

Sample Stylesheets

THE SEVEN DEADLY (GRAMMAR) SINS

- 1) To avoid ambiguity, **always** use the serial comma (also called the Oxford comma):

This book covers four families: Brown, Pratt, Nelson, and King.
Breakfast includes eggs, toast, and juice or coffee.

- 2) **Never** hyphenate adverbs ending in *-ly*:

a highly anticipated announcement
BUT: a well-attended event

- 3) Only hyphenate with centuries when the century is used as an adjective to modify a noun:

a sixteenth-century manuscript (the century describes the manuscript)
BUT: in the thirteenth century The twenty-first century is here!

- 4) Three acceptable ways to refer to decades:

the 1920s (never an apostrophe before the *s*)
the '20s (the apostrophe indicates that the *19* is missing)
the twenties (if you use this form, make sure the century has been established; this could mean the 1620s, 1720s, 1820s, etc.)

- 5) Making plurals of proper names:

Add the letter *s* to make the plural form of a name that doesn't end in *s*:

the Smiths the Maxwells the Washingtons

If the name already ends in *s*, *ch*, *x*, or *z*, add *es* to make the plural:

the Joneses the Srbinoviches the Rodriguezes

NOTE: Plurals don't use apostrophes; apostrophes are used to indicate that something is missing or is owned by a person or group.

- 6) The correct way to form possessives:

For a singular noun or proper noun, even if it ends in *s*, add an apostrophe **plus** the letter *s*:

The man's dog is very friendly.
Charles Dickens's novels are perennial favorites.

The group's publications sell extremely well.

Kansas's legislature is voting today.

For a plural noun that doesn't end in *s*, add an apostrophe plus the letter *s*:

The women's suffrage movement was a decades-long fight.

The children's birthplaces were not given.

For a plural noun that ends in *s*, add an apostrophe **after** the *s*:

The patrons' reception begins at 7 p.m.

The list included farmers' wives' names.

For a plural proper noun, add an apostrophe **after** the *s*:

The Adamses' farm was located in Quincy, Massachusetts.

The Washingtons' home was Mount Vernon.

- 7) The use of the article *an* before words beginning with a **spoken** letter *h* (one you can hear, as in *historic*) is now considered archaic:

CORRECT: a historic event, a horrific accident, a hotel room

CORRECT: an heir, an honor, an hour

BONUS "SIN": This is one of the most common errors:

its possessive form: its teeth were sharp

it's contraction of *it is*: it's a beautiful day

Know Your Dashes

Hyphen (-): use to join two words and to separate parts of phone numbers:

well-attended

617-226-1206

En dash (–) [a dash the width of the letter *n* in that font]: use to connect ranges of dates, page numbers, times, and places:

1927–2013

pp. 143–204

8–11 a.m.

the London–Paris train

Em dash (—) [a dash the width of the letter *m* in that font]: use to indicate a break in thought or set off text, especially if that text already contains commas:

Three staff—Rhonda, David, and Chris—went to the conference last week.

Note that there is **no space** before or after an em dash in American style.



Month Abbreviations

Abbreviate only months that have six or more letters, spelling out the shorter months:

Jan. Feb. Aug. Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec.

BUT: March April May June July

State Abbreviations

Never use postal abbreviations in narrative; they are for envelopes only. Note that there is *no space* after the periods in abbreviations such as S.C. and S.Dak.

ALABAMA	Ala.	KENTUCKY	Ky.	NORTH DAKOTA	N.Dak.
ALASKA	Alaska (no abbrev.)	LOUISIANA	La.	OHIO	Ohio
ARIZONA	Ariz.	MAINE	Maine	OKLAHOMA	Okla.
ARKANSAS	Ark.	MARYLAND	Md.	OREGON	Ore.
CALIFORNIA	Calif.	MASSACHUSETTS	Mass.	PENNSYLVANIA	Pa.
COLORADO	Colo.	MICHIGAN	Mich.	RHODE ISLAND	R.I.
CONNECTICUT	Conn.	MINNESOTA	Minn.	SOUTH CAROLINA	S.C.
DELAWARE	Del.	MISSISSIPPI	Miss.	SOUTH DAKOTA	S.Dak.
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	D.C.	MISSOURI	Mo.	TENNESSEE	Tenn.
FLORIDA	Fla.	MONTANA	Mont.	TEXAS	Texas
GEORGIA	Ga.	NEBRASKA	Neb.	UTAH	Utah
HAWAII	Hawaii (no abbrev.)	NEVADA	Nev.	VERMONT	Vt.
IDAHO	Idaho	NEW HAMPSHIRE	N.H.	VIRGINIA	Va.
ILLINOIS	Ill.	NEW JERSEY	N.J.	WASHINGTON	Wash.
INDIANA	Ind.	NEW MEXICO	N.Mex.	WEST VIRGINIA	W.Va.
IOWA	Iowa	NEW YORK	N.Y.	WISCONSIN	Wisc.
KANSAS	Kans.	NORTH CAROLINA	N.C.	WYOMING	Wyo.

COMMON TERMS

federal census (1790 federal census) -lowercase

St. Thomas Episcopal Church (not Saint Thomas)

Spell out dollar amount of one hundred or less

Use full date range (1848–1849)

Block quotations single spaced and set in roman

Draft Board No. 15 (not Number)

underage (not under age)

Spell out numbered streets (Twelfth Street; Fifty-Eight Street)

Capitalization, spelling, hyphenation

Historical periods, events, and terms

Anglo-Saxon period	hearth tax, poll tax,	Siege of Boston
Boston Massacre	Protestation Returns	Spanish-American War
	Revolutionary era	

Administrative, government, and military terms

Committee of	General Court	U.S. Army . . . the army
Correspondence	member of Parliament; M.P.	United States (noun); U.S.
Community Charge	Tory Party	(adj.)

Geographic terms

Boston Harbor	Mount Auburn Cemetery	River Thames
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Occupations and buildings

brickmaker, brickmaking	mapmaker	schoolmaster
cabinetmaker	meetinghouse	sergemaker
cordwainer	officeholder	tithingman
doorkeeper	pipe maker (2 words)	wagon master (2 words)
hog reeve (2 words)	ropewalk	woolcomber
innholder	salt maker (2 words)	
ironworks	sawmill	

People and groups

King George . . . the king	Loyalists
Dissenters	Patriots

Compound words

antiwar	half brother (two words) <i>but</i>	non-parochial
	stepbrother	tradespeople

Abbreviations

St. (generally, abbreviate St. in parish names)
Mount Auburn Cemetery (not abbreviated)
Gen., Lt., Col., etc.: generally, abbreviate titles preceding names.
vol. (in endnotes)

Child-list abbreviations

after (not abbreviated)	bur.	liv.
b.	Co. (county)	poss.
bef.	d.	prob.
bet. (between)	d. young	
bp.	int.	

Numbers

Generally, spell numbers up to 100, except for ages, currency amounts, and percentages.

Spell out round numbers: about nine hundred

quarter century, *but* one-fourth, one-fifth, etc.

Use full numbers in inclusive numbers: 1970–1975; 273–274

Double-dating: 1725/6; 1699/1700

English currency: £72 10s 3d; but “about 10 shillings”

Punctuation

Generally, use parentheses instead of brackets: (See Chapter 1.) (See SMITH FAMILY.)

Use brackets around [*sic*] <word ital but not brackets>, around interpolations within extracts, and as parentheses within parentheses.

EXAMPLES FROM SPECIFIC BOOK PROJECTS

Anderson Great Migration to New England series

Letters as letters:

a final *s*

ends in *che*

nn or *un*

letter *x* in “Alxarson”

... <closed ellipses character is OK in all GM books>

Child lists use roman numerals with **no periods**: i, ii, iii

Child JONES, <followed by vitals>

None seen.

connected with, not to

he was well established in Maine

well-known minister

second highest

Adams's

sidestep

step-grandfather

step-niece, but stepson

half-brothers

half-first cousin <en dash>

a brother of

half share

a share and a half

half an acre

a half-acre

half-century

an acre and a half

thousand-acre grant

3½ acres

house lot
16 years old
40-year-old
connected with, not to
long deceased <no hyph>
nonfreemen
seventeenth century <not 17th or 17th>
second largest
St. <American style w/period>
b. say 1639 (based on...)
[sic – recte Wade]
put up, not set up (gravestone)
viz: <rom>
et passim
Washington D.C.
_____ _____ for unknown name

DiCamillo: British Country House Alphabet series

Baroque
chinoiserie
Claude or Claude Lorrain
enslaved Africans
enslaved people
Gothic
Gothic Revival
International Gothic style
medieval (*supported by Merriam Webster and MFA*)
Neoclassical (*differs from Merriam Webster and MFA*)
Neoclassicism
Parliament
Perpendicular Gothic
rococo (*supported by Merriam Webster and MFA*)
Jasperware

Formal titles of rooms are capitalized as they are proper nouns. So:

Lord Byron's Sitting Room, **but** the sitting room
the Amber Dining Room, **but** the dining room
the Doric Garden Temple, **but** the garden temple
Double Cube Room

People with titles

5th Earl of Whitfield, *not* Fifth Earl of Whitfield

“educational whimsy”