



Empowering professionals to write with skill and confidence

Q3 2008 Newsletter

Style Guides—Why Most Companies Need Them

Often, when I give a class at a company, participants often disagree about how things should be written or items discussed in written documents. Sometimes these arguments are as simple as whether a serial comma should be used (the last comma before the “and” in a list; the answer is “yes,” the serial comma should be used), but they often revolve around more serious issues, such as how tables and charts should be presented or how references should be used.

Many of these arguments can be solved very simply: companies need to have and use a style guide, and everyone should be trained on its use. What’s a style guide? A style guide is a resource that mandates things like whether a table should have a title and a caption (many companies that I’ve worked in use a caption, but erroneously call it a title); if documents should use ragged or flush right edge; what type and size font is recommended; and how references should be used, among other issues.

Some companies (usually larger ones) create their own style guides; typically, these larger companies are able to do so because they have a full-time writing staff that can take the time to cull documents and off-the-shelf style guides, interview writers in the organization, and write the style guide. A well-written style guide can take many months to write.

So, what should smaller companies do? Smaller companies that lack the resources of a full-time writing staff have several options: they can hire a consultant to do the work, have staff within the company contribute to and write the document, or use an off-the-shelf style guide (there are many good ones on the market; if you’d like a list, email us at pam@hurleywrite.com).

The style guide should also be treated as a “living” document: it should be updated as necessary, be modified as company policies change, and finally, writers should be trained to use it. It’s simply not enough to let writers know that your company has one—for writers to get the most from it, they need to understand how to find information in it, what information is most important to the company, and where the style guide is located (online is best). They should also understand that the company expects its staff to use the guide.

The benefits of a style guide are numerous: it allows writers to focus on writing and worry less about the minutiae; helps create consistency within the organization (which can be a huge bonus for clients); and perhaps best of all, solves arguments among writers! If your company doesn’t have a style guide,

What's New

We’ve seen such a need for folks who want to polish their writing and/or who want to publish, that we’re launching www.myprofessionaleditors.com. This business will be devoted to editing and proofreading. Our website will be up and running later in July—check it out!

New Puzzler

Submit your answers (and a short explanation of how you arrived at the answer) to pam@hurleywrite.com. You could win the opportunity to take our four-week online technical writing course (a \$399 value). This quarter, we’re mixing it up—these contain errors, but not all of the same kind. Have fun!

- 1: We waited sometime for him to arrive.
- 2: I think that you will be impressed by our systems engineers who are located at our home office.
- 3: After he left the office which was closed he came to my house.
- 4: Efficiency has increased this year. The reason is because our sales team has been more aggressive.
- 5: The meeting included Sheila and myself.

Please note: winners must sign up within 30 days of winning and must complete the course within four weeks of signing up. Hurley Write reserves the right to use the winner’s name as the winner in our newsletter.

Answers to Last Quarter’s Puzzler
 Congratulations to Lynn Aneiro of Neutrogena Corp. She’s the winner of the online technical writing class.

- 1: The lion’s share of diesels are sold in Europe.
 Should read: **The lion’s share of diesels is sold in Europe.** (It is the “share” which is singular which is sold)

consider getting one. If it hasn't been updated in awhile, update it. And finally, if you don't know if your company has one, find out. If it doesn't, suggest that it get one. Your writing life will be less stressful and more productive.

Did You Miss Our Spring Webinars?

If you missed our spring Lunchtime Webinars, we're offering them again in the fall, but at 2pm EST. We'll also be offering our new Lunchtime Series. Based on requests from past participants, our new webinars will be on the following topics:

- Creating Successful Pre-Writing Strategies
- Writing the Informed Consent
- Writing Effective Business Letters
- Writing the Summary and Discussion Sections of Reports
- Using Tables, Charts, and Graphics Effectively

If you have a topic you'd like to have discussed in our one-hour webinars or would like more information, email us at pam@hurleywrite.com. An email blast will be sent in August indicating the dates of the webinars.

Continue to send us your questions—grammar and writing-related!

2: There is an estimated 1,000 dogs living in our apartment complex.
Should read: **There are an estimated 1,000 dogs living in our apartment complex.** (The verb "are" relates to the noun "dogs" which is plural).

3: A system of pipes extend under the city.
Should read: **A system of pipes extends under the city.** (system is a singular noun and needs to relate to the singular verb extends)

4: Each of the staff members were late to the meeting.
Should read: **Each of the staff members was late to the meeting.** ("each" is the noun for the sentence which needs to be related to a singular verb)

5: The editorial board of the journal have high standards.
Should read: **The editorial board of the journal has high standards.** (the noun "board" needs a singular verb "has")

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