

St. James Day School



*Writing and Style
Manual*

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Preface

The St. James curriculum emphasizes the importance of writing with correct grammar and punctuation in each grade. Without the ability to communicate effectively in both writing and speech, a person's unique ideas and keen intelligence can be lost or hidden forever. For that reason, the teaching of writing skills, correct grammar, and presentation styles are stressed at each grade level from one through six.

Modern English textbooks, casual email writing, and academic fads have sometimes slurred our once infallible rules of good writing and acceptable English. We want to impress on our students the fact that there is never a substitute or shortcut for writing well. That is the purpose of this manual: to ensure that our students are taught consistently, in each grade, the preferred rules of grammar, punctuation, and style accepted by academic authorities.

Resources used in the compilation of this manual are:

The Elements of Style (Strunk and White)
MLA Style Guide
APA Style Manual
On Writing Well (William Zinsser)
Guide to Grammar and Style (Jack Lynch)
Grammar Resources on the Web (University of Chicago Writing Program)
Guide to Grammar and Writing (Charles Darling)
Purdue University's On-line Writing Lab
Walsh's Revised *Plain English Handbook*

Where resources offer more than one choice for specific grammatical or punctuation standards, St. James will teach the more traditional form.

Technology is a relevant part of all aspects of our curriculum, including writing. In his book, *On Writing Well*, William Zinsser states,

For children, in fact, the word processor strikes me as an ideal tool for learning to write. Children are natural writers—their heads are full of images and wonder and wordplay. Their motor skills, however, are too slow to get all the wonderful words onto paper, and the words that they do get on paper look childish and clumsy; children, no less than adults, deserve the dignity of having their writing look decent. Pleasure turns to frustration and is often lost forever. This wouldn't happen if children could tap out their words on a keyboard and see them on a screen, and move the words around, and substitute one word for another, and then have a machine print their composition neatly. That's the joy of writing, as every poet knows—to make words dance for us in all their possible patterns.

Regarding style, St. James will teach the accepted form for handwritten documents as well as the preferred format for word processed reports and journalistic documents. Students will be taught to discern differences in writing assignments and make appropriate choices in preparing final papers.

Additional information will be added to this manual as needed.

PUNCTUATION and GRAMMAR

Apostrophe

To show possession

- After a plural noun ending in *s*, put just an apostrophe
example: **two hours' work**
- If a plural does not end in *s* — *children, men, people* — use plain old apostrophe-s
examples: **children's, men's, people's**. (never mens' or childrens')
- When a singular noun ends in *s*, most style guides prefer **s's**
example: **James's house**.
(Plain old s-apostrophe (as in *James' house*) is common in journalism, but most other publishers prefer *James's*.)
- Possessives of pronouns *never* get apostrophes:
examples: **theirs**, not *their's*; **hers**, not *her's*; **its**, not *it's*.
- To refer to a decade, don't use an apostrophe before the *s*.
examples: the **1960s** or the **'60s**

Capitalization

- Capitalize:
 - *The **first word of a sentence**
 - *The **first word in every line of poetry**
example: *"Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."*
 - *The **major words in the title of a work**
 - ***Proper nouns** (names), including most adjectives derived from proper nouns
examples: *Spanish* from *Spain*, *Freudian* from *Freud*
 - ***Personal titles** when they come before a name
examples: Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones, Dr. X, Captain Hook,
Reverend Gary Davis,
 - *All letters in an abbreviation (N.A.S.A., M.R.I.)
 - *Important historical events and documents
examples: Battle of Hastings; Declaration of Independence
 - *A title used as a proper noun when it refers to a particular person
examples: The President of the United States spoke today.
Ann went with Mother and me to the fair.
 - *Words such as Bible and the books of the Bible

Commas

Serial commas:

- the comma *is* preferred before the last item in a list
examples:
red, white, and blue
honest, energetic, but headstrong
He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.
the first, second, and third chapters.

Leaving it out — the first, second and third chapters —
is a habit picked up from journalism.

Dates:

- between the day and the year
example: **November 20, 1990**

A few places commas should be avoided:

- Do not use commas after the conjunctions *and*, *but*, and *or*, unless the comma sets off a phrase which can't stand alone as a sentence.

example of when *not* to use a comma: But, she did get it done on time.

example of when *to* use the comma: But, *to be fair*, she did get it done on time.

- Do not use a comma between a month and year in a date
example: not *November, 1990*, but *November 1990*.

Numbers

Traditionally:

- Spell out numbers less than one hundred (some say ten)
- Write numbers above 100 as numerals
- **Never begin a sentence with a numeral:** either spell out the number, or rewrite the sentence to move the number from the beginning.
- Very large round numbers should be spelled out: not *1,000,000,000*, but *one billion*
- In a series of numbers, either spell them out or use numerals for *every* member of the list: don't switch in the middle, as in "pages thirty-two, ninety-six, 107, and 235."
- Dates should always get numerals: October 3, 1990; the exception can be dates on formal invitations
- The only time you should mix spelling and numerals is in very large numbers: not *8,600,000*, but *8.6 million*.

Other examples:

over two pounds
six million dollars
after thirty-one years
eighty-three people
after 126 days
only \$31.50
6,381 bushels
4.78 liters

Time of Day

8:00 A.M. (or) a.m. (or) eight o'clock in the morning
 4:30 P.M. (or) p.m. (or) half-past four in the afternoon

Addresses

16 Tenth Street
 350 West 114 Street

Identification Numbers

Room 8
 Channel 18
 Interstate 65
 Henry VIII

Page and Division of Books and Plays

page 30
 chapter 6
 in act 3, scene 2

Large Round Numbers

four billion dollars (or) \$4 billion
 16,500,000 (or) 16.5 million

Numbers in series and statistics should be consistent.

two apples, six oranges, and three bananas
 NOT: two apples, 6 oranges, and 3 bananas
 115 feet by 90 feet (or) 115' x 90'
 scores of 25-6 (or) scores of 25 to 6
 The vote was 9 in favor and 5 opposed

Explanation Marks - more than one is too many**Quotation Marks**

- Commas and periods go *inside* quotation marks—**always**,
example:
 See the chapter entitled *The Conclusion, in which Nothing is Concluded.*"
 (Periods **always** go inside.)

 The spokesman called it "shocking," and called immediately for a committee.
 (Commas **always** go inside.)
- Semicolons and colons go *outside*, regardless of the punctuation in the original quotation.
- Question marks and exclamation points *depend on whether the question or exclamation is part of the quotation, or part of the sentence containing the quotation.*
example: Have you read "Araby"?
 (The question mark is part of the outer sentence, not the quoted part, so it goes outside.)

example: He asked, "How are you?"
 (The question mark is part of the quoted material, so it goes inside.)
- Quotations *inside* quotations are the *only* place for single quotation marks — **don't use them to highlight individual words.**

Titles

***Note that italics and underscores are the same thing** — typewriters used underscores when italics weren't available.

***Use underscores when writing by hand;**

***Use italics when writing with a computer.**

The rules below assume the writer is using a computer

- The titles of books and other long works (plays, long poems, operas, &c.) are **italicized**
- All the major words in an English title are **capitalized** — *major* meaning the first word, the last word, and everything in between except articles, conjunctions, and prepositions
examples: *A Tale of Two Cities*
 I Have a Dream
 The *Iliad*; the *Odyssey*; *As You Like It*; *To a Skylark*; *The Newcomes*;
- A title can end in a question mark or exclamation mark, but **it cannot end in a period.**
- **Italicize** the titles of things that can stand by themselves: novels, poems, and short stories
- Titles of newspapers do not italicize the word *the*, even when it is part of the title (the *New York Times*)
- **Other titles that should be italicized include the following:**
 - *Journals and Magazines: *Time*, *U.S. News and World Report*
 - *Plays: *Waiting for Godot*, *Long Day's Journey Into Night*
 - *Long Musical Pieces: Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*,
Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite* (but "Waltz of the Flowers"),
Schubert's *Winterreise* (but "Ave Maria").
 - *Cinema: *Freaky Friday*, *Seabiscuit*, *Harry Potter*
 - *Television and Radio Programs: *Dateline*, *Scooby Doo*, *Car Talk*
 - *Artworks: the *Venus de Milo*, Whistler's *The Artist's Mother*
 - *Famous Speeches: Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*,
Washington's Second Inaugural Address
(when that is the actual title of the speech)
 - *Long Poems: Longfellow's *Evangeline*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*,
Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*
 - *Pamphlets: *New Developments in AIDS Research*
- When an exclamation mark or question mark is part of a title, make sure that mark is italicized along with the title,
examples: My favorite book is *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*
 I love Dr. Suess's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*
- If the end mark is not part of the title, but is added to indicate a question or exclamation, do not italicize that mark.
example: Did you enjoy Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain?*
- **Do not** italicize the titles of long sacred works such as the Bible or the Koran.
- **Do not** italicize the titles of books of the Bible: Genesis, Revelation, 1 Corinthians.

Bylines

bylines (used to show ownership of writing content) do NOT use a colon.

RIGHT: by Mary Smith

WRONG: by: Mary Smith

Writing with a Computer

Publishers and professors don't want fancy fonts; Don't count on having readers who judge your work based on the typeface. Spend your time writing. And please don't insult your professors' intelligence with gigantic typefaces, narrow margins, and wide line-spacing to make short papers seem longer; despite all appearances to the contrary, we're really not that dumb.

Purdue Writing Manual
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

St. James' standards for regular writing assignments, book reports, and research papers

Line Spacing

*Double-space (or space 1.5) all typing in all documents.

Fonts & Font Size

*A serif typing font should be used, something like Times, Times Roman, or Times New Roman in a 12-point font size. *Don't use anything fancy and avoid the non-serif fonts (except for headlines, if you have any), as they can become difficult to read after a while; cursive scripts are forbidden. Never mix font styles.*

Margins

*Use one-inch margins (or a bit more, never less), all the way around the edge of your text. **Do not use justified margins.** Justified margins tend to create some word-divisions and spacing that are not appropriate. (Margins may be justified for journalistic writing)

Spacing

*Use only one space after a period, question mark, semicolon, colon, etc. Word-processors will allow for the appropriate spacing.

Form

There are two acceptable forms for paragraph writing with a computer

- **BLOCK FORM** - in block form, everything is left-justified (or in some journalistic writing, all-justified) and there are NO indents for paragraphs. Instead of indenting, **skip a line between paragraphs**
 - **INDENTED FORM** - this is the preferred form for handwritten documents, but is also acceptable in computer prepared papers. There are NO skipped lines between paragraphs, and each new paragraph is indented 5 spaces (one TAB)
- ***For computer-generated documents BOTH forms are taught in each grade.**

WORD USAGE

Alright and All right

- There is no such word as alright.

Alot

- There is no such word as alot. A lot is ALWAYS two words.

It's versus Its

- There's no shortcut; all you can do is memorize the rule.
- * ***It's* with an apostrophe means *it is***
- * ***its* without an apostrophe means *belonging to it*.**
- What about *its'*, with the apostrophe after the *s*? — **Never, never, never.**
Wrong, wrong, wrong.

First, Second, Third

- Traditional usage had *first, secondly, thirdly*, but this is too inconsistent for modern taste. Most guides prefer just plain old *first, second, third*, and so forth, without the *-ly* ending.

Every Day versus Everyday

- *everyday* (one word) is an adjective, and means “normal, quotidian, occurring every day, not out of the ordinary.”
- Other senses should be two words.
example: An everyday event happens every day.

Letter Writing

Business Letters

Preferred form:

- single-spaced
- full-block form (EVERYTHING left justified)

Type:

Name of sender
 Sender's address
Date

Skip two lines

Type:

Name of person or organization to whom the letter is written
 Address
City, State, Zip

Skip two lines

Type:

Salutation (greeting) followed by a colon

Skip two lines

Type:

the BODY of the letter (no indents; skip a line between paragraphs)

Skip two lines

Type:

Closing followed by a comma

Skip 4 lines

Type:

Your name

Use a pen to write your name in the four blank spaces after the closing

Friendly Letters

On the right hand side of the paper, type or write:

Your address
Date

Skip a line

type or write:

Salutation followed by a comma

Skip a line

Type or write:

the BODY of the letter, with indented paragraphs and no skipped lines

Skip a line

Type or write:

Closing followed by a comma

Your name (first, first & last, or nickname - depending on relationship)