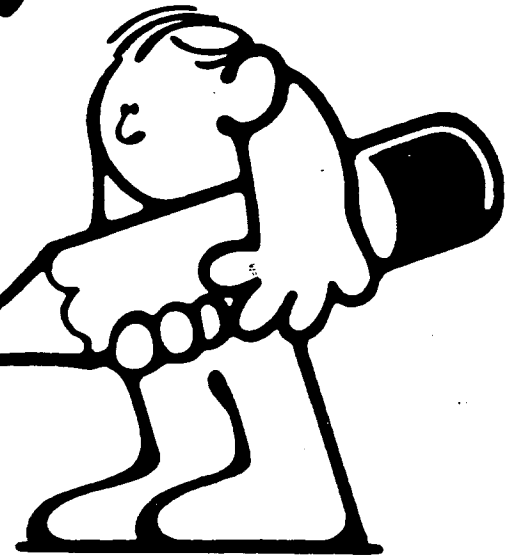


# Writing and Editing Style Manual



SENTENCE STRUCTURE

PUNCTUATION

SPELLING

EDITING

PROOFREADING

EFFECTIVE WRITING  
STRUCTURE AND STYLE

# *Writing/Editing Style Manual*

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES / 1997**

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NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES



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FOREWORD

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' *Writing and Editing Style Manual* is an extremely useful guide to writing in a clear, concise and effective way. I strongly encourage everyone to keep it within reach for easy reference.

Ben Taylor, the department's resident wordsmith, is the proud author of the manual, and he is always willing to answer questions about grammar, syntax, punctuation and other fun stuff. Please feel free to call on him for assistance.

Our goal is to make sure all of the documents we produce in this department are understandable. We frequently find ourselves caught up in bureaucratic jargon that tends to garble our message. This manual can help us all avoid that trap.

October 1997  
Ninth Printing

Don Reuter

Director  
Office of Public Affairs

# Writing/Editing Style Manual

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

## Introduction

RELAX.

This manual isn't intended to make you tremble with anxiety because you misplaced a modifier in the last letter you wrote; nor will it tear asunder all the English you learned in high school or college. Its sole purpose is to jog your memory of some useful tools of the written English language that may be rusty from lack of use.

To echo the logic behind the manual's Foreword, our writing and our editing need help! Our language suffers from a kind of semantic flatulence. Simple, descriptive words are ignored in favor of longer and "impressive" words. Taxpayers don't want to be "impressed." They want to be informed.

Those of us who work for government are authors. We compose correspondence, route memos, develop reports, dictate policies, explain procedures, and create copy for the publications. The pace of everyday business sometimes forces us to rely on habit and expedience. Proper grammar gets lost in the shuffle.

The manual steps cleanly through the elements of writing and editing and is sprinkled generously with examples of usage, both good and bad. An occasional, "Oh, yeah...I remember that now!", will signal the manual works.

**K.I.S.S. (Keep It Short and Simple)** is stressed throughout the manual. Short doesn't have to mean dull. The focus will be on how clearly you express yourself. Strong verbs, tight sentence structure, creativity in the use of clauses and phrases, correct punctuation, cogent paragraphs, and determination to be a good speller makes K.I.S.S. work FOR you.

Prose composition is not governed solely by rules. Rules are only sensible recommendations for general application. What governs most is the desire to communicate . . . clearly and precisely; and to do so with a style that is uniquely your own.

Let this manual guide you on a leisurely stroll through the fertile fields of good grammar. Use it regularly and you will begin to recognize and eliminate gobbledygook and jargon. That **DEFINITELY** will put you in a class by yourself!

## *Return To The Basics ...*

Imagine for a moment you're back in the classroom (grades 4 or 5) and the teacher has drawn a straight line on the blackboard. Then she starts cutting lines at angles, proclaiming sternly "the subject goes here . . . the verb goes here . . . "

The fine art of diagramming is before your eyes, etching its sentence scenario across the memory tracks of your brain. Will it register, say, 40 years later? If it does (or has), then you're miles ahead in the race to understand the importance of sentence structure. That, folks, is BASICS.

Good writing begins with proper sentence structure. Not only does it make writing a pleasure rather than a task, it makes editing a cinch.

Poor sentence structure, however, lurks in a memorandum from a section chief to a field technician and sneaks into letters from the Secretary to a Mayor. It hides in the copy for a brochure, settles not-so-harmlessly in a department's policy manual, and frustrates an information officer struggling to explain government to the public.

Most of the trouble in sentence structure centers on the relationship of subject to verb and verb to object. The more distance between the main elements of a sentence, the greater the likelihood that all kinds of bad things will happen -- infinitives get split, nouns get strung, participles dangle, and unrelated clauses climb all over each other trying to relate to the subject.

A mastery of fundamentals is as critical for writers as it is for professional athletes. It was the abuse of grammar fundamentals that prompted the author to begin his research into why and how government writers had strayed so far off the beaten path. Satisfied that the culprit in most cases was a misunderstanding of BASICS, the beginning of this manual fell easily into place.

To begin this Writing and Editing Style Manual by ignoring a discussion of BASICS would be a disservice.

A logical step in understanding the "noun" process is a brief discussion of the most common forms of the noun.

### Proper Nouns

(person, place or thing) should always be capitalized.

EX: Herman, Lithuania, and USS North Carolina.

### Pronoun

A word that substitutes for the noun. Keep the word "substitutes" in mind, and you will never fall prey to one of the most common grammar mistakes in writing.

EX: WRONG - "All documents shall be submitted by the branch to the division director to whom they report."

EX: CORRECT - "All documents shall be submitted by the branch (The Division does the reporting, not the documents.)"

Such glaring examples of the misuse of "it" and "they" pop up in the most unexpected places.

EX: Former President Ronald Reagan in a speech: "When a citizen...is justly denied their (WRONG) rights..." (Make it "...his or her rights..."); or Florida's Commissioner of Education in a speech: "Each arriving teacher candidate will receive a welcome packet of information and a computer printout...which matches their (WRONG) credentials." (Make it "...his or her credentials.")

The best guide is this: if a noun is singular, the pronoun must be singular; if the noun is plural, the pronoun must be plural. There is no in-between.

The best protection against a habit of abusing pronouns: read aloud what you have written, find the subject of the sentence, and see if the pronoun matches.

## *B. The Gerund*

The reliable gerund is "sort of" a noun. Using a gerund is like playing with putty; i.e., take a verb, add "ing" and mold it into a noun which you can proudly call a gerund.

EX. "Playing with fire is dangerous."

We took the verb "play" and added "ing." That works very well. In conversation and writing, the gerund's a handy tool.

HOWEVER, lots of words in the English language are both nouns and verbs. When you're tempted to create a gerund, go to the dictionary and determine the word's most common usage (immediately following the phonetic breakdown

There's no need for a writer to become frustrated cataloguing which noun tense goes where and when. There are only three tenses and the use of each is obvious. Accordingly, we will treat them briefly in this manual.

## D. Noun Tenses

1. First Person (the person saying or doing something)

EX: "I, Roger Dangefield, am a comic."

2. Second Person (the person addressed or spoken to)

EX: "You, Roger, can make most people laugh."

3. Third Person (the person or thing spoken of)

EX: "Dangerfield just arrived, so he can read the want ads upside down."

The key to using the correct noun tense is CONSISTENCY. When the writer bounces between first and third person, slips in a few second person declarations for variety, and returns to first or third person ... confusion reigns in the mind of the reader. That writing style looks something like this:

"The department's policy on annual leave accumulation dictates that all unused vacation leave at the end of a calendar year must be used if it totals more than 240 hours. You (Second Person) lose any hours beyond that. You can avoid this loss of benefits by scheduling your leave time to keep accumulation less than 240 hours at any given point. I (First Person) would encourage all employees to keep good leave records so that you (Second Person) will protect your earned leave time. Personnel Division staff can help you (Second Person) understand this provision and we (Third Person) will be glad to do so."

In government writing, unfortunately, the easy way out of being personal is often "none of the above." People become things, programs and policies. No person or persons are responsible for anything. The "they" and "it" syndrome takes over. The syndrome could create the following:

EX: "Rules and regulations which control the issuance of permits for septic tank installations have blanket application in North Carolina.

"The aforementioned permit application conflicts with said rules and regulations and is hereby denied in toto. GS 167-56 (b) offers no appeal process. Therefore, use of the property heretofore described for human uses cannot occur."

Now, if you're a landowner needing a septic tank on your property and you received correspondence like that, how would you rate it? (Cold) (Impersonal) (Mean) (Bureaucratic) (Uncaring). Of course ... all of the above.



Consider this example:

"The County Health Committee will meet this afternoon at 3 p.m. to discuss the items on its agenda approved last month and publicized as required by state statutes. Major discussion is expected to be on the proposal to fine restaurant owners \$1,000 for every cockroach found in kitchens inspected by county food inspectors."

Use of strong verbs and imagination could narrow that to two effective sentences:

"Restaurant owners could face a fine of \$1,000 for every cockroach found roaming their kitchens. That is a proposal before the County Health Committee, which meets at 3 p.m. this afternoon."

The writing immediately takes on new life; and that's one purpose of good writing.

## 7. Infinitives

An infinitive is a verb preceded by "to," e.g., to install, to defend, to remove. The two parts of the infinitive are meant to be inseparable. That's not a "rule" of grammar; it's merely a guideline of style.

Because we split infinitives (putting an adverb between the "to" and the verb) when we speak, we feel we can do it when we write. Once in a while is no disgrace, so long as common sense is your guide. You would lose semantic grace and creativity if you wrote the following any other way:

EX: "To boldly go where no man has gone before."

How often do any of us use such a literary style in government writing? Since we don't need much of that, it's best by far to stick to the axiom (salted with a little common sense): don't split an infinitive.

The key to avoiding split infinitives is simple: let the adjective or adverb you want to use flank the infinitive (before or after it, depending on style). It may read awkwardly at first, but it allows the reader to swallow the verb at one glance. That's a good trade-off.

EX: to install completely, not "to completely install".  
to defend vigorously, not "to vigorously defend".  
to remove quickly, not "to quickly remove".

Remember, anything that interrupts the flow of a sentence is not good grammar. Splitting an infinitive is one interruption to avoid.

## *G. Smothered Verbs*

For some reason, government writing seems to demand that 10 words be used when one will do nicely. Nobody knows who started the trend; but when found, he/she will be shot!

If you fall prey to using several words when one will do (as the following examples reflect), circle the cumbersome phrase and substitute a word you use in routine conversation. Amazing how well that works -- and how clear your writing becomes.

### SMOTHERED VERBS

are desirous of	desire
effect an improvement	cause
take into consideration	consider
have a need for	need
afford an opportunity	let
in agreement with	concur
made a determination of	decided
make an adjustment	alter
not in a position to	cannot
cognizant of	know
initiate the process of	begin
make preparations for	prepare for
make use of	use
undertake an analysis	analyze
hold a conference	meet/confer

Such a list could easily cover 10-20 pages!

Our language is heavy with words that convey little meaning or merely echo unnecessarily across the page. Learn to look for these "lard" words and start skimming them from your sentences.

### THE "LEAN"

maximum  
one hour  
nominated  
except  
recently  
brief  
because  
basics  
until  
repeat  
smile

### THE "LARD"

greatest maximum possible  
one hour of your time  
nominated for the position of  
with the exception of  
just recently  
brief in duration  
because of the fact that  
basic fundamentals  
until such time as  
repeat the same  
smile on his fact

preceded by "a"; then there's "hour" -- it is preceded by "an". Make any sense? Of course not: so let your dictionary work it out for you.

"A" and "an" don't point out anything in particular (that's why they are called 'indefinite' articles), while "the" points out a particular person, place or thing. Some of the trickiest adjectives and adverbs should be familiar territory. A few of the most notorious ones are worth review here. Others are found in the Usage Glossary at the end of this manual.

### Less And Fewer

Less indicates amount.

EX: "The Army gave him less travel money than in 1989."

Fewer denotes number.

EX: "IBM has fewer employees than before."

Easy (adjective) and Easily (adverb)

Easy indicates simplicity.

EX: "It is easy to read the clock from here."

Easily indicates a degree of accomplishment

EX: "He easily reset the clock."

Sure (adjective) and Surely (adverb)

Sure means reliable.

EX: "The engineer used a sure method to test water."

Surely is to emphasize with confidence.

EX: "Surely he will win."

A brief note on one of the most troublesome words: only. Be careful where you place the word in a sentence; it could change the meaning entirely. The misuse of "only" is not easy to spot. Read aloud the sentence using "only," emphasize the word as you read, and see if it's in the proper position. It's a tricky problem, so a good proofreader is your best ally.

EX: "The bank teller is only allowed to cash checks for depositors." (Now, that teller does a lot more work than that!)  
What "only" is trying to do is: "The bank teller is allowed to cash checks only for depositors."

See the difference?

When you review your work and see those four to seven prepositional phrases popping up in one sentence, try spreading the information over several sentences. Try putting some of those prepositional phrases in a separate paragraph.

## *K. Conjunctions*

Conjunctions are easier to identify than to explain in grammatical terms. Clinical meaning is unimportant, but their use often is the glue that holds two parts of a sentence together. That's what they are supposed to do. Some of the most common conjunctions:

and	if	but	since
for	that	or	which
nor	what	yet	that
as	until	as if	unless
because	when	before	where

Also, we have the common correlative (or "one-two" punch) conjunctions: both-and; either-or; neither-nor; not only-but also. They can cause problems, but only if you break up a match set.

# Punctuation..., -;:;!%&\*'/?

We write to communicate.

Not much punctuation in that sentence -- one period and you can move on to the next thought. But if that sentence were spoken, the eye would register the facial expression, the ears would pick up tone and dialect, and the brain would sort out innuendos.

Wouldn't it be nice if we had all those tools working for us when we write?

We don't. When we write, we make a sound in the reader's head. That sound can be a joyful noise, a sly whisper, a throb of passion or a dull rumble (like so much of the government prose that puts people to sleep).

Learn to listen to the sounds your words make. One of the most important tools for making paper speak in your own voice is punctuation. We rely on punctuation to do for us what pauses, stresses, and inflections do for talking. Recognizing that reality underscores the necessity for correct punctuation, all punctuation serves one of four purposes:

1. To terminate, use a period, a question mark, an exclamation point, or sometimes a dash, ellipse, or colon.
2. To introduce, use a comma, a colon or a dash.
3. To separate, use a comma, a semicolon or a dash.
4. To enclose, use a comma, a dash, full quotation marks, a single quotation mark, a parenthesis or a bracket.

Knowing which punctuation mark does what and when to use which one is the signature of a good writer. Knowing the effect any punctuation mark has on a sentence marks an even better writer.

Let's sketch the basic punctuation marks one by one.

1. The period is simple -- it ends a sentence.
2. The comma is used for brief pauses in thought, to separate short groups of words.

2. Use a comma to set off a lengthy introductory phrase or clause (usually a prepositional phrase) from the subject of the sentence.

EX: " Although they obviously intend to follow company policy, they have yet to complete their filing for the month."

3. Use a pair of commas to set off a word or group of words which serve to emphasize.

EX: "On that occasion, it seems, he was careless."

(Remember, it's always a pair of commas).

4. Use commas to divide elements in a series.

EX: "She blushed, stammered, sneezed, shook her head and burst into tears."

5. Use commas with transposed initials, with titles, and always in dates.

EX: Dexter Lenci, M.D. or Jones, B. W. " The boys sailed for Europe on June 22, 1962."

6. Use a comma, or commas, to prevent misreading.

EX: "The morning after, a policeman came to the door."  
" In 1942, 361 men from this town entered the Army."

That's a basic example of when to use commas.

Let's look next at when not to use them.

- a. Don't use a comma before the first or after the last member of a series.

EX: "The Forest Ranger was looking for tree stumps, fallen branches, trampled flowers and loose rocks." (No comma after "for" and none before "and")

- b. Don't use a weak comma when a stronger semicolon or colon is needed. The stronger form of punctuation is appropriate when you list several thoughts or if you are making an emphatic point. A comma simply won't do that effectively.

EX: WRONG: " The orders were specific, keep the motor running, raise the lift and secure the wench to the bumper."

EX: CORRECT: "The orders were specific: keep the motor running; raise the lift; and secure the wench to the bumper."

- c. Don't use the comma to separate a word in apposition that really needs to be strong , i.e., no comma is needed before or after "Margaret" in "My sister Margaret is a lovely woman." (That may not be the way you were taught in school, but it is "today's" approach to good grammar)

TO THIS: "The agency's policy on travel is based on necessity and the availability of funds to cover expenses. Travel expenses are paid when agency business requires the work be done outside the office."

A semicolon is effective when used to separate two or more complete thoughts (make sure the two are close in meaning or provide similar information). That creates a strong compound sentence.

EX: "Don't guess at spelling; you rarely win."

Use a semicolon to divide complete statements tied together by a conjunctive adverb (also, anyhow, besides, otherwise, etc.)

EX: "Don't guess at spelling; otherwise, you open yourself to correction."

### C. The Colon (:

The colon is the best "warning signal" we have in writing. The colon anticipates; it says "watch for what is coming." "What is coming" usually is explanatory or illustrative material set up by a word or words which precede the colon.

The colon can be an effective punctuation tool, but use it sparingly. Don't set one up, then follow with a string of semicolon phrases that stretches line after line before you stop. Do that, and it's guaranteed that long before you get to the period, you've already forgotten what the sentence was going to say in the first place.

Use the colon:

to introduce something

EX: "Several things could have caused the damage: heavy winds blowing from the sea; termites; an explosion; or sabotage."

to separate

EX: 10:45 a.m. or John 3:16

For clear writing, avoid a "love-hate" relationship with the colon. Don't use the colon in lieu of a dash. Remember the difference: the basic use of a colon is to anticipate, while a dash summarizes or accentuates what has gone on before.

1. Don't use a colon if only one clause or phrase follows before the period ends it all. You'll discover that usually is the perfect spot for a semicolon, NOT a colon. Better yet, consider forming two sentences.
2. Don't use the colon after "namely" or "for instance." It is good grammar to set up "as follows" and "the following" with a colon.

2. Quotes within quotes are tough. Remember that any typewriter or computer has one or more single quote keys. Use that in the same manner you would a full quotation mark; e.g., "The bull romped across the 'new' field."

"Mr. Inside" or "Mr. Outside" - always confusing:

The comma and period always are enclosed within the quotation marks; but the colon and semicolon are never enclosed within the quotation marks.

"Mr. Inside " - "Men will walk on the moon before this decade comes to a close," said the President in 1961.

"Our venture into space," President Kennedy said, "is a test of will as well as science."

"Mr. Outside" - "He moved the vehicle off the road after carefully removing the 'dead and injured'; yet his instincts told him this was an exercise, not reality."

## 7. The Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe indicates an omission of a letter or letters from a word. The most common use is as a contraction; e.g., "aren't." The apostrophe forms possessives of nouns and certain pronouns; e.g., men's; or doctors' (when it is used to apply to collectively plural nouns or pronouns). It indicates plurals of letters, numerals, symbols, and certain abbreviations; e.g., 8's.

Writers are often confused about whether or not to use an apostrophe when expressing a decade or century. Most of us were taught to always express it as 1890's or the 1900's. Times change; and grammar flows with it. Style editors now say that use of an apostrophe in that case is outdated. Express it as 1890s or the 1900s.



# Fellow Travelers

Just outside the framework of stock punctuation marks are some grammar devices that, for the lack of a better portrayal, fall in the punctuation category. Nonetheless, their use is just as full of pitfalls as any standard punctuation mark.

## A. Abbreviations

The best style advice about abbreviations is to avoid them. If you must abbreviate, be sure the abbreviation has universal understanding.

A remarkable writing tool for condensing words, as every good secretary knows, is the art of shorthand. But it turns good grammarians into pitiful spellers. After all, phonics is the secret to shorthand; but it wreaks havoc on spelling. Much the same goes for abbreviations. They force the reader to respond to the most dangerous word in the English language: assume!

If you feel compelled to abbreviate, keep these points in mind.

- a. Don't trust your memory of how a word is abbreviated - check the dictionary.
- b. If there's any doubt about the correct abbreviation of a word or title, spell it out.
- c. Stick to standard address abbreviations: Ave. (Avenue); Blvd. (Boulevard); Bldg. (Building); Ct. (Court); Dr. (Drive); Pl. (Place); Rd. (Road); Sq. (Square); St. (Street); and Ter. (Terrace).
- d. It's best not to abbreviate "county" as "co." (it could also mean "Company"); and always capitalize it when it follows the county name (Lincoln County)

When you list several counties, that guideline changes, so be careful:

EX: "The river meanders through the counties of Martin, Pitt and Bertie."

EX: "The river meanders through Martin, Pitt and Bertie counties."

- e. Consistency is the byword for abbreviating south, north, west, and east. You can abbreviate them as part of an address, e.g. "So. Elm St." Beyond that, it's better grammar to spell them, e.g. "West Indies," "He lives west of here." To describe geographical regions, capitalize them, e.g. "The South shall rise again!"

The process was hatched some cold, rainy day in the reign of President Teddy Roosevelt. Ever since, every government bureaucrat has stretched his brain to create at least one new ONE (Office of Nuclear Energy) per day. Acronyms have become so imbedded in the fabric of government writing that even a nuclear war couldn't unravel them.

Our state government takes a back seat to no one in creating and using acronyms.

"Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study" becomes APES.

BRIDGE is actually "Building, Rehabilitating, Instructing, Developing, Growing and Employing" (it takes a fertile mind to tie five gerunds together, ignore commas and use it as an acronym)

Since we can't kill the suckers, at least we can make them behave.

- a. Spell out the words in the first usage and follow immediately with the acronym in all caps in parenthesis - Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources (DEHNR).
- b. Once established, the acronym can subsequently be used in lieu of spelling the words each time.

EX: "The Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources (DEHNR) competes for funding in the General Assembly like all other state agencies. DEHNR, however, is more successful than some agencies."

- c. Write acronyms in all caps, never caps and lower case or all lower case letters.
- d. Each letter of an acronym represents a word; e.g. in APES, the "A" represents Albemarle. The acronym should never include "a" or "the" or "and."

# Spelling

Although the reasons and excuses are legendary, there still is no acceptable excuse for a misspelled word. Unless, of course, there are no dictionaries within 1,000 miles or the word differs in spelling from one source to another. Since that rarely happens, the "no excuse" doctrine must stand.

Writers must cultivate a sense of doubt - a kind of instinct, or hunch, or suspicion - that they may have misspelled a word. Once cultivated, make that sense of doubt a lifetime partner.

Most of us rely routinely on "my friend, Mary" or "my buddy, Bill" to help with our spelling. Often that works fine. But, when it doesn't and 10,000 copies of a document are printed with a misspelled word that "Bill" spelled for us, who gets the blame from supervisors?

Today's computers, unfortunately, have created another spelling trap for writers. The computer software that accompanies the hardware usually features a "spell check" or something of a similar description. It's quick and easy: highlight a word, pull up the computer dictionary, and the computer will tell you whether you're right or wrong.

That can lull us into false security - security that crumbles under the weight of misspelled words discovered AFTER the printing is completed. How often have you seen this computer foul up: you type "their" when you meant to type "there." Mr. computer says "their" is a correctly spelled word, so get on with your typing. That underscores a salient point about computers: they don't differentiate between the subtleties of basic spelling and prosaic intent (something our minds easily separate).

This manual is not saying don't use "spell check" functions. By all means, use the "spell check" function. It is quick and generally reliable. Many computers now also use "grammar checkers" to help you write logically and simply. They are especially helpful in keeping you on track as to sentence and paragraph length, and can analyze the grade level of your writing.

But the best defenses against a misspelled word remain: proofread carefully; and, if there is any doubt at all, check the dictionary.

## *Dividing Words*

1. Never divide one syllable words. (drowned)
2. Never divide words of two syllables when a single vowel is one of the syllables. (even...over)
3. Never divide parts of a name. (Susan Jones, Mr. Smith)
4. Never divide numbers or abbreviations. (10,000...C.O.D.)
5. Never divide endings. (-tial...-tion...-cious...-geous)
6. Never separate a final syllable of one or two letters. (-a...-ed...-es)
7. Never divide hyphenated compounds, except at the hyphen. (all-around...all-American)

# *Editing*

## *1. Introduction To Editing*

Editing is confirming, changing, cutting, expanding or rearranging words. To edit is to polish, to put in the best form possible. The instinct to edit is stronger in some people than in others. Some even turn that instinct into a fetish.

If you doubt that, type something and purposefully make mistakes in usage, punctuation or spelling. Tape it to your office door and see what happens. Long before the paper can become faded with age, some mysterious person or persons will have come by and marked up your words -- confirming, changing, cutting, expanding or rearranging.

That calls for a tongue-in-cheek observation: "The strongest drive is not love or hate; it is one person's need to change another's copy."

Editing requires knowledge of grammar and basic sentence structure, insight into what the writer intended to say, and the ability to improve his/her writing. Editing embraces a little of everything in this manual. The principles of sentence structure, punctuation, spelling, writing style - they all apply, whatever is being edited. In our work as information processors, two basic types of editing are involved - Copyediting and Substantive Editing.

### *A. Copyediting*

Copyediting is the most common editing process. It simply means to review a manuscript for grammar, spelling and punctuation. That's usually the most attention we give to our writing or to that of others.

Copyedit with confidence and accuracy and most of the bad grammar will evaporate. But, if you're still reading this manual and need help on communicating beyond accuracy, the next step opens the door to creativity.

Copy editing does not mean rewriting or reorganizing what someone else has written. That's called substantive editing.

subject, verb and object. Any one of them may be implied from a prior sentence, but they still exist for the sentence with which you are working.

4. Look for active, strong verbs in ANYTHING you edit. If they don't exist, it's your responsibility as a substantive editor to create them for the author. Passive expression not only wastes paper, it lulls the reader into boredom.

EX: Rather than say, "The meeting was called by the Secretary,"  
be far more active by saying "The Secretary called the meeting."  
Recognize the difference?

5. Watch constantly for syntax pitfalls: misplaced modifiers; noun strings; subject-verb tense mismatches; personal pronouns that don't match; split infinitives; dangling participles; redundancies; or wordy clauses that run on and on and say nothing.
6. Keep spelling and punctuation in mind at all times.

### *3. Editing tips*

1. Concentrate. Good editing cannot be rushed; nor should it be. Develop a routine that allows for isolation or as few interruptions as feasible. Distractions while you are editing often allow mistakes to float by without being recognized.
2. Trust your instincts. As you read, listen to that alarm bell going off in your head; then stop and check it out. (Recall the earlier discussion in the SPELLING section about instincts.)
3. Talk to the author if you can't understand what you are editing. If YOU can't understand it, neither will the reader.
4. Look for the obvious: misspelled words; spelling of names and titles; punctuation; and acronyms that go unexplained.
5. Use any and all reference guides you need as you edit (dictionary, thesaurus, spelling guide). Let them be the final authority - not what someone "swears" is right or wrong.
6. Don't change anything unless it is "broke." The copy belongs to the author. He/she wants you to get it in the right shape, not alter the facts or change the purpose.
7. Ask someone unfamiliar with the copy to take a cursory look at your editing job. They just may see something you've missed.

# Proofreading

Proofreading basically is comparing copy and marking corrections. Sounds simple enough, but it's a critical step because it usually is the "final stage." Anything that slips through at that point will surely come back to haunt you.

There are some basic remedies which will protect any proofreader.

1. Be sure you have ALL the copy to be proofed before you start. Proofing without copy to go by limits the effort to checking for typographical errors and obvious misspelled words.
2. Concentration, as it is in editing, is the meat and potatoes of proofreading. Don't apologize for it; to allow interruptions as you proofread is to open the door to sins of omission.
3. Trust your instincts. Typos, broken type, misspelled words and hazy punctuation should stare at you. Faith in your knowledge of grammar will give power to your instincts.
4. If possible, make proofreading a two-person operation. One reads the copy while the other proofreads. (Let the best speller of the two proofread the manuscript)
5. If you proofread alone, place the copy and the proof sheet side by side. Then compare word by word or phrase by phrase.
6. Don't let the copy's author do the proofreading. It's the author's natural tendency to read what the copy is supposed to say, rather than what it does say.

## 1. Proofreading Tips

1. Let the author check the copy before you start proofreading.
2. Avoid making lengthy notes in the margins. If copy additions or changes stretch to a dozen words or more, key the location with a letter or number and type the new words on a separate sheet of paper and attach it. Be sure and use the same key.

# Effective Writing Style

No two fingerprints are alike; and no one else has a writing style that matches yours. The trick is to master YOUR writing style.

Writing always starts from a few notes, maybe an outline, or a point of view wrapped inside an idea. The writing process picks up steam with research, interviews, consultations, and publication planning. THEN you pick up the pen or switch on the computer.

Not many of us can write with the style of a Winston Churchill. His mastery of verbs was a beautiful match for the flow of homilies, innuendoes, similes and metaphors which cemented a nation's resolve during World War II. Churchill, and others like him, were born with an innate talent to communicate.

When talents are not innate, they can be developed. Taking a careful, studied look at how you develop your writing is time well spent. This section offers some writing style tips, warns you of some pitfalls, and guides you safely through the mine field of awkward prose.

We'll break the formation of style into basic components and expand from there.

## 1. Is the writing clear?

The "pyramid" format for writing is one style approach that rarely fails, especially in government writing. To "pyramid" means to express the "who, what, where, when, why and how" first and expand from there. Straying from that precept in establishing a topic can quickly add fat to a healthy body of writing.

Newspaper reporters live by the "pyramid" principle. All the basic facts are up front in the lead paragraph or two. The rest of the copy echoes the basic news and background material wraps up the story.

Relating that to style means, for instance, making the subject, verb and object of your sentences obvious and up front. The clauses and phrases that weave in and out of any sentence are doing much the same work that newspaper reporters are doing when they develop a news item from the basic lead.

That doesn't mean we must cover everything we write with the bare essentials of words and punctuation. Sometimes brevity needs to be shelved. You can still be "effective" in your writing by using active verbs, descriptive adverbs and adjectives and cogent paragraphs.



## *A. Are You Writing in English or Gobbledygook?*

Write in language that anyone can understand. Write to explain, not to impress. Webster defines "gobbledygook" as "unclear, often verbose, usually bureaucratic jargon." Bad grammar habits and the urge to change what already works is another way to define gobbledygook. Either makes a mockery of K.I.S.S.

Gobbledygook takes energy - most of it wasted. Why is "terminate" better than "end?" Why say "magnitude" when you can write "size?" Why ramble on with "in the event of" when "if" says it all?

Don't write so your reader must translate. A good writer translates for them.

EX: "Gallinaceous ovulation is effected by hens." Translation:  
"Hens lay eggs."

Too obvious, you say? The following was uncovered in a paper with distinctive government tones.

"I have, therefore, taken the liberty of reducing its scope to cover some aspects of inter-media relationships in the control of environmental pollution and to illustrate some of these relationships by reference to the ubiquitous pollution from toxic chemicals."

(That's 39 words, two commas, one period - and 10 readings later, the reader is still confused.)

A devotee of gobbledygook would say this:

"In this case I have undertaken the journey here for the purpose of interring of the deceased. From this point of view I do not, however, propose putting anything on record in so far as praise is concerned."

Recognize that? Perhaps you know the edited version: "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him."

Few things frustrate a friend of good grammar more than words that are imprecise, affected or just plain "snotty." Like shells on the beach, they are everywhere.

We know instinctively when someone is "talking over our heads"; and we don't like it. Jaw-breaker words, endless acronyms and strange terms batter our eardrums. Initial reaction is predictable - fatigue, boredom or anger. Comprehension drops by the wayside.

If any of the following words or phrases (just a sample) sound "ok" to you, then gobbledygook and jargon have infected your ability to communicate simply and clearly.

viable	effectuated	impacted
input	orientated	pursuant
hereinafter	finalize	parameter
prioritize	implement	hires (employees)
utilized	mode	interface
operationalized	facilitated	optimize
maximize	minimize	signage
combusted	uncombusted	networking

"Bad habits" and the urge to change what already works give birth to gobbledygook and jargon. Both make a mockery of clear writing. Nobody will ever catalog all of the gobbledygook or jargon that replaces good writing, but it may help to get acquainted with some of it. Some of the WORST examples (with a better choice in parenthesis):

affirmative (yes)	terminate (end)
facility (plant or building)	transmit (send)
formulate (make)	utilize (use)
initiate (start)	in view of the fact that (since)
negative (no)	prioritize (rank)
prior to (before)	in the event of (if)
regulations (rules)	in connection with (about)
compensate (pay)	in relation to (regarding)
subsequent (next)	in the matter of (about, concerning)
substantial (large)	with regard to (regarding)
for the purpose of (to, for)	due to (since, because)
exists (is)	activate (begin)
expenditure (cost)	overcover (topsoil)

Circling the wagons endlessly without purpose can easily produce the following (unearthed in a draft of an agency's annual report to the General Assembly):

"There is considerable inter-specific variability regarding the proportions of each component required for each species or taxonomic group."

To repeat Mark Twain, who put it succinctly in talking about the advantages of using familiar and specific words: "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and lightning."

Don't put the reader to sleep with lengthy phrases begging for a simple outlet.

#### FROM THIS

make a study of  
arrive at an approximation  
take into consideration  
facilitate clarification of  
have a particular preference for  
conduct an investigation of  
was the recipient of  
hold a conference

#### TO THIS

study  
estimate  
consider  
clarify  
prefer  
investigate  
received  
meet

#### WHY SAY THIS

utilize  
terminate/finalize  
magnitude  
optimum  
unique  
conjecture  
necessitate  
fabricate  
endeavor/attempt  
impact  
purchase  
facilitate  
implement

#### WHEN YOU MEAN THIS

use  
end/complete  
size  
best  
uncommon  
guess  
require  
build  
try  
effect/affect  
buy  
enable/allow  
begin/initiate

If you don't buy the premise that short, descriptive words are better than cumbersome combinations, at least CONSIDER using words that paint a verbal picture. Some words don't do anything except muddy the water. E. B. White, author of "The Elements of Style," put it this way: "Rather, very, little and pretty ... these are the leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words."

If we can't kill gobbledygook, the least we can do is make it suffer.

## *2. Is The Writing Concise?*

A sobering thought for all writers: the reader has about 1/10th as much time to read your words as you think he/she does. Armed with that insight, use brevity and clarity to grab the reader's attention.

How? Try the "17-3-8" approach.

"7" - THE BEST AVERAGE FOR NUMBER OF LINES IN A PARAGRAPH.

The goal is to keep paragraphs focused on a single topic. You can stretch the number of lines to 10 or even 12, provided the sentences flow together and the topic stays intact. If the topic stretches far beyond seven lines, it's a signal that you've crammed too much into the paragraph.

Read most paragraphs 12 - 25 lines long and see how they blow your concentration. Professional writers learn early in their career not to write long paragraphs; follow their example and take a giant step towards the goal of concise writing.

When you have completed your writing, become the editor mean enough to soften your prose and smart enough to say what you have to say and quit. That is what "concise" writing is all about.

### *3. Is The Information Correct?*

Tight writing, accurate grammar, and well-organized paragraphs count for little if the information is WRONG.

- A. Take time to double check your information before you start composing. Any delay to ensure accuracy is time well spent.
- B. Take time to check spelling. An instinct that a word "just doesn't look right" should be trusted. As stated before in this manual, rely on a dictionary when in doubt rather than what somebody else says.
- C. Pay particular attention to spelling of names, titles and acronyms. Do not ASSUME anything in this regard! People can forgive almost anything except a misspelling of their name.

### *4. Is the writing complete?*

Does your writing contain all the information the reader needs? If not, you definitely will hear about it later, i.e. "Your writing's fine, but it leaves too many unanswered questions."

- A. Whatever you are writing, even a memorandum, do a draft and let someone review it. The pressure of time may not allow such a luxury, but at least sketch an outline before you begin to compose.
- B. Keep a copy of the text, including your changes. That's called "protecting your rear end."

EX: "The Communications Center operations personnel training manual" is a good example of a Noun String. That makes far more sense when it reads: "The manual for training operations personnel in the Communications Center."

D. Find the one or more nouns in the string which mean the same thing, then keep the most descriptive one. Ease the pain of killing a word you slaved over with the healing salve of clarity.

EX: "Based on extensive training needs assessment reviews."  
"Assessment" and "review" are fighting each other, so bury both of them. When you "assess" something, you "review" it. Since "review" is a simple, recognizable word, revive "review" and drop "assessment."

That turns the noun string into: "Based on extensive reviews of training needs."

Look back at these examples and pluck the core word from each noun string. The more often you repeat that exercise, the stronger your writing.

### *Dealing With Numbers*

For something so apparently simple, the misuse of numbers can spoil most of the good writing that surrounds it. Consistency and common sense count the most.

A. A good rule to follow: Spell out numbers one through nine.

EX: Water samples were taken by six biologists.

EXCEPTION - Any number can stand as a number when immediately followed by a dash and a word that complements the number, i.e.

EX: "He secured the buoy with a 6-foot piece of wire."

B. The number 10 and those higher should always be used as numbers, unless they begin a sentence.

EX: The committee has 10 members and 16 subcommittees.

EX: Thirty-seven club members attended.

C. Specific quantities or measurements are expressed in figures, e.g., "3-man race" or "12-ton slab."

D. Bring daylight to your writing by simplifying large numbers, e.g., "26 million" rather than "26,000,000." The same principle applies when expressing dollars. "\$316 billion" rather than 'three hundred and sixteen billion dollars' or (even worse) "\$316,000,000,000."

countered our arguments about "good" writers who used bad English or awkward grammar with: "But they have poetic license."

It's unlikely those writers learned to write exactly as they talked. That would have created only more chaos the world doesn't need. They learned to express themselves in natural and effortless ways; and their words were carefully edited for clarity and conciseness.

For a few of us, writing "like you speak" is sufficient. Most of us, however, can tumble into gobbledygook and jargon before we even realize we've fallen off the cliff and into the jungle of stilted, impersonal writing. Good writers build their fortune on the clarity and simplicity of their writing structure. Once again...the key to good structure is K.I.S.S.

Don't expect perfection at that first writing effort. The flow of words without regard to spelling, punctuation or even order should not be restricted. Even professional writers rarely get it right the first time. Good style and structure evolve in the editing process, seldom in the rough draft stage.

An effective way to improve your writing style is to expand your knowledge of the basic writing rules. Substituting new rules for old ones won't help much. Rules are effective only if they make our message clear. They are a means, not an end.

Consider some of the proven ground rules of a good writing style.

### *Form a Habit of Being Concise.*

"Staff technical engineer trainees, once the problem is quantified and viable solutions targeted, will endeavor to undertake a feasibility review of the issue at hand."

Look at the underlined words and phrases (pure gobbledygook). "Study" communicates, but "endeavor to undertake a feasibility review of" is an exercise in word inflation. So is "issue at hand," when "problem" is universally understood.

Why not write: "Staff engineers will review the problem."

1. Use a participle or a prepositional phrase to narrow two sentences to one.

EX: "Former Governor, James Holshouser, spoke to the planners." -- far better than "James Holshouser spoke to the planners. He is a former North Carolina Governor."

latest.... refer back.... cooperate together.... past history.... basic fundamentals....  
consensus of opinion.... a full gallon.... past experience.

*Scrap the tendency to write artificially.*

EX: "A vast concourse of those amicably inclined toward him assembled to do him honor on his natal day." (WOW!)

Make it read: "Many of his friends came to celebrate his birthday."

*Learn how to handle modifiers.*

Never leave them "dangling":

EX: "Walking down the street, the beautiful building was admired." (The building did not walk)

*Do not misplace the modifiers (easy to do and it happens all the time):*

EX: "We saw a man on a horse with a wooden leg." (The man had the wooden leg, not the horse)

*Letting a modifier wander out of control can be dangerous...and embarrassing:*

EX: "The woman's nearly nude body was found by a relative lying face up with multiple stab wounds in her chest about 25 feet into a wooded section atop the hill."

Now, that makes far more sense as: "A relative found the woman's nearly nude body about 25 feet into a wooded section atop the hill. The body was lying face up with multiple stab wounds in the chest."

*Be careful to avoid shifting gears in person*

a. Do not shift the person of a pronoun.

EX: "One must work if one (not you) would succeed."

b. Do not shift the voice of a sentence.

EX: "As we went up the path, a snake was seen."

Make it read: "As we went up the path, we saw a snake."

3. The closing sentence of a paragraph should conclude the thoughts expressed in the paragraph. The closing sentence is most effective when it echoes or relates to the point made in the opening sentence of the paragraph. That sounds awkward, but perhaps an example would illustrate:

EX: (opening sentence): 'Rainfall alone is not the deciding factor in how fast an elm tree grows.' (closing sentence): 'Damaged internally by blight, bark disease and woodpeckers, insufficient rainfall can hasten the demise of elm trees in any heavily forested area.'

In summary, take time to look closely at every paragraph. If your paragraphs contain a good opening, interesting sentences, and a strong closing, then keep repeating the process until you've finished writing. To test the process, read a good novel and see how it flows from page to page. If the reading flows easily, you have touched the foundation of that author's story-telling ability - good paragraphs!

*\* A special note about sexist writing ...*

The world is changing, and so is English grammar. A "sexist" word or phrase gains acceptance not by its exclusionary response to a "male-female battle over power and influence" but by its ability to combine the preference of both sexes simply through its meaning.

Women's Lib can be targeted as the cause for much of the pronoun scrambling that passes as grammar. Consider the abominations "freshperson" and "waitperson" and "chairperson..."

The following is offered by a London judge to hopefully wipe out the use of "chairperson" and "chair" as being correct grammar:

"The correct word is 'chairman'. It has no gender. It merely describes a human being occupying the office of chairman. 'Chairman' is merely a matter of ordinary grammar, with no connotations beyond that."

Writers have become paralyzed by fear of being called sexist, so good grammar is tossed aside. Don't surrender good grammar principles to the whims of others.

*The (I)ze and (I)sm trap.*

Believe it or not, there is NO local, state or federal government statute or policy that demands that government writers develop at least one new "ize" word every working day. Nothing in government is ever completed: it is "finalized." We never put things in order of importance, we "prioritize"



# Usage Glossary

Consistently good writing depends on use of the right word at the right time. Use this section of the manual to guide you through some of the more common pitfalls of word usage faced by all writers.

ACCEDE	To abide by an agreement
EXCEED	To surpass
ACCEPT	To receive, to believe in
EXCEPT	To exclude, to omit
AFFECT	To influence, to change (use only as a verb)
EFFECT	To accomplish (a verb); a result (a noun)
ALLUDE	To make an <u>indirect</u> reference
REFER	To mention something <u>definite</u> or <u>specific</u>
ALTAR	An elevated place of worship
ALTER	To change, to modify
ALTERNATE	To switch from one to another (a verb) Every other one (an adjective) Someone who takes the place of another (a noun)
ALTERNATIVE	The choice between two or more (a noun) Providing a choice (an adjective)
AMONG	Refers to <u>more than two</u>
BETWEEN	Use <u>only</u> when referring to <u>two</u>
APPARENTLY	Something that may or may not be true
EVIDENTLY	Something that is demonstrably true
APPRAISE	To value
APPRISE	To inform, to notify
APT	Suitable, appropriate
LIABLE	Legally bound; likely to occur
LIBEL	A written, printed or pictorial statement that damages a person
ASCENT(D)	The act of rising; to rise
ASSENT	Consent; permission

EMINENT IMMINENT	Outstanding, lofty; distinguished Something that's going to happen soon; impending
EMPTY VACANT	Containing nothing Having nothing in <u>or</u> on something
ENSURE INSURE	To make sure or certain To protect with insurance; protect from financial loss
EXCEEDINGLY EXCESSIVELY	To an <u>unusual</u> degree Beyond expected, anticipated or planned limits
EXCEPTIONAL EXCEPTIONABLE	Uncommon; above average Open to objection
EXPECT SUPPOSE	To anticipate To doubt; to imagine
FARTHER FURTHER	Refers to <u>distance</u> Refers to <u>time, degree or quantity</u> ; to advance (a verb)
FEW LESS	Refers to small numbers Refers to quantity
FORMALLY FORMERLY	Ceremoniously Previously; prior to; before
GUARANTEE GUARANTY	To secure (a verb); something that ensures an outcome (a noun) A pledge to pay or ensure payment of another's debt
GOOD WELL	Describes what kind, type; i.e. "He's in good health." Describes how something is done; i.e. "He sings well."
GOT HAVE	Something acquired or achieved, an action process Ownership, possession
IMPLY INFER	To suggest more than is obvious; to insinuate To interpret; to draw a conclusion
LAY LIE	To place something To recline
LEAN LIEN	Having little fat content A legal claim to something
LESSEE LESSOR	A tenant One who gives a lease

SHALL	A command
WILL	The <u>intent</u> to do something
STATIONARY	Not moving, fixed
STATIONERY	Writing material
WAIVER	To relinquish a claim, right or privilege
WAVER	To hesitate; indecision; to sway

# Common Words That Can Make You Stumble ...

Our language is full of words that are as tricky in usage as they are useful. Knowing how to use them can help avoid abusing them. The following are some of the most glaring examples:

- ACT:** Act, when used as a linking verb to mean "seem" or "pretend to be," is usually followed by an adverb. **"He certainly can act stupid."**
- AD:** This short form for advertisement is not an abbreviation and is not followed by a period; accepted in conversation, but not in writing. **"I read your advertisement (not ad)."**
- ALL RIGHT:** Use the phrase all right rather than alright. **"Is it all right (not alright) to take the test?"**
- ALREADY:** Use already as an adverb. **"The guests already had left."** (as an adverb) Use all ready as a noun followed by its adverb. **"We were all ready for him."**
- AS:** Use it after verbs of "saying," "knowing," "thinking," or "feeling." **"I was thinking as I left the room."**
- AS-AS:** When expressing a positive statement, use "as-as." **"He is as tall as John."**
- SO-AS:** When expressing a negative, use "so-as." **"He is not so tall as John."**
- AWFUL:** A good word that originally meant "awe-inspiring." Today, it is seldom used that way. Since "awful" and "awfully" are general terms of emphasis or disapproval, find some other word. **"This was a difficult (not awful) job." "She is unusually (not awfully) beautiful."**
- BADLY:** Do not use this adverb to replace "very much". **"I want very much (not badly) to succeed."**
- CONSIDERABLE:** Use this word as an adjective, not as a noun. **"A considerable sum of money is involved." (adjective)**

# Proofreading Symbols

- ⊙ PERIOD
- ^ COMMA
- ;/ SEMICOLON
- ⊙ COLON
- SPELL OUT - IN TEXT
- Ⓢ SPELL OUT - MARKED IN MARGIN
- ¶ PARAGRAPH
- # NO SPACE or MORE SPACE
- ↵ DELETE
- bf BOLD FACE TYPE
- ≡ PUT IN CAPS
- ital* PUT IN ITALICS
- lc LOWER CASE
- ^ INSERT AT THIS POINT
- tr TRANSPOSE
- (1) PARENTHESIS
- =/ HYPHEN
- ∨ INSERT APOSTROPHE
- ⊗ BROKEN TYPE
- ? IS THIS CORRECT?
- stet RETURN WORDS/LETTERS CROSSED OUT
- wf WRONG FONT (type style)
- [ ] BRACKETS
- ⊂ CLOSE UP
- // STRAIGHTEN END OF LINES
- ∨ OPENING QUOTATION MARKS
- ∨ CLOSING QUOTATION MARKS
- ∨ SINGLE QUOTATION MARK

## Example of Editing Using Proofreading Symbols

The old woman's head jerked as the boat flapping nosily across the water. She glanced at the cold, wet face lying at her fingertips, then rose and scrambled the water.

The old woman stood at the shore, flipping here damp hair from her eyes. A small boat, tossing icy spray in all directions, whipped left and right down the river, fading quickly into the mist. One man, looks like; funny little airman's cap, with tear flaps slapping against his face.

Nothing more to watch," she whispered to no one. Soon, the boat became only a spot of dark in front of sprouting spray. She stood motionless, staring down the river. Her ears picked out only the sound of waves lapping the shore at her feet.

Help. She had to get help. Not for the poor man lying in the bushes, for surely he was dead. And she didn't even know who it was. But somebody had to be told what she had seen and heard,

The old woman stood by her cabin atop the hill shivering beneath her sister's hand-woven shawl she had hastily grabbed from the sofa. Down below, just behind the pine that had felled two men with shiny guns at their waist moved toward the old man lying silent in the bushes.

The police had come within minutes of her frantic call.

At the river's edge, a silvery boat with police markings bumped against the shore. It's two occupants were moving up the slippery slope to join the others. The noise of the wind whipping through the snowy bows of the pines was the only sound to be heard.

As if startled by some unseen danger, one of the policemen pointed to the body in the bushes and loudly gasped, "MyGawd . . . It's George . . . George Dumas!"

The last words bounced across the swaying pines, echoing to the old woman. She pulled her shawl ever tighter around her shoulders, mumbling name's not known to me . . . Geroge? That's his name?"