



Dream of Travel Writing

Mastering AP Style: The Grammar Style of Choice for Publications

You should see a slide now that says, “Mastering AP Style: The Grammar Style of Choice for Publications,” which is what we’re gonna talk about today. So, as I mentioned, capitalization is very apropos for our topic right now, because that’s actually one of the sticking points about AP style that I often see coming through people who only have web writing training. And I’m gonna talk in a little bit once we get started officially about why you should even care about AP style, especially if you’re only writing online. I think if you know that you wanna write for publications, it seems evident that it’s something you should probably learn. But you wanna learn it before you get assignments, and I’ll tell you why as well.

So, what we’re gonna cover today is... I said, “Why does this dusty book matter to you?” It’s got some high tech, sort of not high tech, but some technical ways of viewing it now that I’ll go over, at the end of the call as well, how to find it, but, first and foremost, we’re gonna talk about why this matters. And then we’re gonna go over some of the basic tenets that are less, you know, “You need to use this word rather than this word,” but philosophical shifts to make in how you put your words and your writing on the page to make sure that you’re properly tending to these tenets of AP style. And then I’m gonna talk about some of the things that are just sort of plain old wrong that you might not even suspect. But the thing, and I’m gonna talk about this when we talk about why AP style matters, is that, similar to the folks who translate “Harry Potter” books from one language to another, and then we all get the codified American English version rather than the British English version, some people somewhere sit around in a room and have several meetings, deciding not just that this is the way that everyone will do it, but this is the way that everyone will do it for a reason. And so that’s one of the reasons that it’s good, not only to learn AP style because it does, in fact, make your writing easier, but also these sort of tricky conventions, so to say, it’s good to know them because it shows your editors that you keep up on these trends. And, like I said, we’ll wrap up at the end by showing where you can find in full or in parts when you needed the guides for AP Style.

So, one of the reasons that this topic came up is that I have been encountering a lot, whether in submissions that I get, or in emails, or especially in pitches that I’m reviewing, various things that pop out as red flags to editors. And when we talk about pitching, we talk about how there’s two different things that you need to think about when you’re putting the words on the page for your pitch. On the one hand, it’s best practices, it’s the best way to go about what it is you’re trying to do. And then on the other hand, it’s just sort of I call them obnoxious editor pet peeves that you just need to know because you just have to do it this way, and there’s no good explanation, and it’s just how it is. And these AP style guidelines can often seem like one of those, and a lot of these, on their own, just seem like, “Well, why do I have to remember all these rules?” But then when you look at it together, it’s because they all form part of this framework, which is conveniently located in one book that you can read, and learn, and reference as needed. But one of the things that I see when I have my



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editor hat on, either editing things that are being submitted to us or looking at pitches that you guys are looking at submitting to editors, is that there's been a disconcerting rise in these numbers of red flags that really just go back to whether it's AP style or kind of, let's call it, learned and official grammar rather than what flies on the web.

So, you'll see me do it, and even when I was teaching web writing, I was very clear about this, you can use partial sentences when you're writing on the web. You can start sentences with "and." You can start sentences with "but." You can have sentences that are just one word. But that doesn't fly... The majority of the time in print it can. But, correspondingly, it also doesn't fly always in corporate writing. And one of the things, as I was looking up the origins of AP style and how it's used today, is that a lot of corporations have adopted that, and you'll see, when we talk in a little bit, about the secret things hiding in the AP style book that are very useful for you to know, that some of that has to do with businesses and how businesses are described.

And so, as I get a lot of these submissions for the database, what happens is that we, like many publications, use a certain standard set of styles, and then we have our own things on top of that. And so what typically happens, and any of you guys that have worked with online markets, websites that have a lot of content going around, especially any of the third-party content organizations, whether Demand Media back in the day or Contently now, you tend to get these like 13-page to 15-page style guides. And, like I said, some of that is gonna be specific to that organization and what they cover, and some of that is gonna be just the standard stuff. And so knowing it in advance can help you from having to learn it over and over again each time.

So, one of the things that AP style does that I think a lot of us don't realize is that it actually has the "correct way," the standard way to talk about a lot of new stuff as well, and I'm gonna tell you a couple of funny things about that. But AP style guide is more than just where to put your commas, it's more than just how to spell certain words if the spelling is disputed, it's redone every single year, and its aim is really to keep a standard across the board. Like I mentioned, it's Associated Press, so that's America-specific, but you do see a similar thing in a lot of other English language markets. So, if you're writing in a different English language market, it's worth seeking out what is the AP style equivalent there as well, just as a side note. But it's meant to make the press corps, the American English press corps, have a standardized way of writing. And part of that is to make editors' lives easier, but part of that is also for the readers, it's so that the newspaper reader who might read, say, "The Washington Post," "The New York Times," the "L.A. Times," and the "Chicago Tribune" as part of their... whether it's a Sunday morning tradition of actually holding the newspapers or just the apps that they have on their phone or the websites they peruse in the morning, so that



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they can have a seamless reading experience. So that what they are reading from one place to another is understandable as the same thing, is not sort of jumping voice overtly when you go from one news outlet to another. It's meant to create a standard news voice.

And to that end, like I said, they will have the correct way to capitalize or spell the latest memes, much to many people's amusement. Part of the AP style guide is just a very long list of words and their correct usages. And one of the things, like I said, the reason that this impacts your pitches is that it's a very quick and very clear signal to editors that you speak their language, that you are not going to take a lot of their time on the editing side of things that they expect a standard journalist to know. And this is something that I've had a lot of discussions with my husband, who also co-owns the business, about this recently, when we've been looking at hiring writers, which is that when you're looking at hiring a writer today, you are looking for different things than just writing obviously. You're looking at, you know, being able to use WordPress, for instance, or being able to do research online, as opposed to just being able to do research over the phone. So, these are ways that things might be different from standard journalism. But what I've seen is that there's essentially, forgetting about WordPress, which everybody seems much better within these other two things, there's two basic things. There's that research reporting side, where people are increasingly stopping several paces away from where they should get, and then there's just the writing. So, I've had a lot of instances recently where I've been going over something, and I feel like I'm not able to give it a proper edit in terms of the content, because I've gotten so mired in fixing various little things in terms of commas, or sentences not being legible in these ways that you might not think about, but which we're gonna talk about a little bit more next week, or simply just not following the style conventions that have been very clearly outlined.

So, this quote that I pulled here for you is very telling and interesting, because, as I was looking up, just a very simple search query of why use AP style or why is AP style important, something very unexpected for me happened, which was pretty much all of the things that came up were not for writers, they were for PR people. I saw very few blogs about journalism, or about blogging for that matter, or even about content marketing, talking about why you use AP style. I saw a lot of PR people, an overwhelming number of PR people, harping on why it is important to learn and use AP style. And the reason why is this quote right here, that more of her press releases are answered, more of her op-eds are published. I saw so many quotes like this. A lot of press releases, you may or may not know or notice this, but in a lot of markets, magazine editors will essentially publish press releases verbatim in the final book news sections of their publications, and other PR people said their press releases were published with fewer changes. This is really important, because we, as writers, as freelance writers, are only a piece of the pie of who is pitching editors, and the majority, I would say, of pitches that editors get are not the ones from writers at all, they are the ones from PR people.



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So, in terms of techniques for pitching editors, how to pitch editors better, we can take a lot from these PR blogs. And often there's really great guides on PR blogs, but not on journalism blogs, about what types of things editors of different magazines are looking for, and what they need, and what they are trying to do for their audience. And this, I think, is a really great thing that, as I mentioned, I'm seeing a lot of these issues, and PR people are talking about it a lot, this is the division. People who work in an office, and their job is to pitch journalists, know this. They care about it, they work hard to improve it, but the majority of freelancers or content marketers aren't thinking about this. So, by thinking about, and using, and really understanding, and imbibing AP style, that's gonna set you ahead of a lot of other freelancers. And so, like I said, AP style is not just something that is gonna help you if you are working for publications, and here's why.

AP style, because of that standardization aspect of it that I mentioned before, that it's really meant to make writing easier for readers of all kinds, has been adopted by a large number of corporations. And so that means that a lot of company websites or government websites, like a lot of CBBs are connected to the government, that you might write for, do, in fact, have this in mind. And even further than that, I've met a large number of editors for company sites who have a journalism background, whether that's a journalism degree, and then they decided to go into content marketing because it's easier, or they worked in a newsroom for several years, their newsroom closed, they weren't good at pitching, and so they went and became an editor for a company, because editing is what they know. And so this is also gonna really help you if you are working for different companies, or, like I mentioned, governmental organizations, or other nonprofit organizations and CBBs in that writing as well, because a lot of those editors have this background. And if they don't, it's a major selling point that you know these things, because you can bring that standard to that online publication.

So, like I mentioned, there's a lot of things that you wouldn't expect. There's even sports terminology, because sports journalism is actually a huge amount of the things that are created. There's financial and business terminology. But then there's actually things that are more instructive to us as writers that are really great, such as how to write photo captions the right way, media law guidelines. And then, as I mentioned, they have things that are very much just the right way to spell this particular word that is often used. So, there are various things in there, like I said, media law, financial terms, but there are things in there that are just how to be a journalist. So, I mentioned that they talk about the right way to put photo captions. They also talk about the right way to attribute quotations, the right way to use abbreviations. But then they also say things like this, and this is why I wanted to put this in here, because it's worth one time in your life just sitting down and reading the whole AP style guide, even though I'm gonna tell you kind of the most important and most often screwed up



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sections today, but here's one of those things that's really, like I said, about how to "do journalism."

"Women should receive the same treatment as men in all areas of coverage. Physical descriptions, sexist references, demeaning stereotypes, and condescending phrases should not be used." Now, especially in this day and age, this can seem very like taking a stance, like the AP style guide is defending women. However, this and a lot of the other things in there are just showing what is good journalism, what is unbiased, balanced coverage. In terms of quotations, they advocate something which is less and less prevalent, which is to very much leave any quotation that you receive from a quote source as is, to not clean it up, if you need to remove some words, to just put in ellipses, if there's a gross error, to put in sic in parentheses. So, some of those things, like I said, are less used today, especially online. But a lot of the things that they have in there are just good journalism.

Now, another thing that happens, I mentioned a lot, like the right way to spell the latest memes, are that things change. And while editors are keeping up with this, they expect you to as well. I've had some editors who very nicely remind us in the annual kind of update to their own style guides that things have changed. But some of them won't, and some of them will just start seeing errors in your submissions, which weren't errors before, and won't say anything to you about it, and will just get increasingly annoyed that they need to make more changes to your work. So, some of the things like that that have come up is it used to be quite annoying that the word "internet" needed to be capitalized every time you used it. And in 2016, AP style finally changed that "internet" could be said with the lower case "i." However, "Wi-Fi," and you may have noticed this around, "Wi-Fi" should always be spelled with a capital "W" and a capital "F" and a dash in between. But then there are some other things that have changed which are more sweeping. So, for instance, I think it was two, three years back, it used to be that when you wrote a city and a state, AP style had a different set of abbreviations that aren't the standard postal code ones, like MN for Minnesota. And part of this is because, very handily, like I said, a lot of readers don't actually know those. And so they were slightly more descriptive abbreviations that made it quite clear which state they were talking about. And perhaps a sign of the times, or perhaps for clarity, recently, AP style has changed so that you actually spell out all states. So, rather than writing, before, you would never have written "Tallahassee, FL," you would have written "Tallahassee, FLA," but now, you would write "Tallahassee, Florida."

So, another change that happened recently, which has not been well-received, is "over" versus "more than." I'm sorry, I'm missing a parenthesis there. Are any of you familiar with this "over" versus "more than" debate? So, this is something that has been, just in your average writing and even kind of your average speaking, a pet peeve for grammar geeks for



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many years, is people mincing the usage of “over” and “more than.” However, recently, AP style, you could sort of call it caved, and said that they could be used relatively interchangeably. And my favorite protest in that debate was an editor saying, “More than my dead body.” And what she meant was like, “Over my dead body,” but she was showing how you can’t really interchange “over” and “more than.” And this is one of these cases, and “fewer” versus “less than,” there are several other ones that are quite similar, that you’ve probably misused, at least one of these, for ages. There are some that I forget about and still use wrong until I glance upon it on a grammar site and I’m reminded. But you’ve probably misused a lot of these just because you were taught wrong by somebody at some point. And so these ones, like “over” versus “more than,” even though they’ve said they’re interchangeable now, and “fewer” versus “less than,” and different things like that, are definitely worth a look. And, like I said, there’s anything sort of in that area of the *er* versus the spelled-out version, they tend to have different uses. And I like to use this example, which comes from Italian, and we don’t have quite a word that works the same way in English, so I have to explain it to you in Italian.

So, in Italian, there’s two different words that mean share, like you share a meal, you share a couch, you know, like you share a cab ride, okay. Now, the two different words are “dividere,” like divide, and “condividere.” And this is the thing, we don’t have this other word in English. Now, the way that it works in Italian is that the simpler word, “dividere,” can only be used for things that could be physically broken apart. So, you can “dividere,” divide a croissant, but you can’t “dividere” a cab ride, or a car, or a couch, because you can’t just saw it in half. In those cases, you need to “condividere,” the other type of share. So, these are the types of grammatical nuances that AP style, very similar to its unequivocal words about how to describe women, just cuts through all the crap, all the nonsense, and gives very, very clear descriptions for. So, that’s one of the other reasons, like I said, where it’s worth just sitting and reading through once in your life, because it will reset you on all of these tendencies.

Now, let’s get into kind of the basic pieces, and, like I said, you can almost think of them as philosophical, about the AP style guide that a lot of folks, either, like I mentioned, have mislearned somewhere along the line, have just always done in a certain way, or that you may have learned from a different style system. So, I don’t have a slide on all the different style systems in here, but if you have an academic background, there are some different ones, like MLA is a very major one. I also came up, when I was working in academia, using something called the Chicago Manual of Style, simply because the institution that I worked at, and specifically the president of the university who we wrote for, kind of had a sense of being more elegant, and Chicago was kind of thought of as a bit more, not for boast per se, but AP style, at its core, is meant to keep things brief. AP style was actually created in 1953, and, as I mentioned, it’s now updated annually. At the time, it was updated biannually, but the



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purpose was initially, like I said, to standardize, but that was back when a lot of things were coming in on wires.

So, things were coming in with different abbreviations just to save space in the wire or to save space, save type space, in the newsprint. And so standardizing these abbreviations created a code that everyone can understand instead of the many, many different types of abbreviations that were used at the time. And one of those things that was abbreviated, but we don't think of it as abbreviated, because we think of words as being abbreviated, but one of those things that were being abbreviated was numbers, in terms of how numbers were being spelled out. So, a very, very basic thing about AP style is when you use a numeral versus when you write out the number.

So, tenet number one of AP style, and this is one of these things that, and I'm sure every editor has a different stance on this, but I am very hard to convince that I should hire, engage with somebody if they send me an email where, a pitch email of some kind, and a pitch email in which there are numbers in different places, and either there's a numeral for one or four or two repeatedly. Like, "I have been working for two years," and they say the numeral "2." Or they mince, and they have some numerals for one, and sometimes they spell out one, and there is absolutely no rhyme or reason to what is in that pitch and how they have done it that way or what background they have that may have influenced this.

Now, it seems like an editor pet peeve, but let me explain why. I do this, or I have this in this unmistakable and unignorable feeling, because if somebody is using, especially if they're starting sentences with numerals, it looks sloppy to me. And this is the case to a lot of editors, and it goes back a little bit to what I was saying about Chicago just being cleaner. But it looks like text messages, or it looks like tweets but more so like text messages, and so that gives you as the editor the sense that all of this person's text is gonna come in sloppy, that the sentences won't be complete, more importantly, that there will be holes in the research. But the second thing, the more insidious thing, like I said, when there's some numerals and some spelled-out numbers, and there's no rhyme or reason, to me, that shows that this person doesn't even have their own style code that they live by, and they probably haven't even thought of having one, and that it will be very hard to teach them one. So, like I said, these are some of the reasons why these tiny, tiny tweaks in your pitch can broadcast very big and often, like I said, red flag, insidious kind of things to editors.

So, numerals above nine, but spell out the numbers below nine. Now, there are some exceptions to that. So, if a number begins a sentence, we get a lot of these in the database, because we have the demographic section, where we talk about who the typical reader of



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each publication is, and we pull statistics from a media kit, so we're often saying like, "Fifty-nine percent of readers are women." But if you begin that sentence with that "fifty-nine percent," it doesn't get to be a numeral anymore, it needs to be spelled out "fifty-nine." And, again, that's just this kind of "cleanliness" bit to the writing in the way it looks on the page. However, ages are always in numerals. Likewise, feet and miles, but miles are only in numerals over 10, whereas feet and ages are in numerals all the time. This is, like I said, there are little nuances in here, and editors will see if you know them or not, or like I said about considering people for the database, they will think about if you have ever thought about this. And if you haven't thought about this, if impossibly I knew about it or if it's a lost cause and not worth their time to work with you.

So, two other important things on the numbers here. Percent, so you always spell out the word percent, and this is another one where it seems like an odd exchange between saving space and being clean, but the AP style has decided on percent, and, honestly, I agree. I think it looks...it somehow just looks more elegant, it looks nicer, it looks more newsy. So, whatever number you're writing for percent, you always need to write out the word "percent." And then the other weird one about numbers, and this is actually a bit about dates, but since it's numbers, I've kept it in here. So, you need to offset years in your dates. So, if you're saying, "January 17th, 1987," there needs to be a comma after "1987." But if you're just saying, "January 17th," you don't need a comma. So, why is that? Because "1987," in this case, is essentially another modifier on that date. So, it's like when you're saying, "It's a big, blue, boisterous bunny," and you would put commas in between "big" and, well, maybe not between "big," but you put a comma in between "blue" and "boisterous." So, "1987" is another adjective, in a way, easier to think of it as a modifier that's modifying that date.

Okay, so let's get away from numbers, because they're quite technical. This one is much easier, but it's like one of these philosophical things that you just need to wrap your head around, and then you will do it much better/perfect forever going forward. So, this is one of these things that PR people have mentioned a lot that it's difficult for them to get a handle on but it makes them much happier.

The thing about AP style is that they are very judicious about capitalization. And so what I mean by that is that I've been getting a lot of work from people, either who are paid contractors for us in a certain way, or I see it in pitches where there's an odd amount of capitalization, and then sometimes things that I know should be capitalized aren't. So, this is like that numerals thing, where I, with my editor hat on, am saying, "What is the rule book that this person thinks that they're following by capitalizing some things and not others?" And this is very similar to the numbers, one of those red flags to editors that's gonna make them have some serious doubts about working with you even if the content of what you've



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submitted seems great, just because they're not sure that they can reteach this, and they don't wanna spend a bunch of time editing it or trying to explain it to you.

So, a very, very easy one is names. So, names, of course, should always be capitalized, as should companies. So, a company name would be, like Dream of Travel Writing, in our case, okay, so that would be capitalized. However, what I often see happening is that then people will say, you know, say they're talking about, for instance, the Travel Magazine Database that we produce, so that would be in all caps. It is the official name of the website of the resource. But so what if somebody's writing about it, and they say in the beginning, "the Travel Magazine Database?" They capitalize it all. And then, you know, in a good abbreviated fashion, they're trying to not use the full name throughout with their writing, and they start limiting it to being just "the Database." So, they're saying, "the Database."

Now, a lot of people believe, and I'm not quite sure how this got out there, that when you sort of narrow something down like that, you would continue to capitalize "the Database," like not "the" but "Database." You would say lower case "t" and then capital "D." And this might be, from the very, very limited times that we do these with titles, which are things like "the President" and "the Pope," that's pretty much the only times that you would say somebody's title. So, after saying, you know, "President..." I actually forgot his first name for a second. That was really lovely. After saying, "President Donald Trump," you might go on to just say, "the President." In those cases, the "P" of "President" would continue to be capitalized, but for anything else, if it's the president of a corporation, if it's the database, if you've said the name of a building, and you know, it's like "Parkside Condos" is the proper name, and then you go on in the future to say, "the condos," you would not continue to capitalize. That "P" for the corporation president, that "D" for the Travel Magazine Database, or that "C" for the condos, in those cases, it becomes lower case.

Now, I see this happen also with things, let's call them ideas or movements. So, an example might be, like when I am talking about something in a webinar, and I talk about a blog post that somebody wrote or philosophy that is called Blah, and then its central tenets are Blah, Blah, and Blah. But it's not a religious philosophy. The names, you know, have been made up by this person for the purpose of this blog post. The proper nouns or the proper names are really just created subheads of a blog post in this setting. So, as you would go on and continue to say, you know, "the law of different sentence lengths," let's go back to the web writing webinar I did, for instance, that wouldn't be capitalized. It's not an official proper noun. It's not an official name. It doesn't count. So, that would need to become lower-cased.



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Now, some people, and I do this, I do it for our own kind of internal style guide, will offset things like that with quotation marks, and that's another thing that in AP style is technically not the case. And so, when you're talking to someone, it may be at a museum or some other institution, and they're telling you about some programs that they're running, and they are telling you the names of these things, but those aren't names that, you know, the program publicly goes by or that you would find on their website, they're just the names that they're using to refer to things. So, for instance, I recently announced that we are starting for a coaching program a knowledge base, which is really like the technical term, but we have a different proper name for it. It's the On-Demand Coaching Concierge. But if somebody was quoting me, interviewing me, talking about how we set that up and why, they shouldn't be going around and capitalizing "knowledge base" throughout, because that's not actually the proper name of it, or if we hadn't come up with an official name yet, or we were just calling it our knowledge base and it didn't have a name, you still wouldn't capitalize "knowledge base" throughout.

So, the quote that I have on here, I really love, and this comes from a PR website again. But she says, "Company presidents are, no doubt, very important people. However..." And this is something that you see come up a lot when you're doing interviews, is that people will have very long and convoluted titles, and when I say, "long and convoluted," I don't do so many of these anymore, but it wasn't uncommon to interview people whose titles are like seven or eight words. And in those cases, I have actually had, when I sent the quotes to people to review, not the whole story, but just their quotes review, I've had people write back and correct their title to be in capitals, because in their signature, or when they describe themselves internally, they capitalize their title. However, for AP style and for journalism, their title doesn't get to be capitalized.

So, as I mentioned, this is the case a lot with titles, whether it's the title of a person or, you know, a title which is actually the name of an entity, an enterprise, a business, an initiative. But another thing to watch out for is when you are referring to people in ways that... I've seen this come up a lot. Like if you are on a tour, and there is a live action element, and say there's a witch. So, people might go on in their blog post, writing about that experience, just say "the Witch" in capital letters. So, you never got this person's name, it's not really her title, but it's how she's being referred to at the present time. And this is similar to when I was talking about the knowledge base that we're starting to do. So, just because she is, for the purposes of this live action play, a witch, doesn't mean that "the witch" is her proper name. So, "witch" would not be capitalized there. So, that would be another case where it's not an official title but it's more of kind of name that's being used to describe a person that you wouldn't capitalize. Okay. So, that's the second sort of philosophical thing.



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Now, here is another philosophical thing that I wanna touch on. So, the Oxford comma, have you guys heard the term “Oxford comma?” I’ll explain briefly what it is for those of you who haven’t. But the idea of the Oxford comma, and I didn’t look into why this is called the Oxford comma unfortunately, I’m sorry about that, but the idea of the Oxford comma is that when you have a list of things, the Oxford comma is the comma that comes before the last item. So, if you say, “I need to go to the grocery store to get bread, milk, cheese, eggs, and beer,” that comma that comes before “and beer,” the comma that comes before the “and” and the last item on the list, that’s the Oxford comma.

Now, this is a huge point of debate among any type of editing cohort, whether it’s, you know, in the AP style selection committee itself or in different publications. And so, even when I was looking at PR people talking about why they use AP style, very interestingly, one person who was writing the blog post for this PR website said, “I love that it’s very clear you just don’t do the Oxford comma.” And then the editor of the blog post, the editor of the website heard, and editors aside in that part of the blog, and she said, “Just as a note, here at whatever it is our PR name, we do use the Oxford comma just for clarity purposes.” And I feel like that exchange right there kind of sums up the Oxford comma dilemma, as I’m calling it here, is that a lot of publications do use the Oxford comma, and they should tell you, and you can always ask them. But AP style doesn’t use it. And the idea for AP style not using it is, like I said, in terms of saving space, and this blog post that I referenced, she said like, “How great is it that I can take that out of a tweet, you know, and it helps me save one of those precious characters?”

But the reason that I personally always use the Oxford comma is this example, which I think I learned when I was working in-house at the university, but Chicago Manual of Style uses the Oxford comma anyway. But this is an example. It’s the kind of sentence you might get in a class on ambiguity. So, in logic programs, you sometimes spend a whole semester taking a class on ambiguity. And I’ve taken some logic courses where we had whole piles of these sentences that were ambiguous, and you had to explain all of the different ways that this sentence can be interpreted. So, let me know in the chat box if you see what’s wrong with this sentence, and I’ll read it out loud for those of you who are just listening in and not here on the live call. So, this sentence goes, “I’d like to thank my parents, Mother Teresa and the Pope.” Now, this is absolutely correct in terms of AP style, okay. There is no comma before the last “and.” And someone very elegantly said in the chat box, “The problem with this sentence is that they shouldn’t be procreating.”

So, what it looks like if you read this sentence, especially on the page, it’s a little harder if I just read it to you out loud if you’re not here looking at the slides, is that the comma offsets “my parents.” So, the person says, “I’d like to thank my parents,” and so then it can look like



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they are saying that their parents are Mother Teresa and the Pope. So, because I don't work in the age of newsprint, where some poor soul has to physically move all of the little numbers and characters to put together our newspaper every day, I always use the Oxford comma, because I feel like, for instance in this case, there are some ambiguity. But, also, there's a lot of times where the sentence is just long, and it's become convoluted, and I feel like those commas help to give the reader a little breath of fresh air. In this case, it's quite a short sentence, so the issue is more the ambiguity. But I like it for that opportunity to pause and know that the previous thought has ended. So, the Oxford comma, like I said, is not technically used by AP, but it is used by a lot of publications for this very simple clarity note. And, hopefully, you will always remember, from this day forward, the potential problems with the Oxford comma by remembering that Mother Teresa and the Pope should not be anyone's parents, at least, you know, not together or probably not individually.

So, let's look at quickly some of the most common very specific errors that pop up in AP style, and a lot of these are like general grammar notes. I've got one question in here. So, would a strict AP adherent object the Oxford comma here? And I assume that's in the Mother Teresa and the Pope thing. And they would. So, I'm just gonna go back. So, publications that are really strict about AP, which should be, you know, I think "The New York Times" is probably more about clarity than strictness, but it is "Chicago Tribune." They would object to the comma here, and they would say that it should be clear to people that they are thanking these three individuals and not that it's Mother Teresa and the Pope, which I find, like I said, to be unfortunate, which is why I do tend to use the Oxford comma regardless of the situation. Okay.

So, most common errors, these are like nuancey things or spelling things that I wanna fill you in on quickly. And, as I mentioned, it's really good one time in your life to read through the whole AP style book, but the ones that I'm telling you now are the ones that come up quite frequently and that might come up in your pitches that can give the editor that whiff of, "Hmm, is this the person that I wanna work with?" So, one of them is "on Saturday." So, let me explain this. So, "on Saturday," "on Tuesday," "on Monday," is commonly used when you say, for instance, "I do this webinar on Thursday," or, "I try to do this webinar on Thursday," "I aim every week to do this webinar on Thursday," when you are discussing with somebody an act, a habit, an event that happens, you know, whether it's on Saturday or... Months are different, actually, for AP purposes, so it's gotta be the days. So, there, it's "on Saturday," or "on Tuesday or Monday." Technically, for AP purposes, it should just be "Saturday." So, "I do the webinar Thursday." You don't have to say, "Thursdays," you just say, "I do the webinar Thursday," or, for instance, "My husband calls his mother, you know, Monday," or something in India, something like that. So, technically, you're not supposed to say "on" and then the proper name of the day.



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Another thing that has to do with days and dates is that... Remember I was talking about how months are used differently. So, one of the ways that months are used differently is that they can be abbreviated, day names should never be abbreviated, but months can be abbreviated but only for dates. So, that January date that I told you earlier, which I can't... Let me just go back and find it. Okay, January 17th, okay. So, you can write "Jan. 17, 1987," but if you were saying, "It happened in January 1987," you would need to say the whole month. So, you can only abbreviate a month if it comes with a date attached. If you're saying, "It happened in January 1987," then two things happen. First, you need to spell out the month, and then the year also isn't offset. So, those are the differences. So, you can say, "It happened Jan. 17, 1987," or you say, "It happened in January 1987."

Now, here is a couple other ones I'm gonna get into that are this kind of spelling this word rather than that word thing. So, it is always "toward," and, likewise, it is always "forward," rather than "towards" or "forwards." I couldn't quite understand the "forwards" use, which is why I didn't put it in here, but I just wanted to mention it. But "toward" versus "towards" is one that I personally am sometimes writing, I'm like, "Oh, my God, I can't remember which one it is." So, it's always singular, it's always "toward," it's always "to something," not "towards," which should make it... It seems like that would make more sense for an adverb, which "toward" is, because it modifies a verb, but that is not actually the case. It's always "toward."

Similarly, in terms of movement, "further" and "farther," these are things that I think some of us do sign writing, but I caught myself last night, talking to my husband, not even in any context to this webinar, just saying the wrong one. So, you can take something further, but you would walk farther. So, like once I tell you it seems pretty simple, but the thing is it's just one of these things that slips out that it's worth looking at. So, like an idea can be developed further, but a distance can only be farther. A distance can never be further. So, another way to think about it is that "further" is for kind of abstract and "farther" is for things that are physical.

Now, another weird thing about AP style, and there's a very technical reason why this is the case, is that books, movies, and television shows are all treated the same. Now, in other settings, especially any of you guys who have academic backgrounds, and I know some of you do, there's situations where you're writing a bibliography and you have to look up in MLA style how to do this bibliography, and websites are treated one way, books are treated one way, short stories are treated one way, episodes of a television show are treated one way.



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In AP style, we do not have that problem. Everything goes in parentheses, or in quotation marks, it's very simple. Movies, books, television shows, they all get quotation marks, and the reason for that is that in, again, going back to that poor soul who has to physically move the little metal pieces of type to make the newsprint, back in that time, italics was, you know, if it happened, was a hugely more difficult and painful thing, and it also had different purposes in different newspapers. Sometimes the italics would be used, you know, for the subheads, or sometimes not, or they didn't have those available. The whole concept of italics was actually made up to save space, but because people find it harder to read, it's also less used in news, where the type is already made very, very small and readability is important. So, books, movies, and television shows all being in quotation marks also goes back to that idea that, while saving space is important, we do only have a certain number of letters available. So, it's much easier to just put the quotation marks around these things rather than drum up the italics, you know, pieces, the italics little metal type keys. So, that is something that you don't need to look up anymore. It makes your whole life easier. Just put everything in quotation marks.

Now, here's a couple other spelling ones. So, "entitled" versus "titled." Now, at first, I looked at this and I couldn't even understand the confusion, because I thought they were talking about entitled people, but then I realized. So, this is talking about the book is titled "Food in Jars" or the book is titled "Game of Thrones." The book is never entitled. "Entitled" is only for spoiled children that go to private school here in New York City, or something like that. So, "entitled," you can think of as for people, but "titled" is for objects, or can also be like, you know, "He was titled the president of the corporation," but that "president" is in a small P to go back to where we were talking about capitalization. Now, here's a weird one that I actually didn't know and I think I have been spelling wrong for years, is that "adviser" in AP style is not spelled S-O-R, it is spelled S-E-R. So, that's another one to remember.

And, unfortunately, there's no setting in Microsoft word that I know of where you can switch it between different style guides, because wouldn't that be grand. So, some of these things, like I said, Microsoft Word won't catch, and I mentioned in the email and the blog post leading up to this webinar, but Grammarly is sadly very much not your friend. I was really excited when I saw this thing come out, and I was personally, like, gonna start using it for some things. And then somebody did a coaching call with me, and she sent me some pitches to look at. And there were some very glaring grammatical issues, and she said she had run it through Grammarly.

And then, because we know somebody, my husband used to work with somebody who now works with Grammarly that we know very well, played board games with, I wrote this whole email about all of these things that I had tested and caught, because what the person that we



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know does is he develops the algorithm that decides whether to tell you your grammar is wrong or not, that makes all these complicated decisions. And the answer that I got from him was like long delay, because he had to talk to some other people, and really disappointing. And it was basically along the lines of like, “It’s a very difficult thing, and we’ve only gotten so far.” And so, if you do use Grammarly, you’ll notice that there’s a lot of...like, they’ll ping you on a lot of things, but there are things like using really, they don’t even tell you if there’s a word missing from your sentence.

So, Grammarly, unfortunately, is not the answer in the same way that we’ve become accustomed to Microsoft Word catching things. So, it’s quite young, and it might someday get to the point where I’ll recommend it to people. But right now, please, please don’t rely on it, because it will let you through a lot of things that are unintelligible that you won’t notice, because you’re just trusting this app.

So, the last one on here, in terms of common errors that I wanted to mention, is no courtesy titles. So, what do I mean by that? So, for instance, my husband has a Ph.D., so he’s technically a doctor. So, that would be, if we were being interviewed, and throughout the rest of the article, they called him Dr. Kale instead of just Kale, which is his last name, which is spelled like “kale,” which people find really funny because we have a farm. So, it’s the difference between mentioning in the article, you know, Dr. Satyen Kale and then later on just calling him Dr. Kale versus just calling him Kale. But the other thing is that, while you should just use people’s last names later on in every other mention of them, this courtesy titles extends also to that first mentioned. So, remember when I said calling him Dr. Satyen Kale in the beginning. You actually wouldn’t do that even though he has a Ph.D., and you wouldn’t do it in most cases.

So, there might be some very, very specific times when the background of that person is relevant, and then you would expand upon it, you know, like Dr. Oz, or somebody like that. But in the vast majority of cases, you don’t get a courtesy title. So, that’s why if it’s a necessary title, then it should be there, but if it’s a title that the person has, and I use “Dr.” here because we think that is earned, but it’s the same for “Mr.” and “Ms.” and all of these things, they just don’t belong in your article. So, you don’t need to further down say, you know, like “Mrs. Burns,” it should just be “Burns.” And it sounds a bit brusque, but when you read it, it probably doesn’t bother you. It feels brusque to you when you write it, and once you get used to it, it’s very easy. It makes your writing very easy and very quick. And, personally, it makes me much happier, because I just color code everybody, and then I just have to go through and match the color codes of the quotes up to the names that I’ve put on the side.



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So, some quick notes about where to find AP style. If I just need to check a really quick thing, I will say it like the word “adviser” or “Wi-Fi” and “AP style” into Google, and it doesn’t always give me results about that specific thing, but here’s another thing to watch out for. Unless you have specifically set Google in this search to tell you things from the last year, you might get something that comes from a different version of AP style, as in I mentioned earlier how “internet” is now lower case, there’s also like the state abbreviations have changed. So, if you just Google, you might also get something that is from an earlier version.

So, in fact, one of the resources that I wanted to recommend to you on here, the Purdue OWL site. I noticed after I had prepared the slides, when I was just checking on some things and getting ready for the call, that they do have some of those older notations. So, for years and years, I’ve used this Purdue site, because it’s free to check on AP style, but it seems like they haven’t been updating it. So, do use that with a bit of caution if you’re gonna use it. But if you have a smartphone, which is the technical term for smartphones, all lower case, “smartphone,” then there is an app for that. So, you can get the AP style app, which will be your own little personal AP style with Google to look up all these things.

The AP Style Twitter account also announces changes, and I found, actually, I was quite delighted, that when I was looking up some of these things to test how well they came up in Google, that they are often serving the Twitter messages directly from the AP Style account in Google if there is an appropriate one. Now, the annual print version, I say, it’s a great desktop reference for those who actually use a home office, because many of us don’t have a home base, or aren’t there often, or simply work in cafes, as I often do. But I always had one of these when I worked in-house and even when I started freelancing, and there’s something really nice about having it, like I said, obviously, to read through it one time, but also having it on your desk to just flip through the alphabetical listings if you just need to look up a certain word.

So, if you do use a home office, I actually do recommend just having the physical copy on your desk. Now, one other thing that isn’t specific to AP style but covers grammar more generally that you might wanna check out if you haven’t heard about it is Grammar Girl and her Quick and Dirty Tips, and she also has a podcast. And she talks about a lot of these things, like “further” and “farther,” and “over” and “more than,” and all of these little nuancey things that people often get wrong. And she talks about all of the specific situations in which it should be one versus the other.

And thank you so much, you guys. Have a great weekend.