

# NE JE Namibian Journal of Environment

## Style Guide May 2018

**(Adapted from Venture Publications style guide)**

This style guide is designed to help authors with style, punctuation, grammar and clarity. We adhere to South African (Oxford) spelling rules and use the 2002 edition of *Macmillan English Dictionary* for spelling, hyphenation and capitalisation.

**Before submitting your article, read this carefully and correct typing and other obvious errors.**

**Beware of spelling and grammar checks in Word. They can be very helpful, but sometimes misleading or totally incorrect. These must be set to UK or SA English. Sometimes a word is spelt correctly but used in the wrong context. This is generally not picked up by Spell checker. Be especially careful of Autocorrect – it can change the spelling of a scientific name (incorrectly) without you being aware of it. It also insists on giving you a capital letter after a full stop, which is incorrect when writing a species name after a genus abbreviation.**

denotes incorrect usage of English.

denotes correct usage.

### STYLE RULES

Articles must be easy to read, interesting and informative. They must be written in simple language, using terminology that the general reader will understand. If highly technical terminology is unavoidable, this should be explained at first mention. This particularly applies to articles submitted for section B.

Keep your text readable by using the following:

- ◆ Short, simple sentences (Both the author and the reader get lost in very involved sentences). Do not make them too short, or the writing will be jerky.
- ◆ Short, simple words
- ◆ Avoid starting all your sentences with the same word. (Wrong: 'The farm is 80,000 hectares. The farm is 10 km south of Luderitz. The farm has 100,000 camels.' Here you can combine the information into one short sentence: The 80,000-hectare farm, situated 10 km south of Luderitz,

has 100,000 camels).

- ◆ **Using too many words.** Before you submit your article, read over it carefully and delete unnecessary words. Do not use three words when one will do. Do not repeat yourself unnecessarily.

**Use of active or passive voice:** Traditionally, all scientific work was written in the passive voice (e.g. Ten transects were laid out). This is still the case, for instance in the methods. However, to avoid clumsy writing or ambiguity it is acceptable to use I or we (active voice) (E. g. Previous researchers found X, while we found Y).

### CONFUSION BETWEEN AMERICAN AND VARIOUS ENGLISH SPELLINGS

Many Namibians are not aware of the differences and may be more familiar with American spelling through the media. Below is a short list of the approved spellings used by NJE. Some words (but not all) ending in -ise/-ize can be spelt either way in UK English. We opt for -ise for consistency. For a more complete list please visit: <http://www.tysto.com/uk-us-spelling-list.html>.

- tranquillise (not tranquilize)
- metre (not meter, unless you are talking about an instrument for recording or measuring something)
- organise (not organize)
- realise (not realize)
- colour (not color)
- hyaena (not hyena)
- litre (not liter)
- centre (not center)
- analogue (not analog)
- licence (not license)
  
- savannah is the correct spelling, but so many people use savanna that we now accept both – but not in one paper!

### WATCH OUT FOR THESE WORDS AND PHRASES

Certain words and phrases, unless used carefully and correctly, can give distorted images. Many of the words below are used incorrectly by Namibian writers.

**Research:** is not a thing, it is a process. It can be a verb or a noun, but never plural. You cannot have “researches”. You also cannot do “A research” – you can only do research or you can do “A research project”.

**Significant and plus-or-minus ( $\pm$ ):** have a very precise, statistical meaning. Do NOT use these unless you have performed the correct statistical test for significance.

**As well as:** Often, 'and' will suffice. 'As well as' is unwieldy and is only useful in certain cases, such as for emphasis.

Kalahari Gourmet makes spreads, pâtés as well as terrines.

Kalahari Gourmet makes spreads, pâtés and terrines.

Jannie wanted to buy sweets as well as chocolates. (Note the difference in emphasis between this sentence and 'Jannie wanted to buy sweets and chocolates.')

'As well as' often means something similar to 'equally' or 'in the same way as':

You must cater for businessmen as well as holidaymakers.

**Both:** Both refers to two only.

Both the three trials failed.

All three trials failed.

This word is often used when it doesn't need to be used at all. Often when it is used, it gives the wrong impression.

Both readers and subscribers can qualify for this special offer.

This means there are only two readers and the rest are subscribers. A better way of putting this would be:

Readers and subscribers alike can qualify for this special offer.

**Current:** This word is often redundant as it refers to the present time, and thus does not have to be emphasised.

The current trend is to wear Panama hats to work.

The trend is to wear Panama hats to work.

**Among others** when the 'others' are people but **among other** things/ aspects/ circumstances.

**One:** As a pronoun, this word tends to become clumsy, and often demands the subjunctive. Use 'you' instead.

If one went down to the woods tonight, one would be sure of a big surprise.

If you go down to the woods tonight, you're sure of a big surprise.

**Only:** This word should immediately precede the word it is qualifying.

This gate only opens for pedestrians.

This means the gate only opens (and does not close) for pedestrians.

This gate opens for pedestrians only, or

This gate opens only for pedestrians.

**That:** Usually, by leaving this word out, you can improve the flow of the sentence and not lose meaning:

He said that he did not know that it was going to rain.

He said he did not know it was going to rain.

**That and which:** 'That' is used with a defining clause or phrase. 'Which' is used for a non-defining phrase or clause (merely gives additional information). It is always preceded by a comma.

This is the house which Jack built

This is the house that Jack built (defines which house we are talking about)

This is the house that Jack built, which cost him N\$500,000 and has a red roof.

**Respectively:** Means sequentially or in the same order.

He farms with springbok and eland respectively (respective of what?)

He farms with springbok and eland, of which he has 2,000 and 500 respectively.

### **Overused words and phrases**

[Ranging] from... to...

It's worth it

Very

Dynamic

Proactive

### **Replaceable words and phrases**

Ask yourself: does this word have a shorter, simpler synonym? Examples of words that can almost always be replaced by simpler ones:

Utilise - use

As well as – and

A number of - several

### **Collective nouns, plural nouns**

GAME – is a collective noun for wild (often huntable) animals. You cannot get 'a game' or 'games'. The word is always singular --- Game is ..... OR Game animals are.....

CATTLE – are always plural, therefore you cannot say 'a cattle' or 'cattles'. If you are referring to one animal, you have to say 'a cow' or 'a bull'. You can have 20 cattle. NOT 20 cattles.

DATA – are plural. The singular is datum. Americans are unaware of this and refer to data as singular.

## **TENSES**

All results found during a study are past tense, even if the phenomenon being described still continues today. Other people's work can be cited in present or past tense, depending on the context. Methods employed by the researcher are also past tense.

## **AGREEMENT OF SUBJECT AND VERB**

If the subject of the sentence is singular the verb takes the singular form, e.g. The elephant runs.

If the subject is plural, the verb takes the plural form, e.g. The elephants run.

Often, but not always, the singular form has an 's' while the plural does not. In past tense the verb is

usually the same for both. The elephant ran, the elephants ran.

Make sure that you know what the subject of the sentence is.

A total of 235 elephants were observed. **A total** is the subject of your sentence, not 235.

A total of 235 elephants was observed.

To get around this particular problem, rather say “In total, 235 elephants were seen”. ‘235 elephants’ is now the subject of the sentence. If you only had five elephants you could have said “Five elephants ran” and avoided the problem. However, you may not start a sentence with a number. See below.

235 elephants ran.

## SINGULAR VS PLURAL

Generally, when referring to an organisation or body, use singular verbs:

Venture Publications takes its employees on frequent weekend excursions.

Venture Publications take their employees on frequent weekend excursions.

**Collective nouns** (flock of birds, etc) also take singular verbs.

But: A number of people *are* going ice-skating.

Wherever possible, avoid plural pronouns and verbs in an effort to be non-gender specific. The use of 'his/her' is more politically correct but it is also awkward to read. An alternative is to pick one gender at random. Try to avoid having to make this choice either by using all plural or, where possible, by removing pronouns and sticking with a singular verb.

If a person is too cold, they may remove their jersey.

If a person is too cold, he/she may remove his/her jersey.

If a person is too cold, he may remove his jersey.

Those who are too cold may remove their jerseys.

**Each:** always singular:

Each of the hotel rooms are fitted with built-in cupboards.

Each of the hotel rooms is fitted with a built-in cupboard.

**None:** When none is the subject of a sentence and refers to a group of people or things, it can be used with a singular or plural verb, depending on its meaning.

None of his friends lives nearby. (None = Not one)

None of the plates were broken. (None = not any)

## NUMBERS

One to ten must be written in full, unless followed by a unit e.g. 5 mm or 8 km. Always leave a gap between a number and the units – **not 5mm**. **Never** start a sentence with a number in figures – it must always be in words e.g. Two hundred and thirty-two gemsbok died in the drought, **NOT** 232 gemsbok.....

## QUOTATION MARKS

Use double quotation marks for direct speech or a direct quotation, single ones in other instances.

## CAPITALISATION

Use lower-case wherever possible, as this makes for easier reading. If it is the official name of an institution, document or whatever, then capitalise. Thus, you would write Medi-Clinic Private Hospital, Kalahari Sands Hotel, the Gender Equality Bill.

It is incorrect to capitalise a word simply because you feel it is important:

Here at Springer we make Liqueur, Marzipan and Praline Chocolates.

Here at Springer we make liqueur, marzipan and praline chocolates.

**Currencies:** lower case: rand, Namibia dollar, pound; but N\$20.

e-commerce (but, as with any word, the first letter is capitalised if at the beginning of a sentence); e-mail

**Geographical names:** upper case if part of title of political or provincial area – South Africa, North America, Western Cape – but lower case when part of a general region – southern Namibia, northern Spain, southern Africa, and in the North (in the sense of Owamboland).

Also, Middle East, Far East (upper case), but southern hemisphere.

**Headlines:** All headings and subheads should appear in sentence case:

The Advantages of Air Travel

The advantages of air travel

**Honorifics:** One would cap Mr, Dr, Professor and the Rev John Kamati, as these are titles. One would do the same with Foreign Affairs Minister Hausiku and Minister of Justice Dr Kawana. All the rest should be lower case. Thus, general manager Pilisa Hango, managing director Jayne Mbumba and chief executive officer – or CEO – Siseho Simasiku. As a general guideline, capitalise when you would address the person with the title, thus President Nujoma and Minister Kawana, but not chief executive officer Simasiku. You would address him as Mr Simasiku.

**Streets and rivers:** Lüderitz Street; Independence Avenue; but Long and Short streets; Kunene River and Orange River, but the Kunene and Orange rivers.

## ABBREVIATIONS

A general rule in the decision of whether to use an abbreviation is: **write it as you would say it in everyday speech**. In tables and lists (where full sentences are not used) space constraints make it permissible to use abbreviations.

(in body copy) Use two kilograms of potatoes for this Irish mixed grill.

(in the list of ingredients in a recipe) 2 kg potatoes.

**When to abbreviate:** Abbreviations used in everyday speech are fine. These include TV, don't, won't, and so on.

GDP: (upper case) gross domestic product (lower case) - not all sets of initials stand for proper nouns. Measurements are simpler to read if they are abbreviated than if they are written out in full:

- They travelled 200 km to reach the next town.
- The swordfish weighed 220 kg.
- Police confiscated 12 g of cocaine.
- He was trapped travelling at 186 km/h.

Dr, Ms, Mr, but Prof. (if abbreviation ends in same letter as word, then no stop)

**When not to abbreviate:** Following is a list of abbreviations you should avoid using in body copy, along with suggested alternatives. (Please note that we drop the full stops in abbreviations.)

- eg –  for example; for instance
- et al –  and others
- etc –  and so on; and so forth
- ie –  that is
- OK –  okay
- 14-15 people –  between 14 and 15 people; 14 to 15 people
- & is permissible only if it is part of the name of a company, and should not substitute 'and' in normal writing.
- Woermann & Brock
- The restaurant is open day & night.

**Initials and acronyms:** Use the full version for the first mention, with the acronym in brackets; thereafter use only the acronym. (Please note that we drop the full stops.)

- University of Namibia (UNAM)
  - Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF)
- Write acronyms in upper case throughout – CCF – unless the organisation or entity involved prefers only the first letter to be capitalised or it is commonly done this way – Swapo
- There is no apostrophe in the plural form of an abbreviation or acronym
- CEOs
  - CEO's (this is the possessive form, not a plural)

## PUNCTUATION

**Apostrophes:** To create the possessive in the plural, just use an apostrophe, without an 's': the sisters' cat, the Smiths' dog. For a singular noun, even one ending in 's', create the possessive by adding an apostrophe followed by an 's': Jones's cat, the boss's dog. An exception to this rule is in the case of ancient names: Jesus', Moses', Isis'.

**Brackets:** Use rounded ones ( ) except within brackets and within quotes where you use [ ].

“They [the staff] objected to the new software.”

**Colons and semicolons:** Lower case after a colon, unless the phrase before the colon is functioning as a heading:

I know exactly why he's angry: somebody stole his stapler.

Locally brewed beer: Namibia's best-known beer is Windhoek Premium Lager.

Use colons before a list or an explanation, or a quote that is a full sentence.

Use a semicolon as a weak version of a full stop. Note that a semicolon cannot be used as a colon, preceding a list.

She had three reasons for leaving: it was getting hot, she was bored and she was hungry.

She had three reasons for leaving; it was getting hot, she was bored and she was hungry.

She had her reasons for leaving; without a word she tiptoed out of the room.

But if a full stop will do, use one in preference to a semicolon:

She had her reasons for leaving. Without a word she tiptoed out of the room.

A semicolon can also be used to separate lengthy list items, providing more clarity than commas:

She had three reasons for leaving: it was getting so hot that her feet were sliding about in her shoes; she was bored beyond words; and she felt if she did not find something to eat soon, she might expire.

**Commas** can be used to parenthesise a phrase or to simplify the meaning of a sentence. Do not sprinkle them liberally over your text.

Sally while looking for her cigarettes happened upon a pot of gold in the kitchen cupboard.

Sally, while looking for her cigarettes, happened upon a pot of gold in the kitchen cupboard.

Reggie saw Sally admiring the gold which she had already claimed as her own. .

Reggie saw Sally admiring the gold, which she had already claimed as her own.

**Dashes:** avoid the use dashes in formal writing. Rather use commas or brackets.

**Full stops:** Use freely. Short sentences are good. Always use a single space after a full stop, not two or three (two and more spaces cause little white snakes through printed copy).

Do not use full stops between or after initials in surnames or abbreviations:

EM Forster

Raymond E Feist

CEO

ANC

**Quotation marks:** Double quotation marks are used when quoting direct speech, single ones to denote a 'so-called' context and within single quotation marks:

The 'fossil' plant of the Namib, *Welwitschia mirabilis*, has been described by botanists as the platypus of the plant kingdom and one of the most baffling plants ever discovered.

“Tania's upset,” said Ute. “She says, ‘Jeanine can't even spell welwitschia’.”

Quotation marks should not be used unnecessarily to enclose proper nouns or concepts. Book, paper and film titles are written in italics, not quotation marks.

**Hyphenation:** Hyphenate all **compound nouns** – a compound noun is made up of a noun and a verb.

- Bird-watching is fun.
- Wine-lovers are not all drunkards.

Hyphenate all preceding **compound adjectives** (two-worded adjectives that come before a noun):

- The working-class revolutionaries had had enough of being exploited.
- The long-term plan was to take over the world.

Please note that some terms might seem like compound adjectives when they actually are not:

- Members of the middle-class felt threatened.
- Members of the middle class felt threatened.
- In the long-term, Piet Pompies hopes for world-domination.
- In the long term, Piet Pompies hopes for world domination.
- The full-time staff were ordered to stop working full time.
- The 25-metre tree is 25 metres tall.

Numbers can also be compound adjectives:

- Four-thousand unhappy labourers stormed the office.
- Thirty-billion people voted for a three-day weekend.

As can an era:

- The 20<sup>th</sup>-century technology was not sophisticated enough for the fussy PC users of the 21st century.

If the first word is an **adverb**, the preceding phrase is not a compound adjective:

- Jeanine served us freshly-baked cakes.
- Jeanine served us freshly baked cakes.

But if the adverb is short and common (and does not end in 'y') it can take a hyphen if this improves clarity:

- Well-known TV star Piet Pompies has left the country.

Other such adjectives include: little; much

## NUMBERS

Use words for numbers up to ten (e.g. one, three) and where a number starts a sentence (Forty years ago...) but figures from 11 upwards.

- ◆ 300; 3,000; 30,000; 300,000, but three million or  $3 \times 10^6$
- ◆ Spell out approximate numbers such as a hundred, a thousand, a dozen
- ◆ Two-thirds, three-quarters, but a quarter
- ◆ 1998/99; 2000/02; 1960s
- ◆ 12 December 1924
- ◆ 9:00, 16:30 (not 9 am, 4.30 pm or 9h00, 16h00)
- ◆ N\$350, N\$3.50, 50 cents, US\$500
- ◆ 2% or 95% unless at beginning of sentence, in which case: Ninety-five per cent.
- ◆ 64 years old; but a 64-year-old man

## DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLE (the and a/an)

'The' is more specific (definite). It refers to a particular thing e.g. The house that Jack built (not just any house). The tree on the corner (a specific tree on a specific corner).

'A' ('an' before a vowel) is more general. E.g. A house that Jack built (could be one of many). A tree on a corner (any tree on any corner).

## CONVENTIONS

### Bulleted and numbered lists

If the items are full sentences, then punctuate fully:

- 1 Sally is an Aquarius.
- 2 Jeanine is a Cancer.
- 3 Tania is an Aries.

If the items are not full sentences but would form part of a sentence if the bullets were to be removed, then punctuate as follows (note lower case):

The editor's job is to:

- beg people to meet their deadlines;
- surf the Internet;
- make tea for the receptionist; and
- buy lollipops for everyone.

If the entries are short, numerous and not appropriate for sentence form, do it like this:

Essentials to have in your handbag

- Sweets
- Lip balm
- Money
- A deck of cards
- Sunglasses

## COMMON ERRORS MADE BY NAMIBIAN AUTHORS

- ◆ **Springbok, gemsbok and steenbok**, not springbuck, gemsbuck and steenbuck. (It is not wrong to use oryx, but gemsbok is more specific. There are several oryx species and subspecies in Africa but only one gemsbok.)
- ◆ **1900s** and **NGOs** without apostrophe.
- ◆ **It's and its**: It's is the short form of it is: It's my book. 'Its' is the possessive form of it: The chair fell on its side.
- ◆ **A company such as Skeleton Coast Fly-In Safaris is a single entity**, and takes a **singular verb**, for instance: Skeleton Coast Fly-In Safaris takes tourists to Kaokoland.
- ◆ **Owambo**, not Ovambo.

- ◆ **When starting a sentence or paragraph in the first person, stick to the first person throughout.**  
The same applies to second and third person.
- ◆ **Okavango River, not Kavango River; Kavango Region and Kavango people.**
- ◆ **Avoid using clichés, catch phrases and jargon as far as possible** (e.g. first and foremost, last but not least, let's unpack the causes) - rather use simple terminology that is to the point (firstly, lastly, let's investigate the causes).
- ◆ **Overuse of the dash.** Check under PUNCTUATION on for when to use dashes.
- ◆ **Leave** (to go) **and leaf** (green appendages on trees)
- ◆ **Their** (possessive pronoun) and **there** (indicating direction)
- ◆ **Where** (direction or position) and **were** (past tense of are)
- ◆ **Incorrect use of present continuous tense instead of simple present:**
  - I am living in Windhoek.
  - I live in Windhoek.