

TAMMY'S STYLE SHEET CHEATSHEET

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

A style sheet makes a great checklist to be aware of before you start writing, & can help remove a lot of inconsistencies & mistakes later for revisions & edits.

BEFORE YOU WRITE, CHOOSE:

A few technical considerations before Once Upon a Time...

FORMAT:

Set your page size, margins, fonts, indents, page numbers, paragraph spacing, etc., **FIRST!**

Note: When your preferences differ from your app's defaults, change them before you start.

TENSE:

Present: All screenplays are present tense. Most other prose is past tense.

Past: Most books are written in past tense, only employing perfect past when moving backward in time for backstory.

POV (point of view):

1st Person: I, me, my – This is all from my personal perspective & I am all in.

2nd Person: We, us, our – This uncommon & often uncomfortable POV is when the reader is involved in the narrative by a writer who has one foot inside the story & the other outside of it.

3rd Person: S/he, her/him, her/his – The most common & typically easiest form of prose to write & read is looking in from the outside.

Note: All screenplays are written in 3rd person, though they can be presented as 1st-person with voice-over narration or 2nd-person by breaking the 4th wall (talking directly to camera/audience).

INNER THOUGHTS POV:

Omniscient: The writer tells the story revealing the innermost thoughts of any or all characters.

Limited: The writer reveals thoughts & feelings of only a few key characters.

Subjective: The writer observes with a bias or sympathy for certain character(s) in most scenes.

Objective: The writer only observes, without bias & without revealing inner thoughts.

Note: It is good practice to establish rules early on which character types are worthy of inner POV.

Note: Screenplays can be subjective or objective, but never omniscient or limited.

QUOTES:

Straight quotes: "straight quote" for apostrophe's & 'inner quotes'

Smart quotes: “curly quote” for apostrophe’s & ‘inner quotes’

Note: Some apps make it difficult to make changes after the fact, so set it & forget *before* writing.

WRITER STYLES, HABITS, & PREFERENCES:

There is no right or wrong with styles. But the earlier you establish a pattern, the easier it will be to write, revise & edit.

SENTENCE SPACING:

Still using 2 spaces between sentences? You may be giving away your age. Or making it hard on your editor. Or ignoring your software's settings.

1 space: Just 1 space after all full-stop punctuation (. ! ?) – recommended.

2 spaces: 2 spaces after all full-stop punctuation (. ! ?) – not recommended.

Arguments for 1 space, not 2:

Software: Many apps have a default that favors single spacing, so it may introduce it if you don't override the setting *before* writing if you have a preference for double.

Ageism: Most people in the digital age use 1 space, while many people of a certain age still use 2 spaces.

Editing: It is fairly difficult & time consuming to change all spacing to 2 whereas it is just a few clicks to change all double spaces to single, thus single is recommended.

Script format: Even for screenplays in monotype font (Courier 12), 1 space is most common.

Easy to change: After 40 years of double-spaced sentences, it literally only took about an hour to break the habit, & I have not looked back since. This is true for most who make the commitment.

SERIAL COMMAS:

In true American (AmE) fashion, we like to eliminate wasted ink on the page, thus it is often a British (BrE) vs. AmE decision, though Oxford is the preference for many Americans as well.

Oxford – yes, yes, and yes

AmE – no, no and no

Note: This is one place where Americans can & perhaps should be inconsistent as the lack of a 3rd comma in some lists is clearer while the added comma in other lists is clearer. Choose a preference, & only make the exception when clarity is at stake.

COMMA PRECEDING:

No comma is needed before *too* or *though* & other adverbs, but it is writer's choice.

With: I like a comma before "though," *too*.

Without: I like no comma before "too" *though*.

COMMA FOLLOWING:

No comma is required after conjunctions that start a sentence, but it is writer's choice.

So, but no comma following *But*, *And*, *Then* & *Or*

With: *So*, I like a comma after "So."

Without: *But* I don't like a comma after other conjunctions.

DASHES REPLACE COMMAS:

En dash: An en dash – which is shorter – must be surrounded by spaces.

Em dash: An em dash—which is longer—must have no spaces.

Note: Do not use en or em dashes in screenplay. Follow protocol for double dash or spaced dash.

HYPHEN OR COMPOUND:

Hyphen: back-yard party (typically BrE)

Compound: backyard party (typically preferred in AmE)

Tammy@Scriptpreneur.com

HYPHEN AFTER ADVERB:

While hyphens do not belong after any adverbs, certain staples are preferred by some.

With: well-deserved reward

Without: well deserved reward (typically preferred in AmE)

Note: Many spellchecks & programs like Grammarly have preferences that do not always follow CMS or AmE norms, so you may have to override when they highlight.

ELLIPSES:

No spaces – as one character: (...)

No spaces before/after: (...)

Space before/after: (...)

Spaces between each period: (. . .) – not recommended w/few exceptions

Note: Use nonbreaking spaces to avoid ugly line breaks if using spaces in an ellipsis.

POSSESSIVE NAMES ENDING IN S:

S following: Lazarus' s

No s following: Lazarus'

NUMBERS:

1–10: one–ten, zero, then 11-999,999, + combine numeric + million, billion, trillion, etc.

1–100: one–one hundred, zero, then 101–999,999 EXCEPT multiples of hundred, thousand, etc. (one hundred, two thousand, twenty-five million, etc.) + combine numeric + million, billion, etc.

SYMBOLS & ABBREVIATIONS:

If there are no set rules governing your work, make your own rules & stay consistent.

Symbol & abbrev.: \$, %, #, St., St., etc.

Spelled out: dollars, percent, hashtag, Street, Saint, et cetera

Note: Screenplays do have set rules about nitpicky things that differ from dialogue to action.

PREFERRED SPELLINGS:

Aside from AmE vs BrE preferences, if you know you like quirky spellings of some words, or you discover them while writing, add them to the list, & customize it to be Younique!

- okay
- alright
- makeup (cosmetics)
- backpack
- grey
- cell phone
- back seat
- rearview
- goodbye
- pick-up (truck)
- t-shirt
- theater
- 'til (be sure to use the right apostrophe, not left)
- toward, backward, forward, upward, afterward, etc.
- towards, backwards, forwards, upwards, afterwards, etc.
- mixed: towards, backwards, afterwards – however: forward, upward, etc.

LISTS TO MAKE WHILE WRITING:

Keep your story straight!

Some apps, such as Final Draft, keep a list of everything for you, but most don't, & you'll need to keep a running list of characters, places, etc., whether it's fiction or non-fiction.

CHARACTERS:

To ensure that Bob doesn't evolve into Rob, or that 32-year-old David doesn't tell someone he's 25 in dialogue because you forgot, keep a list here in your style sheet.

- **David Johnson** (main POV, 32, blond)
- **Tony Jones** (no POV)

Note: List FULL names to see that many last names will be repeated or too similar.

Note: Listing names also saves you from needing to fill the next list with too many.

Note: Another reason to list full names is you may end up with a distracting celebrity name if you wait to give a last name until later, so you may not see it clearly unless it's in a list.

SIMILAR NAMES:

You'll be amazed how many different characters have the same or similar names even in fiction that you've dreamt up! A list will help you as you write, & it will save time from having to go back & make a lot of changes in revisions or editing.

- Karen/Sharon
- Roger Banks/Robert Hanks
- Carlo/Carlos
- Pepe/Pepe
- Rocco/Rico
- Luigi/Louie

Note: List FULL names to see that many last names will be repeated or too similar.

PLACES:

Like people, it's hard to keep it all visualized.

- **Washington Heights**
- **Washington State**
- **Washington Monument**
- Etc.

Note: This also helps with unintentional duplicate or similar names, such as the Ben Franklin Bridge, when there are already various forms of the names Ben & Franklin in the character list.

TIMELINES:

If it's a bit complicated, &/or it's a true story with real timelines, an Excel or Google Sheets worksheet will probably help keep times & events straight.

BONUS INFO

Some AmE vs. BrE issues to watch for

AmE = American English

BrE = “British English” - the international (non-American) standard for English grammar/spelling

CanE = “Canadian English” - a blend between AmE & BrE

To ensure your prose reflects your unique voice, always stay consistent within the norms of your country’s grammar, punctuation & spelling rules. If submitting your work for evaluation to anyone outside of your country, it is good practice to make them aware of your country of origin to avoid any possible confusion.

“ . should be . ” – In AmE, quotations go around the period & comma.

Basic rule for AmE QUOTATIONS & PUNCTUATION:

INSIDE: Commas go “inside,” as do “periods.”

OUTSIDE: “semicolons”; “colons”: “asterisks”* “dashes of all sorts”-- (– or —) (unless it’s part of the quote, “such as when dialogue is cut off--”)

IN or OUT: “Most times, in go the questions and exclamations!” or Shall I put such marks outside for a “clause” or “phrase”? “Yes!” “Really?” The answer is “yes.”

Note: The different BrE rules do not apply to Hollywood scripts.

‘Single’ quotation marks – AmE uses full “quotation” marks for all types of quotes.

Note: this can be considered a style choice, but there are no rules governing single quotes & BrE has no specific rules, thus the inconsistency is distracting.

AmE quotes-within-quotes format:

The sign reads: “‘To be or not to be...’ --Shakespeare”

collective nouns in AmE (crowd, crew, group, government, etc) are *singular* & require the proper verb:

the crowd cheers

the couple embraces

the government is on high alert

Note: In BrE, collective nouns are plural.

Note: AmE readers easily adjust to AmE or BrE, as long as it’s consistent throughout.

Numbers:

TIMES use a colon, not a period: 5:00 pm

CURRENCY uses decimals, not commas: \$6,503.25

BrE/AmE PHRASE MIXUPS:

In dialogue, it's important that Brits/Internationals don't sound American & vice versa.

is sat (BrE) v. sits (AmE)

is stood (BrE) v. stands (AmE)

has got (BrE) v. has gotten (AmE)

have a break (BrE) v. take a brake (AmE)

BrE/AmE WORD PREFERENCES:

BrE spellings seem preferred, but several words are Americanized.

Keep it consistent one way or the other.

BrE vs. AmE spellings: BrE characters should obviously sound British (or whatever country) in dialogue, but all narrative & AmE characters should use AmE words, phrases & spellings. All should appear with AmE spellings unless it requires a different pronunciation, such as aluminium.

Typical **SPELLING** examples

aluminium **should be** aluminum (whichever pronunciation is called for)

honour = honor

jewelery = jewelry

specialise = specialize

speciality = specialty

defence = defense

programme = program

sulphur **should be** sulfur

cheque **should be** check

judgement **should be** judgment

cancelled **should be** canceled

traveller **should be** traveler

manoeuvre **should be** maneuver

catalogue **should be** catalog

litre **should be** liter

adviser **should be** advisor

Typical **WORD CHOICE** issues:

When writing for an American audience (Hollywood readers), use AmE in narrative to avoid image mixups, & use AmE words/phrases for American character dialogue:

different to **should be** different from (true in AmE & BrE, but commonly spoken in BrE)

queue **should be** stand in line (*not* stand on line unless specifically on East Coast)

buggy **should be** cart or shopping cart (buggy = baby carriage in AmE)

homely **should be** homey (homely = ugly in AmE)

jelly **should be** Jell-O (jelly = jam/preserves in AmE)

fag **should be** cigarette (fag = sexuality slur in AmE)

football **should be** soccer (football = American rugby-style football in AmE)

beaver **should be** beard (beaver = vulgar slang in AmE)

A&E **should be** ER (A&E = Arts & Entertainment TV network in AmE)

boob **should be** mistake (boob = female anatomy in AmE)

jumper **should be** sweater (jumper = pullover dress for girls in AmE)

punch-up should be fistfight (punch-up = quick fix in AmE)
 rubber should be eraser (rubber = galosh or prophylactic in AmE)
 Hoover should be vacuum (Hoover = dam in Nevada / former US president)
 semi should be duplex (semi = 18-wheel truck in AmE)
 pants should be underwear (pants = trousers in AmE)
 pavement should be sidewalk (pavement = road surface in AmE)
 ta should be thanks (ta = bye in AmE)
 mate should be friend (mate = sexual partner in AmE)
 surgery should be doctor's office (surgery = operating on a person in AmE)
 stand for should be run for (office) (stand for = represent in AmE)
 row should be argument (hard for AmE reader to figure out but easily understood when spoken)
 chips should be fries (chips = crisps in AmE)
Important for dialogue, but not a big deal in narrative/action:
 advert should be ad
 garden should be yard
 crisps should be chips
 till should be register or checkout
 incased should be encased
 post should be mail
 bin should be trashcan
 windscreen should be windshield
 mobile should be cell
 takeaway should be takeout
 water closet should be bathroom
 wellies should be waders or galoshes

VICE VERSA AmE > BrE issues:

When writing for a British character's dialogue, use BrE words & phrases.

AVOID mixups such as:

poof = BrE derogatory / AmE magical

fanny = BrE derogatory / AmE buttox

use compounds in modern AmE:

alongside
 wherever
 nowhere
 nothing
 everything
 someone
 yourself
 outside
 something
etc.

Metric vs. US standard measurements - use non-metric for AmE readers/audiences. Americans know centimeters & millimeters, & that's about it. For BrE readers/audiences, metric is fine. AmE does NOT include liters, kilometers, kilograms, meters, Celsius, hectare, etc. AmE DOES include inches, feet, yards, pounds, ounces, miles, Fahrenheit, acre, etc.

Mr vs. Mr.

In AmE there is always punctuation for abbreviated titles:

sample: Mr. Johnson visited Dr. Smith at Lt. Harper's house on St. Simon's Island.

Note: It's ok to leave out punctuation in character slugs (just be consistent)

Comparative modifiers in BrE or AmE – When proper English is called on for narrative &/or a proper-speaking character, the correct modifiers are:

different *from*

similar *to*

compared *with*

[adverb] *than* (more than, worse than, etc.)

[adjective-er] *than* (better than, lesser than, etc.)

Some ESL issues to watch for

When English is your second language (ESL), it's important to be aware of some of the common things that may come up in your writing, including cultural references, grammar, etc.

If submitting your work for evaluation to anyone outside of your country or native language, it is good practice to make them aware of your country/language of origin ahead of time to avoid any possible confusion.

Clearly describe characters' ethnic origin (if not American).

Describe your characters' ethnicity. Never assume a reader will know a character's accent (or gender) based on an ethnic name. Since ESL writers tend to write with an accent for all characters, give the reader clarity upfront whether the character is *supposed* to sound foreign or not.

suggested: Have a native English speaker edit all dialogue for characters who are meant to be native English speakers.

Thesaurus synonyms: while it's good to not overuse words like sits, walks, stands, it's worse to use the wrong or awkward words; use the best, most VISUAL verb or adjective in all instances

Never use brackets [] in the text – 1) it is not normal AmE punctuation; 2) Final Draft uses brackets in its search code, so it may not be searchable.

Parentheses are fine if used sparingly/correctly.

Prepositions – for ESL writers, at/to/on/in can be tricky. The rules are difficult to explain to non-natives, but here are some typical samples of CORRECT uses:

*She sits **at** the table. (never "on")*

*She sits **in** the chair. (rarely "on")*

*She sits **on** the seat. (sometimes "in")*

*She goes **to** the door. (sometimes "towards")*

*She moves **from** the window. (implies "away")*

*She heads **for** the door. (sometimes "towards")*

Extraneous prepositions are redundant:

in between **should be** between

stands up **should be** stands

sits down **should be** sits

on top of **should be** atop

to the side **should be** aside

nods his head **should be** nods

on the top of his head **should be** atop his head

out of the window **should be** out the window

enters into the shop **should be** enters the shop ("in" & "into" are incorrect grammar)

ponders on it **should be** ponders it ("on" is incorrect grammar)

All extraneous words & phrases clutter the page & slow the read:

She picks up her backpack **from the table** and leaves **the room**.

should be

She picks up her backpack and leaves.

Missing prepositions are problematic when they're **required**:

steps out the car **should be** steps out **of** the car **or** steps out **from** the car
 picks the object **should be** picks **up** the object **or** picks the object **up**
 note: *split infinitives* & ending sentences with prepositions are perfectly acceptable styles

NO need for that in most usages. While it's not wrong to use it, it's usually best eliminated:

He didn't believe that she would do it.

should be

He didn't believe she would do it.

multitudes phrasing:

five million (not five millions)

millions of dollars

articles apply in specific uses in AmE:

She's in **the** hospital.

however...

She's in school.

"get" – people don't "get" places. They go, walk, saunter, move. They may get *into* a car or get things.

ESL WORD MIXUPS:**articles are specific:**

the vs. **a/an**

the = specific

a or an = generalized

sample: **A** man we've never met walks into **the** store we're already at.

one vs. **a/an**

one = specific number

a or an = generalized article

sample: **A** man smokes **one** cigarette after another.

across vs. **across from**

When people/things are facing each other with something between them, they are across FROM each other.

sample: At a huge desk across the room, Nancy sits across from the stern-faced banker.

it vs. **that**

sample: What is it? What's wrong? I've got that bad feeling again.

take vs. **make**

sample: She takes a step forward then makes her way through the forest.

“pick” vs. “pick up”

pick = pick at or choose

pick up = lift

She picks a flower. (she pulls it from the ground)

*She picks **up** a flower. (she lifts a loose flower)*

reaches vs. reaches for

sample: When she reaches her destination she reaches for her gun.

“tell” vs. “say”

She tells him to say the right words.

now vs. know

sample: I know she loves me now.

few vs. a few (they are basically opposites)

few = not many

a few = more than 2

sample: A few people applied for the few job openings.

“sit” v. “seat”: The correct verb in nearly every instance should be “sit”:

Joe sits, and Amy takes a seat near their grandmother, who is already seated on the couch.

smiley vs. smiling

smiley = overall personality

smiling = smiles in the moment

sample: The smiley talk-show host addresses the smiling contestants.

passenger vs. passenger side (or passenger’s side)

“passenger” is not a location.

exam vs. examine

exam = noun

examine = verb

sample: They examine the results of the exam.

VIEW VIDEO:

<https://share.descript.com/view/wsZ0rkmNw8A>

TEMPLATE DOWNLOAD:

<https://wowhollywood.com/VOWstyles>