# SASPU editorial style book

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**God is in heaven, and thou upon earth;**
**therefore let thy words be few**

**— Ecclesiastes 5:2**

**Contents**

## (1)Introduction

Language is the tool of the journalist. Whatever the aims of the student press, little can be achieved unless copy is written in clean, correct English. The purpose of this style guide is to suggest some guidelines for correct style.

Each student newspaper must make its own decisions on the issues discussed here. Many of the points made below are discussed annually at Congress; frequently the only decision is an agreement to disagree. Once a newspaper has made a decision on style, however, that decision should be scrupulously followed. The South African student press cannot be completely consistent, but any newspaper can and should be.

## (2)Copy instructions

Production is quicker and easier if copy is prepared in a standard way. One possible set of rules is given here:

a. Copy should be typed if possible. If you cannot type, or a typewriter is unavailable, write legibly. If copy is written out, names and obscure spellings must be in caps.

b. Type on A4 paper only, in double spacing, and on one side of the page.

c. Stories that are of any conceivable use to SASPU should be typed in triplicate. A good system is to type the top copy on white paper and the first and second blacks on coloured paper.

d. At the top of each page, type in lower case: your name, at the left, and underneath that the date; the issue of the newspaper copy is being prepared for, in the middle; and a catchphrase, for indentification, at the right. Avoid catchphrases such as "SRC"; several stories on the same theme could be running.

e. Number each page at the top right.

f. If the story runs over two or more pages, type "more" at the bottom of each page except the last. At the end of the story type "ends." If desired, the last take can be labelled "last." This convention is much more important for the commercial press, where stories might be set take by take over a period of time.

g. Place the copy in the subs tray and the other in their respective trays.

h. Only the top copy should be subbed. Once it has been subbed, typesetting instructions can be written on the first page and the story sent for typesetting.

i. Once the story has been set, place the top copy in the proofreader's tray. The reader can then check set copy against the original, correct any errors and send the typeset material for paste-up. The top copy can then be spike.
j. Try to keep to the deadline; deadlines make it easier to set copy and plan each issue as a whole. A student journalist's livelihood does not depend on observing deadlines, but the strongest possible effort should be made.

### (3)Suggestions to typesetters

If yours is a newspaper on which staff do the typesetting, the following suggestions may be useful.
a. If copy has been specifically marked "follow copy," then do so, mistakes and all. Otherwise correct at your discretion. There is no point, however, in exchanging a compositor's language for a reporter's if the original is clean and unambiguous. Every change increases the possibility of errors.
b. Anything circled must be omitted. Obviously, if a page number has not been circled it can be omitted anyway; but if a catchline is not circled it must be set, distinct from the text, for identification.
c. Indicate paragraphs by indentation and not double spacing.
d. It frequently happens, especially when setting across narrow measures, that a line cannot be set comfortably because of the language of the text. Newspapers should decide whether to allow typesetters to make changes in language in such cases. The same principle applies to avoiding monosyllables standing alone at the end of paragraphs.
e. Try to avoid excessive hyphenation. Avoid, if possible, hyphenating two lines in succession.
f. Not even a computer can hyphenate consistently, but the division is obvious in horseshoe, prizewinner, etc. Otherwise divide a word by placing the hyphen after a complete syllable. When dividing participles that have been formed by doubling a final consonant, place the hyphen before the suffix: flogg-ed, subb-ed, etc. The general rule is to divide a word in a way that promotes readability: the first part of the word should suggest the second.
g. Monosyllables cannot be divided, even in the direst straits. Try to avoid hyphenating names as well.
h. Correct for abbreviations is full caps without points: SASPU, not S.A.S.P.U. or Saspu or any other form. Iscor, Escom, Assocom and Putco may be treated as acronyms, but not COSAS, SACOS, NACOS or

NUSAS. The same applies to the various United Nations organs: UNESCO, not Unesco.

i. No points are needed after Dr, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Prof and so on.

**(4)Hyphenation**

The general trend is to reduce hyphenation as much as possible. Two words can usually be compressed into one.

The order of preference in joining words is: join without hyphen, join with hyphen, do not join. Hence we write jawbone, horseshoe, tomorrow, today, hillside, heavyweight, horsewhip, semitone. Originally all were hyphenated, but the hyphen has been dropped.

Never use a hyphen between an adverb ending in -ly and a participle. Not "carefully-written essay," but "carefully written essay."

Use hyphens to avoid ambiguity. We write "pickled onion," but "pickled-onion seller" to show that he or she is a seller of pickled onions and not a pickled seller of onions. Likewise "re-creation" (to create again) is distinct from "recreation" (a pastime.)

The use of the hyphen between the prefix "co" and words beginning with "o" is an illogical but accepted practice. Thus we write co-operation, co-opt and co-ordinate, but not co-erce. The hyphen is also used in co-education and co-respondent.

Do not say "20-odd." The expression is clumsy and pretentious and is usually wrong.

Use hyphens in "two-year-old," "10-year-old."

Compass points must be written in lower case and hyphenated: north-west, south-east. Do not write "north-by-east."

Compound words that have a different meaning from their elements are written as one word: fingerprint, commonplace.

Write courthouse, courtroom, bedroom, but living room.

Use hyphens to avoid capital letters in the middle of words. Thus Pan-African, Pan-Slavism and mid-Atlantic. Do not cap or hyphenate unchristian, antichrist or transatlantic.

Degrees of comparison must be played by ear. Do not write "the furthest-fetched movie I have ever seen." Write "most far-fetched." However, write "hardest-working." Do not say "best-made;" it reeks of Americanese. Say "most well-made."

KwaZulu is never hyphenated.

## (5)Capitals

When to cap? The rule is: as rarely as possible. Capital letters suggest full points and break up the flow of a sentence - a point to remember in writing heads.

**Cap:** Proper names and recognised geographical entities: the Far East, Britain, the British Empire, the Great Powers, America.

Political parties and campus movements ("Positive Action").

Clubs and societies on campus, when referred to in full. A policy decision must be taken on whether to cap students representative council.

The word "the" when part of a title: The Daily News.

Government, when referring to a specific government: "the Government ought to abolish the institution of private property." Likewise with state: "the French State," "the State alleges," but "few states recognise the Transkei."

Sea, river, coast and bay when part of recognised names: "the Umgeni River," "the North Coast."

Do not cap street or river in the plural: "the Umgeni and Tugela rivers," but "the Umgeni River and the Tugela River." "West and Smith streets," but "West Street and Smith Street."

Organisations and agencies in full: Durban City Council, Durban Municiplal Library.

Names of groups: Pink Floyd, Genesis, The Who.

Names of animals of geographic derivation: Great Dane, Irish Terrier, Jersey Cow, Pomeranian. Do not cap generic terms: setter, terrier, retriever. Derivations of proper names must also be capped: Doberman Pinscher.

Adjectives in proper names: Large Black Pig is obviously different from large black pig.

Cabinet ranks, in full or not: the Minister/the Minister of Defence.

Public Holidays.

Magistrate's Court, Supreme Court, Appellate Court, Bench, Full Bench, Bar, Side-Bar.

Titles of books, plays, poems, hymns, songs, films lectures, paintings and musical compositions. However, only the important words need be capped. Articles and prepositions are left in lower case.

Deputy only if part of a title.

Constitution, if referring to the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act of 1961 or any amendment of it.

Act and Bill, but not section and clause.

Personifications: "Justice, like Death, is blind."

Liberal, Nationalist, Socialist and similar terms if referring to members or supporters of political parties.

Administrator if of a province.

Formal bodies in organisations or structures: Senate, House of Commons, Security Council, Projects Comm.

Cap church as an institution but not as a building, unless part of a title.

Individual newspapers must decide policy on capping Black, Indian, white and coloured. "Coloured" is normally quoted. When possible, do not use these words at all. They are rarely relevant.

Cap movements, conceptual systems and political parties that derive from proper names: Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Bakuninism, and so on.

**Do not cap:** seasons and compass points.

Communism, socialism, fascism, democracy, bolshevism, anarchism. Naziism must be capped only if referring to the German Nazi Party.

Unless identified in full, do not cap national road, docks, harbour, station, airport, stock exchange, board, institute, society and so on.

Do not cap department of economics, dean of the faculty of law, and so on.

### (6)His or her?

This is a vexed question, not because of disagreement about the desirability of non-sexist language, but because of arguments about its most appropriate forms. The solution is obvious in cases such as chairperson and salesperson, but postperson and foreperson tend to raise eyebrows and make students laugh. These expressions should be avoided, but not at the cost of a return to ideological and sexist terms. "Policeperson," for example, is nearly always better written as "police officer."

Some people argue that words like policeperson and foreperson should be used precisely **because** of their shock value. A counter to this is that language should never intrude on content. The debate cannot be evaluated here. In general, however, the use of "his or her" is bland enough to escape attention. Readers have little difficulty in adjusting to it. Likewise with "humans," "persons," or "people" for "man."

Do not use "he/she" unless your theoretical position is that non-sexist language must be used to confront and challenge presuppositions. The stroke used in text is so ugly that it doesn't merely confront, it leaps out of the page and beats you about the head.

If words are sick, it's up to writers to cure them. But surgery should not be taken too far - only far enough. The word "human," for example, is not sexist simply because it contains the syllable "man"; the word actually derives from the Latin "homo" for "person."

An American student newspaper experimented with the pronoun "co" to denote "he or she," but the experiment was a failure. It may be profitable, however, to undertake a similar experiment on a South African campus.

### (7)**Abbreviations** (i)

Never use an obscure abbreviation without explaining it in full. Few students will know that SNS stands for the Students Nihilist Society. Similarly with AISEC, SAUJS and even NUSAS and SASPU.

Never use points in abbreviations. Even well-known abbreviations that are used verbally as acronyms must be in caps. Using caps and lower case is confusing, especially when no sensible acronym can be formed, as in Saujs and Sasj. This applies even to unions: FOSATU, not Fosatu; MWASA, not Mwasa.

The only campus abbreviations that should be used are those found in the timetable. Even then, however, obscure courses should be explained - Class Civ, for example, should be introduced as Classical Civilisation.

Names of residences can be abbreviated if res students use an abbreviation.

When abbreviating a course, take note that students may not style their course in the same way, and your abbreviation may offend them. On many campuses, for example, Political Science or Political Studies students refer to their course as "Politics" and Pol Sci or Pol Studs.

### (8)**Abbreviations** (ii)

If a policy decision is made to allow some abbreviations to be used without being used in full, a short list of the more common examples is given below. Many people will disagree with many of these examples.

| | |
|---|---|
| AA | Automobile Association |
| AMA | American Medical Association |
| BA | British Airways (do not confuse with degree) |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| BMA | British Medical Association |

| | |
|---|---|
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| CID | Criminal Investigation Department |
| COL | Cost-of-living allowance |
| DDT | Insecticide |
| GATT | General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade |
| GMT | Greenwich Mean Time |
| GPO | General Post Office |
| ICI | Imperial Chemical Industries |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| IOU | I owe you |
| IRA | Irish Republican Army |
| KLM | Royal Dutch Airlines |
| MGM | Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer |
| PAYE | Pay as you earn |
| PLO | Palestine Liberation Organisation |
| POW | Prisoner of war |
| PRO | Press/Public Relations Officer |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| SAAF | South African Air Force |
| SADF | South African Defence Force |
| SABC | South African Broadcasting Corporation |
| SAPA | South African Press Association |
| SAR | South African Railways |
| SPCA | Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals |
| SES | Socio-Economic Status |
| TUC | Trades Union Congress |
| UAR | United Arab Republic |
| VAT | Value added tax |
| YMCA | Young Mens' Christian Association |
| YWCA | Young Womens' Christian Association |

It is probably safest to stick to the most well-known southern African organisations: the ANC, SWAPO, PAC, NUSAS, ZANU, ZAPU.

The general rule of sticking to caps only can be broken in the cases of Sasol, Iscor, Escom, Assocom and Putco, as well as the numerous "socs" that abound on campus - Photosoc, Cathsoc, Ansoc and so on.

The growth of international organisations, especially the various UN organisations, has led to a flood of abbreviations and acronyms. Most people are ignorant of the majority of them; few students will know that UNMOGIP stands for the United Nations Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan. The following, however, can in general be used freely:

| | |
|---|---|
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organisation |
| ICJ | International Court of Justice |
| ILO | International Labour Organisation |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| OAU | Organisation for African Unity |
| OPEC | Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

Most people know what an ICBM is, but are ignorant of the other abbreviations thrown up by nuclear warfare. Do not refer to MAD, SLBM, MRBM, ALBM, MIRV etc without explaining the term first.

Some jounalists disagree entirely with this policy on abbreviations. They argue that people, even students, are surprisingly ignorant of the world around them and many do not know what the UN or the CIA stand for. According to this view, **all** abbreviated terms should be introduced in full.

(9)**Dates and numbers**

Write April 22 1961. All other forms should be treated as unacceptable.

Numbers from zero to nine are written out. Round figures are also written out: one thousand, not 1 000. Otherwise use figures. Remember that in large figures every three digits are grouped: 3 141 592 653.

Expressions in headlines should be written in the most convenient way possible, whether this produces numbers or figures.

Multiples of millions are written R5-million, 26-million. In a headline write 1-m for million. The hyphen distinguishes the "m" from "metres." Do not abbreviate "billion" - or, indeed, use it at all; it is uncertain whether it denotes a thousand million or a million million.

Numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine, if written out for some reason, take a hyphen. Forty is spelled like that.

To indicate a decimal point use a comma: 87,1 and not 87.1 or 87-1.

Use figures for:

Exact sums of money: R56,09; 30c.

Street numbers.

Temperatures. (Use Celcius notation)

Dimensions: 5m by 5m. Do not use X for "by".

Years of study. Roman numerals are best for tertiary education and figures for primary and secondary.

Results of voting and referenda.

Decimals smaller than one must be written 0,9, 0,875, etc. Do not drop the zero, the comma might be missed.

Use figures for car registrations, measurements and times. Exact times are written 6h46m48s. Otherwise 11am/pm, not 11:00am. Avoid using naval time: 6 o'clock, not 18h00. Write 1980s (no apostrophe) or '80s.

### (10)**Plurals**

Technically speaking, words of Latin origin form plurals according to definite rules based on gender. These rules are dying out, however; it is better English to write "funguses" than "fungi." If you prefer to stick to the technical rule, the more common plurals are:

| | |
|---|---|
| alumnus | -alumni |
| focus | -foci |
| fungus | -fungi |
| hippopotamus | -hippopotami |
| genus | -genera |
| nucleus | -nuclei |
| opus | -opera |
| radius | -radii |
| cactus | -cacti |
| stimulus | -stimuli |
| syllabus | -syllabi |

Latin words ending in -a add -e. Thus nebula, nebulae; larva, larvae. But formula is usually rendered as formulas.

Note that some commonly used words of Latin origin are already in the plural: propaganda, data, agenda. Neither propaganda nor data can take another plural, but it is correct to speak of agendas.

Other plurals that cause difficulty:

| | |
|---|---|
| analysis | - analyses |
| appendix | - appendices (books) |
| appendix | - appendixes (anatomical) |
| axis | - axes |
| basis | - bases |

| | |
|---|---|
| beau | - beaux |
| bureau | - bureaux |
| bureau | - bureaus (administrative) |
| cherub | - prefer cherubs to cherubim |
| chrysalis | - chrysales |
| crisis | - crises |
| criterion | - criteria |
| graffito | - graffiti |
| hippo | - hippos |
| index | - indexes (books) |
| index | - indices (mathematical) |
| libretto | - libretti |
| miasma | - miasmas |
| phenomenon | - phenomena |
| rhinoceros | - rhinoceroses |
| series | - series |
| species | - species |
| specie | - specie (gold) |
| spectrum | - spectrums |
| stigma | - prefer stigmas to stigmata |
| synopsis | - synopses |
| tempo | - tempi |
| thesis | - theses |

Plurals of words ending in -o:

(a) If the o is preceded by a vowel, add -s. Thus bamboo - bamboos; cameo - cameos.

(b) If the o is preceded by a consonant noun, add -es: hero - heroes; buffalo - buffaloes.

Exceptions: cantos, chromos, bromos, commandos, dynamos, pianos, provios, solos, tiros.

Plurals of compound words: form the plural from the important noun. Lieutenant-generals, lookers-on, box-offices, passers-by. Nouns ending in -ful simply add s: cupfuls, not cupsful; armfuls, not armsful.

**(11)Metrication**

Correct abbreviations for the metric system are:

millimetre - mm

| | |
|---|---|
| centimetre | - cm |
| decimetre | - dm |
| metre | - m |
| kilometre | - km |
| kilogram | - kg |
| gram | - g |
| metric ton | - t (write "metric ton" for figures less than 10) |
| square mm | - sq mm |
| square cm | - sq cm |
| square dm | - sq dm |
| square m | - sq m |
| hectare | - ha |
| square km | - sq km |
| centilitre | - cl |
| hectolitre | - hl |
| megalitre | - Ml |
| kilolitre | - kl |
| millilitre | - ml |
| cubic cm | - cc |
| cubic dm | - cu dm |
| cubic m | - cu m |
| litre | - write out; the abbreviation is confusing on a typewriter. |
| degree Celcius | - deg C |
| kilometres per hour | - km/h |
| ampere | - amp |
| centi | - c |
| deca | - da |
| deci | - d |
| kilowatt | - kw |
| kilowatt-hour | - kwh |
| kilovolt | - kv |
| kilocycle | - kc |
| kilovolt-amp | - kva |
| kilohertz | - kHz |
| megahertz | - MHz |
| megawatt | - Mw |
| milliamp | - ma |
| milliwatt | - mw |
| millibar | - mbar |
| ohm | - ohm (not cap Omega) |
| watt | - w |
| volt | - v |

Note: use M for mega, m for milli to avoid confusion. The scientific abbreviation for "micro," lower case Greek mu, should not be used.

### (12)Place names

The spelling of many place names, especially African and Afrikaans names, causes great difficulty. Lack of space proscribes offering a comprehensive list here. However, there is a simple solution to any doubt; simply consult the trunk call dialling list in the front of every phone book. Alternatively one may consult the Post Office's list of postal codes. The material published by the Place Names Commission is seldom wrong and this should be regarded as the final authority. The Concise Oxford Dictionary lists the commonest place names, and includes an appendix of correct pronunciations of proper names, which should solve any problems about the spelling of overseas place names.

A moot point is whether "kwa" is capped or not. It means "of" and could justifiably be left in lower case.

### (13) Grammar

It is absolutely essential for a student newspaper to use reasonably correct grammar. This does not mean that petty grammatical rules must be observed; since euphony ought to be the guiding principle, absurdities such as using "whose" only for a personal antecendant can be dispensed with.

Harold Evans cites the following list of "un-rules":

(1) Don't use no double negative.
(2) Make each pronoun agree with their antecedant.
(3) Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
(4) About them sentence fragments.
(5) When dangling, watch your participles.
(6) Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
(7) Just between you and I, case is important too.
(8) Don't write run-on sentences they are hard to read.
(9) Don't use commas, which aren't necessary.
(10) Try to not ever split infinitives.
(11) It's important to use your apostrophe's correctly.
(12) Proofread your writing to see if you any words out.
(13) Correct spelling is esential.

Keeping to these un-rules should prevent problems with grammar. More specific points are discussed below.

**Prepositions at the ends of sentences:** Not surprisingly, Evans omitted another classic un-rule: never use a preposition to end a sentence with. This is a foolish rule. The guiding principle is - how does the sentence sound? "That is an accusation up with which I will not put" sounds laughably clumsy. "What did you bring that book I don't like to be read to out of from up for?" sounds reasonably clear - although ending a sentence with six prepositions is an extreme case. If the sentence sounds wrong, change it. Frequently the euphony of a sentence is improved by using a relative pronoun to shift the preposition away from the end of a sentence. But this ought not to be an absolute rule. Prepositional pedants are people to whom its not worth listening.

**Split infinitives:** Once again, euphony is vital. Avoiding split infinitives at all cost produces stilted English. To take an example, the sentence "he stated that the ice had failed completely to melt before it reached the end of the slope" is unnatural and ambiguous. The infinitive could justifiably have been split as "to completely melt." By the same token, "the tenant agrees to properly clean all the windows" is equally clumsy, and would have been better written as "the tenant agrees to clean all the windows properly." If you are forced to choose between clumsiness and ambiguity, rewrite the sentence using noun constructions instead of infinitives.

It should be noted that avoiding split infinitives gives you more control over shades of meaning. "Correct policy is scrupulously to avoid the split infinitive" has a different emphasis from "correct policy is to avoid the split infinitive scrupulously." The first emphasises scrupulousness; the second emphasises avoiding split infinitives.

Possibly the best advice ever given on the split infinitive comes from the Argus Editorial Style Book:

> While we urge that an endeavour should be made always to avoid the split infinitive, we do not go so far as to flatly forbid it.

**Tenses:** Since newspapers usually report what happened in the past, use the past tense. Straight news reports are written in the perfect or imperfect. The pluperfect indicates the "past of the past": "the students were arrested although they had earlier taken legal advice." However, use constructions such as "the SRC has resigned" to avoid confusion about subsequent events. This sentence indicates that the

**Prepositions:** Misused prepositions confuse sentences. Since a preposition defines the relationship between two or more nouns, an incorrect preposition defines a relationship incorrectly. The more common uses are:

agree to, on, with
avail of
averse from, to
adverse to
under, in the circumstances
compare to
compare with (in noting differences and similarities)
consist of (to enumerate)
consist in (to define)
depend on, upon
depend from (in the sense of hanging; archaic)
different from (rarely to; never than)
doubt whether, if (positive statement)
doubt that (negative statement)
on either side
imbue with
inculcate into
in the meantime (or "meanwhile," but never "in the meanwhile")
less than (degree)
fewer than (number)
prefer to
prevent from
purport to (avoid purport in the passive)
regard, consider, count, deem as
substitute for
exchange (noun) of
exchange (verb) for, with
try to (never try and)
unequal to
introduce to (people)
introduce into (things and concepts)
suffer from (not with)
at variance with
destructive of
identical with; avoid to
in search of
in respect of

with respect to
in relation to
of one's own accord

**(14)Singular nouns**

Certain nouns are used only in the singular: each, every, either, neither, none. It may seem correct to say "none of the workers were paid enough" but it is not. Correct is "none of the workers was paid enough."

Some nouns are found only in plural form: semantics, economics, politics, mathematics, hysterics. (But ethic and dialectic are also used in the singular.) These should be used as singular nouns; one never says "economics are confusing."

**(15)Qualification of absolutes**

Certain adjectives cannot be qualified. The best known example, and the one most frequently qualified, is "unique." Something cannot be "rather unique"; if it is unique it is one of a kind. It is logically permissible, but hardly useful, to describe something as "almost unique."

Moot cases are "relevant," "dead" and "pregnant." "Relevant" is losing its absolute qualities, but it is probably better to avoid expressions such as "semi-relevant." It seems fair to describe a person as "almost dead" or even "very dead"; and the expression "very pregnant" is sometimes used to describe and advanced condition of pregnancy.

"Virgin" can never be qualified.

**(16)Names**

In giving a name in a news report, or in any kind of writing, try to include a first name or at least an initial. The use of first names, however, displays a certain familiarity; it is better for the student press to refer to "R F Botha" and not "Pik Botha" in a first reference.

Titles should be included but not used excessively; religious ministers can be first referred to as "Reverend" (or whatever the title may be) and after that just plain "Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms." The pope is Pope John Paul, not His Holiness. Cardinals and bishops can be referred to by

their titles.

No points are used after Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Prof, Rev, Hon, and so on. The use of Ms is obviously correct if a woman describes herself that way, but the question then arises whether the initials should be used for all women referred to. The best solution is probably to use "Ms" for all women unless someone calls themself Mrs or Miss, in which case it is polite to use her name as she herself uses it.

Afrikaans names that begin with van, de, du and le should be capped if they stand by themselves, otherwise not. The plural of a name such as "Du Plessis" is probably best rendered as "Du Plessis's."

Always spell names correctly; a name misspelt is a person misidentified. If you are unsure of a spelling then phone up the person and ask. Otherwise check in the phone book (which is not always accurate.) When interviewing somebody be sure to get their full name, or name and initials, and title.

A full indentification includes full name, age, address (including street number) and profession or job. Since student newspapers rarely include court reporting this point is not very important.

### (17)Quotation marks

Minimise quotation marks. If you don't like a word, find another; don't place it in quotes. Quoting a word to distance yourself from it is bad form. Consult a dictionary to find an alternative; otherwise, if the word says what it has to say, let it do so without the hindrance of quotes. Use double quotes throughout, except for quotes within quotes, which are single.

The comma and the full point are placed within the quotation marks, and other punctuation according to construction: "What do they mean by 'epistemological break'?"

Never quote the possessive of a plural, as in "the gardeners'" - the juxtaposed apostrophe and quotation mark look ugly, and when set on some machines look like a triple apostrophe. Rather use the construction with "of."

Never quote Afrikaans words. Foreign words, unless idiomatic English, should be set in a different style - preferably italic.

### (18)Spelling

The Concise Oxford Dictionary should be regarded as the final authority.

Many newspapers prefer the Authors' and Printers' Dictionary, but for the purposes of the student press the Oxford Dictionary is better. A Sixth Edition should be used if possible, and should take preference over earlier editions.

The most frequently misspelled words are sergeant, separate, assassin, receive, exist/existence/existent, occur/occurred/occurence definite, occasion. If you are unsure of the correct spelling, split the word into syllables: se - par - ate.

Avoid American spelling: aluminum, gray, humor.

Many people prefer "ize" to form verbs from nouns, especially people with an American or classical education. However, some words are almost never spelt with a "z": advertise, comprise, surmise, advise, despise, exercise and emphasise. The safest course is to use "s" in all cases; that way you will never be wrong, although other spellings may also be right.

**(19)a or an?**

Use the indefinite article "an" if the word that follows begins with a vowel sound. Use "a" if the following word begins with a consonantal sound. In particular cases:

| | |
|---|---|
| a eulogy | an MP |
| a European | an RAF plane |
| a ewe | an SAAF plane |
| a herb | an MS version |
| a heroine | an habitual |
| a history | an heir |
| a humble | an heirloom |
| a TNT explosion | an heraldic |
| a TS version | an heroic |
| a unanimous | an historical |
| a union | an honest |
| a unique | an honour |
| a unit | an honorarium |
| a universal | an hotel |
| a university | an hour |
| a useful | |
| a usurper | |

## (20)Choice of words

The key to style is simplicity. This does not mean that you need to write in simplistic language; rather, choose the word and the construction that convey your thoughts in the simplest possible way. Fowler's five rules are:

Prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched
Prefer the concrete word to the abstract
Prefer the single word to the circumlocution
Prefer the short word to the long
Prefer the Saxon word to the Romance

Following these rules should keep language clear and concise. Journalists, the people who ought to have the most respect for language, are often the people who abuse it most freely. Bombast and euphemism replace plain words; four polysyllabic words replace a monosyllable. Always keep to the simple word and construction.

Latin constructions should be avoided if suitable English equivalents can be found. Never use "per" except in a Latinism; say "ten litres a hundred kilometres," not "ten litres per hundred kilometres." Avoid esoteric phrases. The mythical "average student" would rather turn the page than look up the meaning of "et hoc genus omne." Heading a story with "mens insana in corpore sano" will drive off most readers.

Think about the language you are using. If you are unhappy with a word, consult a dictionary of synonyms. Always ask yourself: can I put this more simply? Avoid sloppy writing; never reach for a handy abstract if a concrete word can be found.

Do not misuse words. Some of the more commonly misused words are considered here.

Use "alibi" only for an excuse that proves the accused was somewhere else when the crime was committed. The word is not a general synonym for "excuse."

"Alternate" means by turns; "alternative" means in a way that offers a choice.

Do not confuse "a priori" and "prima facie." The first means from assumed principles; the second means at a first impression. Better still, avoid these Latinisms.

A question-begging answer is not an evasion, it is an answer which makes an assumption as much in need of proof as the thing it tries to prove.

Use "behoves" with an impersonal subject. It is wrong to say "the

rain behoved the driver to take care." Rather, "the driver was behoved to take care because of the rain."

A chronic illness is not an acute one, it is one that lingers over time. Chronic illnesses are usually the opposite of acute ones.

Compound is so commonly misused that it is best avoided altogether. It means to condone for a consideration, not to make worse. Try complicate or exacerbate.

Use "aggravate" in the sense of worsening a situation. A peaceful person is annoyed; an annoyed person is aggravated.

Use "comprise" to enumerate the elements of which a body is composed.

"Consists of" lists the elements that make up an entity; "consists in" defines it.

Use "disinterested" to mean impartial, not unconcerned.

Paths which diverge are not merely separate, they are getting further away from one another all the time.

"Decimate" originally meant to reduce by one tenth, but now means to inflict severe destruction or damage. However, the word cannot be quantified. "Decimate by half" or "decimate completely" are wrong.

Enable is always followed by a verb, never by a noun. "This will enable a saving of ten per cent" should be "this will enable us to save ten per cent."

"Feasible" means capable of being done. It does not mean plausible or probable, and it doesn't mean "viable," which means capable of independent existence.

"Historic" means noted in history; "historical" means belonging to history. Never say, as the SABC do, that "tomorrow's meeting is historic." Only the most eccentric philosophy of history allows a future event to be noted in the past.

"Ilk" is not a synonym for kind or associates or henchperson. It is a Scots word meaning "of the same." The word is best avoided altogether.

Do not confuse infer and imply. The first means to surmise, the second to suggest.

An interval can only be between two events. Do not say "after an interval of 24 hours." Say "after a period of 24 hours," or better still, "after 24 hours."

A leading question is not an important one, but one that suggests the answer it seeks. "Would you say that the present SRC has done more work and achieved more results than any SRC of the past 20 years?" is of the kind called "questions expecting the answer yes."

Mitigate means to soften; militate means to inhibit.

Practical means useful in practice; practicable means capable of being done.

"Refute" means to prove falsity. It does not mean to repudiate. "Mr Swart refuted the accusations of drunkenness by shrieking "I was not!" is wrong. Mr Swart merely denied the accusations; to refute them he would have had to produce evidence to the contrary.

A replica is a copy made by the original artist. Anyone else makes a reproduction.

Never use "transpire" for"happen." The word means "come to be known" or "come to light."

Try to match your choice of words to the story you are writing. Straight news copy demands the blandest, most neutral language possible; language in the zero degree. Editorial comment must be sophisticated, not a rave. Reserve the banal for satire; revolvers do not smoke in real life, certainly not since the invention of smokeless propellants. Spurn the cliché.Avoid reference to grim tragedy, gruesome murder, daring burglary, grip of drought. Avoid describing the beauty of a scene unless it is germane to what you are writing.

The word "I" causes difficulty. Some newspapers ban it completely; others allow it to appear freely. This is an issue on which individual policy decisions must be taken. Remember that the use of the first person singular demands a very sophisticated style. Any story in which it appears must also have a byline.

Keep the editorial "we" out of comment; it makes language sanctimonious and inflated. The only person allowed to use "we" is the man or woman with a tapeworm.

Avoid overworked metaphors. Some of the worst are:

blueprint
bottleneck
breakdown
catalyst
ceiling
interface
liquidate
parameter
syndrome
complex (noun)
charisma
dialogue
dichotomy
detente
educator
interpersonal
lifestyle
perspective
polarised
posture
relate
societal
thrust
target
orient (verb)

**(21)Redundancies**

George Orwell's advice was "if you can cut a word out, always cut it out." Redundancies waste space and clutter stories. Some of the commoner examples are:

| | |
|---|---|
| a greater number of | - more |
| a little less than | - almost |
| a small number of | - few |
| a large number of | - many |
| a period of several days | - several days |
| a sufficient number of | - enough |
| a team of 10 researchers | - 10 researchers |
| absolute guarantee | - guarantee |
| acute crisis | - crisis |
| advance planning | - planning |
| advance reservations | - reservations |
| all of | - all |
| all-time record | - record |
| already existing | - existing |
| arrived here | - arrived |
| as a general rule | - usually |
| as yet | - yet |
| at a later date | - later |
| at that time | - then |
| at the present moment | - now |
| at regular intervals | - regularly |
| bald-headed | - bald |
| basic fundamentals | - fundamentals |
| broad daylight | - daylight |
| brought to a halt | - halted |
| called attention to the fact | - reminded |
| came to a stop | - stopped |
| Canary bird | - Canary |
| cannot be possible | - cannot be |
| circular shaped | - circular |
| climb up | - climb |
| close proximity | - proximity |
| close scrutiny | - scrutiny |
| Collie dog | - Collie |
| combine into one | - combine |
| complete monopoly | - monopoly |

| | |
|---|---|
| completely decapitated | - decapitated |
| completely destroyed | - destroyed |
| completely filled | - filled |
| completely surrounded | - surrounded |
| consensus of opinion | - consensus |
| continue on | - continue |
| cost the sum of R10 | - cost R10 |
| current trend | - trend |
| dead body | - body |
| definite decision | - decision |
| despite the fact that | - although |
| different kinds | - kinds |
| divide up | - divide |
| during the course of | - during |
| dwindled down | - dwindled |
| eliminate completely | - eliminate |
| empty cavitiy | - cavity |
| engaged in producing | - producing |
| end result | - result |
| entire monopoly | - monopoly |
| entire absence | - absence |
| entirely destroyed | - destroyed |
| equally as | - equally |
| essential condition | - condition |
| exact reproduction | - reproduction |
| falsely fabricate | - fabricate |
| few in number | - few |
| finally ended | - ended |
| first began | - began |
| first prototype | - prototype |
| follow after | - follow |
| for the purpose of | - for |
| foreign imports | - imports |
| free gift | - gift |
| future plans | - plans |
| future prospect | - prospect |
| grand total | - total |
| guest speaker | - speaker |
| heat up | - heat |
| 13 hectares of land | - 13 hectares |
| hidden pitfall | - pitfall |
| hoist up | - hoist |

| | |
|---|---|
| important essentials | - essentials |
| incumbent president | - president |
| in addition to | - and, besides, also |
| in case of | - if |
| in excess of | - more |
| in order to lift | - to lift |
| in regard to | - about, on |
| in the absence of | - without |
| in the city of | - in |
| in the near future | - soon |
| in the event that | - if |
| in the vicinity of | - near |
| introduced a new | - introduced |
| invited guests | - guests |
| is going to | - will |
| is opposed to | - opposes |
| joined together | - joined |
| killed outright | - killed |
| killed instantly | - killed |
| large-sized dog | - large dog |
| last of all | - last |
| lift up | - lift |
| link together | - link |
| made out of | - made of |
| massive size | - massive |
| meet with | - meet |
| merged together | - merged |
| midway between | - between |
| more preferable | - preferable |
| mutual co-operation | - co-operation |
| new construction | - construction |
| new innovation | - innovation |
| new record | - record |
| new recruit | - recruit |
| newly created | - new |
| on a stretch of road | - on a road |
| on behalf of | - for |
| on the question of | - on |
| original source | - source |
| partially damaged | - damaged |
| passing phase | - phase |
| past experience | - experience |

| | |
|---|---|
| peculiar freak | - freak |
| penetrate into | - penetrate |
| period of time | - period |
| postponed until later | - postponed |
| prejudge in advance | - prejudge |
| present incumbent | - incumbent |
| prior to | - before |
| probed into | - probed |
| proposed project | - project |
| qualified expert | - expert |
| quite pressing | - pressing |
| rather serious | - serious |
| refer back | - refer |
| repeat again | - repeat |
| rise up | - rise |
| root cause | - cause |
| short space of time | - short time |
| since the time when | - since |
| skirt around | - skirt |
| square-shaped | - square |
| still persists | - persists |
| strangled to death | - strangled |
| suddenly exploded | - exploded |
| temporary adjournment | -adjournment |
| remporary reprieve | - reprieve |
| total costs | - costs |
| total extinction | - extinction |
| true facts | - facts |
| unsolved problem | - problem |
| utterly defenceless | - defenceless |
| ways and means | - ways |
| whether or not | - whether |
| went on to say | - continued, added |
| whole country | - country |
| with the exception of | - except |
| young infant | - infant |

The commonest redundancy of all is the word "that"; it can almost always be dropped from sentences like "Bishop Tutu said that South Africa would have a black prime minister in five years."

## (22)Jargon

Jargon has a place in technical language, but avoid it in writing copy. If you understand your subject you can reduce it to the level of the non-technical, or at least the intelligible.

Jargon is characterised by several uses:

**(a)** Simple terms are expanded: "is indicative of" for "indicates"; "in the event that" for "if." Abstract terms abound, such as activity, facet, field, factor, in terms of, of this nature ("the sky is of a blue nature), situation, type.
**(b)** Noun-noun constructions become standard. "Surplus Government chemical warfare vapour detection kits," which qualifies one noun with six, is typical.
**(c)** Parts of speech are converted: adjectives become nouns, adverbs become adjectives, nouns become verbs ("she authored this book") and the final mixture makes little sense.
**(d)** Sentences run to sixty or seventy words, most of them contained in subordinate clauses which are dragged along with the main clause like rolling stock.

By sticking to simple terms you can avoid jargon. It is the worst possible style for a student newspaper.

## (23)Theoretical abstraction

Closely related to the problem of jargon is the problem of abstract conceptualisation. Many of the issues student newspapers cover must be discussed in a theoretical way, but it is best to keep theoretical terms to a minimum. Most students will be driven away from an article shortly after encountering Objective Class Structures and Over-Determining Relations and The Relative Autonomy Of The State. Those that aren't probably support your argument anyway or are only reading to pick holes in it. Keep theoretical argument down, even at the cost of oversimplification. Never use a theoretical term without explaining it in full. Assume that your readers are idiots. Refer to examples constantly; mix fact and theory judiciously. Call a spade a spade, not the means of production.

(24)**Mixed metaphors**

Most mixed metaphors simply produce nonsense: "Flexibility is a cornerstone of budget planning." The worst mixed metaphors are the amusing ones; readers laugh at you, not with you. Some gems:

"The sacred cows have come home to roost...."

"Durban harbour exhibits a rapid turnover of ships...."

"We now have more than a hundred pairs of surgical rubber gloves on our hands...."

"This is a virgin field pregnant with possibilities...."

(25)**Ambiguity**

The commonest causes of ambiguity are dangling participles and relative pronouns without specific antecedants. The results are often hilarious: "If the baby does not thrive on raw milk, boil it." Be sure that every pronoun used refers to only one antecedant.

"Danglers" produce similar results. An example is "after being warned to stop talking, the man shot him in the head." Who was warned to stop talking? Logically, it must be the man who was shot; grammatically, it must be his assailant. Other examples:

By mixing chemicals with the gas, the flame will change colour.

How does a flame mix chemicals?

An E-shaped building, the fire started in the south wing.

Can fires be E-shaped buildings?

Short and enjoyable, I read the book in an hour.

Candid self description?

(26)**Non sequiturs**

Non sequiturs are expressions or constructions that do not follow logically. An example is "born in Cape Town, she was unable to make a success of her business." This suggests that the place of her birth affected her capacities as a business manager. The two are in fact unrelat-

ed, but because of the construction of the sentence they seem to be connected. Non sequiturs are most frequently found in obituaries and profiles of people:

> A keen chess player, he is survived by his wife and three children.

In this kind of writing it is almost impossible to eliminate all but the worst non sequiturs; if each idea is contained in a separate sentence copy reads like a child's primer:

> He was a keen chess player. He leaves his wife and three children. He was a practising lawyer in Cape Town. He was instantly liked by all who met him.

Usually the construction beginning "who..." will eliminate the non sequiturs from copy:

> He was a practising lawyer who was instantly liked by all who met him.

### (27)Punctuation

Some student journalists regard punctuation as a tiresome and unnecessary element of writing, to be used as little as possible. Some, indeed, know only three punctuation marks: the comma, the dash and the full point. But punctuation, if used properly, can be a valuable tool; and at minimum it ought to be correct.

The period, or full point, marks a complete break. Sentences should be kept to a manageable length; one or two subordinate clauses and a main clause. Alternatively, the period can be used to give emphasis to short, pithy sentences which would lose something if a comma were used:

> The war is over. But the struggle continues.

Full points should not be used in abbreviations. There is one exception to the rule - when points are needed to avoid ambiguity. An example is this headline:

US INVADES ME

The end of private individualism?

To mark a pause, use a comma, a semicolon, or a colon. The comma marks the shortest break. Do not use commas excessively. Avoid sentences such as the following one:

> The war, which has lasted more than three years, is over, although strategy experts, who have studied the situation, say there is a chance, however small, that it could break out again.

It is difficult to make sense of this kind of sentence because several subordinate clauses and parenthetical elements have been introduced with commas. The sentence could be broken into two or three shorter sentences.

Commas should not be used to patch over ambiguities. An exception is the following case: "Mr Swart said Mr Baskin is an idiot." If Mr Baskin was in fact insulting Mr Swart, commas are needed: "Mr Swart, said Mr Baskin, is an idiot."

Commas are not needed in "SRC president Julian Baskin," but they should be used in "the English opening batsman, Geoff Boycott."

Commas are also used to introduce parenthetical elements. Avoid one-legged commas:

> The establishment of a "Rhodesian" Student Society, and not a "Zimbabwean" one is obviously a right-wing backlash.

The second comma should have been inserted after "one." If parenthetical elements are placed in parentheses it becomes even more important to avoid this kind of error.

The semicolon marks a longer pause, and usually indicates a break in sense. It can often be replaced by a comma, but in longer sentences it is more convenient.

> The war, which has lasted three years, is over; however, military experts say it could break out again.

The semicolon is useful in lists in which each element is qualified:

> Mr Smith, Prime Minister; Mr Jones, Minister of Finance; and Mr Green, Minister of Defence.

The colon marks the longest pause short of a period, and suggests that what follows depends on what went before.

Three people were arrested: Susie Smith, Fiona Jones and Shelley Green.

The dash, which incorporates elements of comma, semicolon and colon, should be used sparingly. It can almost always be replaced by one of them, and sentences punctuated by dashes irritate readers; it becomes difficult to separate the main clause from the subordinates

There is, however, a trend in journalism to use the dash for introducing information:

The murder of Rick Turner — the University of Natal political science lecturer was was banned in 1973 — stunned South Africa.

Punctuating with dashes works well in a conversational style, but this technique should be reserved for columns.

Parentheses must be used in pairs! Avoid excessive use; they have the same effect as the dash, only more so.

Use a question mark at the end of a question. It is easy to omit the question mark at the end of a very long sentence. The error also occurs in very short sentences: "What now SA student."

The apostrophe has three uses: to form possessives, to form certain plurals, and to form contractions.

To form a possessive of a singular noun, add apostrophe plus s. "Mr Smith's vegetables." This applies even if the singular noun already ends in an s: "Mr Jones's vegetables." People whose names end in s are angered by the omission of the second s. They feel that they are entitled to having their names spelt correctly.

To form the possessive of a plural noun, add an apostrophe. "The gardeners' vegetables." No apostrophe is needed in Womens Movement or Students Union, since the nouns have descriptive force.

Some plurals are written with an apostrophe. The obvious cases are single letters: "two a's." For more than one letter no apostrophe is needed: "two VIPs." It is not really necessary to use an apostrophe in plurals of words treated as objects: "two thousand whys."

Form contractions by using an apostrophe: can't, won't, wouldn't've. Don't misplace the apostrophe, as in "do'nt." If you are unsure where the apostrophe goes, expand the contraction: do not. The o in "not" is omitted, so the apostrophe takes it place.

Do not confuse "its" and "it's." The first is the possessive of "it," and the second is the contraction of "it is."

Use three dots to mark a very long pause: "if we're arrested ... well, I don't know what we'll do." Use an ellipse to indicate that material has

been omitted. If what is omitted is part of the same sentence, use three dots; if it includes a full point, use four.

The ampersand must be used only in company names, as in Smith & Nephew. Never use it in a headline.

## (28)Syntax

Word order is very important in English. In the simplest example, "Cain killed Abel" means something different from "Abel killed Cain." Subject must precede object.

Because word order is so important, parts of a sentence most nearly related must be placed together, or as close together as possible. Ambiguity arises when this rule is not followed. To take an example, this sentence is ambiguous:

> There was a meeting yesterday about right-wing remarks made by racists in the boardroom.

The ambiguity would have been avoided if "in the boardroom" followed "there was a meeting yesterday." Inserting a comma after "racists" would only have added clumsiness to ambiguity.

Do not separate a relative from its antecedant. In this example,

> The SRC has received enquiries about racist remarks made by right-wing groups, which give rise to questions about the SRC's jurisdiction

it is not clear exactly **what** gives rise to questions about the SRC's jurisdiction. Is it the enquiries, or is it the right-wing groups? A separate sentence should have been added: "These enquiries/right-wing groups give rise...."

Do not separate a verb from its auxiliary. A typical example of this error is "the SRC should, in cases of right-wing remarks, convene a student disciplinary court." The reader must absorb a subordinate clause before completing the verb. This practise is acceptable only in the case of conjunctions: "The SRC should, therefore, convene a student disciplinary court."

Place adverbs immediately before (or after) the verbs they qualify. "He came soon" and "he soon came" emphasises different things: the first his coming, the second his promptness.

The word "only" causes many problems. It displays an ungrammatic-

al affinity for verbs and nearly always deserts its post and attaches itself to them, regardless of what it is meant to qualify. An example of the ambiguity which can result:

Her disease can only be alleviated by a major operation.

This may mean either that her disease is incurable, and that her suffering can only be relieved, or that it will take a major operation to cure her.

Sometimes misplaced "onlys" cause real trouble:

Carpet-yarn only can be obtained from India.

Third World poverty hits new lows!

"Even" behaves in much the same way. Remember the rule: place the modifier as close as possible to the modified element.

**Conjunctions:** the South African education system spends twelve years teaching the aspirant student journalist not to begin sentences with "and" or "but." Fortunately, this rule can be unlearned very quickly. Sentences begun with conjunctions are perfectly acceptable. And they frequently give great force to your writing. But do not overwork them on principle.

Do not use "and" to introduce a first relative clause. It is wrong to say "the SRC is a hard-working body and which has consistently upheld the position of the student press." Second relative clauses can be introduced with conjunctions.

In writing "both ... and" place "both" immediately before the first noun introduced. "The SRC is dedicated to both sloth and decadence," not "the SRC is dedicated both to sloth and decadence."

Do not use "if" to mean "though," "either" or "but" if ambiguity arises. An example of this is "only time will tell if this helps or not."

Use "while" in the temporal sense. Using it to mean "although" leads to trouble:

While the surgeon was drunk, she performed the operation better than ever.

Some writers use "while" as a meaningless conjunction to introduce second main clauses:

Bailey was elected president while Dixon was elected treasurer.

Properly speaking, this means that the elections took place simultaneously.

**Negatives:** in English, two negatives make a positive. "I don't know nothing" means nearly the same as "I know something." Trouble with negatives usually arises in the case of "neither ... nor." Do not write "neither the cat or the dog." The error usually occurs in long sentences: "He said that the Bill would neither be introduced this session, which lasts until May 10, or indeed this year."

It used to be wrong to say "neither cat, nor dog, nor mouse." In modern usage, however, the "neither ... nor" construction can be used with as many nouns as desired:

> Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature....

If the initial negative is "no" or "not" there is confusion as to whether "nor" or "or" should follow. If the initial negative runs into the second part of the sentence, use "or":

> He did not think that the Bill would be introduced this session, or indeed before the recess.

But if the initial negative does not apply to the second part of the sentence, use "nor":

> He did not think the Bill would be introduced this session, nor indeed would it be before the recess.

Avoid "not ... because." It leads to ambiguity.

> I did not write that letter because of what you told me.

Was the letter written or not?

Since two negatives make a positive, it is better style to make them into a positive anyway; multiple negatives confuse. Lenin thought he had quashed Stalin when he said "Stalin is not right when he says we cannot not sign." Stalin was probably too busy trying to work out that Lenin meant "Stalin is wrong when he says we are compelled to sign."

**Numbers:** singular subjects take singular verbs, plural subjects take

plural verbs. "Eliot's plays are his best work" but "Eliot's best work is his plays." A common mistake is to use nouns linked by "and" as singular:

> The utilisation of skills and the development of resources is an urgent task.

This kind of slip is very easy to make.

Collective nouns take singular verbs or plural verbs, depending on what you wish to emphasise. If you wish to emphasise a group as a collection of people, use a plural noun: "the SRC were unable to agree." On the other hand, if you wish to emphasise a group of people as a unit, use a singular noun: "the SRC has resigned."

Do not shift from singular to plural: "The SRC, which is nearing the end of its term of office, have decided to dispense with elections."

The verb must agree with the number of the subject, not the number of the object. The examples "Eliot's plays are his best work" and "Eliot's best work is his plays" illustrate this rule.

"Either or both" causes difficulty, because one is singular and the other plural. The rule is to take the number of the word closest to the verb: "Is either or both dead?" but "either or both are dead."

Do not say "A large number of people were present." Say "many people were present" or "the number of people present was large." The construction using "many" is infinitely preferable.

### (29)Miscellaneous rules and conventions

Prefer adjectives of quality to adjectives of degree. "A violent protest" says more than "a strong protest."

Avoid "on behalf of." Say "for."

The word "claim" is so misused that it is best avoided altogether. Properly speaking, it means to assert a right. One claims from an insurance company. "Claim" in journalese suggests that the claimant is talking nonsense, and the use of the word increasingly invites libel actions. Write plain "say." This word is completely neutral and should be preferred to "believed, pointed out, reminded, insisted. agreed that, admitted" and so on.

Do not say "residence" for "house."

Do not write "the job is worthwhile." "Worth" has a prepositional force and demands an object, in this case "while" (the time taken to do the job.) A job is "worth while," but it is a "worthwhile job."

Emigrate means to leave a country; immigrate means to arrive in another.

Avoid the impersonal in reporting. "This newspaper approached Ms Smith" sounds pompous. Say "(name of newspaper) approached Ms Smith."

Avoid hanging participles and absolute constructions. Do not say "the hecklers having been thrown out, the meeting resumed." Say "once" or "when."

Avoid "basically," "fundamentally" and "essentially." They are ways of avoiding precise facts.

Never write "in terms of." It is a vague way of expressing a relationship that can almost always be expressed concretely.

Drop adjectives such as considerable, substantial, complex.

Avoid disaster, chaos, shambles, anarchy, havoc. They have lost their strength through excessive use.

Write "the Soviet Union," not "Russia" or "the USSR."

Write "the US/A," not "America" or "the States."

Write "South Africa," not "SA" or "the Republic."

The use of "damage worth millions of rands" is wrong. Damage is worth nothing.

Say "gave," not "donated."

Gerunds should be treated as nouns. Say "the SRC censured Mr Swart's drinking," not "the SRC censured Mr Swart drinking."

Two cars collide; a car hits a brick wall.

Avoid "involving" — the word has to do duty for too many others. Likewise with "development." (A thousand homes are to be destroyed" not "new developments involving the destruction of thousands of homes are underway.")

Use "must" only in the sense of compulsion. "People must eat to live" is right; "the State must abolish the institution of private property" is wrong. However, a statement like "South Africa must change to avoid violence" is correct, because there is no normative connotation, only a hypothetical observation.

"Forced," too, should only be used in the imperative sense. Say "obliged" if you mean obliged.

Fantastic means pertaining to fantasy and nothing else.

The construction "Mr Jones is believed to have drowned," although correct, should be avoided.

**Never** write "meaningful" without asking **WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Reserve "farther" for distance and "further" for "in addition."

"Data" is a plural of "datum." Never use it in the singular.

People lying on their backs are supine. People lying on their faces are

prone.

Cap "president" only for very important people. The president of the SRC does not merit a cap.

Deaths occur. Funerals take place.

"Owing to" means "because of" and "due to" means "caused by." "Mr Swart was inarticulate owing to drunkenness" but "Mr Swart's inarticulateness was due to drunkenness."

"Nubile" means "marriageable." It is **not** a synonym for voluptuous, luscious, tantalising, pneumatic or any such term.Leslie Sellers obviously didn't know the correct meaning of the word when he spoke of a "nubile young leg." One cannot marry a leg.

Write "among" not "amongst." It is technically wrong to use "between" for more than two things, but this is one of those rules that can be broken to promote clarity. We do not speak of the space among three points.

Write "first, second, third ... last" not "firstly, secondly, thirdly ... lastly."

**Never** write "that is the exception that proves the rule." This is surely one of the most fatuous expressions that has ever crept into the English language. An exception tests a rule — which is what the expression "exceptio regulam probat" originally meant. The old sense of "prove" survives in the term "motor proving ground."

## (30)Campus language

A newspaper must speak the language of its readers, but student newspapers should be sparing in their use of slang. The guiding principle should be: if you can say in one word what would otherwise require several, use that word. An example is "jorl" (definite spelling.) Remember, however, that English is a flexible language; only very rarely is recourse to slang necessary.

Special campus terms — tut, prac, supp and so on — are obviously necessary usage for a student newspaper. Afrikanerisms such as "lekker" should be avoided.

Obscenity is a more difficult problem. Occasionally you may see this sign on a wall:

**COMMIT NO NUISANCE**

This means, in Professor Warner's words, "do not piss against this wall." The circumlocution is used because a public notice must be bland

enough to offend nobody's sensibilities.

A student newspaper's readership, however, is not likely to take offence at the occasional expletive. However, it should never be used literally, and never in a news report, except in direct quotation. Its proper use is to underline a point, and then on the rarest occasions. Excessive use deadens impact; if a newspaper is consistently clean, the calculated recourse to obscenity has that much more effect.

Beware of problems with the law. Public obscenity is a criminal offence and student journalists have appeared in court before on this charge.

## (31)Paragraphs

Keep paragraphs short. A few sentences to a paragraph; no more. Copy that looks fairly short in typescript will look several times longer when typeset. No reader wants to wade through a sea of print; write terse, vigorous paragraphs with definite breaks in sense.

Beware, however, that paragraphs are not consistently of the same length, to avoid monotony. If yours is a paper that uses subheads, take care that their placement does not create a monotonous effect rather than cancel it. The location of crossheads and sideheads should be planned according to page design, not according to a "four-to-six-inch" formula.

Years of reading newspapers have conditioned readers into believing that more important information comes sooner in a story. There are two reasons for this. First, reader comfort: not everybody will read through every story. The gist of the story must be suggested by the first few paragraphs. Second, subs demand that stories be written according to the principle of diminishing importance so that if they need to cut off a few paragraphs, the story won't suffer badly. It helps layout artists, who have one of the hardest jobs on a student newspaper, if this rule is followed.

Write paragraphs that can be read easily. Keep your style terse in news copy. The "sting in the tail" does not belong in a news story. It violates the principle of diminishing importance and suggests a conclusion to what is frequently an ongoing issue.

Writing according to the principle of diminishing importance does have a disadvantage — it encourages lazy subbing. Any butcher can lop off two or three paragraphs; it takes a subeditor to trim a story.

## (32)The intro

The introductory paragraph, or intro, is a single sentence or two or three short sentences. It must be written with force and conciseness, and it must contain the angle, or main item of interest. Journalists must explain who, why, what, where, when and how, but it is pointless trying to cram all these things into the intro. All it must do is offer the important news in a few well chosen words, but in such a way that the reader's curiosity is aroused and he or she reads the rest of the story.

A good rule is to keep intros to 35 words or less - although many writers can handle twice that number with skill.

An example of a bad intro is

> Mr Fred Mork, the president of the SRC, said at an extraordinary meeting of the SRC last night that right-wing students, who form a powerful bloc on campus, ought to be expelled.

This is too wordy and contains a lot of information that doesn't belong in an intro. The Mr can be dropped; "president of the SRC" can remain, since names must always have handles unless they're very well known, but it should be written as "SRC president." The news is not that Fred Mork said it, but that the SRC president said it, so we transpose the terms. Finally, the **real** news is not that the SRC president said it, but **what** he said. The information about the meeting and about right-wing support can be kept for second and third paragraphs.

The intro then becomes

> Right-wing students should be expelled, says SRC president Fred Mork.

This is a terse and vigorous intro. The terseness could be taken further:

> Right-wingers must go! So says SRC president Fred Mork, who struck out at this powerful bloc last night.

This is as vigorous as the first example and says more. However, this is approaching — or sinking to — the level of the **News of the World.** The first example does all that an intro need do, and this style is best for a serious student newspaper.

Never write an intro which seems to be your own words but turns out to be someone else's on further reading. The intro which states starkly "right-wing students should be expelled" and then identifies the speak-

er in the next paragraph would only irritate readers. The headline, too, should make an attribution; either as

**RIGHTISTS MUST GO — MORK** or **"RIGHTISTS MUST GO"**

The intro cannot be properly treated here. Irwin Manoim handles it more fully in his handbook, and the topic is dealt with exhaustively by Harold Evans in Volume I of his series. See the "Books" section at the end of this guide.

### (32)Interviews and speeches

Correct style in writing up an interview is to minimise quotation marks. Use the form Q and A, or the initials of the interviewer and his or her subject. The simplest style is to have questions and answers set in different weights. Avoid indirect speech; the reader should be able to read exactly what was said. Make sure that quotes are exactly correct. Some people won't object if they are misquoted in an unimportant way; others will quibble about punctuation. The only solution is to report exactly what was said.

In reporting a speech, more indirect speech is needed. Mix good quotes with accurate synopsis. Give a logical account of the proceedings. Every speaker deserves some attention. Never misquote a speaker; if you don't catch exactly what was said, report in indirect speech. Never withhold any reservations or qualifications that may be attached to a statement, even if they seem trivial.

If you are reporting on an foreign or an Afrikaans speaker, give the original of any contentious statements. Jimmy Kruger was able to mitigate his responsibility for "Biko's death leaves me cold" by protesting that "dit laat my koud" has different connotations from the English translation.

### (34)Arts writing and reviews

If you are writing a review of a book, film, play, record or exhibition, be very careful in your choice of words. The language of criticism is far better developed than the language of praise; if you wish to give a favourable review of your subject, few metaphors and adjectives are available to you. Hence it is easy to slip into nonsense:

> The movie shows freedom to be a staggering and demoralising burden on the individual that lends insight into problems that seem insoluble.

Before you write anything, as yourself: can I say this more simply? If the answer is yes, use the simpler language. Never write anything you can't explain intelligently. The writer of this passage probably didn't know what he or she was talking about:

> The music lacks something of Pink Floyd's previous flair and imagination, as shown in "Dark Side of the Moon" in particular. The brilliant guitar interpretation, musical arrangement and sound effects of Side One are allowed to slip off into a monotony of jarring themes which drag on to a miserable end.

What does it all mean? The catchwords "flair," "brilliant," "interpretation" and (worst of all) "monotony of jarring themes" seem to communicate something very profound and erudite, but actually say nothing at all. Try to avoid overworked expressions of excellence such as brilliant, fantastic, superb, classic, exquisite, magnificent, marvellous and wonderful. Never say "epic"; the word can only be applied to a long narrative poem with a heroic theme. Remember the rule — choose adjectives of quality over adjectives of degree.

One solution to the problem is to slate everything reviewed. It is easy to do so intelligently and makes entertaining reading, but is hardly ethical. The best kind of review mixes praise and criticism in response to a personal appreciation.

If you have a musical background, beware of using technical terms:

> The cataclysmic explosion in A flat minor is followed by a neat little pentatonic phrase which ends in a fine chromatic with F sharp (and not B sharp as one might have expected from the opening bars) triads.

This is, literally, nonsense, but it bears a surprising similarity to many reviews. Most readers won't know what you're talking about, and they'll assume that you don't either.

If you are reviewing a film, give the names of the principal actors and the roles they play, and the sames of the producer and director. In other writing quote author, editor, artist, sculptor, and so on. Say where a performance can be seen, where a movie is showing, and where a book or record can be bought.

## (35)"New Journalism" and "Wolfisms"

Although the "New Journalism" had a powerful influence on the student press, its techniques are best left out of student newspapers. There are two good reasons for this:

(a) The techniques have had little exposure in South Africa, and tend to confuse students. Informal prose is usually found only in the columns of the Sunday Press (where it is handled skilfully) and the style is antagonistic to students who couldn't care whether your paper exists or not, but since it does exist and is in front of them, feel they might as well glance at it. Stream of consciousness techniques are unfamiliar to many people. Usually only English students and readers of Joyce and Faulkner will understand what you are trying to achieve. Used in moderation, new journalism techniques are useful, but they must be skilfully applied.

(b) The second reason, related to this last point, is that it's hard to handle these techniques well. The dividing line between informality and triteness is very thin, and to cross that line is very easy. Clear style yields to hackneyed, clichéd language, and the result is that the story goes unread.

"Wolfisms" — run-together phrases, absurd hyperboles, onomatopoeic renderings of screams and cries, and - heeewack! - assorted interjections — should be banned from copy. They make text look like something out of one of James Joyce's more eccentric experiments, and layout must be impeccable if they are to stand up. Just imagine

aaaaaaaauuuuuuuuurrrrrrrrrrgggggggggghhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!!

set in 10pt across 9 ems.

## (36)Heads and captions

These points cannot be properly treated here. Irwin Manoim covers them in his handbook, and Harold Evans treats headlines comprehensively in the third volume of his series.

The important point to be made is that headlines need verbs, normally, in the present tense. The "label" headline is too common in the student press: "Empty Protests," "Battered Women," "Hatchet Thatcher," "Dope," "Shell," "Inkatha" and "Platform 80" are all heads taken out of just six pages of one student newspaper. Nothing is said, readers are uninterested, and stories go unread.

Avoid the American practice of dropping the subject from headlines:

"Shoots self, then husband." Even if the subject "woman" were included, the headline would be infinitely better.

Headlines that make puns are a moot point: some papers like them, others don't. A campus story about a major reorganisation of Rag can be cleverly headed "New Rag Wipes Clean." But the rule should be that the pun must be good or it must be left unprinted. Witty heads should be used sparingly.

The substance of the headline must be taken from the intro. If the two don't agree, the headline is poor or the intro is wrong. There is no point in writing a good head over a bad intro; if the angle is missing from the first paragraph, rewrite the story.

Beware of the strapline or second deck that contains the real news. Many small-town newspapers include heads that contain the news in the strap, as in this example: "Police force in crisis, so... TRAFFIC COPS GET NEW POWERS." The news is that traffic officers are being used to plug a staff shortage in the police force, but the headline doesn't reflect it.

Beware of headlines with double meanings: "Man held in cigarette case," "SRC president stoned," "Patients feel doctors' pinch." Irwin Manoim's handbook provides other amusing examples.

All photographs should be given captions, with the exception of single column photos used to brighten up layout. If the picture is obscure, out of focus, or likely to print as a grey mess, it needs an explicit caption. Pictures of people juxtaposed with stories about the same people need no captions, provided that no confusion can arise. Mugshots of people should always have captions.

At the other extreme, photographs blown up across 40 ems sitting on top of stories need no captions. There is always the danger, as well, that people will read the caption and ignore the photo. A really good photo must be treated with care. It it is interesting enough, people will seek an explanation in the text.

A useful technique in writing captions is to write "teasers" - captions that provoke interest. A picture of the SRC president captioned: "Bailey... indecent exposure" will almost always make students read the story.

If a photo does not accompany a story, it needs a fairly detailed caption.

Graphics rarely, if ever, need captions.

A caption should never explain the obvious. It is pointless to caption a picture "a woman looking at the sea" when that is what we can see already.

## (37)Credits and bylines

Stories that should never take bylines are those in which the writer has asked that his or her name be witheld. Sometimes this fact can be emphasised, with the writer's permission; often it's news in itself.

Stories that should always take bylines are:

(**a**) Those written by someone who is not a staff member, if this is appropriate;

(**b**) Any review or personal comment which cannot be classified as editorial comment. At the very least, reviews should carry initials.

Otherwise, individual newspapers must take policy decisions on this issue. Some papers prefer to list all contributors under the masthead; others list only printer and publisher (these two are legally required.) Some papers give bylines on every story; others give none. There are cases to be made for both positions. Bylines reward staff and give students names they can remember if they have news. On the other hand, many students feel that bylines and credits are merely false pride and are irritated by them.

## (38)How not to give advice

To illustrate some of the points made in this guide, here is an example of appalling style. It is taken, believe it or not, from a guide to style.

> Sportswriters, subeditors and dictation typists are asked to follow style closely as it will be appreciated that correct preparation of copy means vital time-saving - the works will be spared the time-consuming task of sorting copy in terms of style and unnecessary resetting at crucial moments consequently will be avoided.

This is atrocious. It is too long, it is vague, it is ambiguous, it is badly punctuated, it uses sloppy and meaningless words, it is illogical and it is unidiomatic.

(**a**) Too long: the whole clumsy sentence could have been written: "Sportswriters, subeditors and dictation typists must keep to form; this will save the works the trouble of resetting."

(**b**) Ambiguous: "It will be appreciated that correct preparation of copy means vital time-saving." Does this mean that "sportswriters, subeditors and dictation typists will appreciate that correct preparation of copy means vital time-saving" or does it means that "the works will appreciate the correct preparation of copy as this will save time"?

(c) Vague: "Sorting copy in terms of style" - what does this mean? How does one sort copy in terms of style?
(d) Badly punctuated: Although the sentence is almost fifty words long, it is punctuated by a comma, a dash, and the final full point. As a result it makes heavy reading. Note the misused dash: does it perform the function of a comma, a semicolon, or a colon?
(e) Use of sloppy and meaningless words: "vital," "in terms of," and "crucial" seem to say a lot but actually say nothing. It is unlikely that time-saving is a matter of life and death anyway.
(f) Illogical: first, in the use of "style." The writer meant "form."

Second, in the phrase "unnecessary resetting." This is tautological; only an idiot would reset anything if it weren't necessary. The writer meant "necessary resetting" or just plain "resetting."
(g) Unidiomatic: "resetting at crucial moments consequently will be avoided." This is bad English; we say "will consequently be avoided," not "consequently will be avoided."

It is, of course, possible that the writers of the guide in question were trying to make a subtle point. Perhaps the errors in this guide will be taken the same way. The charge "physician, heal thyself" is hard to swallow.

(39)**Books**

Every student newspaper should have a basic library. Some useful texts, in no particular order, are:

**The Concise Oxford Dictionary.** Preferably Sixth Edition.
**Roget's Thesaurus,** in Penguin.
Fowler's **Modern English Usage.**
Cassell's **Modern Guide to Synonyms and Related Words.** Entertaining reading, but not as good as Roget.
Alan Warner's **Short Guide to English Style** on style.
Gowers's **Complete Plain Words** should be considered absolutely indispensable.
Irwin Manoim's **Handbook for Student Journalists,** published by SASPU and now in a new edition, is essential.
**Doing it in Style** and **The Simple Subs Book** by Leslie Sellers. Consistenly sexist, but apart from that major flaw, good and even brilliant at times.
**Editing and Design Volumes 1 - 5** by Harold Evans, former editor of the London Times and The Sunday Times. The last word in journalism.
**The Newspaperman's Guide to the Law** by Kelsey Stuart. Very dry, but useful. Keep to the latest edition; texts on South African newspaper law become obsolete as fast as the State can print legislation.
**News Extra** (ed. Philip Jones) - SAAN - is a standard text.
The **Argus Editorial Style Book** and the **Argus Editorial Handbook** are very good indeed - if you can obtain copies.
Tom Wolfe's **The New Journalism.**

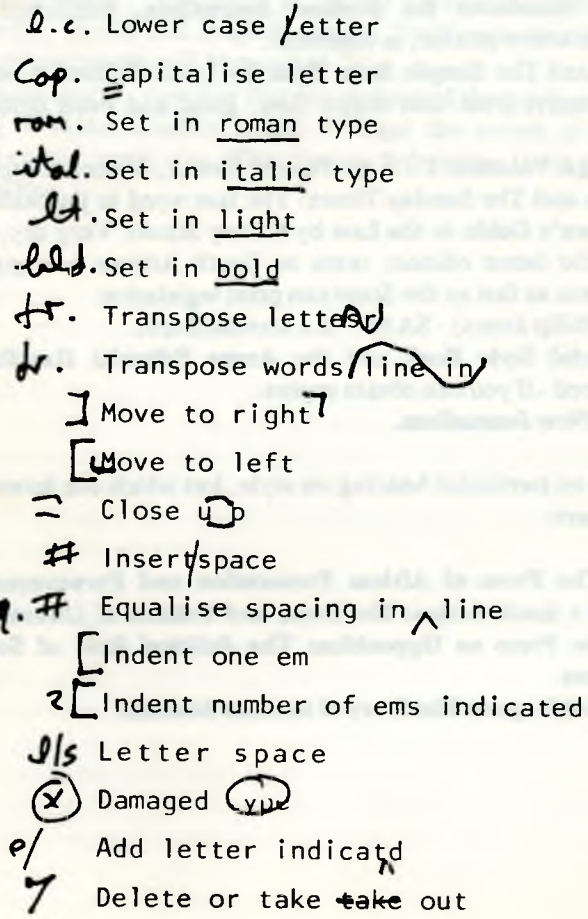
Books which have no particular bearing on style, but which are interesting nevertheless, are:

Frank Barton's **The Press of Africa: Persecution and Perseverance.**
Chimutengwende's **South Africa: The Press and Politics of Liberation.**
Elaine Potter: **The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers.**
Rees and Day's **Muldergate: The Story of the Info Scandal.**

**Appendix: Proofreading Marks**

Some or all of the following proofreading marks may be useful, especially if yours is a paper on which staff members do the typesetting. These marks are the most convenient way of indicating editorial and typographical changes; unless some standardised notation is used, different marks may be interpreted in different ways.

Once a page has been made up, a proof can be run by making a photostat. All changes can then be marked with a yellow koki pen, which won't photograph onto a plate. Made-up pages can also be marked - even scribbled on freely - in yellow.



Delete and close up

stet. Let matter above dots stand

Correct word

Insert full point

Insert comma

Insert colon

Insert semicolon

Insert quotation marks

Insert apostrophe or single quotes

Insert (parentheses)

Insert exclamation point

Insert hyphen

Spell out abbr

Run in on

run on

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