

Updated December 2017

The Oxford Scientist Style Guide

0. GREATEST HITS

These are some of the most common things you will come across and need to fix—if we get these right then we're halfway there.

- *Sentence length.*
 - Avoid long sentences. On the other hand, don't use too many short sentences—it can come across as choppy and dull.
- *Dashes.*
 - The hyphen is used for compound words only, such as carbon-neutral. If you're not sure whether it's a compound word then look it up. Hyphens are not dashes (see below).
 - The en dash is medium sized and used for spans of numbers, such as 1995–2017. It can also be used to show conflict in phrases such as predator–prey or north–south.
 - The em dash is the longest and is used in place of commas, parentheses, or colons. It is quite common to overuse these—one a paragraph is a good rule of thumb or they lose their effect.
- *Quotation marks.*
 - 'Any direct quotation from a person goes in single quotation marks', said the Print Editor. 'If something doesn't appear in the original material' then it mustn't appear in the quote marks.
 - Double quotation marks for anything else, like “nicknames” , “scare quotes”, or ‘quotes “within” quotes’.
- *The Oxford comma.*
 - We always use the Oxford, or serial, comma for the final item in a list.
 - 'We invited two monsters, Theresa May, and Jeremy Corbyn' versus 'We invited two monsters, Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn'.
- *Jargon.*
 - Anything above a high school/GCSE level must be defined. If you're in any doubt then other people will be too, so it needs defining.
- *Paragraphs.*
 - A paragraph is a group of one or more related sentences. If you start a new idea then you should start a new paragraph.
- *Which vs. that.*
 - “That” introduces information that is necessary for the sentence to make sense. “Which” comes after a comma and introduces subordinate information, which could be left out without any problems.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of style guides has little to do with typographical or grammatical accuracy. Instead style guides aim to ensure uniformity within publications. Once the rules are decided, all that matters is that they are followed. So that's rule number one: **be consistent**. Happy reading!

GUIDELINES

- Be concise. If you could say something in fewer words, do. If certain information isn't needed, don't include it. Restraint is the name of the game.
- Nothing ~loud~! We don't want to see THIS KIND OF THING very often... ok? Basically: no caps lock, ever; ellipses, italics, and exclamation points, *almost* never; semicolons and question marks, only if you must.
- Italics can be used in their correct format for species names:
 - Genus name capitalized; species name lower case:
 - *The Aedes aegypti mosquito is the vector for malaria*
 - The SECOND time it is used, the genus can be abbreviated:
 - *A. aegypti breeds in standing water*
 - Note that **singular**, not plural, verbs follow.
 - Only *E. coli* and *T. rex* need no prior introduction
 - When a specific species is unknown or irrelevant, the abbreviation *Genus* sp. can be used. 'sp.' is not italicised
 - *Rattus sp.*
 - To refer to multiple species, *Genus* spp. can be used:
 - *Oak trees, Quercus spp., can be found throughout Europe*
- Don't use unnecessarily big or fancy or foreign words. You're writing journalistic copy here and the good journalist's way of being pretentious is through aggressively simple prose. **Any scientific jargon above that used at GCSE must be defined.**
- When quoting people, keep their comments as unaltered as possible. If you have to make changes, make sure to leave the meaning of the quotation entirely intact. (And on a related note, avoid drawing from anonymous sources. Only quote anonymously if the individual is integral to the story.)
- Paragraphs should be short. 100-150 words is a general rule of thumb.

2. STYLE RULES

QUOTES & QUOTATION MARKS (UK English)

- Any direct quote from a person should be in single quotation marks
- Double quotation marks for anything else, like nicknames or quotes within quotes:
 - 'Harry might say he gets "pissed every night", but actually he just mucks around on InDesign', a former *Bang!* editor said.
- Quotes should be introduced with commas, not colons:
 - The Museum's spokesperson said, 'We dug it up and flew it here'.
- When introducing a quote that was made to *The Oxford Scientist*, always use 'told *The Oxford Scientist*' not 'said to *The Oxford Scientist*'
- Full stops and commas always go outside quotation marks (single or double ones). This is one of those rules that is easy to get wrong so probably best to blindly follow.
- After a line break in a quotation, the new paragraph should be introduced by opening quotation marks BUT only use closing quotation marks at the very end of the quote.

TITLES

- Books, plays, albums, exhibitions, and publications should be italicized. For example:
 - John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* was a seminal work on the Great Depression.
 - Why write for *New Scientist* when you could write for *The Oxford Scientist*? Inexplicable.
- Use single quotation marks for essays, songs, poems, and chapters. For example:
 - The lyrics of 'Eleanor Rigby' are easily among Paul's best.

HEADLINES

- Only the first word and proper nouns should be capitalised in headlines. For example:
 - A bittersweet day for Oxford on the Thames
- Don't put a full stop at the end of headlines or standfirsts!

DATES

- In full:

- Thursday 29 March 2017
- These (and only these) variants are correct as well:
 - 24 May 2012
 - Thursday 24 May
 - 24 May
- Always base the choice of which format you use on the context. Only include the day/year when not doing so would be confusing or ambiguous.

TIMES

- Put a period, not a colon between hours and minutes: **1.30am** *NOT* 1:30am
- For consistency's sake, use am and pm, not 24-hour time. Also, never use 12am or 12pm; instead, 'midnight' and 'noon.'
- No space before am or pm—which should also be lowercase.

NUMBERS

- Spell out numbers from **one** to **ten**. Use figures for numbers **11, 12, etc.**
- Similarly, spell out 'first' through 'tenth.' Then use **11th, 12th, and so on.**

PERCENTAGES

- Always %

ACRONYMS

- No dots between or after letters: **USA** *NOT* U.S.A.

DASHES

- Use the em-dash (—) *NOT* the en-dash (–). It can be written 'Alt' + '0151'. Use en-dash for ranges (e.g. 5–6).
- Don't surround dashes with spaces. For example:
 - The magazine—Oxford's finest—could always do with more physics.
 - Almost as bad as—if not worse than—underusing commas is overusing them
- Hyphens (-) function as connectors. They are not dashes, so should never stand alone.

3. GRAMMAR

QUESTION MARKS AND EXCLAMATION POINTS

- Use neither often, and never when writing news. There are usually better ways to indicate emphasis than through rhetorical questions or exclamations.
- When transcribing, insert quotation marks and exclamation points sparingly. It is best to err on the side of full stops.

PARENTHESES

- Punctuation that ends a sentence belongs outside brackets, unless a separate sentence is contained within them. For example:
 - Finishing prelims brought him extraordinary bliss (despite his assuredly poor performance).
 - She couldn't be happier that exams were over. (And even bet she had done well.)

COLONS AND SEMICOLONS

- Colons show a direct connection, usually explanatory, between two clauses:
 - Tristan really shouldn't have eaten that curry: unpleasant going in, it was even more uncomfortable coming out.
- They can also introduce lists:
 - The culture editor had three main hobbies: InDesign, Photoshop, and *Cherwell*.
- Semicolons are used to connect two related clauses. Don't use them much; keep your sentences nice and short instead.

COMMAS

- Commas mark where to take a breath when reading. Don't let your reader suffocate.
- Although almost as bad as—if not worse than—underusing commas is overusing them
- *The Oxford Scientist* uses the 'Oxford comma' (before the last item in lists).
 - The debate was attended by some monsters, Theresa May, and Jeremy Corbyn.
 - **NOT** The debate was attended by some monsters, Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn.

FULL STOPS & PARAGRAPHS

- Short sentences are easy to read.

- So are short paragraphs. Paragraphs in journalism are especially brief.
- But be careful about not letting everything be short—make sure you vary up the tempo of your copy enough so that the article doesn't read as staccato.

SQUARE BRACKETS & ELLIPSES

- Square brackets indicate modifications to a quotation while ellipses are used to show that text has been omitted. Ellipses shouldn't be surrounded by spaces or brackets.
- Use both sparingly—it is better to keep a quotation unmodified whenever possible. Only ever use square brackets for clarification purposes and be careful never to change the meaning of a quotation through use of an ellipsis.
- For example:
 - 'I was born and raised [in New York].' (Original: 'I was born and raised here.')
 - 'Joe Bloggs...hates *Cherwell*'. (Original: 'Joe Bloggs is one of the least keen people you'll ever met. He absolutely hates *Cherwell*.')

APOSTROPHES

- Apostrophes are used in words to indicate possession or omission and look like this: '.
- Use 's in all instances of possession except after plural nouns that already end in s. In those cases, only use an apostrophe.
- In instances of compound possession, there should be as many apostrophes and possessive pronouns as items possessed. For example:
 - Harry and Tristan's design skills are paralleled only by toddlers.
 - The editors' and deputy editors' responsibilities are more or less identical.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

- Use English, not American, spellings. Here are some common differences:

○ -our	NOT	-or
○ -ise/-yse	NOT	-ize/-yze
○ -re	NOT	-er
○ -lling	NOT	-ling
- When referring to Oxford, 'University' should be always be capitalised. When referring to a college, without its full name, the 'college' should not be. For example:
 - Balliol College was founded in 1263. The college is one of the University's oldest.

- When quoting a student, don't include extraneous details. Your reader might not always need to know what subject they study. Accordingly, the full format of 'year, college, subject' should be used relatively infrequently.
- Don't split the infinitive (to go boldly NOT to boldly go) because last-gen professors will otherwise go 'tut, tut' when reading *The Oxford Scientist*.
- Similarly, avoid beginning a sentence with 'However,'. Use 'Nevertheless,' or similar.