, this means the quote continues at the beginning of the next paragraph. ** If you change speakers, announce it as soon as possible -- preferably by starting the new paragraph with the name of the new speaker. ** Generally avoid partial quotes and one-word quotes. This can be an annoyance, especially when the usage is to show the writer's superiority over the person being quoted. Ex.: She suggested that we go to the beach to "catch some rays" and "snag some dudes." ** He said there was a 50-50 chance that "he'd run for governor" is likewise a misuse of quotation marks because the candidate clearly did not refer to himself in the third person. In this case, use a longer quote or none at all.

SEMICOLONS. Use a semicolon in place of a period to emphasize the link between two closely related sentences. Avoid the use of semicolons in quotations; the semicolon is formal and quotations are generally informal. Use semicolons to separate clauses in a sentence, or to separate items in a complex list. In the sentence, "We invited John Smith, the chairman of my department, Andy Sheehan, a reporter for KDKA-TV, and Louis Rukeyser," two well-placed semicolons would make it clear that you invited three people, not five.

STATES. In references to specific locations, we follow the post office in using uppercase, two-letter abbreviations with no periods. Outside of listings, use common sense and refrain from imposing our style on someone else's name. Don't write "Every spring I go to the KY Derby" or "The juiciest item on the menu is the CA burger." See CITIES.

STEREOTYPING. In your stories, avoid stereotyping people by race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual preference, physical appearance, religious affiliation and so forth. The potential problem lies not in pointing out a true detail, but in selective use of such details in an unfair way. (Cf. "robbery suspect" to "black robbery suspect.") In a story about design students, for example, don't digress from a cursory list of names to point out that one student is from Fiji and another uses a wheelchair. In a similar vein, recognize that exact quotations of imperfect English may necessarily make the speaker sound ignorant. Rely on paraphrases instead.

THAT AND WHICH. Generally use "which" after a comma. Use "that" in cases where no comma is required. This rule roughly preserves the distinction between a non-restrictive clause (using "which") and a restrictive clause (using "that"). Note the

difference between "I ate cheese that is disgusting" and "I ate cheese, which is disgusting." Which speaker is the vegan?

TIMES AND DATES. Use the time before the day. (7:30 p.m. Wednesday). When you're narrating the story in a specific time frame, name the days of the week to refer to the previous days. ("I stayed in bed Wednesday because my boss fired me the previous Wednesday.") And write it this way: I came here in December 1992. I came here on Dec. 23, 1992. I came here in March (not last March). I came here Thursday (not last Thursday; use date for previous Thursday). See **DAY AND DATE**.

TITLES. If the title is one word, generally use it before the name (President Bill Clinton). If it's more than three words, always use it after the name. (Elroy Royale, president and CEO of the Acme Match Co.). Simplify unwieldy titles. Instead of "Jolene Anderson, associate professor of surgery and head of the department of thoracic surgery at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center," use "Jolene Anderson, head of thoracic surgery at Pitt." If you use courtesy titles, use them for everyone -- and use the title the person prefers. It's simpler to use none at all. Any title longer than three words should be used after the name, not before the name. Ask yourself whether the title would ever be used before the name in normal conversation; if not, always include it after the name. Thus we can use President Jared Cohon, Gen. Colin Powell, Sen. Arlen Specter and Vice President Al Gore, but not **FOCUS** editor Jim Davidson or CMU vice president Jeffrey Bolton. By this rule, it would be acceptable to write Dean Michael Murphy, as he's commonly called. But on first reference this would create a redundancy: Dean Michael Murphy, dean of students. So on first reference use "Michael Murphy, dean of students." See **COURTESY TITLES, JOB TITLES, IDs**.

UNDERLINING. For typographical reasons, we generally don't use it in the newspaper. See **ITALICS**.

UNIVERSITY. Lowercase when standing alone and referring to Carnegie Mellon.

WEBSITE. We write it as "website," not "Web site" or "web site."

WORDS. Pay attention to correct usage, noting the differences between these commonly confused groups of words:
cache/cachet; discriminate/indiscriminate/discriminating; disinterested/uninterested;
distinct/distinctive; dominate/dominant; effective/efficacious; eminent/imminent;
feared/fearsome; flammable/inflammable; flaunt/flout; healthy/healthful; hone/home;
imply/infer; incredible/incredulous; ingenious/ingenuous; premier/premiere;
reign/rein; supplant/supersede; tack/tact; track/tract; wrested/wrestled.

YEARS. Refer to "last year," "this year" and "next year." Use dates for all other years. All year references use numerals: 1920, 1996, 2001. Refer to decades by adding an "s" (no apostrophe) to the appropriate date: the 1920s, which can be abbreviated to the '20s. See **DAY AND DATE, MONTHS, PLURALS**.

FOCUS is an independent newspaper that is not subject to pre-publication review by anyone outside the staff. Story drafts should not be shown to sources or

other interested parties. If you need to enlist a source's assistance in checking the accuracy of information, make a list of the questionable facts and quotations. Whenever possible, double-check this information face-to-face or via telephone.

(Style sheet developed and written by Jim Davidson, editor of Focus)
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