

Why you need to have a style

When writers talk about style they are rarely talking about fashion. They are talking about editorial style. They discuss whether to use the Associated Press Style or the New York Times Style or Chicago Manual. There are probably four or five major published style guides that people follow. In journalism and by extension, public relations, most people adhere to the AP Style. In government circles, people tend to follow the Government Printing Office (GPO) Style. (Here's a great article on Roll Call about the chairman of the GOP Style Board.)

There is one reason to have an editorial style: consistency.

Consistency helps unify your writing. Let's use a common example. It's Chicago Manual style to write Web site (two words, web is capitalized always). It's AP Style to write website (one word, lowercase). **Either way is correct.** But if you use AP in one press release and then Chicago on a white paper, you are being inconsistent. Worse would be to use both styles in one document.

Choose one style and stick with it.

Organizations should develop style guides editorial and branding/image purposes. These written documents (in this case, the oral tradition just won't do!) will help to make sure everyone in the organization is on the same page, bolstering organizational consistency.

Editorial guides should cover issues like:

- Word usage (website versus Web site; do you say chairman, chairperson or chair?)
- Punctuation (use em dashes or not?)
- Preferred date and time usage (do you say April 24 or April 24th?, 6 PM or 6:00 p.m.?)

Branding/image guides should clarify issues like:

- Logo size and positioning
- Organizational colors
- Acceptable fonts

There are a great many resources on the web, and even templates to follow. Large organizations like the World Bank have style guides that you can download.

If you don't have an organizational style guide, this year-end may be a great time to develop one or make it a goal to develop one in 2014.

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