Writing with Style: The Use of Style Guides for Publishing

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Style guides are the standards that each individual publisher uses to make their products consistent. Each publisher usually chooses a style, like the MLA, the CMS, or the AP. In our case, Perpetual Light Publishing will use the CMS, the Chicago Manual of Style, 17th edition along with the Catholic News Service Stylebook on Religion, 3rd edition. This is handy for many reasons, the number one reason being that an author, proofreader, or copyeditor can look up the preferred grammar usage and spelling of various terms that we use when writing, and common questions on formatting as well.

When you write for a publication, it is a good idea to request the company style guide. Academic publishers often use the MLA, the Modern Language Association manuals for research and scholarly writing. This is probably the one that you used in high school, if your teachers were having you write bibliographies and cite sources. There is an online version of almost everything now, and you can go to www.mla.org to see the plethora of resources they have available, especially for writers in the humanities. Caveat: you will need to buy a membership to access all of the features, including a free copy of the current MLA handbook.

The CMS, or Chicago Manual of Style is known for being the writer's tool of choice. The publishing industry relies on this 1,000+ page manual for everything from editing to spacing, formatting, and even foreign languages including American Sign Language. It is a bit daunting to go through the CMS for the first time, but many style guides include citations from it, which look like decimals such as section 11.38. The entire CMS is online as well, for members only with an annual fee. PLP has chosen the CMS because it is the most comprehensive grammar tool, with many helpful charts such as one for Bible abbreviations.

The AP, or the Associated Press style is used by journalists and news editors. You can find it at www.ap.org. This style is updated the most frequently, to keep up with news and technology. It also has a reputation for being the go-to place for politically correct speech. The AP style is used the world over, but many academics and creatives prefer their own style guides influenced by the MLA or CMS.

After you have submitted a project and that project has been accepted by a publisher, you will be required to use the house style guide. You could request a hard copy or find it online. Careful adherence to a publisher's style guide will give your submission a professional edge.

Here are some examples of subjects in the PLP Style Guide:

- Capitalization: Use uppercase for all pronouns that refer to God, except for "who" and "whom."
- Catholic Church: Capitalize when referring to the universal Church, and lowercase when referring to a building or the diocese (the "local church").
- Punctuation: Use the serial, or Oxford comma in a list ("Father, Son, and Holy Spirit").

- Quotations: Use the abbreviations in the CMS 10.45 for Bible verses. When the quotation ends with a question mark or exclamation point, a period is added after the closing parentheses. Example: "Who is this King of glory?" (Ps. 24:10).

The style guide should answer your questions about things like writing out numbers, using commas, when to hyphenate, and any special language that is commonly used with your subject matter. Anything that is not specifically spelled out in an individual publisher's guide can be found in the larger manuals like the CMS. When you make an effort to follow the house style, your editor will appreciate having less work to do to format and upload your book or other project for publication.