



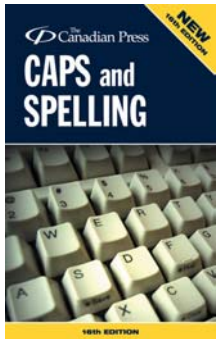
# COPY TALK

*A Look at Writing*

## CP moves to new style for web terms as part of 16th edition of Caps and Spelling

The Canadian Press will move to lowercase for such Internet phrases as website, webmaster and web browser, although the term World Wide Web will remain uppercase as it is a proper noun.

So it will be web, web page, web server and the like. Also, website and webmaster, formerly two words, will now be written as one, as will weblog and webcam and other new words that may arise. The next edition of the *CP Stylebook* will be updated to conform to this change.



This move reflects the growing usage of the lowercase for such words in Canadian publications. This style will also be the first listed spelling in the next edition of CP's official dictionary, *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

Katherine Barber, editor of the dictionary, says although there is evidence as far back as 1987 that the lowercase has been used for the web, editors were more likely to opt for uppercase because of the newness of the term. "They probably capped it to make their sentences unambiguous, lest the reader might think that they were talking about spider webs or tangled webs or whatever," says Barber.

"But then the Internet became part of everyone's everyday life, so that no one could read a sentence like 'I went on the web to look for cheap airfares' and even think about spiders. The cap was no longer necessary to disambiguate the word; the context did that."

It is not an uncommon phenomenon – Barber says telegraph was originally capped in the 19th century when it was invented.

The new edition brings a few other changes as well, reflecting the current way most Canadians use the English language:

- Bestseller, cellblock, changeover, goalmouth, miniseries, outtake, seatbelt and teenybopper

no longer have hyphens.

- Hometown, payday AND videocassette have gone from two words to one, while the noun extra billing is now extra-billing.
- One-time is now hyphenated in all uses.
- Arctic is now uppercase when the word means "of the Arctic region." So it's Arctic Ocean, Arctic hares, Arctic explorers. It is lowercase when the meaning is "very cold": arctic temperatures.
- The eastern sport of tai chi is now lowercase.
- Many of the changes and additions to *Caps and Spelling* come at the request of the writers and editors who use CP style, especially those at CP. Some of the additions have recently popped up in regular usage; other words have been added because they are often spelled or capitalized inconsistently.

The new listings in the 16<sup>th</sup> edition include:

Action démocratique du Québec, ADQ  
 Afghan (*n.* and *adj.*, preferred to *Afghani*)  
 ambassador, Ambassador Paul Cellucci  
 antivirus  
 al-Qaida  
 Athletes Can  
 awhile  
 Osama bin Laden  
 chat room  
 coronavirus  
 crossfire  
 daylong  
 kimchee  
 Avril Lavigne  
 New Age  
 Newfoundland and Labrador (but Nfld. in placelines)  
 Mumbai (*formerly* Bombay)  
 Ozzy Osbourne  
 Palm Pilot  
 Condaleezza Rice  
 Serbia and Montenegro (SERBIA-MONTENEGRO in placelines)  
 severe acute respiratory syndrome, SARS  
 spellcheck  
 video lottery terminal, VLT  
 voice mail

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**COPY TALK: A LOOK AT WRITING****No. 177 – APRIL 2003 EDITOR: PATTI TASKO**

*Copy Talk* is published periodically by The Canadian Press for users of the *Canadian Press Stylebook*. It is intended as a forum for all sorts of writing and editing matters. It can also be found on the Internet at [www.cp.org](http://www.cp.org). Suggestions and questions are welcome.

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Throughout, we have also updated many other references. And for business writers, the listings for major Canadian corporations have been expanded and their stock symbols added.

## Sexed-up news: a colourful term spreads

One entry that missed the deadline for the new *Caps and Spelling* is the expression "sexed up," which has been in the headlines a lot lately. It started in the spring when the BBC alleged that Tony Blair's government had asked for a report on the Iraqi weapons threat to be "sexed up." It is unclear who first used the expression – Downing Street or security officials – but it has certainly been repeated with great enthusiasm, as is often the case with such descriptive, succinct phrases. (Ground Zero, for the site of the World Trade Center towers, and 9-11, for the Sept. 11 attacks, come to mind.)

The use of the expression "sex up" – meaning make more exciting – has been around, at least in the British media, for some time. John Mullan, writing about the background of the term in the *Guardian* newspaper in June, reported that the expression has been used at least since the 1940s to mean sexually aroused, and it has also been used for some time to mean increasing the sexual content of something. "Yet once newspapers started referring to sexed-up productions of classic plays or operas, and everyone talked of Andrew Davies's trademark sexed-up classics of English literature, it was easy for sexed up to mean made more appealing or exciting – implicitly to those with low tastes," wrote Mullan.

Use of the phrase to mean make more attractive or exciting is becoming common enough that it will be added to the next edition of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, says editor Katherine Barber. "We do have evidence (of use) from North American as well as British sources."

Barber says the first example of it being used in this way was in 1954, by writer Arthur Koestler. Given the current use of the term, Koestler's words

sound eerily familiar: "Otto thought that a little sexing up of the war could do no harm," he wrote.

At any rate, it is destined to become one of those phrases that is used everywhere to describe a range of situations that have nothing to do with sex, at least literally. Spotted already on the Internet: Sens could be latest to sex up game presentation (Carleton University student newspaper); Sex up your savings (Sunday Mirror); ECB sex up England's cricketers (BBC); and *Copy Talk's* favourite: Teachers plan to sex up German (from a site on teaching German).

The British media, in fact, even sex up themselves: in July the *Guardian* website reported that the *Express* was planning to "sex up" its Sunday edition. In this case, however, it was a throwback to its older meaning: editors were setting a new quota of six sex stories per week.

## Take the time to keep it short

Some things just keep getting longer and longer: daily commutes, Hollywood movies – and news stories.

And, with apologies to Martha Stewart, it's not a good thing. Or to quote Mark Twain, another American legend, on the superiority of succinct writing: "If I'd had more time, I would have written you a shorter letter."

On its website, *Editor and Publisher*, as part of a story on 10 papers doing smart things, lauded the *Financial Times of London* for its commitment to tight writing. The move is part of its campaign to become a must-read newspaper for American business.

Lionel Barber, U.S. managing editor, has this advice for reporters: "If you're writing a news story, you should be able to write it in under 500 words. If you're doing analysis, you're not going to get more than 700 words. And we do not have turns (to an inside page) in our stories."

The newspaper's approach was especially apparent during the U.S.-Iraq war, when most major North American papers expanded news holes. Much of the coverage was good, but it was questionable how many readers had time to plow through it.

In the *Financial Times*, each page of war coverage was given a theme, such as diplomacy or economic fallout. Perspective was kept global, not too American-centric. The approach seems to have worked: sales figures during the war grew from about 130,000 a day to 150,000, the paper says.

At CP, most of our main stories would not meet Barber's 500-word limit. On this year's Sept. 2 budget, seven stories were more than 1,000 words, with the main story of the day – an election call in Ontario – weighing in at 1,400. Only two stories were 500 words or less.

Over time, story length appears to have grown. A spot check of the stories budgeted for Sept. 2, 1998, and Sept. 2, 2003, shows they averaged 823

words in 2003 and 688 words in 1998.

*Copy Talk* is firmly against imposing arbitrary rules on story length. But it doesn't stand to reason that seven stories a day are worth more than 1,000 words. In newspaper terms, that is about 26 column inches. A typical story in the *Globe and Mail* runs 10 to 14 inches; a major one would get 15 to 20 inches.

Some people argue that stories appear online where length is not an issue. But we still have to think about the poor reader who is pressed for time and needs editors to do their job. Why would anyone want to read 1,000 words when the same points can be covered in 700 words? Write what the story is worth; sometimes, on a top story, it might be 1,000 words. Most of the time, however, it is not.

It is a bit of a cliché to use the Gettysburg Address as an example of tight writing, but it is true that Lincoln managed to sum up the significance of one of the most important events in American history in 269 words. He wasn't the only speaker that day in 1863 – someone named Edward Everett gave a 13,609-word speech. It's no surprise that he doesn't get quoted anymore.

"In too many newsrooms, the collective head is in the sand," editor Clark Hoyt of Knight Ridder wrote in 2001 in the online version of *The American Editor*, the magazine of the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

"It is as though editors and reporters picture their audience as a Victorian English family. Father and Mother are seated at the fire, the spaniels sleeping at their feet. The children, chins cupped in their palms, listen raptly as Pater reads aloud the latest piece of narrative journalism from the evening paper."

Let's get our heads out of the sand. Here are some tips on keeping it short:

- Every paragraph should provide new information. Don't state a point, repeat the point in a quote, then sum up the point.
- Keep attribution tight. The reader doesn't need to know which department of Statistics Canada released the survey or the exact title of a source. A job description usually works better anyway: NOT Jean Green, special events co-ordinator with the city of Halifax; BUT concert spokeswoman Jean Green. Avoid over-attribution; every number does not need to be sourced back to Statistics Canada.
- As Strunk and White famously advise in *The Elements of Style*, omit needless words. Why say "on the grounds that" when "because" works just as well? Check the Plain Words section of *Caps and Spelling* for more inspiration.
- While background is important for context, many developing stories get out of hand because material is constantly added but never culled. When doing updates on stories, try to take out as much material as goes in.
- Focus on the most important angles of the story, and see if others can be ignored.

We could go on, but this is a four-page newsletter.

## Concentration camps were not Polish

Word order can have a dramatic impact on the meaning of a phrase. Sometimes tightening an expression leaves the entirely wrong impression.

CP had to issue a Corrective this spring after running a story that mentioned "Polish concentration camps." This resulted in several calls, including one from the Polish Embassy, rightly pointing out that the camps were not Polish, but Nazi concentration camps in occupied Poland. They were not run by Poland, and in fact many Poles were imprisoned in the camps.

It's a small rewording but provides a vital distinction.

## Editing 101

CP Main Desk editor **Ross Hopkins** has gathered a few style faux pas he has spotted recently.

- It is backyard (one word), not back yard.
- When used to describe the region, Prairies should be capped.
- East end, as in Toronto's east end, is two words, not one.
- Cellphone is one word.
- It's pummelled, not pumeled, and worshippers, not worshipers.
- Don't cap police when not using the proper name of the force. So it is Toronto police but Toronto Police Service.
- It's health-care, not healthcare when used as an adjective; as a noun it is health care.
- It's reacquaint, not re-acquaint.
- Use Grade 1, not Grade One.
- Smokescreen is one word.
- If using "about" with a number, round the number off: NOT about 103 kilometres, but about 100 kilometres.
- Tim Hortons, noun or adjective, has no apostrophe.
- Spell it sizable, not sizeable.
- It's judgment, not judgement.
- It's modelled, not modeled, fuelled, not fueled, and quarrelled, not quarreled.
- CP uses metric, but not blindly. Hopkins spotted this bizarre conversion on the wire: Henderson was pulled over early Tuesday for driving 109 km/h in a 88.5-km/h zone. Have you ever seen a sign for a 88.5-km/h zone? In this case, leave it in imperial or, better yet, reword: Henderson was pulled over for driving 20.5 kilometres an hour over the speed limit.

## Copy Talk gets mail

"Words frequently used incorrectly are forgoing and foregoing," says **Diane Menzies** of CP's Life-Entertainment Department in Toronto. "The first means going without, the second means preceding."

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*Copy Talk* has chuckled in the past about the indiscriminate-to-the-point-of-goofy use of such expressions as "parents' worst nightmare" to describe anything from a missing child to bullying. So **Jill St. Louis**, Vancouver bureau chief, couldn't resist passing along the following close relative from a story out of Corpus Christi, Texas: Residents FEAR THE WORST as they brace for the arrival of hurricane Claudette.

"What the heck does it mean?" asks Louis. "Armageddon, a wet basement, power outage? Missed manicure appointment?"

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Main Desk editor **Mary Ann O'Rourke** says she keeps seeing a hyphen in expressions like fifth-annual event.

Although this example is not specifically cited in the hyphens section of the *CP Stylebook*, perhaps people are applying rule No. 14 on page 299 that says hyphen are used in successive compound adjectives such as 19<sup>th</sup>-century fashion or 10-second intervals.

But in this case the rule doesn't apply, because fifth and annual each separately modify the noun event. That's not the case with 19<sup>th</sup>-century fashion. So drop the hyphen in phrases such as fifth annual event and ninth consecutive win.

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For readers' amusement, Katherine Barber, editor of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, shares two examples she spotted of improper word order:

Built for people on the go, Oakville's Mariel Bradley has produced a cookbook....

Live traps baited with chicken parts and regular parks patrols are being used to catch the critter.

Of course it is the cookbook, not its author, that is built for people on the go. And in the second example, "I bet those park patrol guys didn't know that their job would require this kind of sacrifice!" comments Barber.

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"Is there any other kind of founder than an original one?" asks **Stephen Thorne** of CP Ottawa. He provides the following example:

Moses Znaimer, one of Citytv's original founders, is stepping down from several executive positions at media company and Citytv owner CHUM Ltd. but will continue on with the company in other roles.

Thorne's right. Original founder is redundant.

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Alexandre Trudeau, the second son of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, is usually referred to in the media as Sacha, his nickname as a child.

Recently, after a question from a reporter, he publicly expressed a wish to be referred to in the media by his given name.

Unfortunately, we got the news just after the release of the new edition of *Caps and Spelling*, in which we had added his name as Sacha. That listing, on page 171, should be modified to read : Trudeau, Alexandre (*preferred to Sacha*).

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**Nelson Wyatt** of CP Montreal noted a reference to a Quebec provincial police SWAT team member rescuing someone during recent flooding. "The provincial police here, like the emergency services unit in New York, have a broader mandate than just SWAT duties, which are handling barricaded criminals or doing the forcible entry on drug raids."

He suggests that it may not sound as cool, but a better term for these provincial police units that do search and rescue would be tactical squad. It also offers the advantage of not being an all-caps acronym, and any opportunity to get those out of copy is welcomed.

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One Sunday, **Mary-Jo Laforest** of CP Edmonton spotted two stories on the CP wire with the expression "completely destroyed" in the leads. "It always has and always will drive me nuts to see those two words paired," says Laforest. "It is redundant to say completely destroyed because destroyed means demolished, annihilated, wiped out, put an end to. If it's destroyed, it's completely gone, nothing left. It's like saying someone is completely pregnant. Or like saying something is completely redundant."

Laforest is completely right.

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"I've always found it jarring when we use the word 'sickened' to describe people who fell ill from something," says **Katherine Bell**, former CP Prairies bureau chief. "As in: Many people were sickened by the E. coli outbreak. But usually when I feel sickened I feel disgust over something, not a medical condition."

Both meanings – to disgust and to make sick physically – are valid in transitive uses, although the former is much more common. Perhaps this is why using it for the secondary meaning can sound awkward, even ambiguous. Take, for example, this headline from CNN's website: Hundreds sickened aboard cruise ship. Were they sickened by illness or sickened by the lousy entertainment? Perhaps it is best to avoid using it in the secondary meaning.

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New word alert: **Mike Fuhrmann** of CP's Life-Entertainment Department reports that he has heard the word nowcast used along with forecast on CBC weather reports. "I guess nowcast is a report on current weather conditions," he says.

It's not just the CBC that has adopted the word. A Google.ca search turns up 75,000 hits from weather sites around the world, and there is evidence it has been in use since 1977.

Is it just meteorologist's slang or a term that will enter the vernacular? Who knows. Predicting the weather is a lot easier than predicting how the English language will twist and turn.