

# The 12 Rules of Good Writing

## NEVER ASSUME: FACT-CHECK EVERYTHING.

### Use Word.

Use a spell-check program before publishing. Typos are death to credibility.

### Don't trust Word!

But spell-check programs won't catch everything, especially if you use the wrong, but real, word, like *compliment* for *complement*, *home* for *hone*, or *hear* for *here*.

### Be consistent.

Be sure that your writing is consistent—your spelling, your spacing, your font style, etc.—page after page after page.

### Quotation marks versus italics.

Use italics for book and magazine titles; use double quotation marks for the titles of newspaper and magazine articles and around song and poem titles.

### Quotation marks in American English.

Use double quotation marks (" ") for direct quotes. If a quote within a quote is necessary, use single quotes (' '). End quotation marks are *always* placed *outside* periods and commas. There are no exceptions. Be sure to use the same style of quotation mark (directional or non-directional).

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## **The marriage of two sentences.**

When you join two sentences, you have two options:

You can join them with a conjunction + a comma.

You can join them with a semicolon.

## **Plurals.**

Plurals are formed in three ways: you add *-s*, *-es*, or *-ies*, or the word doesn't change (moose), or the word changes entirely (mouse to mice).

The only time you use an apostrophe + "s" to form a plural is when you are writing about a) single letters (P's and Q's), b) single numbers (1's and 2's), or c) an acronym with periods (the M.B.A.'s).

## **Colon don'ts.**

Yes, colons often start a list. However, never put a colon after *include*, *includes*, *including*, or *for example*.

## **Noun-pronoun agreement.**

The noun drives the bus: a singular noun requires a singular verb and singular pronoun. This sentence is confusing *and* incorrect: Each author must mind their manners. "Each" author is singular, so you must write "his or her." An easy workaround would be "All authors must mind their manners."

Tricky nouns include *audience*, *company*, *team*, *crew*, and *staff*. These nouns are treated as singular nouns and require a singular verb form and the singular pronoun *it*. Again, an easy workaround would be to rephrase if necessary: audience members, listeners, employees, staffers, and participants.

## **Don't be trendy.**

Guard against overuse of trite words and expressions.

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