

Chicago Style Variances from Academic English (and a tip or two) Special Report #105

Below are a few differences between Chicago Style (preferred by book publishers) and the academic style most of us learned in school. Excerpts below are from *Purge Your Prose of Problems* by Bobbie Christmas (available at www.zebraeditor.com) and are based on *The Chicago Manual of Style* by The University of Chicago Press.

Note: While most book publishers prefer Chicago style, I cannot speak for all, and some may have specific style issues that differ from Chicago style. In addition, if you write articles or reports for academia or periodicals, check with the publication in which you plan to publish. Periodicals often use other style guides, such as Associated Press style, which will differ from Chicago style in some ways.

a.m./p.m.

Chicago Manual of Style says this: Figures are used in designations of time with a.m. or p.m. (lowercase with periods), the preferred form, or AM and PM (small caps with no periods). Whichever you choose, be consistent throughout the manuscript.

Creative-writing hint: Avoid redundancies. Never use a.m. with *morning* or p.m. with *evening*, and never use *o'clock* with either a.m. or p.m. or figures. Below are clear and acceptable ways of designating times:

4:00 p.m.	12:00 noon
10:45 in the morning	12:00 midnight
11:30 AM	eight o'clock at night

Note that the abbreviations *a.m.* and *p.m.* (*ante* and *post meridiem*) should not be in uppercase and should not have spaces. They should have periods, whereas if small caps are used, the periods are not necessary.

Creative-writing hint: In creative writing, avoid using a.m. and p.m. whenever possible. *We awoke with the sun at six o'clock* is better than *We awoke at 6:00 a.m.*

Avoid using *a.m.* or *p.m.* in dialogue, especially. People usually know the time of day, anyway. Relate it in more relative terms. Examples: “*I’ll meet you for lunch at twelve-thirty.*” “*What are you doing calling me at four in the morning?*”

Abbreviations in State Names

Spell out the names of states, territories, and possessions of the United States in full, with the exception of the District of Columbia. Example: *Mary drove from Smithville, Texas, to Washington, D.C.*

Capitalizing Titles

If a title precedes a name or replaces a name, the title gets capitalized. *I met Sergeant Bob Beddingfield when he was fresh out of college. The jury rose for Judge Bryan Golson. I loved Mom’s cooking.*

If the title follows the name or stands without a name, it is not capitalized. *Years later, Bob Beddingfield became a colonel. The jury rose for Bryan Golson, judge.*

If an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) or a possessive pronoun (*my*, *his*, *her*, *their*) precedes the replacement, do not capitalize. *I loved my mom’s cooking. Let’s call your dad.* The one exception covers Native American names, if an article is part of the name. *Mildred, known as the Laughing Water in her tribe, raised her hand.* Note that the article (*the*) remains in lowercase.

Class titles are not capitalized unless they would normally be capitalized, such as English, Spanish, or Latin. Examples: *Cassie signed up for Latin, history, economics, and algebra.*

Capitals

Many things do not require capitalization, including the names of plants (*oak tree, pansies*); titles that are not part of proper names (*John's doctor, my father, German shepherd, Tom's professor, Cuban dictator*); and the titles of courses (*biology, science*), unless languages (*English, French*). Be careful to capitalize only proper names and trademarks. (*Carol ate French toast and drank a Coke near the Pentagon with her uncle in Washington.*) Capitalize directions when used for areas of the country. (*He went North for the summer.*) Do not capitalize for general directions. (*We drove south for four blocks.*)

Do not capitalize words to provide emphasis or set them apart. The editors of *The Chicago Manual of Style* quipped, "Only Plato still gets to cap Truth, Beauty, and Cultural Movements."

Capitals in Headings and Subheadings

The Chicago Manual of Style says to capitalize the first and last words in titles and subtitles (also called headings and subheadings) as well as all other major words (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and some conjunctions), but we should lowercase articles *the, a, and an*, unless they come first in the title or subtitle. Lowercase the conjunctions *but, for, or, and nor*, as well as prepositions, but there are some exceptions, especially when a word is important to the heading.

Commas

Chicago Style calls for the serial comma; therefore, use a comma before the conjunction in a series. *Red, white, and blue banners hung off the building.*

Dashes

Do not space before or after a dash. Examples: *Las Vegas—gambling Mecca that it is—features casinos that stay open twenty-four hours a day.*

Use two hyphens (--) to indicate a dash, if you do not have a dash on your computer. Example: *I would like to tell you--emphatically--you are brilliant.*

Whether using the true dash or two hyphens, be consistent.

Creative-writing hint: Use dashes sparingly and never use them to avoid using correct punctuation.

Inc., Incorporated, Ltd., Limited

Chicago Manual of Style dictates that *Inc.* and *Ltd.*, whether spelled out or abbreviated, be eliminated from corporate names, unless the terms are an inseparable, integrated part of the name. Examples:

(Incorrect) *John worked at Smith Builders, Ltd., but Marsha had her own construction company, Sun Rooms, Inc.*

(Correct) *John worked at Smith Builders, but Marsha had her own construction company, Sun Rooms Incorporated.*

Numerals

Spell out numbers from one to one hundred, including numbers affixed with hundred, thousand, million, etc. Dates are the exception. Numerals in dialogue, with the exception of dates, are almost always spelled out.

Examples:

Of twenty boys born in the village in 1991, only three went to college.

Profits from the venture topped six million.

"I'll meet you at six o'clock."

Dates are an exception and are always in numbers, but in cardinal numbers, not ordinal numbers—November 1, not November 1st.

Example:

I was born on May 14, but my twin sister was born on May 13.

Oh, and one final comment to finalize the debate of whether to space once or twice after periods.

One Space after Periods—and an Easy Fix

Chicago style (preferred by book publishers) dictates one space after a period. This spacing differs from what some of us were taught in school, because academic and business style do not always align with Chicago style.

Yes, typography is a small detail, but using two spaces can imply that the author is not of the electronic, proportional-spacing era. Break the two-space habit!

In addition, if you plan to self-publish and intend to set your book in justified type, you absolutely must delete the extra spaces before going to press, or the extra spacing will make the printed book look awkward.

Use my Find and Refine Method™ to find and delete all the extra spaces, and the task takes only a few seconds. Pull down the Edit menu and then Find and Replace. Put the cursor in the dialogue box for Find and press the space bar twice. In the Replace box, put the cursor in the box and press the spacebar once. Push the button that says Replace All, and in moments, the computer makes the changes for you.

When I work with clients' manuscripts, I sometimes have to run the function more than once to ensure I catch all the extra spaces. Run it until the computer says it has made zero replacements, and the job is finished.

Did you like this information? You'll find much, much more in *Purge Your Prose of Problems*, a book doctor's desk reference. To order, go to www.zebraeditor.com and click on "Tools for Writers." You'll also find many more free reports for writers on site. While on the site be sure to sign up for the FREE monthly e-zine for writers, *The Writers Network News*.

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