

Psychology of Women Quarterly (PWQ) STYLE GUIDE

Prepared for *Psychology of Women Quarterly* by Kitty Barnes with Anna Hillary
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We believe that what our writers have to say deserves the widest possible audience, so that they can inform and influence public discourse and public policy related to the psychology of women and gender. When members of that audience do not easily understand what is being said, they are not likely to engage with the content. They are more likely to simply ignore it.

We know that the work done by our contributors is complex and difficult. We want our readers' work to be informative and enjoyable. The rules below have been constructed in an effort to make the writing in this journal as clear and as easily understood as possible, to make it enjoyable and informative, so that it reaches, engages, and influences the audience it deserves.

This guide builds on the editorial that appeared in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 42, March, 2018. Editor Mary Brabeck (2018) described her vision and argument for writing clearly in *PWQ*; she quoted from the well-known essay by George Orwell (1946) that is further elaborated on below. This document is divided into two sections. In the first section, we elaborate on the six rules for good writing that Orwell identified. Then we go beyond Orwell's rules and share the lessons we have learned through editing *PWQ*.

George Orwell's (1946) Six Rules for Good Writing

1. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

Clichés can make writing as weak as a kitten. They are the Achilles heel of good usage. So we ask our writers to avoid clichés like the plague.

Clichés are tedious, vapid, and off-putting. They're a signal to the reader that the writer is typing without thinking. And if the writer is not fully engaged, chances are the reader will soon be completely disconnected. Root out clichés and re-plant with language that is alive and flourishing.

The word *cliché* originated as a printer's term. It was used to describe the stereotype plate, or metal type plate, that could be reproduced over and over from the original, facilitating mass printing. Unlike a metal plate, words or phrases repeated over and over do not retain their integrity and force.

When Shakespeare coined "dead as a doornail," "elbow room," "for goodness' sake," and hundreds of other words and phrases, their freshness and singularity brought sparkle to

the speeches of his actors. Centuries of repeated use have made these same phrases stale and dull.

Here are a few examples of the many clichés common in academic writing:

at the end of the day
to all intents and purposes
acceptable behavior
widespread support
in the current climate
a level playing field
in the final analysis
think outside the box
the path of least resistance

In many instances, a cliché can simply be replaced by a less shopworn word or phrase.

Instead of,

“At the end of the day, none of these studies was convincing.”

Simply state,

“Ultimately, none of these studies was convincing.”

Clichés cannot, and perhaps should not, always be entirely avoided. Sometimes a cliché, such as *zero tolerance* or *managing expectations*, is the most direct way of saying something. And writing around the cliché, for example, by explaining: “extreme intolerance of antisocial behavior, usually by an uncompromising application of the law”; or “seeking to prevent disappointment by establishing in advance what can be achieved,” can seem verbose and obscure, if not incomprehensible.

If it is unrealistic to eliminate all clichés in our writing, it is nonetheless possible to use clichés discriminately and thoughtfully and to take care instead to demonstrate precise and careful thinking in writing. Here are some tips for doing so.

Ask yourself whether the cliché that readily, and automatically, comes to mind is especially apt in the context of what you are trying to say. Is it better to describe specific actions that meet common standards than to employ an abstraction like “acceptable behavior”? Is it clearer to identify who and how many are in favor of a given policy rather than to generalize about “widespread support”?

If after consideration a cliché seems the best way to express a thought, make sure to quote it correctly. Nothing will embarrass you more quickly than putting the petal to the metal. Nor will you forestall embarrassment by nipping it in the butt.

Let the reader know that you are aware of using a cliché by modifying or contextualizing it for the intended audience. For example, in explaining why a good policy has few advocates, you might revive clichés by saying: “Influential donors and other heavy hitters are not playing on a level field.”

The general rule here, as in all good writing, is to continuously strive to engage the reader energetically, thoughtfully, directly, and clearly.

2. Never use a long word where a short one will do.

Most readers are not impressed by overly complex language; they're annoyed, and often alienated, by it. Confronted by widespread use of unfamiliar terms, many readers will skip words, some will stop reading. Few will find the writing more engaging or convincing.

That is at odds with the strategy of some academic writers, who believe that long words are more elevated and serious than short ones. It is a strategy that often backfires. According to a study published in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* (Oppenheimer, 2005), using long, complex words makes you sound less intelligent. The name of the study: "Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly."

To make matters worse, sometimes fancier words are just wrong. The ubiquitous *utilize* is actually a specialized word. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines *utilize* as "to make useful, turn to profitable account, make use of" (1986, p. 2525). *Webster* distinguishes *utilize* from *use*, which "is general and indicates any putting into service of a thing." Use the right words, don't utilize them.

Try substituting short words for longer ones, especially in dense writing filled with technical terms and complex language and see how it aids the reader's comprehension.

Here are a few examples. Change:

ameliorate to improve

cognizant to aware

deleterious to harmful

disseminate to issue or send

facilitate to help or ease

implement to carry out

proficiencies to skills

Many long words are abstract, formed by adding endings like -tion, -ity, -age, -hood, -ment. Abstract, generic words are formless, giving the reader nothing to hold on to. Concrete, specific language is more powerful; it enlists the senses to capture and hold the reader's attention.

Orwell makes this point by transcribing a well-known passage from *Ecclesiastes* into abstract language.

"I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all" (p. 360).

In Orwell's transposition to abstract language, this becomes:

“Objective considerations of contemporary phenomena compel the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must invariably be taken into account” (p. 360).

It is not possible, or desirable, to avoid abstract language in expressing ideas, but whenever you can, flesh out these formless concepts with vivid, concrete language that gives shape to your thoughts and gives the reader a stronger grip on your argument.

3. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it.

This is a rule most eloquently expressed, and illustrated, by William Strunk and E. B. White in their excellent writing guide, *The Elements of Style, 4th Edition* (1959/1999).

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts” (Strunk & White, 1959/1999, p. 17).

Strunk and White caution that this does not mean that all sentences must be short, nor that illuminating details should be omitted, but only that every word tell.

Here are a few commonly used phrases that violate this principle:

due to the fact that
employed the use of
completely eliminate
alternative choices
basic fundamentals
in as few words as possible

These can, and should, easily be changed to:

because
used
eliminate
alternatives
fundamentals
concisely

Be vigilant in avoiding unnecessary words. It is a courtesy to your readers that demonstrates your respect for their time and attention and that will likely be rewarded with more of both.

4. Never use the passive where you can use the active.

If there is one universal rule for good writing, this is it. The reason is clear in this simple paragraph below.

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action. “Scientists performed experiments to test the hypothesis.” In the passive voice, the subject receives the action. “Experiments were performed in order to test the hypothesis.”

Notice that the active voice is clearer and more direct. English relies heavily on word order to make meaning clear. The most basic order in a sentence is SVO, subject precedes verb precedes object—“Scientists performed experiments.” That order conveys force, speed, and efficiency. The shortest distance between two points is a straight line.

And that leads to the second advantage the active voice holds. Sentences in the active voice are often shorter than those in the passive voice. “Scientists performed” vs “Experiments were performed.” The active voice offers a twofer: the language is more concise as well as more direct.

Perhaps most important for feminist scholars, the active voice identifies the source of the action. Consider: “Rape myths were invoked to influence the jury” vs “Daniel Smith, the lawyer for the defense, invoked rape myths to influence the jury.” Or: “Women’s health around the world has been adversely affected by changes in U.S. policy” vs “The Global Gag Rule, reinstated by the President of the United States in 2017, has adversely affected the health of women around the world.” If we wish to influence public policy as well as public opinion, we must help our readers identify exactly who and what are responsible for conditions as they exist. We want to tell readers who are clinicians, scholars, teachers, and parents what they should do with the information that has been published in *PWQ*.

For that same reason, avoid anthropomorphisms like “This controversial study explored the concept of intersectionality.” In this example, attribution is assigned to a subject (study) that cannot perform the action described (explored), leaving the reader uncertain of the claims made by the writer. Be specific. “The researchers at the Brookings Institution explored the concept of intersectionality in this controversial study.”

5. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

One of the main reasons that academic writing is difficult to read is that it is often jargon-infested. Sometimes jargon is just a word or phrase that has stayed on well past its expiration date, fresh last year (e.g., “bankster,” “truther”) and hackneyed today, when its use has spread epidemically. In academic writing, jargon also results from our talking solely to one another, using language that is perfectly clear within our field of interest but impenetrable from without.

All fields have an “insider” language, verbal shortcuts that let specialists communicate succinctly and easily with other specialists who have similar training and knowledge. But the consistent, widespread use of this language undermines important goals of feminist scholars: to inform and influence public discourse and public policy related to the psychology of women and gender. It basically ignores the public nature of the issues under consideration.

The information that is omitted in the use of jargon is information obvious to specialists in a particular field. But it is probably not information obvious to anyone outside that field. Everyone else. And to make everyone else responsible for clarifying each jargon word in a jargon-filled text is, essentially, to limit your audience to specialists only. To reach a wider audience, replace jargon with standard English words or phrases whenever possible.

But sometimes it is not. The use of technical language, jargon, is often necessary in describing or exploring a method or theory. Help the reader by following up with a brief description of that jargon using everyday English words. “The researchers at the Brookings Institution explored intersectionality, the concept that the overlap of various social identities contributes to specific types of systemic oppression and discrimination.”

6. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

Orwell’s first five rules require us to be thoughtful and analytical in expressing ourselves. The last rule tells us that common sense comes first. This rule rules.

We have all received reference letters that commend the subject as someone who “is a pleasure with whom to work.” The well-intentioned writer was straining to follow the rule: Do not end a sentence with a preposition. But the strain was clearly too great for the bonds of common sense. The resulting phrase is not just over-refined, it is faintly ridiculous.

Make common sense your primary rule by asking yourself the following questions before you begin to write:

What do I want to say?

Who is my audience?

What words will best convey my thoughts to this audience?

After you have finished a draft, put it aside for a day or two, then read it aloud to yourself and ask:

Is this as clear as it can be?

Is it as interesting and engaging as I can make it?

If your answer to those last two questions is yes, submit your paper to your editor. And be ready to answer many more questions.

Beyond Orwell: Observations from *PWQ*

Word Choice and Usage

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. It is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

—Mark Twain

We offer the following advice for word choice, usage, and punctuation. Our suggestions move beyond Orwell's six rules (above) and are based on our observations of common errors in manuscripts submitted to *PWQ*.

Adverse vs Averse

Adverse means hostile or detrimental.

"The adverse publicity destroyed his reputation."

Averse means reluctant or opposed to.

"Because the contest was unfair, she was averse to participating in it."

And, But, So

Never start a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is one of those fauxrules—never split an infinitive, never end a sentence with a preposition—that people tend to follow religiously while sprinkling their sentences with migraine-inducing solecisms—"most importantly," "hopefully," and "between you and I."

Here's what the *Chicago Manual of Style* has to say on the subject:

"There is a widespread belief—one with no historical or grammatical foundation—that it is an error to begin a sentence with a conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *so*. In fact, a substantial percentage (often as many as 10 percent) of the sentences in first-rate writing begin with conjunctions. It has been so for centuries, and even the most conservative grammarians have followed this practice."

Both *Garner's Modern American Usage* (2003) and *Fowler's Modern English Usage* (1926) call this belief a superstition. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage* (1994) says, "Everybody agrees that it's all right to begin a sentence with *and* [emphasis added]" (p. 93) and notes that you can find examples of it all the way back to Old English.

But, coordinating conjunctions can be overused. That's probably the reason teachers once told their students not to use them at all at the beginning of a sentence. And, I would guess, that's why some people continue to believe it's wrong.

The prescriptive against starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction is not only incorrect, it is also limiting. Sometimes a coordinating conjunction is the most graceful, or interesting, or even arresting way to begin a sentence. But, of course, don't overdo it.

Anxious, Eager

They're not interchangeable. Both convey expectancy. *Anxious* connotes apprehension as well. You wouldn't say "anxious beaver."

Affect, Effect, Impact

These words have been migrating across one another's borders promiscuously in the past several years, losing their affect, effect, and impact in the process. Let's try to restore their true meanings by using them properly. Each can be either a noun or verb.

Affect as a verb means "to influence, to change."

As a noun, it has a somewhat specialized meaning, connoting feeling and mood.

Effect as a verb means “to bring about, accomplish, produce, execute.”

As a noun, it means “result.”

Impact as a verb has the specific meaning of “to strike a blow” or “to pack firmly together.”

As a noun, it means “collision, the force of one thing hitting another.” It can also mean “a powerful or major influence or effect.”

Note: *Impactful* is jargon imported from the world of advertising and public relations. Don't use it.

In behalf, On behalf

In behalf means for the benefit of or as a champion or friend.

“We raised some funds in behalf of the Children's Aid Society.”

On behalf means as the agent of or in place of.

“The lawyer entered a plea of not guilty on behalf of her client.”

Beside, Besides

Beside means at the side of; *besides* means in addition to.

Bring, Take

Bring to, take away.

Compare to, Compare with

When you liken two things or put them in the same category, use *to*.

“Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?”

When you're placing two things side by side to examine their differences or similarities, use *with*.

“Compared with the cost of incarceration, the cost of this community development program is insignificant.”

Comprised, Composed of

Comprise connotes concepts like contain, embrace, include, comprehend. The whole comprises the parts, not the other way around.

“New York City comprises five boroughs.”

“Five boroughs—Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and The Bronx—compose the City of New York.”

or

“New York City is composed of five boroughs: ...”

Never say: “New York City is comprised of five boroughs: ...”

Consist in, Consist of

Consist of is used to introduce component parts:

“The opera consists of an overture and three acts.”

Consist in is used to define or describe an identity:

“The power of opera consists in the interplay of beautiful music, brilliant singing, and ludicrous dramatic action.”

Correlative Conjunctions

The very sensible rule governing these kinds of conjunctions—*both/and, either/or, not only/but also*—says they should connect two of the same things. In other words, don’t harness a yak and a scooter to a plow. This kind of imbalance is remarkably common and is sometimes difficult to spot. Take this example: “These budget cuts will mean not only reductions in faculty, but among administrative staff as well.”

Here “not only/but” links a noun, reductions, with a phrase, among administrative staff.

The correct phrasing would be something like this:

“Because of budget cuts, there will be reductions in faculty as well as administrative staff.”

Dangling/Misplaced Modifiers

Throw mama from the train a kiss. Enough said?

Data

In its traditional sense, meaning a collection of facts and figures, this noun is still plural: “They tabulate the data, which arrive from bookstores nationwide.” (In this sense, the singular is *datum*, a word both stilted and deservedly obscure.) *Data* is acceptable as a singular term for information: “The data was persuasive.”

Denote, Connote

Denote means.

Connote implies.

“The color blue connotes coolness and serenity.”

“The blue sticker on that bag denotes expensive merchandise.”

Different from, Different than

“*Let me tell you about the rich. They are different from you and me.*”

—F. Scott Fitzgerald

The simple rule is, always use *different from*.

Than is used only with comparative adjectives, and you can’t be different than, the way you can be better than or taller than.

Of course, there are exceptions:

“My old neighborhood looks different than I remember.”

When what follows *different* is a clause, rather than a phrase, *than* is sometimes the better choice. The alternative, “My old neighborhood is different from that which I remember,” is just too clunky.

e.g., i.e.

These are often used interchangeably, but they do not mean the same thing.

E.g. is the abbreviation for the Latin phrase *exempli gratia*, and means “for example.”

“I love cats, e.g., tigers, lions, leopards, and jaguars.”

I.e. stands for the Latin *id est*, and means “that is, namely, in other words.”

“I love my cat, i.e., I serve as staff for a pet.”

In press, On press, In preparation

These are terms of art in printing.

On press refers only to work in the process of being printed.

In press refers to work that is physically in the hands of the printer with instructions to print.

In preparation is the proper term to use when a work is actually under way and printing plans are reasonably definite.

If printing plans are more uncertain, the term *unpublished manuscript* should be used.

Farther, Further

Restrict *farther* to the idea of physical distance, *further* for everything else.

Healthcare, Health Care

Healthcare is on its way to becoming a one-word noun. In British publications, it is most commonly a single word when used as a noun or adjective. In US and Canadian publications, *health care* is the more common form in news writing and in government and scholarly publications.

Got, Gotten

British English has only one past participle for the verb *get*: *got*.

In the US, *got* and *gotten* are both correct.

Hopeful, Hopefully

Abandon *hopefully* all ye who publish here.

The common misuse of *hopefully* probably arose from a false analogy with words like *fortunately*, which means “in a fortunate manner.” But *hopefully* does not mean “in a hopeful manner.” It means “it is hoped that.” Not: “Hopefully, the cost of the study will be funded by a foundation grant.” But: “The researchers hope that the cost of the study will be funded by a foundation grant.”

Imply, Infer

Imply means to say or suggest directly.

Infer means to deduce or conclude from facts or indications.

Importantly, Most importantly

Almost always, these should be *important* or *most important*. The word/phrase is usually meant as shorthand for “what is important is that” or “what is most important is that.”

Major, Primary

Strictly speaking, *major* is a comparative adjective, meaning greater in importance, standing, size, etc. When we speak of a major poet, we are comparing her to others in her

field, which may imply, but not mean, great, important, etc. But major is often used as a synonym for words like important, great, fundamental. Try to avoid that usage. *Primary* means “of chief importance, earliest in time or order of importance.”

Nauseous, Nauseated

A thing is *nauseous* if it makes you sick to your stomach; when you are in that condition, you are *nauseated*.

None

Most of us were taught that *none* always takes a singular verb.

That’s only true when *none* means *not one* or *no one*.

“Twenty people saw the accident, but none (not one, no one) was willing to call the police.”

When *none* means *not any* or *no amount*, it takes a plural verb.

“Twenty people saw the accident, and none of them (not any) were willing to call the police.”

Prepositions should never be placed at the end of a sentence

A silly rule, up with which we will not put.

Presently, Currently

They don’t mean the same thing.

Presently means soon, before long. *Currently* means now, at the present time.

Regard, Regards

With regard to, not *with regards to*.

As regards, not *as regard*.

Similar

Always takes the preposition *to*.

Split infinitives

Another rule on its way out. The story, true or not, is that grammarians in the 18th and 19th centuries created the Never Split an Infinitive rule because they were all schooled in Latin, a language in which the infinitive form is one word. Careful writers today still generally follow the rule. One good reason to do so, is that it offers the writer the advantage of creating emphasis by breaking the rule.

“You have to really be careful when crossing West Street.”

That, Which

The rule is fairly simple: *that* introduces a defining, or restrictive phrase/clause; *which* introduces a nondefining or parenthetical phrase/clause.

“The thoroughfare that divides west from east in Manhattan is Fifth Avenue.”

“Fifth Avenue, which divides west from east in Manhattan, is a busy thoroughfare.”

In the first sentence, you can't remove the *that* phrase without compromising the meaning of the sentence. In the second sentence, you can remove the *which* clause easily and still understand the writer's intent.

The problem is not with the rule. We routinely employ it in speaking. But somehow, in writing, many people think of *that* as more colloquial, even slangy, and *which* as more literary, formal, classy. We just need to stick to the rule.

There are two exceptions:

1) When two *thats* come together in a sentence: “The Right's opposition to the Iranian nuclear arms deal is as determined as that WHICH the Left waged against the Vietnam War.”

2) When *that* properly follows a preposition. You have to say *of which*, not *of that*

This/that, These/those

This (singular)/*these* (plural) refer to something present or near either in space or thought.

“I intend to read this manuscript, the one on my desk.”

That (singular)/*those* (plural) refer to something at a great or small distance in space or thought.

“What is that manuscript doing on the table in the back yard?”

If a thought or idea has already been stated and we are pointing back to it, we use *that*.

“All human beings are equal before the law. That is a basic principle of jurisprudence in the United States.”

An exception is if we are bringing a point that has already been made into the present.

Then we use *this*. “All human beings are equal before the law. Women are human beings.

This leads to the conclusion that women enjoy the same rights as men.”

Toward, Towards

Both are correct. In the US, the favored form is *toward*; in the UK, it is *towards*. Use either, but consistently.

Very

Before getting to the “e” in typing it out, ask if there’s a better way to convey the intended meaning. Strong adjectives and adverbs usually don’t need extra help. Overuse of *very* as an intensive is often the sign of a very inexperienced writer.

Strunk and White, in *The Elements of Style*, warned against overuse of qualifiers in general, claiming that words like “very, somewhat, rather” were “leeches that infest the pond of prose, sucking the blood of words.” They also advised against “dressing up words by adding *ly* to them, “as though putting a horse on a hat.” It’s good advice. Avoid words like *overly, firstly, interestingly*, etc.

Word Order

In English, the sequence of words in a sentence affects meaning more powerfully than in many other languages. Without declensions, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives contain little grammatical information. So we’ve established many rules governing the placement

of words, including the all-important SVO: subject precedes verb precedes object. “The dog bit the boy” means something opposite “The boy bit the dog.”

But of course, the placement of every word, not just the subject, object, and predicate, is important to the meaning of a sentence. Untangling haphazard word order in careless or inept writing is one of the most difficult tasks facing the editor.

The change in the placement of a single word changes the meaning of an entire sentence.

The boy said, “I only love you.”

The boy said, “I love only you.”

The boy only said, “I love you.”

The boy said only, “I love you.”

Only the boy said “I love you.”

The only boy said, “I love you.”

Unfortunately, there is no comprehensive set of rules to govern every instance of ambiguous or inaccurate word order—except to be constantly vigilant in identifying and correcting word placement that confuses the reader or betrays the writer’s intent.

Punctuation

Commas

Many writers use commas the way they were originally employed, as pause marks for speakers. The comma was the shortest pause, then the semicolon, colon, etc., indicating pauses of increasing length. Now we use commas and most other punctuation structurally. Commas are used to make meaning clearer and to help the reader grasp the relation of parts quickly.

Commas are used to coordinate clauses in a compound sentence that are linked by a conjunction.

“The fireworks last night were beautiful, but the music was dreadful.”

The sentence has two clauses (they contain a subject and predicate) and the conjunction *but*.

Commas are NOT used to coordinate a clause and phrase in a sentence.

“Last night, we enjoyed the fireworks but not the music.”

“We enjoyed the fireworks” has a subject and predicate. “Not the music” does not; it’s a phrase, not a clause.

Compound sentences with two clauses and no coordinating conjunction usually require a semicolon.

“We loved the fireworks last night; the music, on the other hand, was dreadful.”

Compound sentences containing two clauses and no coordinating conjunction do not necessarily require a comma if the sentences are very short.

“The fireworks were great but the music was dreadful.”

Commas with coordinate adjectives: Two more adjectives modifying the same noun should be separated by commas if they are coordinated in thought; if *and* could be used between them without changing the meaning.

“The hot, humid July weather...”

“The long, winding road to your door..”

Commas vs colons before quotation marks.

A comma is usually sufficient before a direct quote. The greatest exception is when a direct quote runs at great length, especially into more than one paragraph. In that case, use a colon.

Dashes and Hyphens

An em dash¹ is used to indicate abrupt change in thought, or used with an explanatory element—like this—instead of a comma or parentheses. Do not use spaces around it.

“The clinic—the first of its kind in New York City—opened its doors in 2006.”

There are whole monographs written about the proper use of the hyphen in English. Its usage is not fixed, but highly variable and rapidly shifting. The hyphen is most widely used in compound words and modifiers. Modern English exhibits a tendency toward avoiding or dropping hyphens: *air raid* was once *air-raid*; *weight-lifting* has become *weightlifting*. The quickest, safest bet is to just check a good dictionary. For those who are more editorially entrepreneurial, here are a few guidelines

The *Oxford Living Dictionaries* (2012) defines the principal purpose of the hyphen as to connect parts of a compound word, or parts of a word that have been previously divided: *daughter-in-law* or *strong-willed*. Another common use for the hyphen is between multiple phrasal adjectives modifying and preceding a noun: “his long-lost friend.” An exception to this rule would be in the use of phrasal adjectives which include “-ly” adverbs, as in “newly discovered therapy.” There are also some regular phrasal adjectives which will not require a hyphen, because they are so commonly used there is no risk of ambiguity: “civil rights movement.” Ambiguity is the key word when deciding whether or not a hyphen is needed. The primary purpose of the hyphen is to enhance the reader’s understanding of a passage. So if you think that using a hyphen will make a passage clearer, use it.

Here are some excerpts from a thoughtful piece on the subject by Philip B. Corbett, title [“Tricky Little Things,”](#) printed in the *New York Times*, November 26, 2013:

We’ve seen a lot of stray hyphens lately, too. Don’t throw one in just on the off chance that it’s necessary. Hyphens are sometimes needed for clarity in compound modifiers before a noun. They are much less often used for modifiers that follow a verb.

¹ On a PC, an em dash can be created by entering alt+ctrl+ the minus key on the numeric keypad, or by using two hyphens without spaces around them, which should automatically convert to an em dash. On a Mac, use option+shift+the minus key.

As a refresher, here's the stylebook entry:

“Use the hyphen in constructions like *three-mile hike* and *30-car train* and to avoid confusion in words like *re-form* (meaning form again).

Do not use hyphens in compound modifiers when the meaning is clear without them: *sales tax bill*; *foreign aid plan*; *C minor concerto*. But: *pay-as-you-go plan* and *earned-income tax credit*. Comparative modifiers using *more* or *less* do not need hyphens except on the rare occasions when the meaning is ambiguous without one. Hyphens inserted hastily or automatically can be misleading, since the first word may relate at least as much to the third word as to the second. For example: *airport departure lounge*; *fast breeder reactor*; *national health insurance*. Also use no hyphen in these forms: *navy blue skirt*; *dark green paint*.

In some compounds, the hyphen should be used to avoid ambiguity or absurdity: *unfair-practices charge*, not *unfair practices charge*. Note the separation of an otherwise solid compound in *small-business man* (not small businessman) and *parochial-school teacher* (not *parochial schoolteacher*).

Never use a hyphen after an adverb ending in *ly*: *a newly married couple*; *an elegantly furnished house*; *a perfectly explicit instruction*. But an adjective ending in *ly* may take the hyphen if it is useful: *gravelly-voiced*; *grizzly-maned*.

The special case of compound modifiers that precede nouns: *He wore a well-tailored gray suit*. But omit the hyphen when the words follow the noun they modify: *The suit was well tailored*.

Some other compound modifiers, typically those beginning with nouns, keep their hyphens regardless of position in a sentence: *They are health-conscious*; *The purchase was tax-free*; *The party describes itself as family-oriented*; *Stylebook editors are awe-inspiring*.

Use no hyphens in a title consisting of a principal noun with modifiers: *commander in chief*; *lieutenant general*; *attorney general*; *director general*; *editor in chief*; *delegate at large*; *secretary general*. But use the hyphen in a title that joins two equal nouns: *secretary-treasurer*.

When a modifier consisting of two or more words is bound together by quotation marks, the hyphen is redundant; thus *poison-pill defense* and *'poison pill' defense* are both acceptable, but *'poison-pill' defense* is not. A long phrase serving as a contrived modifier is best set off by quotation marks rather than hyphens: *her 'fed up with business as usual' theme*.

Use the suspensive hyphen, rather than repeat the second part of a modifier, in cases like this: *On successive days there were three-, five- and nine-inch snowfalls.*

Finally, for the truly obsessive, here's a link to the Oxford Living Dictionaries site referencing hyphens. It's incomplete.
<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/punctuation/hyphen>. For a complete discussion, the best source is the Oxford English Dictionary, which is not available online except through subscription (See <http://www.oed.com/>).

Quotation Marks

There seem to be two recurring issues with quotation marks:

1) Use with indirect discourse or thoughts.

We know how to use quotation marks with direct quotes.

Indirect quotes do not require quotation marks.

He asked, "How did that happen?"

versus

He wanted to know, how did that happen?

With thoughts, you don't use quotation marks and don't need italics or other distinguishing punctuation.

He thought to himself, how in the world did that happen?

2) Quotation marks with other punctuation.

Always set quotation marks outside periods and commas.

Set quotation marks inside colons and semicolons, because these are sentence punctuation.

Set quotation marks outside exclamation points and question marks that are part of the quotation, inside those that are not.

She yelled, "Oh, shut up!"

Did you memorize Hopkins's "Windhover"?

Possessive Case

That last example brings up a nearly universal mis use of the possessive.

The possessive case of virtually all proper names is formed by adding apostrophe and "s" to the singular. Or apostrophe alone to the plural.

"The Johnsons' home in Colorado."

"Jack's condo in Miami."

"James's apartment in Manhattan."

Even when a proper name ends in "s," add apostrophe "s" to form the possessive.

Make an exception only when the apostrophe “s” would form a triple sibilant with apostrophe “s.”

“Moses’ laws,” not “Moses’s laws”

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