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Communicating in *Style*



‘A gem.
Courteous, unafrightening
and essential.
A perfect companion to Fowler’s
A Dictionary of Modern English Usage
for today’s communicators.’

John le Carré

Shaped by • recommendations from the most recent editions of established style guides • comprehensive searches of the World Wide Web • extensive field-testing with earlier drafts • more than a decade’s experience in technical publishing

Communicating in Style

Yateendra Joshi

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Foreword

by R K Pachauri, Director-General, TERI

The production of this style guide would be a source of great satisfaction for those who are either involved themselves in producing technical literature or responsible for activities in organizations engaged in such work. I am aware of a major consulting organization that has been able to create an enviable record of success in dealing with the chief executives of major organizations around the world largely on the basis of a unique and appealing style of reports published by them. The multi-client reports that this organization produces are given much greater attention at the editing stage than perhaps even at the stage of collection of information, its organization and analysis, and on producing the contents of the basic subject matter itself. The last stages of finishing the product are the responsibility of the seniormost professionals in the organization. I mention this example only to highlight the fact that even with the richest content on the most esoteric subjects, the value of the final product can be diminished or enhanced substantially by the style of the publication. It is for this reason that a style guide is extremely important for enabling scientific writers in particular to come out with products that are not only scientifically valuable and rich in content, but attractive, interesting, and pleasing in all respects to the discriminating reader.

It is especially pertinent that my colleague Yateendra Joshi has worked on this particular product, because he not only brings to bear on this work knowledge, experience, and talent in designing published products, but a passion that provides a unique personality and utility to this guide. The pages that follow are not only full of insights and the distillation of his rich experience drawn from a wide range of publications, but also easy to read and remarkably simple to follow. Hence the message contained in this guide can be assimilated without any hardship or discomfort. For this and various other qualities, I think this style guide will make a valuable contribution in assisting the authors writing on a variety of subjects.

Preface

This book might as well have been titled ‘Where there is no copy editor’ – after David Werner’s eminently successful book *Where There Is No Doctor* – because it is written mainly for those who must revise and polish their work on their own. Last year saw the publication of the 623-page *Oxford Guide to Style* and last month, the 984-page 15th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. However, those tomes of distilled wisdom are for professional copy editors: if you are a researcher, an academic, a journalist, or a manager – long on technical expertise but short on time – you will find style manuals daunting and tedious. Yet, you may want to give your message that well-groomed look— *Communicating in Style* shows you how you can do that yourself.

The Energy and Resources Institute, the publisher of this volume, is an unusual research institute in many ways, one of them being that its researchers may choose to have their writing copy-edited by professionals. This book is a compilation of what those editors have learnt over the years from editing project reports, research papers, newsletters, presentations, manuals, posters, web pages: a variety of formats matched only by the variety of contents, which ranged from air pollution in rural kitchens to global climate change, from bacteria to forests, from policy-making to practical instruction in propagating plants.

The Director-General of TERI, R K Pachauri, suggested that I compile a style guide for in-house use. Accordingly, a draft version was prepared and circulated among TERI researchers and the staff of its information services, doctoral students at the TERI School of Advanced Studies, and many others outside TERI. That draft has now metamorphosed into this handbook, and I am grateful to all those who have had a hand in shaping it.

James Hartley, Chuck Hollingworth, Derek Land, Lynn P Nygaard, Elizabeth Orna, and Sue Walker read an early draft and offered comments or suggested improvements. Hal Cain, Carol Miller, and Elizabeth Wager did the same for several chapters. Conrad Taylor also commented on the design. Members of the Internet discussion groups devoted to copy-editing, typography, and information design patiently and promptly answered many queries.

At TERI, Vikram Dayal spoke for the prospective users of the book and helped in shaping it to serve their needs. P K Jayanthan, Nandini Kumar, Shehnaz Ahmed, and Amalesh Chakraborty diligently pored over successive versions of the text as Anshu Eashwar made the pages and T Radhakrishnan refined the typesetting and design. R K Joshi took all the pictures and offered helpful advice on the design of the left-hand pages. Supratim Chatterjee and Baldev Chand were instrumental in keeping me up to date with the latest books and periodicals. K P Eashwar's belief in the worth of the book despite its slow progress and Sangeeta Gupta's implicit faith in my judgement – on issues related to style – sustained me during this long journey – and the kind words of encouragement from John le Carré, M S Swaminathan, and Jean Hollis Weber made it worthwhile.

The shortcomings of the book are all of my own making, however: I apologize for them in advance and request the readers to point them out to me.

Chapter 1 at a glance

Why you should use this handbook

What is style and why it matters

Sources of advice and information

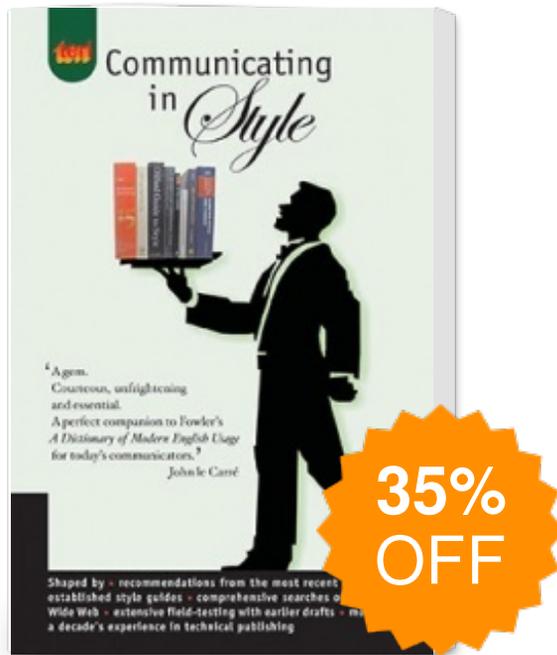
Developing a distinctive style

The essentials of style

- ▶ Keep in mind what the readers would find helpful instead of doing what is easiest for you
- ▶ Use abbreviations sparingly
- ▶ Choose larger fonts
- ▶ Prefer small letters to capital letters; use capitals only when you must
- ▶ Follow the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* in matters of spelling

References

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