

OLAC Newsletter Style-sheet

By Jain Fletcher, Former Editor-in-Chief

Revised by Marcy Strong, Editor-in-Chief, 2015

Submissions for the OLAC Newsletter are accepted for their content and have very few restrictions with respect to an individual's writing style. Indeed, an individual contributor's writing style is both respected and encouraged, especially if it is well-articulated, logically presented and/or engagingly written. Even so, the Editor would appreciate contributors having a general understanding of the Newsletter's stylistic considerations. In general, these guidelines are intended for the Editor's expedience (to aid in consistency from issue to issue). However, contributors who wish to avoid "editorial intervention" as much as possible would also do well to be aware of them. The Editor reserves the right to re-word or re-phrase submissions according to the following guidelines. It should also be noted that the Editor might choose to overlook some of these guidelines every once in a while, if the situation warrants. The end goal is to have a professional publication that is both informative and readable.

Please note that this style sheet does not adhere to any one existing style manual. It is expected that contributors will have a working acquaintance with at least one of the recognized writing manuals, such as The Chicago Manual of Style (in any of the more recent editions), Turabian, Strunk and White, etc. Although this style-sheet generally aligns with the guidance found in the above-named manuals, it has further developed its guidelines to cover particular usages needed by OLAC's constituency.

1. Capitalization

Since many OLAC catalogers work in institutions and attend professional meetings, much of our work is driven by seasonal considerations. Therefore, calendar designations will be capitalized (e.g., Fall, Spring, Tuesday, Friday, April, October, etc.), except for the seasons themselves, when they are used generically (e.g., "The manual should be finished by summer."). More and more companies and initiatives are being named using constructions starting thus: lowercase letter(s) followed by capitalized letter(s) within the same word (e.g., eBooks, netLibrary, dBase, dTOC, etc.). If using one of these names at the start of a sentence, feel free to use these configurations as their constructors intended; however, it would be less jarring to readers if sentences could be formulated by avoiding placing these entities at the beginning.

Capitalize committee or organization position titles and job titles, especially when used to describe a specific person or position: Chair, Vice Chair, President, Vice President, President Elect, Funnel Coordinator, Chief, Treasurer, Liaison, Coordinator, Client Services Director, Representative, etc. These terms may be used without capitalization only if they are used generically (e.g., "The committee will elect a chair and other officers ...")

Capitalize specific parts of AACR2, RDA, etc.: e.g., Chapter 9, Rule 1.0A, Area 6, etc. These terms may also be used without capitalization when used generically (e.g., “Use the rule for ...”, “In the chapters for non-book material...”)

See also (6) below, about capitalizing the words in a title.

2. Punctuation

Hyphenate –

- According to good usage, i.e., word combinations that are not yet accepted
- If a combination is used as an adjective (e.g., well-rehearsed chorus, preconference event)

Use quotation marks –

- For quoted phrases
- For less common terms (e.g., library or technical jargon) or abbreviations
- Given titles of chapters or sections of works, names of programs

Marks of contraction –

- Don't use 'm or the editor'll change 'm! (While contractions seem friendly and more like everyday speech, they are not appropriate for professional or formal written text)

Use the apostrophe or single quote mark –

- Appropriately, such as quotes within quotes, to show the rare accepted contraction (e.g., entr'acte), possessives, etc.
- Please watch out for common incorrect applications of the apostrophe (e.g., 1990's [instead of 1990s or 90s], it's [when used as possessive], plural acronyms [e.g., GMDs, CDs, DVDs])

Use italics --

- For titles of books, magazines or other proper titles (please note that underlining may only be used for titles as a way to indicate italicizing in situations where the italic font is not available, such as with most typewriters)
- For a word or phrase to show emphasis

3. Abbreviation

Avoid abbreviations in general, except for accepted acronyms. Spell out: cities, seasons, months, days, institution names and officers' positions.

For acronyms, no matter how familiar, spell out the first instance of the entity (e.g., book or group), followed by its acronym in parentheses; from that point onwards, the acronym may be used without qualification. Exceptions to this rule would be acronyms in common usage among OLAC's constituency:

ALA, AACR, RDA, BIBFRAME, LCSH, FRBR, OLAC, CAPC, CD, DVD, AV, GMD, MLIS. Render most acronyms without periods (e.g., ALA, not A.L.A.), but not necessarily all, such as most long-time abbreviations for degrees, such as: B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

4. Grammar, usage

Please make every attempt to avoid splitting infinitives--it is almost always possible to re-state a sentence without them, even if this results in somewhat more stilted phrasing than desired (e.g., “to boldly go where no one has gone before” can be easily changed to: “to go boldly where...” without much change in meaning, except, of course, for the fact that it loses its intended stentorian ring).

Wherever possible please try not to end sentences with prepositions. In the famous phrase of Winston Churchill, in response to this same directive, he said: “That is something up with which I will not put!” In this comment, he took the more commonly phrased “That is something I will not put up with!” to its ridiculous extension. He was correct in his objection--sometimes it is better to phrase a sentence to make it glide smoothly or to be more reader-friendly; however, this is a professional publication and wherever possible, an attempt should be made to follow the general guidance to avoid terminal prepositions.

5. Accessibility considerations

To make the newsletter accessible for readers with disabilities please structure your document with the following considerations:

Use Alt text for images –

- Describe any photographic images with text, allowing readers with visual impairments an understanding of what that image contains. It is recommended that the same text be placed in both the title and the description fields when using Microsoft Word. Alt text should be straightforward, such as “Jane Doe, OLAC President” rather than “Picture of Jane Doe, OLAC President.”
- Decorative images will also fail the accessibility check if they are not alt tagged. Add a tag indicating they are decorative images or use “ ” to tell the screen readers to ignore them.

Avoid repeated blank spaces—

- Repeated blank spaces are an issue for screen readers as each one is read out loud as “blank.” Too many of these in a row and most readers assume that are at the end of anything important and move on. To avoid this, remove blank spaces and use the paragraph or indent keys to create space.

Create structure –

- Use heading structure to define areas in documents by selecting Heading types from the Style menu. The heading structure should outline the document. For example, the document title

would be Heading 1, individual sections would be Heading 2, subsections would be Heading 3, etc.

- If including a list, choose either the Ordered List (123/ABC) or Unordered List (bullets/dashes) button in the Paragraph pane in Word.

Use self-describing links—

- Make your hyperlinks smart by allowing the text itself to be the link. For example, the [OLAC website](http://olacinc.org/drupal/website) is a more effective link than displaying the URL like this: <http://olacinc.org/drupal/>

6. Professional communication

Within the context of a newsletter addressed to a collegial gathering of experts, it is fitting for a few of its columns to take a more personal tone (most notably the President's and Editor's columns).

Otherwise, most submissions should aim for a professional tone. OLAC is a small enough organization that many of its members may know a majority of their fellow members, but it is still better to ensure that every potential reader is treated professionally. So, while an open and friendly tone is always encouraged, please make every attempt to accomplish this without appearing to be conversing only with a small circle of like-minded colleagues. One of the best ways to do this is to avoid the personal pronouns "I", "me", "you", "we" whenever possible. This is one good way to broaden the wording in order to be inclusive of all readers. As an example, instead of this construction: "Our work requires that we treat non-book material as ..."; try to clarify and broaden the wording to something like: "A cataloger's work requires that non-book material be treated as ..."

Finally, please note again the overall desirable attributes of good writing style, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this document: that submissions be well articulated, logically presented and/or engagingly written. Please re-read your contributions carefully--with "blue pencils" poised—to check presentation style; do not hesitate to edit and re-edit. In your review of your contribution, I would urge that you back away from your familiarity with the topic and try to imagine your non-librarian spouse, grandparent, or good friend reading it. If you think one of them could read it and come away with a glimmer of understanding of the content and the conclusion, then you have probably written something clear and readable for your colleagues.