UNIT 3 STYLE MANUALS AND HOUSE STYLE

Structure

3.0 AIMS

In this unit we shall be talking about Style Manuals and House Style. As a publishing professional, be it as editor, publisher or author, you would need to be aware of the conventions of the publishing house with which you are associated. These conventions include rules about sizes and shapes and paper, spellings and capitalizations and grammar and so on. They also include knowledge about consistency and copyright and readability. These rules are usually available in house manuals that lay out rules about house style. It is not necessary that each publishing house has its own style manual—sometimes time–tested ones developed by other publishing houses can be used very comfortably as well.

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

- describe what is house style;
- discuss different types of styles;
- delineate the objectives and functions of a style manual;
- illustrate the use of a style manual by an editor, or copy editor; and
- describe what is meant by style.

After you have gone through this unit, you will also be able to distinguish between a style manual and house style, be able to distinguish important points that need to be addressed while editing texts and be able to explain the finer points of the two.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

You would already be aware that the content and the language of a manuscript need to be worked on, even after the author has submitted his work and these can be done in several rounds until consistency, readability and clarity are achieved. The copy editor works on several of these aspects and keeps several factors in mind while editing a manuscript in order to improve, or at least correct, the 'copy'. The pitfalls he encounters there and the tips to overcome them through the tools available will be discussed in passing as well.

However, any editor can not possess all the knowledge and information at his finger tips and would have to consult some sources to check on the material he is editing. This would be most relevant in the case of facts and expressions. For instance, there could be thousands of words out of which some words might be used in a piece of writing that

he is editing. Those few out of thousands of words may or may not be familiar to him. He may have doubts about the meaning, usage and spellings of those words and to clear his doubts he may have to look into some books such as a dictionary and retain or change the words as required. Or he may have doubts about the factual position and may have to check on them. For that he may have to go to a yearbook or even a textbook on that subject to see if the facts mentioned in the writing before him are correct. He may have to deal with a variety of subjects as part of his editing job. He possibly could not know all about those subjects and would need external help while going through the copy. His task, after all, is that of a checkpoint.

Now, we come to another important aspect of writing, that is, the style. It may differ from place to place, organization to organization and even person-to-person. There may be need for uniformity. What it is all about and how that uniformity is brought about will also be discussed in this unit.

To sort out questions of style, most publishing houses and organizations bringing out any publication have **style manuals** for copy editors. These manuals include general instructions in the matter of content and manner of presentation as would be applicable to copy editors anywhere in the world. These manuals also contain the details of and specific requirements of that particular organization.

There are universally accepted rules of copy editing with slight variations in different regions — like different requirements in the U.K. and the U.S.A. For instance, spellings will vary in these two countries. India has been following the British style from the colonial days though there are minor changes coming in the present times. When it comes to electronic typesetting, the dictionaries available on computers/word processors follow either the British or American style.

Manuals are very comprehensive and detailed, sometimes running into hundreds of pages and comprising books in themselves, and offer step-by-step guidance to the copy editor. They are prepared to last a long time but can be updated whenever changes in, information or writing styles take place.

House style is specific to an organization or a publishing house and is part of the comprehensive style manual prepared by it. The specific tips and requirements are incorporated in the general guidelines so that two different sets of instructions do not create confusion. The general instructions will include for instance, rules of grammar of a particular language, while specific instructions which we describe as house style will include things like addressing a person as Mr. or Shri, having smaller or larger paragraphs, etc.

Within these guidelines also, the copy editor has the power to exercise his discretion while processing the copy as to how much editing he should go in for, whether the author is to be consulted on some points, if any permissions such as the copyright are needed, if any illustrations or art work is needed, if the legal requirements are fulfilled, and so on. It is a combination of the given guidelines in style manuals and copy editor's own common sense and experience which ultimately decide the final shape of things in the copy and instructions to the typesetter and the printer. In this unit, we will discuss style and style manuals in some detail.

3.2 WHAT IS STYLE?

Before we come to manuals we must know a little about **style** itself. The most important part of the style for a writer or editor is the style of expression or language. Style is, however, a general term which can be applied to many things, from the way a person lives to the latest designs in clothing. **Applied to writing, it can refer to anything**

from the philosophy and personality of the writer to his choice of words and the way he makes sentences. In a general way, one can say that style is way the language is written.

Apart from the philosophy and personality of the writer, his language is an important aspect of style. The language means not only diction and sentence structure but the whole verbal context of a piece of writing. Tone and distance are two important factors in this. Tone is represented by the attitude of the writer which may be desirable or undesirable depending on its harsh, hostile or sympathetic or understanding tone. As for the distance, a piece of writing can suggest aloofness of a writer or his closeness or intimacy with his reader or audience. A scholar preparing a research paper or writing to his son may represent two examples of distance. All these sentiments can be seen in the sentence structure and diction used by the writer.

In fact, the style is a result of all choices a writer makes in working out the implications of his purpose. His choices, which can be seen consistently in his writings, show his view of his real subject, his personality, the kind of materials he uses and the way he structures and expresses his ideas. Thus, the style of any piece of writing is an explanation of the means by which the writer expresses himself. And this is what we describe as the way it is and act as cause and effect. The purpose is the writer's decision about what he is going to do and how he is going to do it. Style is the result of that decision — actual use of various aspects of writing to implement his decision. All the choices we have mentioned above are exercised by the writer's purpose and are revealed only through the latter's choices.

Activity 1

Read reports about a similar event in two different newspapers, say an English Language national daily and a regional language daily. What difference in the style of reporting did your observe?

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit)

3.2.1 Types of Style

There can be as many kinds of style as there are writers: there are no hard and fast rules about it. There can be only generalizations about it. One way of looking at the subject is to divide style into three categories in a very general way—

- formal
- informal and
- colloquial

Formal style will mean, again in a general way, long paragraphs, relatively long sentences which are complex in structure and have no fragments. Its diction will be extensive vocabulary, scholarly words which may be abstract and practice of fine grammatical distinctions. This kind of style has an impersonal tone and hardly refers to the reader. There is a considerable distance between the writer and the reader.

Informal style has moderately long paragraphs and medium length of sentences, mostly standard sentences with occasional fragments. The diction is generally popular, ranging between formal and colloquial, some contradictions and inconspicuous slang. It may also range between personal and impersonal. The writer often identifies with the reader and addresses him directly. It reflects moderate distance between the writer and the reader.

Colloquial style has short paragraphs and sentences with simple structure with frequent use of fragments. The diction is simple, popular and colloquial, clipped, concrete words with some slang. It is very personal, often intimate, the writer seems to be in conversation with the reader and the distance between the two is small.

A copy editor has to have some idea as to how he should identify and understand the style of the writer to edit it accordingly. It is the style of the writer which has to be followed by the editor.

In a general way, however, there are some tips about the style, in case the editor has the authority to decide about it. First, he must have a firm understanding of the purpose of writing. Do not guess what the reader wants but what the writer wants. It is good to be specific, better to use concrete nouns, verbs and modifiers. Figures of speech should be used cautiously. Sentences should be revised to give required emphasis, vagueness and use of too many words should be avoided.

3.3 STYLE MANUALS

The style manuals, that is, sets of instructions on style to be followed by different organizations can be general style books or specific house style books. The general style book is by way of a reminder about well established and universal rules of grammar, spellings of proper nouns likely to be used by its writers. As the copy editor issues instructions to the typesetter and the printer, he will include guidelines for typography, use of illustrations, headlines, page layout, etc, also.

The instructions will vary from organization to organization from general style manuals only on the nature of the publication and its requirements. The rules of grammar, usage, etc. however, will remain common and universal. For instance, the requirements of a newspaper, magazine, book, booklet, pamphlet, brochure, leaflet, poster, house journal will be individual and specific to the nature of the publication. A newspaper is short-lived, a magazine lasts longer and a book is everlasting. The importance of headlines will be greater in newspapers than in books.

Activity 2

Randomly pick out a page in a book and in a newspaper. Did the book have any headlines at all? And the newspaper?

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(Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit)

There may be a greater scope for page layout in a newspaper or a magazine, but very little attention needs to be paid for layout of a page of a book. The same is true of types

used. There is a greater variation in case of newspapers and journals as compared to the type used for a book. Even the usage of language will differ from a newspaper to a magazine, to electronic media, to a book or to a poster. In case of a magazine, newspaper and a public relations publication, colour in different proportions may be relevant but not so in case of most books. All media organizations and publishing houses have these details in their manuals. It is impossible to reproduce them, for these often are virtually full books. We shall, however, attempt to give you an idea by reproducing extracts from some of these.

3.3.1 A Sample Manual

For example, the following is the **list of contents** in an editor's manual prepared by **Healthlinks,** an NGO based in London to guide publication of its newsletter— a house journal — by different NGOs in the world:

- Use of newsletter in supporting self-learning and training
- Qualities a newsletter needs to interest readers
- Stages of producing a newsletter from planning to evaluation
- Roles and responsibilities of editors and designers
- Writing, editing and adapting material for specific audiences
- Principles of designing and layout
- Obtaining, selecting and using good photos and other illustrations
- Planning the content of a newsletter issue, gathering material
- Assessing readers' information needs
- Evaluation of newsletter use and its impact

The head **Writing and Editing** includes:

- Commissioning and writing
- Ways of conveying information
- Tips on editing
- Guidelines for authors
- Editorial house style
- Proof readers' correction marks

3.3.2 Tips on Editing

The sub-head **Tips on Editing** has this to say:

The editor's job is to present information in the most readable way.

Nobody *has* to read a newsletter. The editor's job is to attract readers to each article and encourage them to continue reading by making articles easy to read. This may mean that we have to make a lot of changes to the original articles.

What to change

First of all, read the whole article submitted. Decide and jot down what the main points are. Sometimes authors get so close to a topic that they imagine they are writing to people as intimately involved as themselves. However, readers don't need to know the dimensions of the room they are running their workshops in, or the detailed geography of the country that workshop is being held in.

Is there anything else we need to know?

Don't leave questions unanswered. Ask authors for more information, if necessary. Articles need not be straight reports. There are other ways of presenting information which might bring variety, e.g., questions and answers, interviews, personal stories, letters, etc.

3.3.3 How to Make an Article Attractive

Do draw the reader in with a good beginning. This can be done by:

- introducing why the information is important
- a good quotation
- asking a pertinent question
- summarizing what the information is about

Do write simply in plain English. On medical topics, this may mean simply in plain English. On medical topics this may mean that we act as a translator.

Do write in short, snappy sentences.

Do cut out the "padding". Most writers include extra words that add nothing except to the article's length.

Do break up information into digestible chunks.

Do make it crystal clear what the article is and why it is worth reading. Do this through:

- the running head stating the theme
- the headline
- the introduction, and the
- caption to describe a photo.

Do find out how many words fit on to a page with a decent size picture. Edit the article down to this. To save time, use the spell check function of the word processing package which counts words per page.

Do not expect readers to have to read half the article to find out what the article is about.

Do not use complicated sub-clauses.

Do not start with words from officialdom.

Do not use jargon, unexplained scientific language, or learned to readers who have English as a second language.

Do not assume the reader knows a lot about the subject. A brief introduction always helps.

Do not bombard the reader with information. Readers cannot take in many statistics. Write in a flowing style, as natural as possible.

Do not carry parts of an article onto other pages. It is messy.

3.3.4 Ways of Conveying Information

Under a different head, "Ways of conveying information", the manual explains some of the ways as being:

- bullet points

- fact boxes
- captions
- main points boxes
- captions
- stand firsts
- graphs
- sub-heads
- maps
- editor's notes
- pull-out quotes
- list of contents
- subscription forms
- explanatory panel about newsletter
- headlines
- highlighted definitions

3.3.5 Design and Illustrations

The manual has this in the contents list about design and illustrations (because of the length, details are not being given here):

- What makes a good design
- Newsletter page plan
- Newsletter style sheet
- Marked-up copy of newsletter
- Choosing photos
- Commissioning photos
- Tips on taking photos
- Commissioning illustrations
- Sample contract with illustrations
- Producing illustrations and diagrams
- How to scale photos and illustrations

Some of the points mentioned in the above extracts from the **Style Manual** of the organization may not seem to be strictly part of copy editing but they have been included here to give an idea as to what detail the manual contains instructions. Also, the copy editor often gives instructions to the printer on areas that do not fall under his jurisdiction, strictly speaking.

3.3.6 Style Sheet for one Issue

Here is a reproduction of the style sheet for one issue of a newsletter:

Date July 1996

Page	Point size	Font
Front cover		
Masthead (newsletter title)		Use artwork
Contents		
Feature pages		
Text	9.5/11	Helvetica
Drop cap	3 lines deep	Helvetica bold-condensed to 80%
Text indent	As 'Text'	With 10pt indent
Text with bullet	As 'Text'	With bullet and 10pt indent
A (main) headings	Varies 24-60	Helvetica bold-condensed to 80%
B (sub) headings	12 to 80%	Helvetica bold - condensed
Introduction	14/18	Helvetica italic 6 point space above 11 point space below
Author's name (as part of introduction)	14	Helvetica bold italic
Author's name (at end of article)	9/10	Helvetica bold italic 4 point space below
Editor's note (at end of article)	9.5/10.5	Helvetica italic
Footnotes/references (at end of article)	8.5/9	Helvetica
Folio (page number)	9	Helvetica bold
Footer	7.5	Helvetica
Picture caption	8.5/Auto	Helvetica bold italic
Picture credit	8	Helvetica italic-up left side of picture
Running head	9	Helvetica bold - reversed
Table headings	8	Helvetica bold
Table text	8	Helvetica
Box headings	10	Helvetica bold - reversed-centre
Box text	9/10.5	Helvetica
Back cover		
Panel text	7.5/8.5	Helvetica 4 point space below
Quiz box text	8/9	Helvetica

3.4 HOUSE STYLE

Elsewhere in this programme you will find a unit on "parts of a book" which will be of great help to you when you are checking on the completeness of a manuscript. Remember, no style manual is more instructive than the manual called "Experience". Often, you will find that you need to develop your own checklist of items to watch out for where there may be inconsistencies or eccentric usages.

As we have mentioned earlier, there are general, universal style manuals and manuals for house style which are exclusive to a particular publishing house or a media organization. The house style offers a distinction to that organization and also to its publication. It becomes sort of a trademark in style. Senior editors of such an organization sit and discuss among themselves the various aspects of style to be followed by copy editors of their organization. The instructions are compiled in a book form and circulated among the staff. The book (also called style book/manual) is preserved in the office and serves as continuation aid for new staffers. It can be, and is, revised and updated from time to time. For instance, in case of a newspaper, new names of persons with proper spellings may have to be added in its stylebook from time to time. We will give you an idea here about the likely points to be covered in the house style manual of a book publishing house. For lack of sufficient space, it may not be possible to give details but only points by way of heads are being given:

3.4.1 Degree of Formality

Effective textbook writing is neither very formal nor highly colloquial, but is in the middle between these extremes of style and diction. The quality is reflected in usage, use of first person singular, use of first person plural and preference to active voice over passive voice.

Stereotyping is to be avoided:

Men	-	All men are brave
Pronoun reference	-	Use 'we' rather than '1'
Occupations and roles	-	All women are motherly

As for spellings, instructions can be about use of British or American spelling. In India, it is mostly British spellings which are used. Prefixes are hyphenated in case of solid words though there is no hyphen between a root and its suffix like in case of citywide and twofold. Compound words are hyphenated and so are words used as modifier before a noun. In case of numbers, spelled-out fractions are hyphenated like two-thirds but mixed numbers in numerical form are not hyphenated. The House Style clearly instructs on use of capitalization of letters.

3.4.2 Punctuation

In manuals, there are instructions on use of punctuation marks for:

- Items in a series
- Introductory words, phrases and clauses
- Restrictive and non-restrictive clauses
- Quotation marks
- Periods
- Abbreviations and symbols

Italics can be used for new terms, foreign words, words with emphasis, slang, titles of works, etc.

Instructions are given on the **use of numerals and words** for numbers like in the beginning of a sentence, for plurals, inclusive numbers, dates, ratios, etc.

The use of **abbreviations** is clearly shown in the guidelines like their use in headlines, unit of time, measure, product signs and nomenclature in technical material.

Quoted material usage is explained and so is the use of footnotes, bibliographies.

There are also instructions on bias and parochialisms, cross-references, proper names, designations of persons, and spellings of proper names.

Sometimes, the author is not clear in putting his view exactly as he wants in the absence of proper words and idioms and phrases used by him. If and when changed by the copy editor, the author feels satisfied by the change. There are also mistakes, which occur too often and the writer is not conscious about these. These become more of rules with him than exceptions like the use of singular or plural verbs or use of 'neither' and 'nor' or 'though' and 'yet', use of 'that' or 'which', positioning of descriptive use of 'ditto' or 'do'. In all such cases, the house stylebook has clear guidelines. Then, there could be some special expressions which are used because of the nature of a publication and specific instructions are included in the stylebook for them.

The copy editor has to decide, while processing the copy for the typesetter, as to how much editing he should go in for, if the author is to be consulted on certain points, if the piece of writing or book calls for re-organization, if any permission like copyright is needed, if any illustration or art work is needed. He can then mark the typescript accordingly. He is guided in these matters also by the style manual.

3.5 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have tried to give you an idea as to how a copy editor, the person who looks at the finalized (from the point of view of content and language) text (before it is sent to the printer) is guided by his or her employer or the organization he is working for.

As the human factor is changing most of the time in such organizations and also definite instructions and guidelines are needed, nothing can be left to chance and the guidelines are to be preserved in documentary form in the office and circulated among the editing staff. This document, known as **Style Manual,** is an important aid for the copy editor. He tries to study it thoroughly before he starts his assignment and refers to it from time to time whenever he is in doubt. After he has mastered it, he is fully equipped to send an almost perfect copy to the printer with his clear instructions for executing the publication of the book.

3.6 AIDS TO ANSWERS

Activity 1

The national daily would possible have a birds-eye view and the regional one a worm's eye view. What did you observe?

Activity 2

At the most, the book would have the half title on the top corner or the chapter heading. The newspaper would possibly have several, different sized, headings in each of the 7-8 columns!