Firm style guide

The contents of this page lay down mandatory rules for formatting documents and grammar conventions. Please read this page careful and make frequent and slavish reference to this page when in doubt about a convention.

If a convention is not detailed on this page, yet a doubt exists as to whether a convention is required, please ask a lawyer. Please also report the absence of detail in this page to Adam P. Strömbergsson-DeNora via e-mail.

Whatever you do, do not freelance regarding style. A uniform style is part of a firm culture. Check with the lawyers and, if in extreme doubt, just check with Adam.

Now, enjoy this sketch, which features at least one Cambridge doctor of English literature: Dr. Johnson's Book.

Electronic document types

The kind of file that one provides will determine the use that a recipient makes of the file. This firm runs purely on electronic files; every document is recorded in the filing system, with versioning handled by the system itself.

General rule

All documents that are to be submitted to individuals or organizations outside the firm are to be provided as PDF files.

Conversely, documents that are shared within the firm ought to be provided to firm members as .ODT (LibreOffice) or .DOCX (Word), depending on the context.

This general rule may be set aside when a client, opponent, or counsel asks for a document in a specific file format. Be mindful, however, of sending text in a format that may be easily edited when editing / changing the document may not be desireable.

Formatting conventions

Documents must be formatted to a professional standard using modern word processing conventions. If we wanted to draft documents that relied on tab stops and the space bar, the firm would buy everyone a typewriter, ribbon, and an endless supply of paper.

We instead now use LibreOffice or Microsoft Word to create documents.

The firm has a series of templates meant to limit individuals' creativity with standard document

formats. These templates should be used.

When a template does not exist, the following rules apply.

Font

Two font options exist:

- Times New Roman. Twelve point.
- Liberation Serif. Twelve point.

→ *If a document is created using Arial font (or any sans-serif typeface) and is submitted to a lawyer for review bearing that typeface, the offending person risks losing any hope of continued work in this environment.* ←

Line spacing

General rule

Lines are spaced at: 1.15-1.2 times the line height (i.e. in a multiple of the line height).

Paragraphs do not benefit from additional space between one another. The tendency to create documents with six or nine points of space between paragraphs is borne of utter laziness: word processors create this additional spacing because it is perceived as a business standard. That may be, elsewhere, but this firm does not condone this practice. Remove space between paragraphs.

Pleadings in an action

The heading and backpage are spaced based on the general rule.

The text of a pleading in an action is double-spaced.

The standard texts that appears on all statements of claim is spaced based on the general rule.

Memoranda

Memoranda use line spacing set at a multiple of 1.5.

Text alignment

The text of all documents must be aligned to the left of the page.

Justified text is **never** appropriate.

→ Any form document provided to the firm from a public institution must be re-formatted to align the

text of the document left. ←

Rationale: This rule exists because word spacing on each line is disrupted when the text is justified flush with both margins. The word processor will create uneven spacing on each line: uneven spacing is difficult to read, especially if one is reading a document quickly.

Use of court form templates

Avoid using court form templates obtained online, in Word or PDF format, as much as possible, for they are misreably formatted. They come with so many deficiencies that it is often easier to copy the content into a new document and reproduce the formatting oneself.

If court form templates must be used, they are not to contain

1. the form numbers;
2. any text above the file number on the right side of the standard heading for court documents;
3. the form number on the backpage; or
4. the digital accession / form number on the bottom right corner of some court forms.

These elements are to be removed.

Grammar conventions

Most grammar conventions used in this firm derive from a desire to properly use the English language. Some conventions are debated, so must be specified in this guide.

Spelling

The firm uses standard British spelling. We avoid using American spellings for words. This rule may require you to revise the way in which you spell words to ensure that British word forms are used.

The distinction between the two traditions is described in *The Canadian Style*, which is reproduced by Heritage Canada online: Canada writing tips

Arabic numerals and spelling

Arabic numerals are not used between zero and ninety-nine: these numbers are spelled out in texts and other documents.

Numbers beginning at 100 and higher use Arabic numerals.

Proper nouns that contain Arabic numerals must be reproduced exactly as they are written, even if the numerals denote numbers between zero and ninety-nine.

Punctuation and sentence structure

The Oxford comma

This firm uses the Oxford, or serial, comma in lists.

The Oxford comma is used at the end of the list to mark off the last item in the list from the rest of the list.

The First Circuit United States Court of Appeals discussed the serial comma at length in *O'Connor v Oakhurst Dairy*. The Court explained the importance of a serial comma in a footnote:

> Before leaving our discussion of serial commas, we would be remiss not to note the clarifying virtues of serial commas that other jurisdictions recognize. In fact, guidance on legislative drafting in most other states and in the Congress appears to differ from Maine's when it comes to serial commas. Some state legislative drafting manuals expressly warn that the absence of serial commas can create ambiguity concerning the last item in a list.

Full text of decision.

When required, serial semi-colons are used in lists.

Coordinating conjunctions

Do not use a coordinating conjunction to begin a sentence.

If you feel the need to use a coordinating conjunction to begin a sentence, you should be using a comma splice or a semi-colon to join the clauses.

Do not, however, use these forms of punctuation (splices and semi-colons) incorrectly: you can always use a full stop to separate ideas.

The active voice

The passive voice has its place in modern speech, and that place is most often the Government of Canada. The passive voice has the benefit of producing lengthy and torturous sentences in which readers can get lost looking for the sentence's meaning. In other words, the passive voice is the linguistic equivalent of a sprawling, unionized bureaucracy. In a non-institutionalized setting, the active voice reigns supreme.

The active voice is a sentence structure that allows the subject to perform the action denote by the verb. It thus operates on the object via the verb.

By contrast, the passive voice is a sentence structure in which the verb operates on the subject.

The passive voice tends to demand more of the reader, which makes it unsuitable for legal writing.

A sentence in the active voice is created by using the following structure:

`Subject–Verb–Object`.

This structure places the subject of the sentence at the beginning of the sentence, thus allowing it to operate directly on the verb.

Additional resources

- The Chicago Manual of Style
  - The Elements of Style
    - The Canadian Style

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