

# Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

This is intended as a general guide, please refer to individual style sheets for points relating to specific subject areas. Please use the *Collins Concise Dictionary* for spellings etc. Use *The Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* and *Hart's Rules* as a general guide to editorial points of style.

**Please note: Series style should take precedence over this general style guide: always check whether a series style sheet exists before starting work on a book.**

**Please make a note of any specific points of style you establish for the title you are working on and return a list of these with the edited manuscript.**

## Style and tone

Keep the language simple and avoid awkward constructions:

- mid-parental height
- >• average height of parents

Avoid jargon and 'journalese'.

Avoid woolly phrases such as 'rather', 'quite' and 'in fact', unless carefully used.

Explain unusual words the first time they occur.

Give preference to the active rather than the passive voice for all instruction, especially in informational text:

- Seedlings should be planted out in Spring.
- >• Plant seedlings out in Spring.
  
- The play was written by Shakespeare.
- >• Shakespeare wrote the play.

It is not always possible, however, to turn the passive into the active:

- The garden had been watered.
- The wine is made at Chateau Bonvin.

## UK bias

Avoid an explicitly or implicitly British viewpoint:

- We in Britain . . .
- In this country . . .
- On the other side of the Atlantic . . .

Avoid statements with a northern-hemisphere bias:

- The beginning of summer is May . . .
- A south-facing wall is sunny . . .

# Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

Where possible, replace trade names with generic names and terms, as specific products may not be familiar to an international audience

## Spellings

Use ‘-ize’ spellings at the end of a word, not ‘-ise’.

Note that the following verbs are never spelt ‘-ize’: advertise, advise, apprise, chastise, circumcise, comprise, compromise, despise, enfranchise, enterprise, excise, exercise, improvise, revise, supervise, surmise, surprise, televise

## Numbers and measurements

### Numbers

With the exception of numbers in measurements, spell out all numbers up to and including ten, unless the text contains a lot of numbers above and below ten. Round numbers such as one hundred, two hundred, six million should be spelt out. Note that numbers from 1,000 to 9,999 take a comma after the thousand.

Do not start a sentence with a numeral. Do not mix figures and numbers written as words in the same sentence. If a larger number comes first and is normally written as a figure, use figures (unless the number begins a sentence). If the smaller number comes first and is normally written out, write out all the numbers:

- Some 34 children were admitted within 7 days.
- Only two cases out of one hundred-and-three had been investigated.

Spell fractions out in running text:

- two-thirds • nine-tenths

With imperial measurements use fractions; with metric use a decimal point:

- 21/2in •5.5cm

Use the least number of figures in reference to dates, pagination, etc., e.g. 23–5, 1837–8 (not 1837–38). However, retain the ‘one’ in the group 10–19 for every hundred, e.g. 211–13 (not 211–3).

### Measurements

Metric followed by imperial, which should be separated by parenthesis. Do not insert space between number and unit of measurement. *Please note:* The only exception to this is for Hamlyn cookery books, where the style is to have a space between the number and the unit of measurement. It is important to continue to use this style for Hamlyn cookbooks so that all Hamlyn recipes are edited consistently and we can easily reuse material.

- 60 x 114cm (24 x 14in) – OPG house style
- 60 x 114 cm (24 x 14 in) – Hamlyn cookery style

# Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

Use the following abbreviations:

mm, cm, m, km / in, ft, yd  
g, ml, l / oz, lb, pt  
hectares / acres, miles – spell out in full

• Abbreviations for units should not be followed by full points, and no ‘s’ is required for the plural, e.g. 5kg, 10m.

Numbers and measurements should be hyphenated when used adjectivally:

• 128-acre site • 5-cm slice

Write out per cent in full (25 per cent, not 25%). NB per cent (two words), but percentage (one word). Only use the percentage symbol in tables.

Use the degree symbol for temperatures, e.g. 45°, but write degree in full for angles, e.g. 45-degree angle.

## Dates

Style in running text: day, month, year, no commas:

• 29 January 1997

20<sup>th</sup> century *not* twentieth century

AD, BC and BCE are always small capitals

• Note that for Godsfield and Gaia imprints it is preferable to use CE (Common Era) instead of AD and BCE (Before the Common Era) instead of BC

Dates should be hyphenated when used adjectivally:

• 19th-century

Be consistent:

• Use 1920s, 1930s or Twenties, Thirties, etc

## Time

5pm (no full points)

Use minutes up to one hour then fractions, e.g. 30 minutes but 1¼ hours

## **Abbreviations**

Words that are shortened to their initial or first few letters take a full point:

• M. • attrib. • no. • vol. • Co.

# Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

Contractions do not take a full point:

- nr • St • Mr • Dr • nos • vols • Ltd

Note that, because they are contractions, plurals ending in 's' don't take a full point, even when their singular form does:

- no./nos

Capital abbreviation will usually be written without a full point:

- EEC • BBC • LSE • USA

• No full points in degrees, honours or acronyms that are all in capitals, BA, RIBA, CIS, RSPB, WWF, etc, but degrees, such as Ph.D and D.Phil do take point.

Do not use full points for people's initials:

- T.S. Elliot
- >• T S Elliot

However, do use full points in the following abbreviations: e.g., i.e., n.b., etc.

Always use *c.* for *circa*. (closed up next to the date)

## Contractions

Avoid the use of e.g., i.e. and etc.

In general, avoid contractions, unless it has been specified that the tone of the text should be informal:

- Shouldn't
- >• Should not

## **Capitalization**

Avoid unnecessary capitalization.

## **Hyphenation**

Use a hyphen to join two or more words together, either as a fixed compound or to avoid ambiguity. Hyphenate as little as possible, provided the meaning is clear.

## Prefixes

Hyphenate prefixes in certain circumstances:

when there is a double vowel:

## Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

- pre-eminent • anti-inflationary • semi-independent  
(but coordinate)

to avoid ambiguity or clarify meaning:

- co-op (but cooperate) • re-cover • re-creation • de-ice • re-use

before a word beginning with a capital letter:

- un-Christian • anti-American

words prefixed with 'ex-' meaning 'former', and 'self-':

- ex-husband • ex-con • self-absorbed

words prefixed with 'mid-', especially when preceding dates:

- mid-18th century • mid-1960s • mid- to late 20th century • in mid-air

Note that 're' and proto' are usually combined rather than hyphenated:

- prehistory • prototype

Note 'post' is usually hyphenated:

- post-war

### Compounds

Hyphenate most three-word compounds:

- son-in-law • happy-go-lucky • merry-go-round

Hyphenate two-word compound adjectives ending in '-ed':

- light-hearted • blue-eyed • red-painted

Hyphenate adjectival compounds used before nouns:

- 19th-century earthenware • pots with a red-and-blue design • plain-chocolate biscuit

### Adverb-adjective combinations

Hyphenate adverb-adjective combinations when preceding a noun:

- well-written book • fast-drying paint

but do not hyphenate when the adverb ends in 'ly':

- beautifully illustrated book

### **Punctuation**

# Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

## Commas

Use commas to separate items in a series; the final comma preceding *and* or *or* is usual in US English but reads uncomfortably in British English – omit it:

- Bell, book, and candle.
- >• Bell, book and candle.

but note that the omission of the final comma can cause confusion if the last or penultimate item contains and:

- they serve pies, fish and chips, and kebabs

Semicolons may be used to break a long list or series separated by commas, or where the commas would otherwise become unwieldy:

- I like my wines to be warm, fruity and bold; light, peachy and cool; or ice-cold, crisp, lemony and tart.

Use commas to separate non-defining or parenthetical clauses or words (it should be possible to remove the phrase enclosed by commas without affecting the basic message of the sentence):

- The company, founded in Massachusetts in 1930, was later removed to Stamford, Connecticut, where it flourished

Do not use commas around defining or essential clauses or phrases:

- The seeds I planted last year have not come up.
- The famous wine writer Hugh Johnson invited us to tea. (*but note* • A famous wine writer, Hugh Johnson, invited us to tea.)

## Apostrophes

For singular possessives of words ending in *s*, whether pronounced or silent, in most cases add an 's:

- Mrs Roberts's garden

except, use an apostrophe only after 'es' pronounced 'eez'; in reverential contexts; and for euphony:

- Hercules' strength • Jesus' life • Mrs Bridges' superb plum pudding

## Quotation marks

Use single quotation marks throughout, following the normal style of double quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

Conventionally, quote marks enclose the punctuation when the sentence comprises mainly the quoted matter plus 'he said' or similar:

## Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

- ‘If only,’ he replied, ‘you’d asked me sooner.’

In other cases, punctuation is placed inside or outside quote marks according to its logical position:

- The ‘piecrust’, ‘pretzel’ and ‘doughnut’ decorations are typical . . .

### Dashes

Use a closed en- dash to mean ‘to’ in sequences, such as dates, measurements or page references:

- 1991–7 • the 1914–18 war • 10–15 metres

or between places

- London–Paris bike ride

except when the ‘to’ part is preceded by ‘from’:

- from 1991 to 1997

Use a spaced en- rule for dashes used to punctuate

### Ellipses

Ellipses are used to indicate the omission of quoted materials. Present ellipses as closed up to words either side. No additional full point when at the end of a sentence.

- Brevity is...wit.

### **Cross references**

Spell out all cross references:

- (See page 000)

Or

- (see page 000)

Refer to page on which article starts only. If the subject of the cross reference is ambiguous then put the title of the article referred to:

- (see Hole in the heart, page 000)

### **Italicization**

Italicize foreign words and phrases that are not fully integrated into the English language.

Italicize the names of books, plays, films, works of art, musical works etc:

## Octopus Publishing Group Style Sheet

- Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*
- Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*
- Have you seen *The English Patient*?

Italicize names of boats, ships, trains, aircraft etc:

- On board HMS *Queen Elizabeth*
- The SS *Normandie*
- The *Flying Scotsman*

Italicize the names of plants, animals etc. With plants, italicize the genus but not the family:

- The lily is a plant of the genus *Lilium* (family Liliaceae).

Where the main text is italic, words that otherwise would be italicized should be roman.

### Captions

- Captions should be hard-working, giving new and helpful information, and clearly relating to the subject illustrated. They should not repeat or reword copy contained in the running text, or be simple descriptions of what is where in the photographs.
- In step-by-step copy, always check that the photograph and text tell the same story.