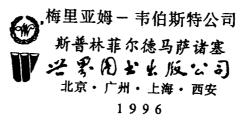The Writer's Resource

The Merriam-Webster Concise Handbook for Writers

韦氏
简明写作手册

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〔美〕梅里亚姆－韦伯斯特公司　编

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The
Merriam-Webster
Concise
Handbook
for Writers

A Merriam-Webster®

内 容 简 介

　　本书在为读者提供既详尽又简明的写作实用技术指南，藉以发展与提高写作技能。旨全书共分九章。本书由韦氏出版公司的资深编辑，积多年著述及编校的宝贵经验编纂而成的。内容全面实用，简明扼要，深入浅出，不仅是英文作者、编辑和校对工作者必备的工具书，又是一切致力于提高写作水平的英语学习者不可缺少的参考资料。

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Preface

THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER CONCISE HANDBOOK FOR WRITERS is designed to be a practical guide to the conventions of the English language in its written form. These conventions, generally referred to by writers and editors as *style,* include such day-to-day matters as punctuating sentences, capitalizing names and terms, using italics or underlining, spelling compound words and the plural and possessive forms of words, and deciding when to use abbreviations and numerals. This book also offers information and advice on composition and grammar and on a selection of other editing- and publishing-related topics. For each topic, the manual offers concise and comprehensive descriptions of the rules and conventions that writers and editors have developed for themselves to help them prepare copy that is clear, consistent, and attractive. Where the rules and conventions have exceptions, variations, and fine points that readers need to know of, these are also presented.

In many cases, the conventions discussed in this book offer choices rather than a single rule, as over the years writers and editors have developed differing sets of rules to guide them in their writing. One writer may favor a particular way of deciding when to use numerals and when to spell out numbers or how to form possessives of proper names ending in *s,* while another writer may favor other ways. Neither of these writers is necessarily wrong; each may simply be following a different style.

There are, of course, limits on the range of acceptable uses available to writers. And within that acceptable range, most writers and editors try to be consistent in the choices they make. This handbook is designed to help writers and editors make those acceptable and consistent choices.

The Merriam-Webster Concise Handbook for Writers was written and edited by working editors, the editors at Merriam-Webster Inc., and it reflects their experience in writing and editing for publication. However, the conventions of writing described in this book are by no means meant to be exhaustive of or limited to the style rules followed in Merriam-Webster® publications. Instead, this manual is based on Merriam-Webster's continuous study of the ways that Americans use their language. It draws on our extensive citation files, which include more than 14 million examples of English words used in context gathered from books by respected authors, major metropolitan newspapers, widely circulated general-interest magazines, and other publications, such as newsletters, annual reports, and special mailings by corporations and other institutions. Working from these sources, Merriam-Webster editors

have been able to establish which practices are most commonly followed in standard American prose.

Based as it is on real-life source material, this handbook offers readers information about both the consensus and the variety that are apparent in standard American writing. The consensus in this book is recorded with simple descriptive statements, such as "A period terminates a sentence or a sentence fragment that is neither interrogative nor exclamatory."

In some cases, these statements have to be qualified, as in "The abbreviations A.D. and B.C. are usually styled in typeset matter as punctuated, unspaced, small capitals ...." The term *usually* is used throughout this handbook to indicate that we have evidence that some writers and editors follow a practice that is different from the one we are describing. However, *usually* appears only in statements describing a practice that is clearly the prevalent practice. Hence, the writer who prefers AD or A.D. or AD knows that he or she is departing from the prevalent practice but that such departures are not unprecedented in standard writing.

In describing practices that are clearly not prevalent, we have used the word *sometimes* to qualify the descriptive statement, as in "Commas are sometimes used to separate main clauses that are not joined by conjunctions." In most cases, a descriptive statement qualified with *sometimes* is also accompanied by an additional explanation that tells the reader what the circumstances are under which this use is most likely to occur and what the common alternatives to it are. In the case of the example just cited, the reader is told that this styling is likely to be used if the main clauses are short and feature obvious parallelism. The reader is also told that using a comma to join clauses that are not short or obviously parallel is usually considered an error, that most writers avoid it, and that clauses not joined by conjunctions are usually separated with a semicolon.

The qualifiers *often* and *frequently* are used throughout this book without meaning to suggest anything about the prevalence of the practice being described except that it is not universally followed. We say, for instance, that "a comma is often used to set off the word *Incorporated* or the abbreviation *Inc.* from the rest of a corporate name; however, many companies elect to omit this comma from their names." This statement is not meant to indicate whether most companies do or do not favor using a comma in this position. We are saying that both practices are so well-established within standard style that their relative frequency is fundamentally irrelevant.

Finally, some practices raise questions that demand explanations that go beyond the use of a simple qualifier. In these cases we have appended a note to the description. Notes are introduced by the all-capitalized designation "NOTE," and they serve to explain, in as much detail as needed, variations, exceptions, and fine

points that relate to or qualify the descriptive statement that precedes them.

The Merriam-Webster Concise Handbook for Writers is adapted from *Webster's Standard American Style Manual* and various other Merriam-Webster® publications and, as such, is based on work done by the writers and editors of those books. The adaptation was carried out by Madeline L. Novak and John M. Morse with the assistance of Jennifer S. Goss, René P. Houle, and Anne Louise Kerr. The index was prepared by Eileen M. Haraty. Additional proofreading assistance was provided by Daniel J. Hopkins.

Contents

Chapter 1

Punctuation

CONTENTS

Punctuation marks are used in the English writing system to help clarify the structure and meaning of sentences. To some degree, they achieve this end by corresponding to certain elements of the spoken language, such as pitch, volume, pause, and stress. To an even greater degree, however, punctuation marks serve to clarify structure and meaning by virtue of the fact that they conventionally accompany certain grammatical elements in a sentence, no matter how those elements might be spoken. In many cases, the relationship between punctuation and grammatical structure is such that the choice of which mark of punctuation to use in a sentence is clear and unambiguous. In other cases, however, the structure of a sentence may be such that it allows for several patterns of punctuation. In cases like these, varying notions of correctness have grown up, and two writers might, with equal correctness and with equal clarity, punctuate the same sentence quite differently.

2   Punctuation

This chapter is designed to help writers and editors make decisions about which mark of punctuation to use. In situations where more than one pattern of punctuation may be used, each is explained; if there are reasons to prefer one over another, the reasons are presented, but there are many instances in which one styling is no more preferable or common than another. Therefore, even after having read this chapter, writers and editors will find that they still encounter questions requiring them to exercise their judgment and taste.

The descriptions in this chapter focus on the ways in which punctuation marks are used to convey grammatical structure. The chapter does not explain in any detailed way the use of some punctuation marks to style individual words and compounds. Specifically, this chapter does not discuss the use of quotation marks to style titles and other kinds of proper nouns, the use of apostrophes to form plurals and possessives, the use of hyphens to form compounds, or the use of periods to punctuate abbreviations. For a discussion of these topics, see Chapter 2, "Capitals, Italics, and Quotation Marks"; Chapter 3, "Plurals, Possessives, and Compounds"; and Chapter 4, "Abbreviations."

General Principles

In addition to the rules that have been developed for individual marks of punctuation, there are also conventions and principles that apply to marks of punctuation in general, and these are explained in the paragraphs that follow.

Open and Close Punctuation

Two terms frequently used to describe patterns of punctuation, especially in regard to commas, are *open* and *close*. An open punctuation pattern is one in which commas and other marks of punctuation are used sparingly, usually only to separate major syntactical units, such as main clauses, or to prevent misreading. A close punctuation pattern, on the other hand, makes liberal use of punctuation marks, often putting one wherever the grammatical structure of the sentence will allow it. Close punctuation is often considered old-fashioned, and open punctuation more modern; however, contemporary writing displays a wide range of practices in regard to commas, and some grammatical constructions are still punctuated in ways traditionally associated with close punctuation (see paragraphs 8 and 22 under Comma in this chapter).

Multiple Punctuation

The term *multiple punctuation* describes the use of two or more marks of punctuation following the same word in a sentence. A conventional rule says that multiple punctuation is to be avoided except in cases involving brackets, parentheses, quotation marks, and sometimes dashes. Unfortunately, it is not possible to formulate any simple general instructions that would allow writers and editors to apply this rule. This book addresses the question of multiple punctuation by including a section entitled "With Other Marks of Punctuation" at the end of the treatment of each mark of punctuation for which there is a specific convention regarding multiple punctuation.

Boldface and Italic Punctuation

In general, marks of punctuation are set in the same typeface (lightface or boldface, italic or roman) as the word that precedes them, but most writers and editors allow themselves a number of exceptions to this rule. Brackets and parentheses are nearly always set in the font of the surrounding text, usually lightface roman, regardless of the text they enclose. Quotation marks are usually handled in the same manner; however, if the text they enclose is entirely in a contrasting typeface, they are set in a typeface to match. Some writers and editors base decisions regarding the typeface of exclamation points and question marks on the context in which they are used. If the exclamation point or question mark is clearly associated with the word or words that precede it, it is set in a matching typeface. If, on the other hand, it punctuates the sentence as a whole, it is set in the same typeface as the rest of the sentence.

> **Summary:** Recently completed surveys tend to confirm the theory that ...
>
> He lived up to his reputation as an *homme d'esprit*; only once did he fail to come up with a witty reply.
>
> You did *that!*
>
> We were talking with the author of the book *Who Did That?*
>
> Have you seen the latest issue of *Saturday Review?*

Spacing

The conventions regarding the amount of space that precedes or follows a mark of punctuation vary from mark to mark. In general, the usual spacing around each mark of punctuation should be clear from the example sentences included for each mark of punctuation. In cases where additional explanation is needed, it is included at the end of the discussion, often under the heading "Spacing."

Ampersand

An ampersand is typically written &, although it has other forms, as &, ℔, and &. The character represents the word *and*; its function is to replace the word when a shorter form is desirable. However, the ampersand is an acceptable substitute for *and* only in a few constructions.

1. The ampersand is used in the names of companies but not in the names of agencies that are part of the federal government.

   American Telephone & Telegraph Co.
   Gulf & Western Corporation
   Occupational Safety and Health Administration
   Securities and Exchange Commission

   NOTE: In styling corporate names, writers and editors often try to reproduce the form of the name preferred by the company (taken from an annual report or company letterhead). However, this information may not be available and, even if it is available, following the different preferences of different companies can lead to apparent inconsistencies in the text. Publications that include very many corporate names usually choose one styling, usually the one with the ampersand, and use it in all corporate names that include *and*.

2. Ampersands are frequently used in abbreviations. Style varies regarding the spacing around the ampersand. Publications that make heavy use of abbreviations, such as business or technical publications, most often omit the spaces. In general-interest publications, both the spaced and the unspaced stylings are common.

   The R&D budget looks adequate for the next fiscal year.
   Apply for a loan at your bank or S & L.

3. The ampersand is often used in cases where a condensed text is necessary, as in tabular material. While bibliographies, indexes, and most other listings use *and*, some systems of parenthetical documentation do use the ampersand. For more on parenthetical documentation, see Chapter 7, "Notes and Bibliographies."

   (Carter, Good & Robertson 1984)

4. When an ampersand is used between the last two elements in a series, the comma is omitted.

   the law firm of Shilliday, Fraser & French

Apostrophe

1. The apostrophe is used to indicate the possessive case of nouns and indefinite pronouns. For details regarding this use, see the section on Possessives, beginning on page 88, in Chapter 3, "Plurals, Possessives, and Compounds."

2. Apostrophes are sometimes used to form plurals of letters, numerals, abbreviations, symbols, and words referred to as words. For details regarding this use, see the section on Plurals, beginning on page 82, in Chapter 3, "Plurals, Possessives, and Compounds."

3. Apostrophes mark omissions in contractions made of two or more words that are pronounced as one word.

    didn't   o'clock
    you're   shouldn't've

4. The apostrophe is used to indicate that letters have been intentionally omitted from the spelling of a word in order to reproduce a perceived pronunciation or to give a highly informal flavor to a piece of writing.

    "Head back to N'Orleans," the man said.
    Get 'em while they're hot.
    dancin' till three

    NOTE: Sometimes words are so consistently spelled with an apostrophe that the spelling with the apostrophe becomes an accepted variant.

    fo'c'sle for *forecastle*
    bos'n for *boatswain*
    rock 'n' roll for *rock and roll*

5. Apostrophes mark the omission of numerals.

    class of '91
    politics in the '90s

    NOTE: Writers who use the apostrophe for styling the plurals of words expressed in numerals usually avoid the use of the apostrophe illustrated in the second example above. Either they omit the apostrophe that stands for the missing figures, or they spell the word out.

    90's   *or*   nineties   *but not*   '90's

6. Apostrophes are used to produce the inflected forms of verbs that are made of numerals or individually pronounced letters. Hyphens are sometimes used for this purpose also.

86'ed our proposal
OK'ing the manuscript
TKO'd his opponent

7. An apostrophe is often used to add an *-er* ending to an abbreviation, especially if some confusion might result from its absence. Hyphens are sometimes used for this purpose also. If no confusion is likely, the apostrophe is usually omitted.

4-H'er   CBer
AA'er   DXer

8. The use of apostrophes to form abbreviations (as *ass'n* for *association* or *sec'y* for *secretary*) is avoided in most formal writing.

Brackets

Brackets work like parentheses to set off inserted material, but their functions are more specialized. Several of their principal uses occur with quoted material, as illustrated below. For other aspects of styling quotations, see Chapter 8, "The Treatment of Quotations."

With Editorial Insertions

1. Brackets enclose editorial comments, corrections, clarifications, or other material inserted into a text, especially into quoted matter.

   "Remember, this was the first time since it became law that the Twenty-first Amendment [outlining procedures for the replacement of a dead or incapacitated President or Vice President] had been invoked."

   "But there's one thing to be said for it [his apprenticeship with Samuels]: it started me thinking about architecture in a new way."

   He wrote, "I am just as cheerful as when you was [sic] here."

   NOTE: While the text into which such editorial insertions are made is almost always quoted material, they are sometimes also used in nonquoted material, particularly in cases where an editor wishes to add material to an author's text without disturbing the author's original wording.

   Furthermore the Committee anticipates additional expenses in the coming fiscal year [October 1985–September 1986] and seeks revenues to meet these expenses.

2. Brackets set off insertions that supply missing letters.

   "If you can't persuade D[israeli], I'm sure no one can."