UNIT-15: STYLE AND THE STYLEBOOK

UNIT STRUCTURE

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15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand what a stylebook is and why newspapers need to have a stylebook
- Learn about the different journalistic stylebooks

15.2 INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A STYLEBOOK?

As a student of journalism, and as a mass media professional, you will find that one of the most basic expectations you will have to meet in your work concerns style. Adherence to journalistic style — both the rules of writing and usage and the customs of journalism — is a mark of a professional writer. Not only should a writer's knowledge and application of the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation be perfect, but also the professional writer should understand the follow the rules of style that are commonly accepted for the field.

You must have noticed that newspapers use only a particular set of fonts and colours, often limiting them to just about four or five. That is because each newspaper follows a certain stylebook.

A stylebook is a set of guidelines that help staff to bring out a newspaper that is homogeneous, coherent and credible. It also provides guidelines on use of language, particularly those concerned with grammar. A stylebook is a guide for a writer or editor for a specific publication. It gives guidelines for usage of terms, typefaces, highlighting, etc.

All good news publications and even most mediocre ones adopt consistent style, and all reporters and editors are expected to adhere to that style. The same applies for magazines, newsletters, brochures and other printed materials. There are several commonly used style-guides that are followed by different publication houses all over the world. When a publication house develops its own specific set of standard rules and style it is known as **house-style**.

This unit on style and stylebook will give you an idea about the importance of knowing and using a particular style of writing and of understanding the customs and conventions of journalism. One of the chief duties of a journalist is to maintain accuracy, and many of the styles and conventions of journalism that have been developed over the years have been to promote this goal. The same can be said of these style rules and conventions as they apply to clarity and brevity.

15.3 WHY DO WE NEED A STYLEBOOK?

The basic purpose of a stylebook is to establish a set of standard rules or style of presentation to be applied by a publication house, so as to maintain consistency and improve communication.

In a daily newspaper publishing house reporters, editors, copy editors and designers alike are always strapped for time and hardly have time to experiment with different designs, styles or fonts. Moreover a single newspaper issue has multiple stories which are written and designed by different people. If each one were to follow different styles of writing or layout designs, it would make the newspaper lose its unique style and will lead to digression of professionalism of the publication.

Having a stylebook enables journalists to follow a specific style of writing,

while maintaining consistency in the usage of grammar rules, spellings, terminologies as well as fonts and colours. It helps reduce questions relating to design and production for newcomers and old-timers alike and reduce inconsistencies in the paper. A stylebook also allows the staff to focus on more important issues, like writing better headlines, selecting and cropping photos better and originating better ideas for illustrations and graphics.

Many young writers think of consistent style as a repressive force hampering their creativity. However, it isn't. Style is not a rigid set of rules established to restrict the creative forced in the writer. Style imposes a discipline in writing that should run through all the activities of a journalist. It implies that the journalist is precise not only with writing. Consistent style is the hallmark of a professional.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. What is a stylebook?

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Q. 2. What is the basic purpose of a stylebook?

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Q. 3. What is a house-style?

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15.4 COMMONLY USED STYLEBOOKS AND JOURNALISTIC CONVENTIONS

Journalistic style may be divided into two types of style: professional conventions and rules of usage. Professional conventions have evolved during years of journalistic endeavour and are now taught through professional training in universities and on the job. The rules of usage have been collected into stylebooks published by wire services, news syndicates, universities and individual print and broadcast news operations. Some of these stylebooks have widespread acceptance and influence. Others have remained relatively local and result in unique style rules accepted by reporters and editors working for individual publications. For print journalists, the main source of those rules is the *Associated Press Stylebook* and *Libel Manual.*

For many years, the Associated Press stylebook has been used as the bible for style for newspapers around the world. Most public relations departments and many magazines also follow this manual as the foundation of their style rules. Apart from Associated Press and Libel Manual, a few more well known and widely used stylebooks are the BBC News Style Guide, the Economist Style Guide, the Guardian Style Guide, the Times Style and Usage Guide, the Chicago Manual of Style, the American Psychological Association Style (APA), the American Sociological Style Association and the Modern Language Association Style (MLA).

Listed below are a few representative guidelines on style covered by the Associated Press Style-book and Libel Manual.

Capitalization: Unnecessary capitalization should be avoided because uppercase letters are harder to read and make the sentence look uninviting. For example, you can write Mayor John Smith, but you should write John Smith, mayor of Jonesville. That is, use lowercase letter in case of title after name, but uppercase for a formal name.

Abbreviation: Abbreviations save much space for newspapers, but

you should use them only when the reader will recognize them instantly. The same principle applies to acronyms. Usually abbreviations are used in case of titles before full names outside direct quotations. For example, Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Mr., Mrs. Etc. Abbreviations are also used with dates or numerals like A.D, B.C, a.m., p.m.; in numbered houses like 20 W. Main St.; names of certain states like U.S.A.; and well know government agencies like C.I.A., F.B.I. etc.

Punctuation: Punctuations, if not used correctly could change the meaning of entire sentences. Stylebooks provide useful guidelines on the use of punctuations, like in the case of using periods, commas, semicolons, exclamation marks, apostrophies etc. For example, semicolons are used to indicate greater separation of thought and information than commas convey, but less than the separation a period implies:

Survivors include a son, Rajiv Sharma of Delhi; two sisters, Julie Devi of Mumbai and Janki Sinha of Haryana; and several grandchildren.

Numerals: Spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for numbers 10 and above. This rule applies to numbers used in a series or individually. Don't begin sentences with numbers, as a rule, but if you must, spell them out. Use numbers for virtually all measurements and dimensions.

Spelling: In journalism, there are many words that are spelled differently. Alternate spellings and variants are incorrect (because of the requirement of style consistency). Make it *adviser,* not *advisor*; *television*, not *TV*, when pronounced as a noun; *percent*, not *per cent*; *afterward*, *toward, upward, forward* (no s); *vice president*, not *vice-president*.

Usage: Comprise means "contain," not "make up": "The region comprises five states," not "five states comprise the region" and not "the region is comprised of five states," because it is passive. *Affect* means to "influence," not "carry out." *Effect* means a "result" when it's a noun and means to "carry out" when it's a verb. *Controller* and *comptroller* are both

pronounced “controller” and mean virtually the same thing, though *comptroller* is generally the more accurate word for denoting government financial officers and *controller* is better for denoting private sector financial officers.

Ages: Use numerals always: a 2-month-old baby; she was 80; the youth, 18, and the girl, 6, were rescued.

Journalistic Conventions

Journalistic conventions include both the basic structures of the stories and the individual ordering of facts. They even include words within sentences that are regularly used in certain types of stories. These conventions or traditions are not spelled out in stylebooks but are known to trained journalists. Some of these conventions are discussed below:

Inverted Pyramid: The inverted pyramid is the most commonly used news story structure all over the world. The inverted pyramid means two things: facts should be presented more or less in the order of their importance, with the most important facts coming at the beginning; and a story should be written so that if it needs to be cut, it may be cut from the end without loss of essential facts or coherence.

Balance and Fairness: One of the basic tenets of journalism is fairness. A news report must be presented in a balanced and fair manner and not one-sided. The journalist or the reporter must never take sides, unless it is an opinionated article. Producing a balanced story means more than just making sure a controversial situation or issue is covered fairly. In a larger sense, balance means that journalists should understand the relative importance of the stories that cover.

The Impersonal Reporter: Reporters should be invisible in their writing. Not only should journalists not report their own views and opinions, but they should also avoid direct contact with the reader through the use of

first-person (*I, we, me, our, my, us*) or second person (*you, your*) pronouns outside of direct quotes.

Sources, Attribution or Quotations: When we read something in a newspaper, we immediately take it to be true, believing in the credibility of the newspaper and the fact that the source the news information from experts and reliable sources. For a journalist, it is important to judge their 'sources' carefully and they should not depend heavily on a 'convenient' source instead of a credible source. When a source is quoted in a story, it should be readily apparent why that source is used, and why that source is credible.

Journalists must also make it clear to the readers where the information has been obtained, whether it is a primary source or a secondary source. Also in case of indirect and direct quotes, it must be attributed correctly. However, if the person who is being quoted has used incorrect English, it is the duty of the journalist to edit the quote, on a grammatical level only, without changing the essence or the meaning.

Language Sensitivity: Editors must understand that language has the ability to offend and demean. Readers and viewers of the mass media are a broad and diverse group, and those who would communicate with them should be aware of language sensitivities of some of the people within that group. The current state of public discourse demands that journalistic writing should avoid using certain terms and language in order to respect and maintain sensitivity towards all readers. Editors should examine their copy closely to make sure that they have treated people fairly and equally, that they have not lapsed into stereotypes, that they have not used phrases or descriptions that demean, and that they have included everyone in their articles who is relevant to the subject. For example, it is no longer acceptable to use the pronoun *he* when the referent may be a man or a woman. "A student should always do his homework" should be "A student should always do his or her homework" or "Students should always do their homework". Editors need to be watchful for gender-biased terms and pose alternatives-

for example- fire fighters instead of fireman, mail carrier instead of mail man.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- 2

Q. 4. Choose the correct answer that conforms to AP style:

(i)The public address announcer asked, "Is there a _____ in the house?"(doctor/Dr./Doctor).

(ii) Early in the _____ he opened his eyes for the first time in a week. (a.m./A.M./morning).

(iii) His first thought was to get in touch with the _____. (Federal Bureau of Investigation/FBI/ U.S. FBI).

(iv) He had to take his exam _____ times before he passed it. (2/two/twice).



15.5 LET US SUM UP

- A professional writer should understand the follow the rules of style that are commonly accepted for the field.
- A stylebook is a set of guidelines that help staff to bring out a newspaper that is homogeneous, coherent and credible. It also provides guidelines on use of language, particularly those concerned with grammar.
- There are several commonly used style-guides that are followed by different publication houses all over the world. When a publication house develops its own specific set of standard rules and style it is known as **house-style**.
- The basic purpose of a stylebook is to establish a set of standard rules or style of presentation to be applied by a publication house, so as to maintain consistency and improve communication.
- Journalistic style may be divided into two types of style: professional

conventions and rules of usage. Professional conventions have evolved during years of journalistic endeavour and are now taught through professional training in universities and on the job. The rules of usage have been collected into stylebooks published by wire services, news syndicates, universities and individual print and broadcast news operations.

- For print journalists, the main source of those rules is the *Associated Press Stylebook* and *Libel Manual.*
- Apart from Associated Press and Libel Manual, a few more well known and widely used stylebooks are the BBC News Style Guide, the Economist Style Guide, the Guardian Style Guide, the Times Style and Usage Guide, the Chicago Manual of Style, the American Psychological Association Style (APA), the American Sociological Style Association and the Modern Language Association Style (MLA).
- Journalistic conventions include both the basic structures of the stories and the individual ordering of facts. They even include words within sentences that are regularly used in certain types of stories. These conventions or traditions are not spelled out in stylebooks but are known to trained journalists.



15.6 FURTHER READING

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15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans. to Q. No : 1 A stylebook is a set of guidelines that help staff to bring out a newspaper that is homogeneous, coherent and credible. It also provides guidelines on use of language, particularly those concerned with grammar. A stylebook is a guide for a writer or editor for a specific

publication. It gives guidelines for usage of terms, typefaces, highlighting, etc.

Ans. to Q. No : 2 The basic purpose of a stylebook is to establish a set of standard rules or style of presentation to be applied by a publication house, so as to maintain consistency and improve communication.

Ans. to Q. No : 3 There are several commonly used style-guides that are followed by different publication houses all over the world. When a publication house develops its own specific set of standard rules and style it is known as **house-style**.

Ans. to Q. No : 4

(i) doctor

(ii) morning

(iii) FBI

(iv) two



15.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q.1 : What is the basic purpose of a stylebook?

Q.2 : What are the three types of journalistic stylebook?

B. Short questions (Answer each question in about 150 words):

Q. 1. Why must a journalist give importance on the different sources of news?

C. Long questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words):

Q.1. Why is it important for publication houses to maintain and follow a stylebook?

Q. 2. Discuss some of the common journalistic conventions related to style followed by newspapers.

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