

# PRINTtips

## Editor's Choice: Editing Copy Written By Others

It can be a tricky situation – editing copy written by others. Whether your task is to compile and edit the company newsletter, review the boss's PowerPoint presentation or prepare the company marketing material, the job of copy editor requires diplomacy and discipline. The diplomacy is necessary to avoid alienating the writer (and losing your editorship); the discipline is required to impose standards and create consistency.

To help with this delicate balancing act, it is useful to have an editor's toolkit – measuring devices that transform your editing from subjective to objective. Here are our suggestions.

### The Style Sheet

A corporate style sheet is a collection of standards for communication and is the main reference for maintaining consistent corporate identity. The style sheet provides logos, guidelines and templates plus instructions for reproducing all elements of a company's identity – from print to web to written communications.

A corporate style sheet can also contain rules for spelling, punctuation and grammar that result in standard usage in all material published by the business. This section of the corporate style sheet

can be the editor's best friend – a reference and a way to settle disputes between you and the writer. Here are some examples from an actual corporate style sheet word list:

Example	Explanation
Email or email	No hyphen
Handheld	Always one word
Internet	Always use a capital "I"
Numbers	Spell out one through nine and use numerals thereafter (e.g., 10, 11, 12)
Punctuation: comma period	Use before conjunctions (apples, oranges, and bananas) Do not use periods in bulleted lists
url	Always use lowercase
Web; Web site	Always initial cap for <i>web</i> ; always two words

The corporate style sheet can also contain the standards for preparing the company's documents (both internal and external). To help writers comply with the standards, they can be saved in a word processor as paragraph styles

Heading 1	<b>Gill Sans; 14 pt, bold</b>
Heading 2	<b>Gill Sans; 13 pt, bold</b>
Heading 3	<b>Gill Sans; 12 pt, bold</b>
Heading 4	<b>Gill Sans; 11 pt, bold</b>
Body text	Goudy, 10 pt
Hint/Note	<i>Goudy Italic, 10 pt</i>
Header	<i>Goudy Italic, 11 pt</i>
Footer (page numbers)	Goudy, 9 pt
Table of Contents	Goudy, 13 pt

Other guidelines that might be stated for technical documents include when to use formatting such as bold, italics and underline; how to handle capitalization; and how to handle bullets. For example,

1. For emphasis: use **bold**, not underline or all capital letters.
2. Avoid over-capitalization. Use lowercase unless there is a specific reason to capitalize.
3. For bulleted lists: be consistent with punctuation or lack of thereof. Use only one style of bullet throughout the document.

What if your company lacks a style sheet? Consider drafting one, especially for technical documents and other situations you are likely to encounter in your role as editor. If you wish, you can adopt the examples we have presented here.

### Useful Tips for Editing Content

If you have a company style sheet for reference, you may be able to defuse confrontations with writers over format. However, you still have to edit content – the area where the writer theoretically is the expert. So it may help to have a few guidelines for determining whether the copy is adequate for its stated purpose.

*Tip 1: Know the audience and edit from his or her perspective.*

It doesn't matter whether you are editing sales and marketing copy, an instruction manual or a technical document. If the copy isn't written with

the reader in mind, it may not be as persuasive or be comprehended as intended. Put yourself in the reader's place and ask whether you understand what is being said. If you don't, edit until you do.

*Tip 2: Make an outline from the copy.*

This is a basic test of organization. If you can outline the main points, then the copy has a logical structure that will be easier for the reader to follow and ultimately more compelling. If you can't make an outline, then very likely the reader won't be able to grasp the message.

*Tip 3: Look for "25-cent words" and compound sentences, especially when editing for a technical expert.*

Even if a technical audience will read the copy, find a way to convey the message simply. Make sure all technical terms are the best choice. Look for "long" words when "short" ones will do. (For example, substitute *use* for *utilization*.) When necessary, define words within the body of the document.

*Tip 4: Be alert for clichés and overblown superlatives.*

One purpose of any document is to establish trust between the writer and the reader. Clichés and overblown superlatives will not accomplish this task.

*Tip 5: Make sure the copy gets to the point.*

Some writers equate simple writing with simple thoughts, and unintentionally overwrite.



This wastes the reader's time and weakens the message. Avoid redundancy, overworded phrases and other examples of poor writing. Be sure the writing provides specific, concrete information in a clear and straightforward manner.

*Tip 6: Verify statistics and citations.*

An editor has a responsibility to read statistics critically. If there are mistakes in tables, graphs or charts, the editor must find them. Also, be sure that citations are present and follow conventional format.

If you find yourself feeling a bit overwhelmed by the duties of an editor, give us a call. We can provide editing services or give you a referral to a professional editor.

# Proofreader's Marks

L	Capital <u>letter</u>	⊙	Insert period or "full point."	]	]	Move to left
cap	SET IN <u>capitals</u>	↗	Insert comma	]L	]L	Put in center of line or page
tr	Transpos <u>e</u> s (order of letters)	↓	Insert apostrophe	⊂	⊂	Close up en <u>tirely</u>
∅	Delete <u>take out</u>	“ ”	Insert quotation marks	#	#	Close up # <u>partly</u>
Let it stand	Let it stand · (all above dots)	=	Insert hyphen	¶	¶	Begin a paragraph
ital	Set in <u>italic</u> (or oblique) typ	—	Insert one em dash	no ¶	no ¶	No paragraph
bf	Set in <u>boldface</u> type	( )	Insert parentheses	┌	┌	Indent Left
☐ ¶	Indent the number of spaces	—	Insert one en dash	└	└	Indent Right
⊙ sp	Check spelling	lc	Lower <u>Case Letter</u>	#	#	Insert space <u>(or more space)</u>
☐	Move to right ☐					



**Bad break:** The incorrect or poorly placed splitting of a word, sentence or paragraph.

**Bullet:** A dot or symbol used to mark or identify the beginning of a new item in a list of items.

**Point:** A measurement used to determine the size of a printed character. A point is equal to 1/72<sup>nd</sup> of an inch, so 72-point type is an inch tall and 36-point type is half an inch tall.

**Drop cap:** The first letter of an article that is larger than the remainder of the text, placed so that the top of the ascender is level with the top of the ascender of the smaller text.

**Font:** A set of characters in one typeface design at a specific style and size.

**Pica:** The basic measurement unit that is used in the graphic arts field. A pica is about .166 of an inch and this makes six picas per inch. Picas are further broken down into point. There are 12 points per pica; 6 picas per inch; and therefore 72 points per inch.

**Running head:** A headline that is repeated at the top of each page in a publication.

**Sans serif:** A font or typeface in which all the characters lack serifs.

**Serif:** Small lines or protrusions at the ends of the characters of certain fonts. They are designed to make the font more attractive and in some cases, more readable.

**Typeface:** All characters of a single design, in all styles, sizes and weights.

**Typestyle:** Variations of a typeface such as bold, italic, black, oblique, roman, condensed, extended and compressed.

**T**ake several things into consideration when selecting typestyles for a corporate style sheet. Since typestyles elicit emotion, the primary consideration is how the intended audience will react. Traditional typestyles such as Times Roman, Century Schoolbook and Helvetica evoke a stable, dependable emotion that is great for companies such as banks, financial institutions and legal services.

A company newsletter, on the other hand, may benefit from a contemporary, modern or unusual typestyle.

Legibility factors to consider include:

*Size of type:* 9-12 points is generally a good size for body copy. For headlines, 18, 24 and 36 point are the most common sizes. Size should be adjusted depending on leading (line spacing), line length and the age of the readers.

*Typeface characteristics:* Italics slow a reader down and medium weight type is easier to read than light or bold. Other factors affecting type include the simplicity and complexity of a typeface's outline, stroke, width and shading. Keep in mind that typestyles with serifs are usually more legible than sans serif.

*Line length:* The line length in picas should be roughly 1 1/2 to 2 times the point size. So for 10-point type, use a line length of between 15 and 20 picas. (A pica is about one-sixth of an inch.)

**Q.** *I am the editor of our company newsletter. Right now it is four solid pages of text. I want to make it more inviting, but I can't take any information out. What can I do?*

**A.** There are several things you can do to lighten layouts that are type-heavy.

- Use a large headline in a font that matches the tone of your information.
- Create headlines for each new section. (These are called *subheads*.) Subheads break up the text into manageable portions. They also enable a reader to enter the article at several points.
- Consider using varied column lengths.
- Separate one column from the next by printing a 1 point or 1.5 point line in between.
- Print keywords in a second color.
- Use mug shots to break up text.
- Shade one or more areas of a page to create contrast.

Box in one or more articles in a tinted area. A tinted box with a pull quote can add interest to your page while stressing an important point from your text.

- Center a large attention-getting headline across the top, bottom or center spread of a page.
- Add a piece of line art. If your type jumps over the art, make sure that readability is not affected.
- Use drop caps.
- Place a large graphic in the left column or screen it in back of your text.