

Publications Style Guide

17th Edition—May 2002

This brief guide was prepared for authors, editors, and proofreaders of books and other works to be published by the National Speleological Society. It answers many common style questions, including several special to caving and the NSS. It doesn't try to include everything. For more information or for items not listed here, we recommend a good style manual such as the *Associated Press Stylebook*, *Government Printing Office Style Manual*, or *Suggestions to Authors of the Reports of the U.S. Geological Survey*. Additions and comments are always welcomed.

abbreviations and acronyms Avoid alphabet soup. Spell out abbreviations in text unless they're very well known. Use them only in singular form. Don't add a period unless they spell an English word. Use ft for foot or feet, m for meter or meters, but in. for inch or inches (though it's probably better to use the full word to avoid confusion.)

For organization names, use only well-known abbreviations and then sparingly. On first—and second—use in text, write out the full name with the abbreviation after it in parenthesis. E.g.: National Speleological Society (NSS).

accept vs except *Accept* is a verb that means to receive, take, agree to, or approve. *Except* is a preposition that means: with the exception of, excluding, or not counting. It can also be a verb. But it's rarely used that way and is best avoided.

affect vs effect *Affect* is a verb (99.99% of the time). *Effect* is a noun (99.98% of the time). Example: "Sales affect profits. It's called cause and effect." *Effect* as a verb? Best to follow the trend and don't use it as a verb. It always sounds affected.

a.m., p.m. Lowercase with a period after each letter. Note, these aren't needed if *morning*, *afternoon* or *evening*, are used. *We meet at 10 a.m.* or *at 10 this morning*, but not *at 10 a.m. this morning*. A.M. and P.M. (capital letters) are OK too.

adjectives of size and distance Use singular and a hyphen, e.g.: a ten-inch sling, a 34-foot pit.

back up As in to back up an anchor when rigging. Two words.

Blue Water, Ltd. Manufacturer of Blue Water ropes and related equipment. It's *Blue Water*—two words—not *Bluewater*.

bullets Try bullets (•) instead of automatically numbering items in a tabular listing. They communicate better and look a lot tidier:

E.g.: • Red Not: 1. Red
 • White 2. White
 • Blue 3. Blue

But always use numbers for a set sequence where the order is important. E.g.: for instructions or steps.

bungee or bungie cord The stretchy stuff,

usually about a quarter or three-eighths inch (6 to 9 mm) in diameter. Both spellings are common.

commas For three or more items in a series, use a comma before the *and*. For example: *One, two, and three*. In punctuating sentences, commas are used for clarity, more or less to indicate where you'd pause when speaking. But note that the fewer commas and other breaks in sentence rhythm the better.

commas and quote marks See punctuation, and smart quotes.

common errors *It's* (it is) for *its* (possessive). *Your's* for *yours* (The possessive pronouns—its, yours, ours, hers, his, theirs, and whose—are already possessive. Don't add an apostrophe.) *Their* or *there* for *they're* (they are), and v.v. *Dont* for *don't* (do not). *Grottoes* for *grottos* (the plural of grotto has no "e"). *Prussik* for *Prusik*. Also, putting commas and periods outside instead of **inside** final quote marks (see punctuation and quote marks).

compound adjectives See hyphenated adjectives.

except vs accept See accept vs except.

dash Stronger, more abrupt break in thought than a comma. Similar to parentheses—but neater and less confusing. Not as strong as a period, which separates two complete sentences or thoughts. In typeset or WP material, a dash is an *em-dash* or *long dash* and looks like this—. In typewritten text, use two hyphens to signify an em-dash. Never use a single hyphen. E.g.: This is what to use—when an em-dash is available—but two hyphens--are OK on a typewriter. Never use two hyphens in typeset text.

dates Format for American English—M/D/Y or month, day—year differs from the European format. So to prevent confusion, avoid the all-number format: like 8/6/1 for August 6, 2001. Spell out or abbreviate the name of the month—*August 6, 2001* or *Aug. 6, 2001*. European format for dates is the opposite—namely, day/month/year. Thus 8/6/1 is 8 June 2001—not August 6, 2001. In European postmarks the month is often a Roman numeral (8/VI/01).

Data processing uses (YY/MM/DD) or lately YYYY/MM/DD. E.g. 01/08/06 or 2001/08/06. Don't forget the 0's.

For decades or centuries—an apostrophe before the "s" can be used or not as you prefer. Both are

OK. Either 1990's or 1900s, or 2000's and 2000s. But avoid 90's or 70s without the century, now that we're into 2000.

In tables, use three-letter abbreviations for months without a period: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, and Dec.

effect vs affect See affect vs effect above.

e.g.: Abbreviation for *for example*. Lower case with periods, except E.g.: at the start of a sentence.

etc. Avoid, if possible. It's a hold over from the 19th century. To convey this idea, use full phrases such as *and so forth*, *and others*, or *among others*.

feet or foot Correct abbreviation for singular and plural is *ft* without a period. But it's best to spell it out to avoid confusing foreign readers. Don't use prime marks, ' for feet, or " for inches. Very tacky.

Gibbs Ascenders Named after the manufacturers, the Gibbs family. So a single ascender is called a *Gibbs Ascender*, not a *Gibb Ascender*.

grottos Proper form, not *grottoes*.

handhold One word.

hand line Two words.

headlamp One word.

helictite Gravity defying speleothem, often called eccentrics in Britain. Derived from the word helix, so the second vowel is an "i" not an "e."

herself, himself, themselves Be sure verb agrees in number. *Herself* and *himself* are singular. *Themselves* is plural.

hyphenated adjectives When two or more words (any words, not just adjectives) are used as modifiers before a noun, they are hyphenated. E.g. *Multiple-word modifiers* or *a holier-than-thou attitude*. But if the modifiers are **after** the word being modified, hyphens are not usually used.

hyphenated words The trend in English is for many hyphenated words to merge and become one word. Examples are *waterfowl*, *bookkeeper*, and *bookstore*. So if you're not sure, write compound words as one word and you'll probably be right.

i.e. Latin for *that is*. Lower case with periods.

in. Abbreviation for inch or inches. But, it's better to spell out the full word. This abbreviation has a period because it spells an English word.

inch or inches Best to spell out to avoid confusion with the word *in*. Avoid prime marks " for inches or ' for feet. Confusing and very tacky.

it's Contraction for it is.

its Possessive form of it. No apostrophe is needed because *its* is already possessive in form, like *his*, *hers*, *theirs*, or *whose*.

Journal of Cave and Karst Studies The new title (spring 1996) of *NSS Bulletin*. Italicize since it's a publication title.

lb or lbs Abbreviation for pound or pounds of weight. From Latin *Libra* (pound). Note that it's a widely used abbreviation. You usually see 100 lbs, almost never 100 pounds.

loose A noun meaning not fastened or tight. The verb "to loosen" means to make something loose or looser.

lose A verb meaning to misplace or not able to find something. The noun *lost* means something misplaced.

me, myself Proper form as object of verb or preposition is *me*. E.g.: "with Smith, Jones, and me." At all costs avoid "with Smith, Jones, and myself," or (worse) "with Smith, Jones, and I."

names In formal writing, give a person's **full** name the first time it's mentioned, i.e., Joe Jones. After that use the **last** name, Jones, not the first. First names are too confusing (except in newsletters, where everybody knows everybody else).

NSS All capitals no periods. When spelled out, initial caps only, not all caps.

NSS Bulletin Former title of *Journal of Cave and Karst Studies*. In *Bulletin*, only the "B" is capitalized. Italicize because it's a publication.

NSS NEWS* or *NSS News No periods in *NSS*. Italicize because it's a publication.

numbers In text, spell out one through ten. For 11 and up, use Arabic numerals.

For fractions in text, spell out if less than one— one-half, one-quarter. Above one, use numbers with fractions—1 1/2, 6 3/4, or decimals 1.5, 6.75.

Spell out two-digit numbers—forty-one, sixty-three, if isolated in the middle of text. Use numbers for three digits and up—141, 163. But in a text full of numbers, use numerals for all of them.

Never begin a sentence with a number.

Avoid Roman numerals. Almost nobody can decipher them these days. The year 2000 is IIM. The year 2001, is IIMI. That's not too bad. But the year 1999 is MCMXCIX. How did they ever build all those roads and aqueducts?

OK In informal text like a newsletter, this is OK. Caps with no periods.

punctuation and quote marks This is easier to handle than you think. Just remember that periods and commas are by far our main punctuation marks. We use about 98% of the time. The rule for them is unequivocal. **Periods and commas always (no exceptions) go inside final quote marks.** Even if the quote is enclosing only a single word or letter. Example: The word "*Prusik*," has only one "s."

So what about the other marks? Since they're only used about 2% of the time, you don't have to worry much about them. You can even ignore the

rule for them if you want. Most people don't understand it anyway. Here's the rule for these other marks: colons, semi-colons, question marks, exclamation points. They can go inside or outside of the quote marks. If they were originally part of the quoted word or letter—they go inside. If not, they go outside. Examples:

He shouted, "*Look Out!*"

He said, "*Does that suit you to a "T"?*"

A final caveat: British usage is different from ours and should not be followed unless you're writing for a British publication.

See also **smart quotes** below.

p.m., a.m. Lower case with periods. Upper case with periods is also OK.

PMI The correct name for ropes and rescue gear made by Pigeon Mountain Industries, Inc.

possessive forms Adding an apostrophe and an "s" ('s) indicates possession, as in *Roger's book*. Words ending in "s" can be either ...s's or ...s'.

Exception—Place names should never use an apostrophe for possession. E.g. *Rogers Cave* and *Lost Soldiers Cave* are preferred in geographical usage (ref.: Hansen, W.R., *Suggestions to Authors of USGS Reports*, p. 87.)

Remember, possessive pronouns are by definition possessive so don't need an 's. These are: *its, yours, ours, his, hers, theirs* and *whose*.

pound or pounds (weight) Correct abbreviation is lb or lbs. Comes from *Libra*, Latin for pound. The abbreviation is invariably used rather than the word.

Prusik Knot, Prusik Knot System When referring to the knot or knot system, capitalize the "P" in Prusik in honor of Dr. Karl Prusik, inventor of the knot. Note that Prusik has only one "s."

prusiking For prusiking—meaning ascending in general—don't capitalize the "p." It has only one "s," and only one "k."

QuickLink One word with a capital "L" in the middle. Or Quicklink. Either way, one word.

rappel, rappelling A borrowed French word meaning to descend on a rope using a descender.

ropewalker One word, as in a Gibbs ropewalker system.

ropework One word, as in vertical ropework.

semicolon Semicolons are fast disappearing into the twilight zone. A period is much better to separate two complete thoughts (AKA sentences).

But a semicolon may sometimes still be useful for subcategories in complex listings. E.g.: red, white, and blue; one, two, and three; New York, San Francisco, and London.

Even so, a table with columns like the one

below communicates much better than a list with complex punctuation lost or buried in the text.

Colors	No.'s	Cities
red	one	New York
white	two	San Francisco
blue	three	London

sight vs site *Sight* is the ability to see, or the act of seeing. Also a tourist attraction, like the sights of San Francisco. *Site* means place or location, as in locus or venue.

smart or typographer's quotes Use curved or "smart quotes" instead of "plain ones." Most word processing programs support smart quotes.

states In text, spell out the full name. Avoid using the two letter abbreviations. The two letter form is not universally recognized, especially by foreign readers. Write *New Mexico* not *NM*. *California* not *CA*. *Massachusetts* not *MA*. *Washington* not *WN*.

Also the phrase "The States" is often used in other countries as an informal name for the United States. But it's not seen or heard much here.

SRT Single Rope Techniques. An international—and American—term for vertical caving, vertical rope work, or vertical techniques.

tables or tabular listings. See examples above under bullets and semicolon.

that vs who See who vs that.

their Possessive form of *they*. Don't confuse with *they're*, a contraction for *they are*, or the adverb *there*.

there An adverb of direction or location.

they're Contraction for *they are*.

time of day Use numerals with a colon between hour and minutes. Morning or a.m. is from 12:01 a.m. to 11:59 a.m. For midday, use 12:00 p.m., 12:00 noon, or noon. Afternoon is from 12:01 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. For midnight, use 12:00 a.m., 12:00 midnight, or simply midnight.

titles When citing names of publications—books, magazines, and journals—use italics. For articles put the title in "quotes." See page 4.

underlining Never (please) underline heads or text. Very hard to read. Use **bold face** type. Underlining belongs to typewriters.

U.S. vs U.S.A. Abbreviations of United States and United States of America. Either seems OK.

wetsuit One word.

who vs that *Who* refers to people. *That* refers to inanimate objects or most animals (except Hodags). Examples: "Cavers who like mud and tight squeezes will love this cave." Not "Cavers that like mud and tight squeezes will love this cave."

Suggestions for Bibliographic References

Book Citation Format

Superscript number Author, *Title: Subtitle* (Place: Publisher, Date), volume and number (if any), and page number. Example:

¹Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit: A Story About Manhattan* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1989), p. 81.

Article in a periodical Format

Superscript number Author, "Title in quotes," *Periodical*, volume, number (date), page number.

Example: ¹T.T. Gelb, "The Sumerians," *Sociology*, Vol. 33, No. 6 (1941), p. 130.

Note: Superscript number is for references cited in the body of the text. Place the superscript number at the end of the sentence where the item is first cited.

We generally place all footnoted references at the end of the chapter rather than the bottom of the page where they occur, so as not to interrupt the flow of the text. However, if there is only one footnote in that chapter, and only one or two in some of the other chapters, we may place the references at the bottom of the page instead of at the chapter end.

For general bibliographic listings—for example, at the back of a book—all entries will be alphabetized and superscript numbers will be omitted.

Final Note: These are *suggested* forms only to encourage internal consistency. Many publications have their own rigid way of doing references. Follow them to the letter.

Proofreading Marks	
	Delete, take it out.
	Close up, print as one word
	Transpose. Knot Prusik should read Prusik Knot.
	Insert space. Crystal Cave should read Crystal Cave.
	Caret. Insert here <i>something</i>
	Insert comma here.
	Insert apostrophe. Bills helmet.
	Insert period.
	New paragraph.
	No paragraph here
	Let it stand. Ignore correction.
	Make lower case. Lower case should read lower case.
	Make letter or word UPPER CASE. Also upper case.
	Make boldface. Also boldface.
	Make Italic. Also italic.
	Spell out. 5 becomes five.
	Use figures. Sixty becomes 60.
	Move to left.
	Move to right.
	Move down.
	Move up.
	Center.

Troublesome Verbs

Present

bid (offer to buy)
bid (command)
lay (to place something)
lie (to recline)
lie (to fib)
set (to place something)
sit (to seat yourself)

Past

bid
bade
laid
lay (not laid)
lied
set
sat

Past Participle

bid
bidden or bid
laid
lain (not laid)
lied
set
sat