



The TYR Stylebook

Acknowledgements

This book is intended to provide staff of The Young Reporter with some guidance on technical style -- the use of capitals, punctuation etc -- and also help with some English writing points which often give problems. There are many excellent style books already, but most of them were not written with Hong Kong in mind. Also it seems that a style book for educational use ought to have more discussion of reasons and alternatives than is necessary in a manual for professionals, who merely need to know their chief editor's arbitrary preferences.

Anyone who undertakes an exercise of this kind begins by climbing on to someone else's shoulders. The following books have been consulted:

Stylebooks:

Thompson R. *BBC Style Guide*. DTP edition, 1993. And the latest version, available at <http://learn.gateway.bbc.co.uk/documents/pdf/newsstyleguide.pdf>
Butcher: *Copy-editing: the Cambridge handbook* -- Cambridge UP, 1981
Deskbook of The Young Reporter compiled by Ray Wong in 1976
The Economist Pocket Stylebook, and its younger sibling the *Economist Style Guide*, both published by Economist Publications Ltd in London.
Far Eastern Economic Review stylebook. (mimeo, 1989)
GIS Guide to Style and Usage, compiled by Training Officer 1982 (who I think was Peter Olaes)
Sellers L. *Keeping up the Style* -- Pitman, 1975
The Los Angeles Times Stylebook. Meridian, 1981
US Govt Printing Office: *A Manual of Style*. Wing Books, 1986.
L. Jordan: *New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* -- Times Books, New York, 1986.
K. Waterhouse: *On Newspaper Style* -- Penguin, 1989.
SCMPost stylebook compiled in 1982-4 by Guy Searles.
SCMPost stylebook (current)
UPI stylebook. National Textbook Co, 1995
The Washington Post Deskbook on Style. McGraw Hill, 1978
The AP Stylebook and Libel Manual. Addison and Wesley Publishing Co. 1995.

On some points my preferences follow memories of the (now alas unobtainable) stylebook produced by Ken Martinus for the *Hongkong Standard* in 1979.

Books on usage and vocabulary:

Allen R.E. *The Oxford Writer's Dictionary* -- OUP, Oxford, 1990

Bryson: *Troublesome Words* -- Penguin, London, 1987.
Bunton: *Common English Errors in Hong Kong* -- Longman, Hong Kong, 1989.
Fowler: *Modern English Usage* -- OUP, Oxford, 1978.
Gowers (revised Greenbaum and Whitcut): *The Complete Plain Words* -- Penguin, London, 1987.
Hicks: *English for Journalists* -- Routledge, London, 1993.
Hughes: *The Penguin Working Words* — Penguin, Melbourne 1993.
Mort: *New Words* -- Longman, Harlow, 1986.
Partridge: *Usage and Abusage* -- Penguin, London, 1973.
Silverlight: *Words and More Words* -- Macmillan, London, 1985 and 1987 respectively.

The section on “difficult words” started as a long list compiled by my colleague Judith Clarke in the light of her experience of common student errors.

Needless to say a gathering of so many eminent authorities produced disagreement about almost everything. The responsibility for all the entries in this book remains mine.

I would like to thank Christine Cheung Suk-yin and Dr Clarke for many helpful suggestions and comments.

Since this book first appeared in 1992 it has added considerably to the workload of the printing technician in the Journalism Department. The present holder of that office, Mr Leung Wai-hung, has shouldered this burden with great patience and technical skill.

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Using this book

The operational part of this book comes in three sections. First there is “Quick reference” which tries to get the most basic style points on one page. Most of them are dealt with more elaborately later.

There follows a brief section on Newspaper Style, which is intended to provide a few hints on style in the more traditional sense. This attempts to embody the spirit which underlies even the most finicky points of style -- the effort to achieve accuracy, clarity and economy, so that the reader is neither deceived nor distracted from the writer’s meaning.

The main body of the book is the Alphabetic section, in which various points of style, grammar and usage are sorted under key words. Users may have to hunt a bit to find minor points. The major ones are under time-honoured headings -- abbreviations, addresses, times and so on.

At the back is a section called Difficult Words in which sundry expressions which have caused problems for students in the past are listed, with examples of correct use and, in some cases, comments or explanations..

TYR reporters will need to memorise the Quick Reference material. Other users are recommended in the first instance to try the main alphabetic section. If the word you want is not there it may be in the difficulties list. If you draw a blank there and the problem is a preposition, there is a long list of prepositional idioms under P.

Possession of this book does not absolve young reporters from the obligation to find and use a good dictionary.

Quick reference

Abbreviations: upper/lower case if pronounceable (Nato, Omelco) otherwise organisations in caps, no points (WWF, UNHCR, AA). Give full name on first mention unless very well known. Measures etc are usually lower case -- kph, mm.

Addresses: 224 Waterloo Road. (no comma)

Ages: Joe Wong, 54, or if not at beginning of sentence 54-year-old Joe Wong (NB both hyphens needed)

Currencies are Hong Kong dollars unless otherwise stated -- \$5, \$5.50 (you need the zero) \$5 million. Foreign currencies need translation in brackets -- £5 (about \$55)

Dates: November 5. The year is rarely necessary but if used should be preceded by a comma: November 5, 1991.

Decimals are preferred to fractions; you need something before the point -- 25.3, 0.75 (except in gun sizes)

Hong Kong is two words. But respect the preferences of people who use it in their names, like the Hongkong Bank and the Hongkong Standard.

Names (local): Lee Peng-fei (note hyphen, small 'f'. Follow Taiwanese, mainland etc preferences for people from those places.

Numbers should be spelled out up to and including ten. But \$7, 5 mph, 8 per cent. Do not start a sentence with figures.

Quote marks should be double except for quotes within quotes, and in headlines. Use curly ones – “ ” etc.

Temperatures: use Celsius.

Times: 9.30 am, 10 am, noon, 2.05 pm.

Titles: Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms with full name on first mention, Mr etc. with surname later, except juveniles, sportspeople, entertainment stars and criminals.

Sir David Ford is Sir David later, not Sir Ford.

Always double check: names (spelling) job titles, ages and other figures, direct quotes (accuracy).

Prose style for newswriters

MOST of this book is devoted to such ticklish but mundane problems as whether accused criminals should be addressed as Mr in news reports. "Style" though has another more general meaning. It may refer to the way words are chosen and used; we might refer to a particular author's style, or a profession's style, meaning a way of writing peculiar to a person or situation.

There is an appropriate style for writing news reports in Hong Kong. Happily the local writer does not need to attempt the "Nude vicar in sex romps shock" genre, or even the less objectionable but less interesting "Fire heroes in mercy dash" type of thing. A plain simple English will suffice.

But this is not as easy as it sounds. The great enemy of any writing done in a hurry is the cliché -- the ready-made phrase which is approximately right and pops into the mind and onto the page without conscious thought. Hong Kong newspapers are free from many of the clichés which disfigure newswriting in England, America or Australia; Hong Kong newspapers have clichés of their own instead. Bear in mind George Orwell's advice on this topic: never use a phrase which you are accustomed to seeing in print. Tough but effective.

For the rest there are some time-honoured rules:

Prefer short words

"Fire" is a better word than "conflagration", "died" is preferable to "expired", "crashed" to "collided". Words should be specific, concrete and if possible vivid. "Red and blue" is better than "brightly coloured"; "heavy rain" is better than "bad weather". Avoid words ending in "-ation" and any combination of which the second half is "conditions" or "situation".

Avoid obscurities, avoid jargon, and above all avoid things like this:

Both environmental variables and personal attributes come together to influence the voter's disposition towards the political world, which consists of cognitive, affective and evaluative perceptions of political reality.

I am not sure what this means. An anonymous civil servant (quoted by Gowers) once said that confused writing may accurately convey confused thoughts.

Prefer short sentences

A short sentence is easier to understand than a long one. Many of our readers are not native speakers and need all the help they can get. Sentences must usually have a subject, a verb, and an object. They will usually be most economically arranged in that order. This is known as a simple sentence and simple readers like it.

Writers on style will advise you that too many short sentences produce a staccato effect which is uncomfortable for readers. In practice the temptations of the

longer sentence are enough to ensure that readers get the occasional rest. So concentrate on keeping them as short as possible. Some things which can help:

Only one idea per sentence

The most common problem, especially with intros, is trying to say too much at a time. You must make your mind up. Remember you are writing a story. This means you need to attract and keep the reader's attention. Readers of news are volunteers. If you make life difficult for them they will stop.

Be active

Use of the passive voice always means a longer sentence and usually means a depressingly limp one as well. "He hit me" is clearly both better and shorter than "I was hit by him". The longer the sentence the more it needs an active verb..

Be positive

A sentence about what something was not can often be rephrased in a less negative way.

Consider the following pairs:

was not successful	failed
the plan will not proceed	they cancelled the plan
police have not captured X	X is still free
he did not consider	he ignored

Some care is needed that you do not change the meaning. Do not tamper in this way (or any other) with direct quotes.

Cut modifiers

Most writers use too many adjectives and adverbs, particularly when trying to be descriptive. Watch out particularly for those which creep in because they are used to another word's company, producing pairs like:

actively pursued
totally unacceptable
constantly monitored
bold initiative ... new initiative ... bold new initiative
major row / development / surprise / whatever

Cut quotations

Most people do not talk in the crisp economical style we want for news purposes. So we try not to use their words as delivered. The uses for quotations are:

- to substantiate a point you have made in summary in your intro. If you say in the intro that a politician attacked the Governor you must give enough of his or her actual words to make it clear that the use of "attack" is justified.
- to capture subtleties or colourful bits of speech.

- to provide a break and a change of pace in what would otherwise be a solid slab of reported speech.

Otherwise use reported speech. Reporters must master the rules for writing reported speech, which you will find under R.

Cut linking words

Teachers of English as a foreign language like to get you to start your sentences with words like “moreover”, “however” and such like. These impress examiners but such long words, and connectives in general, are not used in news writing. Usually you do not need a linking word. People expect the next paragraph to be about the same thing as its predecessor because that is the way news stories work. Occasionally you can use “and” or “but” at the beginning of a sentence if you want to.

Don't be vague

Unknown quantities like “very”, “really”, “quite” have no place in news writing.

Don't qualify absolutes

We know we cannot be slightly pregnant. We also cannot be quite impossible, glaringly obvious, absolutely essential or almost unique.

Do not use ...

The former ... the latter ... which are irritating when the writing has been printed in narrow columns.

Hereafter, aforementioned and other legal monstrosities.

Such -- much overused in Hong Kong. In most cases it can be replaced by “this”.

ALWAYS read your work over and when doing so check for errors of grammar, spelling and meaning. Remember thousands of people read your newspaper. If you make a mistake someone is going to spot it, and may well write to the editor to show off his learning.

Watch particularly for three things:

names: the owner will be insulted if you spell it wrong

titles: The difference between an assistant prof and an associate prof may be a small thing to you but to them it could be important

numbers: because one misplaced digit can put you out by a factor of ten.

A

a, an -- your choice should be governed by the sound. Use 'a' before a consonant sound, even if it is spelled with a vowel -- *a one-year term, a united stand, a euphemism*. Use 'an' before vowel sounds, whether written with a vowel or not -- *an honourable man, an NBA record, an 80s pop star an 18-year-old boy*.

A few pretentious people still insist on 'an' before words which originated in French and start with an 'h' which was silent in that language. Thus you will occasionally come across *an hotel*, and even *an historic event*. This is pointless pedantry if the 'h' is sounded in English. Use 'a'.

For a/the see **articles**.

'a' as a **prefix** does not imply the negative of the word following, as the SCMP stylebook once erroneously suggested. It implies the absence of the word following. An atheist does not believe in God; he is not opposed to God and he is not a devil. *Amoral* is not the same as *immoral*. It is a good idea, though, to follow the SCMP's caution against words of this kind. It is easy for the hasty sub-editor to suppose that *apolitical* is a misprint and that two words were intended. Try *non-political*. If you do use 'a' as a prefix, do not insert a hyphen after it.

abbreviations: The main point is that they should be understood by the reader.

- There is a small range of abbreviations which may be used without explanation in Hong Kong: ATV, TVB, RTHK, ICAC, perhaps also Legco, Exco, BBC, US, UK, UN, USSR, and Nato. Recent arrivals on this list could perhaps include NPC and PRC.

On specialised pages you can assume that readers are familiar with the common abbreviations as appropriate, e.g. sports readers will understand FA, RFU; business readers GNP, fob. But when they occur on general news pages these should be treated as follows:

- With other reasonably common and well-known abbreviations, spell out in full the first time and use the abbreviation thereafter - the Federal Bureau of Investigations becomes the FBI, New Territories becomes NT and so forth. Bear in mind that abbreviations are not compulsory. Your story may read better if you keep using a phrase like New Territories in full, especially if it only comes up a couple of times anyway.

- Where the abbreviation is not widely known, and is used one sentence away from the full title, give it in parentheses after the first mention - *the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN)*. Bear in mind, though that abbreviations look ugly; ACAN can be *the committee* in later references providing there is only one committee in the story. Do not coin new abbreviations or use obscure ones. The Heung Yee Kuk, for example, is better not rendered as the HYK -- call it *the Kuk*.

Companies can become *the company* on second mention provided there is only one. It is better to avoid abbreviations altogether if you can.

A surprisingly common error is to give the abbreviation after the first mention of an organisation, even though you are not going to mention it again in the story. This is unnecessary.

Typography: all caps abbreviations do not take points (UN, MP). Neither do abbreviations which can be pronounced and written as a word (Nato, Asean). Lower case abbreviations usually take points (etc., e.g., a.m., p.m.) except when they are part of the metric measurement system (mm, cm, km). Caps should be the same size as usual.

There is an important difference between Mw (megawatt -- a million watts) and mw (a thousandth of a watt)

Do not abbreviate:

and

Hong Kong (except in headlines where HK is acceptable)

individual American states

Kowloon

names of the month or days

per cent if you are only using it once or twice. The symbol % is usable in the TYR because our printing quality is unusually high; but remember most newspapers avoid it because it prints badly. For headlines *pc* is acceptable.

military ranks

Street, Road, Terrace, etc.

"No" is an acceptable abbreviation for number provided that there is a figure after it -- *a No 7 bus*, BUT do not use it in addresses, where an unadorned *224 Waterloo Road* is sufficient.

Do not abbreviate Christmas, which is not Xmas, even in headlines.

Do not use YSL for Yves St Laurent. Many British readers are familiar with a subversive political group called the YSL (Young Socialist League) and will be disconcerted by suggestions that some local bigwig wears a "YSL tie".

See also **Headlines**.

What abbreviations you use and allow is to some extent an arbitrary matter. It does not matter too much what policy is adopted as long as it is followed consistently. *NYT* uses points in organisation names unless they are in the broadcasting business, and allows companies to drop the points if they do so in their official names. This is one way of ensuring that there is regular demand for the style book. Titles, states and thoroughfares are abbreviated freely. There are useful warnings against using obscure and

awkward abbreviations (NRDGA) and against packing too many in one sentence.

UPI's system appears to me to be rather confused.

***The Economist* uses small caps, unlike most newspapers, and relies on these for abbreviations in text. It has useful lists of business abbreviations and organisations. *Asiaweek* drops a point size for all caps abbreviations, which is sensible but troublesome. It uses points only where the abbreviation is a country name, and for the U.N.**

***SCMP* and *FEER* follow, with minor variations, the system outlined above.**

The GIS manual sensibly points out that some abbreviations may lead to misunderstandings if transmitted on all-caps teleprinters without punctuation. Abbreviations which could be a word -- like US and WHO -- will need stops. Plurals may need an apostrophe.

about should only be used with round numbers. *About* \$3.27 looks stupid. If the story lands you with a fiddly number -- *about 1,274 metres* then round it off to the nearest 10 or 100.

academics should not be allowed to trail their alphabet soup through your columns. Owners of a Ph D (note lower-case 'h') may be called Dr in academic contexts but if there is any danger of confusion you should make it clear that the doctorate is not a medical one: *Dr Fred Wong, who has a Ph D in metallurgy ...*

Note style for degrees is no points but spaces where some lower-case is used -- BA, MA, B Soc Sc, B Sc (Econ), M Litt, B Phil etc. *A bachelor's degree, a master's degree* and similar formations do not need caps.

Professor should be abbreviated to Prof after first use.

Dean takes a cap when given in full before an individual's name -- *the Dean of Social Sciences, Dr William Liu* -- and thereafter can be lower case -- *the dean said ...* Other academic titles like Vice Chancellor, President, Principal etc should be treated the same way.

***FEER*, and many similar international publications, spurn caps for titles altogether, except for those which are customarily placed before a name-- like Lord, King, Duke, Pope, Datuk -- when used in that position. No academic title would qualify except Dr. *FEER* rarely lists degrees, but when it does has the unhappy idea of missing the spaces, producing oddities like LID.**

***Time* magazine has a unique and rather quaint habit of capitalising every job description if given before a name, so that you meet people like Bricklayer Bill Bloggs in its columns.**

accents are those little adornments added to the alphabet in some foreign languages and look like this: é ô è ç. These are the four most common ones, known respectively as the acute, circumflex, grave and cedilla. You can get them on the computer by keying in the code for the required accent before you type the letter it is

supposed to go on. If you are using Microsoft Word there is an accent key on the word bar. The codes are:

acute: option-e

circumflex: option-i

grave: option-' (which you will find in the top left corner of the keyboard, next to 1)

cedilla: option-c

Some Spanish words use a curly thing over n which looks like this -- ñ -- and is obtained by typing option-n.

With the old printing technology it was difficult or impossible to get accents so newspapers got into the habit of leaving them out whenever possible. This is a good idea though not acceptable for serious magazine or book work. Newspaper readers will not miss the accents which should strictly be supplied with *café*, *élite*, *régime*, *entrepôt* and *fiancé*. Less domesticated foreign words tend to look odd without their accents, so supply for *entrée*, *passé* and such like if you must use them (better not). It is a worthwhile courtesy to give accents on people's names if appropriate. Do not get involved in Scandinavian oddities like å, ø or ü.

accommodate is the preferred spelling.

acknowledge(ment) ditto.

acting when part of a title should be lower case -- *the acting Secretary for Securitr*.

acute as in *é* -- see **accents**. For illnesses, acute ones are nasty but short; those which drag on are chronic.

AD, BC should be in caps with no points. Strictly speaking the AD should come before the year, the BC after it, but formations such as 1066 AD now seem to be acceptable. Only Latin speakers will notice.

addresses basic style is *224 Waterloo Road*. Street names are two words with caps -- *Fleet Street* not Fleet street or Fleet-street -- with number first and no comma. But some punctuation is needed if you **must** give a more detailed address: *Flat 7B Lockoo Gardens, 6 Cornwall Street, Kowloon Tong*. Avoid such detail if possible. Note that the English style for addresses gives the most detailed and local point first -- the flat number, then the floor number, if separate, then the building name, then its address. If, as sometimes happens in Hong Kong, someone gives their address in a different order you must change it.

American textbooks require the neophyte reporter to give the full address of every source. This is neither practical nor required in Hong Kong, where addresses

are complicated, difficult to check, and regarded by many interviewees as none of your business.

adjectives should be chosen with care and used sparingly. Most reporters use too many. Some adjectives -- shock, horror, surprise, bombshell -- have been devalued by overuse. Some have become so accustomed to the company of a particular noun that they no longer add anything to it -- if they ever did: *acute crisis, advance planning, serious situation, critical danger, widespread unrest, considerable difficulty, active consideration, free gift, continuous review, invited guest, final decision, long-felt need, all-time record, marathon talks, eye-ball-to-eyeball confrontation, true facts, democratic reforms, free elections* and many other habitual couples should be used reluctantly if at all. Try to avoid using *major* as in *a major issue* and numerous others, and *controversial* (which usually means nothing more than that there have been previous stories about the same topic). *Strategic* is much abused in foreign copy, which abounds in strategic villages, road-junctions, hills etc. Usually their only claim to fame is that they are marked on maps.

admit implies guilt, or at least reluctance to say something. Use this word with care. *Admitted* is often best replaced with *said*.

Advent, with cap, is conventional and accepted for the arrival of Christ. It is better not used for the arrival of anything else.

afterwards must have its 's' in British English.

ageing has an 'e'.

ages may conventionally be indicated by putting the unadorned number between commas after the name: *Joe Wong, 52, has been appointed ...* Exceptionally, for added emphasis, the age may come first, but in this case you must use two hyphens: *For 93-year-old Deng Xiaoping ...* Make sure both hyphens are there. If this system puts a number at the beginning of a sentence you must spell it out.

The SCMP allows fractions in ages. The TYR does not. A more tricky question is whether you should use them at all. A newly-minted sensitivity claims that it is unfair to categorise people by their ages. American academics now routinely send job applications from which this item of information is missing. Some interviewees have always taken the matter into their own hands by simply refusing to give their ages. If the age is available, though, I agree with Sellers' comment: "no single detail tells so much about an individual or adds so much to a story."

aggravate means to make something worse -- *His injury was aggravated by an incompetent doctor*. Whether you can use it to mean "annoy" is still in dispute. Fowler allows it with resignation; Gowers says without much enthusiasm that if it

was all right for Dickens it is probably all right for us; Bryson observes, quite rightly, that “annoy” is just as good and has the advantage that it will not annoy anyone.

aircraft names and numbers are a nuisance, but technically literate readers will be amused or annoyed if you get them wrong. So watch out for hyphens in streams of numbers (Boeing 747-400) for odd lower-case letters in makers’ names (MiG-21) and odd uppercase letters in model names (TriStar). The order should be the maker’s name, followed by the model letters/numbers, followed by the model name if it has one: *The Lockheed P-3 Orion ...* But some makers use the same petname for a succession of models, so you may also get things like *the Dassault Mirage F-1E*. Note that equipment of what was the Warsaw Pact often comes with a name which has nothing to do with the maker -- it is a code name attached to the machine by Nato Russia-watchers and should therefore be omitted unless it helps the reader to identify the machine concerned. You can usually spot these because all bombers’ codes begin with ‘b’, fighters with ‘f’, and helicopters with ‘h’.

Do not use *airplane* (American spelling for aeroplane) in any circumstances, or *plane* except in headlines. *Jet* is acceptable as long as the aircraft concerned is a jet -- that is to say it is propelled by jet engines rather than the old-fashioned fans on the wings. No *Jumbo jets* please.

In case of doubt, consult *Jane’s All the World’s Aircraft*.

alibi is a much-abused word. It does not just mean any sort of excuse or explanation. It means quite specifically a defence that the person accused of a crime can prove that he was elsewhere at the time and so could not have committed it. As the precise meaning of the word still flourishes in legal circles you will give offence if you use the word loosely.

In court cases you may occasionally come across an “alibi warning”. This is a formal statement in court to the accused that if he wishes to rely on an alibi in his defence he must provide details of it to the prosecution before the trial. This is purely a matter of routine and need only be reported in cases of extraordinary public interest, where every detail is wanted.

allege is used in court reports to indicate that the statement concerned was given in evidence but may still be rebutted or contested. Its use in other contexts sometimes gives offence because it is considered to imply that the statement is unsubstantiated if not dishonest. Think carefully before using the word in non-court stories.

Note that it is no defence to a libel action to say that you reported something was “alleged” if the allegation turns out to be untrue. You still repeated it.

all right should always be two words.

alternative used to be confined to situations where there were only two possibilities. Driving on the left was an alternative to driving on the right, but you

were not allowed to say that dictatorship and communism were alternatives to democracy. Some people are still offended by multiple alternatives and they are still barred from the *Economist*.

American is sanctioned by time and usage for citizens and other appurtenances of the United States. This is a nuisance, as it leaves us no adjective for inhabitants of the two American continents as a whole; there are occasionally complaints from Latin, Central, South or other Americans about this. Canadians and Mexicans, on the other hand, are often anxious to stress that they are not Americans. Be careful. Native Americans is the politically correct euphemism for the people who used to be known as Red Indians.

The use of "United States" or "US" as an adjective, as in *the US Consulate General* is acceptable.

American English is a cause of much confusion in Hong Kong. In principle when a colony we used British English, but no rule of this kind can be upheld in the teeth of popular habit. Publications vary with the tastes and/or origins of their editors. As a general rule you should prefer British English unless the American version is widely accepted (as in for example **billion**).

In order to make this vital distinction you do, of course, need to know which is which. So a short glossary follows, with the American term on the right. Asterisked items are our style; where there is no asterisk you can please yourself.

alcoholic drinks (beer/spirits)	liquor
*aluminium	aluminum
*artefact	artifact
*bill (in restaurant)	check
*Briton	Britisher
*bonnet (of car)	hood
*boot (of car)	trunk
*car	automobile
*car park	parking lot
*cheque (banking)	check
children	kids (informal)
company	corporation
*driver (of railway engine)	engineer
*estate car	station wagon
film (shown in a cinema)	movie (shown in a theatre)
*flat	apartment
*foot-and-mouth (disease)	hoof-and-mouth
*guard's van (of train)	caboose
*gybe	jibe
lend	loan
lift	elevator
lorry	truck
*maize	corn
note (money)	bill

*pavement	sidewalk
*petrol	gasoline
*plough	plow
post	mail
*railway	railroad
*stand (for election)	run (for office)
*sabre (sword)	saber
*saloon (car)	sedan
*sweets	candy
taxi	cab
taxi driver	cabby
tin	can
*tram	streetcar
transport (noun)	transportation
*truck (on railway)	boxcar
*underground(MTR)	subway
*unit trust	mutual fund

The main differences in spelling are that words ending in “-our” lose the “u” in America and words ending in “-ence” are often changed to “-ense”. British spellers usually change “-ize” endings to “-ise”, and similarly “-isation” is now universally acceptable in British, while “-ization” survives in America. Use the British spellings.

American legislators come in two varieties: Senators and members of the House of Representatives. Senators are members of the Senate. Members of both groups may be called congressmen.

Note that Senator, as a title, replaces Mr. So *Senator Harry Hamburger* appears in the rest of the story as *Sen Hamburger*. House members are not so lucky. *Congressman Charles Cheeseburger* appears in the rest of the story as *Mr Cheeseburger*. In agency copy gentlemen of this kind will be followed by an indication in brackets of the Congressman’s political affiliation and constituency. (*Rep Ca*) for example means we are dealing with a Republican from California. If this information is to stay in your story it must be spelled out in full. Usually it is of no interest to Hong Kong readers.

American names as presented by American news organisations have some eccentricities. There is normally no need to use the middle initial often provided; your readers will identify *Richard Nixon* without being treated to *Richard M. Nixon*. Similarly you can dispense with suffixes such as Jr, Sr or III (meaning the third of that name) unless there is another holder of the same name who is equally famous and likely to be confused with the person you are talking about.

ampersand is a little squiggle which looks like this: &. It stands for “and” but should not be used in newspaper text. Some publications make an exception for companies which use one in their official title.

and may start a sentence, if you wish.

and/or is much hated by the sensitive. Make your mind up and use one or the other.

animals, in these unromantic times, are treated as objects and should usually be referred to as "it". Exceptionally, in fluffy stories about named domestic pets and the like, you may use "he" or "she" as appropriate. For Hong Kong racehorses stick to "it"; most of them are geldings, which means they were male but have been ... ahem ... fixed.

anticipate does not mean "expect" and you will offend purists (including me) if you use it loosely. It means to take action in advance of an event which is still to come. Thus you may expect a typhoon if the relevant warning is hoisted. You anticipate it if you remove your flowerpots from the balcony before it arrives.

Some authorities have given up defending this distinction on the grounds that violations are of great antiquity and now so common as to make the distinction obsolete. Others persist. The error is certainly very common in Hong Kong, and of late we have even been treated to "anticipate" followed by the infinitive. Abuse of the word seems to be an occupational disease in the Hong Kong civil service -- although such abuse is condemned both by Gowers and by the *GIS Guide to Style and Usage*.

In this as in other fine distinctions it is the job of the newswriter to avoid distracting his readers with usages which some of them will find offensive, even if those offended are a minority.

anyone is always treated as singular.

apartments is an American word. The English counterpart is "flats". Try at least to avoid the term, all too common in company reports and property market analysis, "domestic units".

apostrophe: use with 's' to form the possessive of words which do not end in 's' - *Harry's hat, the President's Men ...*

The same thing will suffice with plural words which do not end in 's' - *the women's room, the oxen's stables*.

If a plural word does end in 's' then put the apostrophe alone after it - *Farmers' Weekly, the Graziers' Association*.

Note that if a singular word ends in 's' you still need another 's' -- *James's hat*.

Do not use an apostrophe to make the plural of a figure: *the 90s* is sufficient for the decade.

artefact: note spelling.

articles are the most common source of error in Hong Kong newswriting. Generally a noun will take “a” when first introduced into the story -- *A bus ran off the road into a tree ...* and will take “the” thereafter -- *12 passengers in the bus were injured and the tree was badly damaged ...* Some things are so well known to your readers that they take “the” all the time: *the Chief Executive, the Queen, the Tuenmun Highway, the MTR, the Shingmun River, the Hongkong Standard.*

Putting the matter more technically, countable nouns when used in the singular must have an article. It should be “a” if the reader has not been introduced, “the” if he or she has. Use no article if talking about things in general: *cars, music, life, beansprouts.* Same goes for “society”, which is often treated to an erroneous “the”. Society should only take an article when you are talking about a specific organisation like the SPCA.

Special situations:

The Government: needs “the” though it is a common affectation among civil servants to omit it. Other deliberative bodies (Legco, Exco etc. take “the” only if the name is given in full: *The Executive Council will meet ... Exco will decide whether ...*

Titles: ancient works usually get “the” -- *the Iliad, the Analects of Confucius* -- while more modern ones go without -- *Hamlet, Lady Chatterley’s Lover, Ulysses ...* If “the” is part of the title it is usual to include it, at least on first mention -- *The Rainbow, The Killing Fields ...* The American newsmagazine is *Time*, the English newspaper *The Times*.

Common phrases which, regardless of logic, take no article at all include:

to/at/from school	in class
to/at/from university/college	to/into/at/from church
to/into/in/out of hospital(as a patient)/prison/bed	
to/at/from work	to/at sea
to/in/from town	at/from home
for/at breakfast/lunch/tea/dinner/supper	
at night	by MTR/bus/car/train etc.
on foot (not feet)	go to sleep

Professions and jobs: all take “a” -- *He works as a reporter...*

Illnesses: are regarded as uncountable and take no article except for “a cold”. A venerable English idiom allows people to be described as *having the ‘flu* -- or some other common ailment -- but this should not be used in formal medical stories. Injuries take “a” -- *a broken leg, a slipped disk...*

Seasons do not need an article except autumn which takes “the”. Other seasons may take “the” if you wish.

Placenames: Use “the” with seas -- *the Pacific Ocean* -- mountain ranges -- *the Himalayas* -- island groups -- *the Pratas* -- and regions -- *the Middle East* -- unless

they include a compass direction -- *South China*. Also use “the” for rivers, deserts, hotels, cinemas and theatres. No article is needed with continents -- *Asia* -- districts -- *Mongkok* -- towns -- *Taipo* -- streets, lakes or countries (unless they have one in their names -- *the United States, the Netherlands, the Philippines*). No article is needed for most public buildings -- *Wanchai Police Station, Hong Kong University* -- or for railway stations, airports etc.

as above should not be used to refer to things you have already written. In modern newspaper design the early part of the article will frequently not be above the later material.

as of should be avoided. Use “since”.

attorney-general is hyphenated. Plural is attorneys-general. Headline version is A-G. This title is no longer used in Hong Kong, where the relevant official is now known as the Secretary for Justice.

attribution is important. In hard news writing all facts should be attributed unless they are being summarised prior to detailed explanation later, or are stunningly obvious: *Hong Kong was a colony...*

The main problem which arises here is the reluctance of reporters to use the word “said” as often as they need to. This leads to frantic attempts at elegant variation: *he pointed out, he observed, he concluded, he opined, he countered* and so on. Some of these are open to serious practical objections. *He pointed out* implies that you agree with the speaker, or at least that the speaker is referring to a widely accepted fact. *He concluded* looks stupid if you are going to produce further quotes from the same person. All this is quite unnecessary, in my view. Use “said” as often as you like. You would not seek a variation for “the” would you?

autumn is the English word; “fall” is generally used only in America. It is becoming more common in Hong Kong educational contexts.

B

ballpoint pen should be used, not Biro, which is a registered trade name.

Bar should always be capped when it refers to the more expensive type of lawyer, to avoid confusion with the many other bars frequented by lawyers.

basically is an overused word and should be shunned.

Basic Law takes initial caps at all times ... including those you will occasionally come across in other countries. Germany has one, for example.

basis, as in *on an annual basis*, is usually a waste of space, if nothing worse. In the example, “annually” or “every year” would be better.

bereft does not mean the same as “without”. It applies only to the lack of something you once had, but lost. A widow is bereft of a husband; a spinster is not.

biannual, biennial mean, in many dictionaries, every six months and every two years respectively. But many style advisers are uneasy about this distinction and some deny it exists. Make yourself clear to all by avoiding both words. Use “twice a year” and “every two years” instead.

Bible takes a cap, as do the Old and New Testaments and books thereof. Avoid variations (the Good Book, Word of God etc.).

SCMP has an interesting convention here: the Bible, and other holy books like the Koran and the Talmud, are not italicised, as other publications are.

Bill should always be capped when it refers to a proposed piece of legislation, to avoid possible confusion with other uses of this versatile word. Bear in mind that once it is passed a Bill becomes an Ordinance (in the UK an Act) and it is wrong to continue to call it Bill.

billion in Hong Kong means 1,000 million. A trillion is a million million. In this respect Hong Kong follows American usage.

blobs look like this •• and are sometimes called bullets. To get one on the Macintosh keyboard use Option-8. Microsoft Word provides “add blobs” commands in three different formats on the word bar. To get nice fat blobs you must change the blob alone to the Geneva typeface. A detailed discussion of their uses can be found in Waterhouse, but the main ones for TYR purposes are:

- for items in lists, as here.

- to mark a few paragraphs added to a story, where for example a comment or related development has been run on the end.
- to draw attention to a cross-reference (•see “Pope resigns” on Page 3) or a turn (• continued on Page 3, col 1).

blueprint is a common -- too common -- alternative for “plan” or “design”. Remember at least that the blueprint was originally the final plan from which builders worked; there is no such thing as a rough blueprint or an early blueprint.

book titles should be enclosed in quotes --- “Madame Bovary”. Follow the publisher’s style in deciding which words should start with caps.

SCMP puts book titles (except for sacred texts) in italics without quotes. FEER likewise. GIS uses quotes. NYT also uses quotes, but makes an exception for well-known reference books. The modern tendency is to reduce the use of italics generally, and they are a nuisance in most desktop publishing programs.

bottleneck is acceptable, if tired, as a metaphor for a shortage of something or a popular spot for traffic jams. Have a thought, though, for readers who remember what a real bottleneck is. Most stylebooks have examples of writers who forgot, producing worldwide bottlenecks, growing bottlenecks and similar nonsense.

brackets () can be used much as they are in ordinary writing to enclose an aside: *The Professor speaks Vietnamese (he learnt it while serving in the US Army) French and Italian as well as English.*

They may also enclose monetary conversions (*about HK\$3,000*) and other explanatory notes.

Square brackets [] may be used for brackets within brackets - though you should not need to do this; try rewriting the sentence. Do not use brackets to insert things in quotes.

Brackets in quotes are permitted by some publications for two purposes. The first is to insert explanatory material where the literal quote needs some addition to make it comprehensible. SCMP gives as an acceptable example “I am going to defeat (Donald) Brazier,” the candidate shouted.

In my view the readers should know who Brazier is by the time the quote is given.

A more controversial idea is to use the brackets to insert into the quote an abbreviated version of one part of it. Papers which accept this would take a quote “I believe that appalling man, who has been misgoverning the country for ten years, is a rotten prime minister,” and would report it as “I believe [Mr Major] is a rotten prime minister,” he said. This is a dangerous practice. And it can be avoided: He said he believed that Mr Major was “a rotten prime minister.”

British legislators come in two varieties: those elected to the House of Commons and those who inherit, or are appointed to, seats in the House of Lords. Only those who sit in the Commons are called Members of Parliament (abbrev: MP). On first mention say: *A Member of Parliament, Mr Tom Jones ...* but *A member of the House of Lords, Lord Jones*. In subsequent mentions they can be Mr Jones and Lord Jones. In a story about parliament you can introduce later participants merely as *Another MP, Mr Fred Smith ...* Recent reforms have removed many of the hereditary occupants from the House of Lords so remember that there are now many Lords who are not legislators.

Parliament takes a lower-case p unless part of a title but the two houses must be capped.

Broadcast past tense is also broadcast

bureau is the post-handover word for those organs of government which used to be known as branches. They form collectively the Government Secretariat, are headed by secretaries (for Economic Services, Education and Manpower, and similar topics) and are responsible for formulating policy. The problem with bureau is that it was originally a French word. The French plural -- bureaux -- flourishes in book publishing circles but most English newspapers have now gone over to bureaus. At present the SAR government is trying to popularise the French version and for as long as this brave effort continues so shall we. See also **Secretaries**.

Burmese people have their own system of titles. A man is "U", a married woman "Daw", an unmarried woman "Mah" and a young man or boy may be "Maung" or "Ko". These should be replaced by their English equivalents. The trick, of course, is to recognise them. U Nu is not "Mr U" he is "Mr Nu". International publications running stories about Burma usually keep the Burmese titles.

cab: see **American English**.

calibres of weapons are the only occasion when you must use a decimal without putting a zero in front of it. So you should refer to a .22 rifle, a .45 revolver etc.

Cambodia has now cancelled its name change and should no longer be called Kampuchea. Most Cambodian names have the surname first and given name last, but usually they are short and are given in full. An exception is Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who is always called (Prince) Sihanouk after the first mention.

canola is a commercial euphemism coined to describe vegetable oil made from the seeds of the indelicately named rape plant. Change to “rape seed oil”.

capital letters must be used at the beginning of:

- proper names -- surnames, given names, family names, names of cities, regions and countries, schools, buildings, religions, churches, associations, ships, aircraft, festivals, government departments, political parties, geological formations, archaeological eras, companies, organisations and other collective bodies.
- publications -- first, last and key words of titles and subtitles of books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, periodicals, plays, poems, and pictures.
- films, music, poetry -- should be handled like books, as should exhibitions, conferences, etc.
- ranks and titles -- should be capped when they immediately precede a name, provided the holder is still in office. It is *President Bush* but *former president Jimmy Carter*.
- Compass points are capped when part of a name -- *Southeast Asia* -- but not when used alone -- *south of Hong Kong*.
- Planets, asteroids, constellations and stars are capped but sun, earth and moon are not, unless they appear in a list with other astronomical bodies.
- Scientific names of the double-barrelled type take a cap on the first word but not the second: a buttercup is *Ranunculus acris*.

The celebrated London newspaper is *The Times*, not the Times. With this exception, though, do not cap the article in English newspaper and magazine names, whether it is part of the title or not. With foreign-language newspapers use the usual name with initial caps regardless of whether it has an article in it or not – *Der Spiegel* and *Le Monde* keep their articles.

Note that having capped the full title of something we do not cap the abbreviated version used later. The Automobile Association will be the association for the rest of the story. But Authority (as in Housing Authority) is better used with

capital throughout because the result can otherwise be confusing. Keep the cap on major titles -- the King, the Duke, the Pope, the President, the Governor and people of similar rank, but the director, the president (of a company) the secretary (for Sewage) etc. Having established that Mr Tung Chee-hwah is the Chief Executive you can call him Mr Tung for the rest of the story because this is short.

The following words change their meaning depending on whether they start with a capital letter or not, and the sense must take priority: askew, august, begin, colon, degas, herb, job, levy, mobile, natal, nice, polish, rainier, ravel, reading, tangier. Fortunately the upper-case version is usually a place or personal name, but try to avoid starting a sentence with the lower-case one.

"Triad" should be lower case whether referring to a triad organisation or a member of it. But you cannot avoid capitalising the names of the wretched things -- *the San Yee On* -- and should also, to avoid confusion, capitalise triad ranks: Red Pole, Grass Sandal and so on.

Words which are, or were, based on proper names are a problem. Do you cap or not? The following list may be some help:

Aristotelian logic, balaclava, Bologna sausage, bowdlerise, boycott, braille, brussels sprouts, bunsen burner, caesarian section, cardigan, Davey lamp, derrick, diesel engine, Dutch cap, french polish, french fries, French leave, French letter, galvanise, Gatling gun, guillotine, Hansard, Krugerrand, Levis (prefer jeans), lesbian, macintosh (rain coat), Macintosh (computer), masochism, Marxist (-ism), mayfly, the Midas touch, mesmerise, Morse code, Pershing missile, Plimsoll line, a pyrrhic victory, sadism, sandwich, shrapnel, silhouette, Socratic dialogue, Spoonerism, Stockholm tar, tantalise, Thomist (-ism), Victorian (et al), Viennese pastry, wellington boot.

But in most cases the correct style is a matter of personal taste.

Registered trade marks and trade names should always have a cap; the problem is to know when you are using one. Trade names which are registered in other countries may not be registered in Hong Kong. Or confusingly, they may be registered for another purpose (e.g. Maxim's). If in doubt it is a good idea to replace a trade name with a general term for the same thing -- which does not need to be capped. The following list has some common trade names, and alternative generic terms for the same thing if I can think of one:

Big Mac	hamburger
Coca-Cola or Coke	cola drink
Formica	plastic laminate
Hoover	vacuum cleaner
Kleenex	tissues
Polaroid	instant photograph
Sellotape	sticky tape

Seven-up (NOT 7-up) or Sprite	lemonade
Technicolor	
Teflon	non-stick coating
Valium	tranquillisers (or diazepam drugs)
Vitasoy	soya drink
Xerox	photocopy

Of course if the whole point of the story is that it is about a particular company or product then you will have to leave the trade name in.

A number of categories are always registered: brand names (Marlboro, Viceroy, White Flower Oil, Chanel), car models (Lexus, Corolla), company names (Jardines, Hutchison).

captions are always written in the present tense, even if the picture is historical --*Nelson dies in the cockpit of the Victory at Trafalgar*.

The caption should normally contain the names of everyone in the picture. Preferred style is to have the names read from left to right, preceded by (*from left*). Where there are only two people in the picture you can use something like *Mr Wong (left) presents a long service award to...*

Do not subject your reader to spotting games in which she is supposed to work out who in the picture is the only one sitting down, wearing a hat, etc. If this sort of thing is necessary you have probably chosen the wrong picture.

car park is two words.

carat see karat..

cedilla see accents.

ceiling is an acceptable metaphor for an upper limit, as long as you remember what a ceiling is. Writers of advice to writers cherish specimens where this was forgotten. My favourite is a government announcement of a "ceiling price on carpets".

celibate means unmarried, not necessarily abstaining from sex. A married person or couple cannot be celibate whether they do it or not. An unmarried person is celibate regardless. In past centuries priests who had taken vows of celibacy took advantage of this delicate semantic distinction by living with "housekeepers".

Celsius is now the accepted scale for temperatures. Any temperature given in Fahrenheit should be converted (subtract 32, multiply by 5 and divide by 9). Do not use the ° symbol; write out "degrees". Write out "minus" if necessary as well.

In tables a temperature can be abbreviated to 45C and you can use the minus sign, -.

chairperson is a droll word. In serious contexts “chairman” is correct whether the holder of the office is a man or a woman. “Chairwoman” may be used in appropriate cases but looks odd, at least to me, if the chairmanship is a formal office to which the title “Chairman” is attached, as in the Legislative Council. Some readers may suppose the chairwomanship to be another office. A popular solution in the US is to use “chair” for the office-holder but this looks odd to readers who are not used to the convention.

cheque not check is the word in banking contexts. See **American English**.

Chief Secretary for Administration is the post-handover title for the official formerly known as the Chief Secretary. The old title will still do in most circumstances but use the full one if there is any danger of confusion.

Chinese names are usually printed in Hong Kong newspapers in the style surname first followed by given names hyphenated -- *Hung Man-tim, Tung Chee-hwa* etc. For Mainland figures, however, follow the Pinyin rendition -- *Deng Xiaoping* -- in which the given names are run together as one word. People from Singapore and Taiwan usually keep all three names separate -- *Lee Kuan Yew*. Unfortunately there is no international agreement on the spelling of Chinese names in Western script, so you have to follow the usage preferred by the name's owner. Watch out for Macanese names because the Portuguese government has a weird system of its own. If the person concerned has a western name as well this comes first and on first mention you should give the lot: *Martin Lee Chu-ming* and later in the story *Mr Lee* or *Martin Lee*.

Expatriate writers and editors are often confused by the fact that Chinese has two bi-syllabic surnames: Szeto and Auyang (in a variety of spellings). Some owners of these names hyphenate them or keep the two syllables separate. Follow the owner's preference. Mr Szeto Wah is a particular trap; he is Mr Szeto, not Mr Wah.

Westernised Chinese people, particularly if living in America, may change the order to follow Western habits, so that Mr Hung Man-tim becomes Mr Man-tim Hung. A similar transition afflicts Hong Kong citizens when knighted; Mr Tang Shiu-kin became Sir Shiu-kin Tang. Knights who are shy about their given names may prefer to be known by their initials, as in Sir S.Y. Chung -- not Sir S-y.

Where a Western given name is used it comes first: *Allen Lee*. Married ladies in Hong Kong usually stick to their maiden names except when escorting their husbands on formal occasions. If the husband's name is given it comes first: A Miss Ho Suk-yin who marries a Mr Tam becomes Mrs Tam Ho Suk-yin. If there is a “Christian” name as well the result can become cumbersome. Our solution is not to allow two surnames. If interviewing a married lady, ask her which surname she usually uses and stick with that.

The SCMP has developed the quaint habit of giving every possible name on every possible occasion -- so that homely Rita Fan becomes the mouth-boggling Rita Fan Hsu Lai-tai. This was apparently provoked by a nasty legal scare involving an ICAC arrestee and a senior civil servant of the same surname and Western name. No doubt this is a sensible precaution in court reports. I can see no justification for doing it in other contexts, where the chances of inadvertently annoying obscure namesakes are minimal, but some publications prefer to be on the safe side.

Chinese words are wasted on Westerners, who don't understand them, and on Chinese readers, who don't need them. Still for a variety of reasons writers like to use the occasional one. The following are familiar enough to be worth mentioning in appropriate contexts. Put them in italics and supply a translation

amah	servant
Beida	Beijing U
chi gong	a type of traditional medicine
chow fan	fried rice
dai pai dong	cooked food stall
dim sum	small snacks
fung shui	traditional geomancy
gaido	small ferry
guan xi	connections
ha gau, siu mai	items of dim sum
ja min (chow mein)	fried rice
kai fong	neighbourhood
kung fu	Chinese martial arts
pak pai	unlicensed taxi
tai chi	shadow boxing (or anything better you can think of)
Wushu	can be left untranslated on sports pages

Do not translate the Chinese names of companies, councils, organisations etc. unless the meaning has some particular significance for the story.

Christ, Jesus should be capped, like other personal names. It is not necessary to cap ensuing pronouns.

Christian in ordinary English and American usage refers to any of the churches which worship Jesus Christ as God's son. Thus it includes the Orthodox and Catholic faiths -- and the Coptic one, for those who like obscurities. In Hong Kong the Protestants try to reserve Christian for themselves, and have had some success in influencing everyday usage. People who should know better will reply to the question "Is he a Christian" with "No, he is a Catholic". Try to make it clear which meaning you are using.

Christmas should not in any circumstances be abbreviated to Xmas.

Church names like company names should be given in full on first mention. Do not be tempted to leave any bits out.

The *SCMP* provides this splendid example: there is a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and a Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. They are not related.

circumflex see accents.

claimed is an interesting word. Ostensibly it means nothing different from "said". By long-standing convention, though, it is used by reporters when reporting things they do not quite believe, and if you use it many readers will pick up a subtle implication that you do not believe what the orator was saying. Handle with care. If in doubt use "said".

clergy are a source of some difficulty. Strictly speaking there is only one way of using "the Reverend" -- and that is (abbreviated if you must) with article and full name: *The Rev Joe Soap*. If he is a Doctor this is inserted before the name: *The Rev Dr Joe Soap*. If he has a particular post it is inserted afterwards -- ... *Soap, Dean of St Paul's*. However in Hong Kong the practice of using "Rev" in exactly the same way as one would use "Mr" is now so widespread that it no longer gives offence. So our dean would be called simply *Rev Soap*. It has the merit of simplicity, and presumably of congruence with the equivalent term in Cantonese.

This is just as well. If you find yourself in a position where the thing has to be done properly then Reverends come in a bewildering set of variations. For Anglicans, Deans are Very Rev, Bishops are Right Rev, Archbishops are Most Rev, and Archdeacons are Venerable (usual abbreviation Ven). Catholic Bishops are all Most Rev, as are their Archbishops. A Monsignor is Right Rev (usually Rt Rev). Cardinals do not require any kind of Rev, but put the title in the middle of their names -- Joe Cardinal Soap, not Cardinal Joe Soap. The Pope has a name and a number. The number should be given in Roman figures -- *Pius IX, John XXIII*.

Some Catholics, and a few others, use Father, Mother, Brother or Sister before their names. The male ones may be abbreviated to Fr and Bro. The other two must be given in full.

Orthodox Christians (who may turn up in Russian or Greek varieties) have Bishops, Archbishops, Patriarchs and Metropolitans.

Other religions are generally easier. Christian Scientists have Practitioners, Lecturers and Readers, Lutherans have Pastors (usually) Jews have Rabbis, and the Salvation Army uses military ranks. Be sure, in the latter case, to make it clear that the rank is not in the real army. Mormons are unlikely to come up but in case of need they have Elders, Bishops, Presiding Bishops and a President. None of these

gentlemen would get a capital in copy unless the full title was given, except the Pope.

Detailed advice on these matters can be found in specialised books on titled people and how to address them. I use "Debrett's Correct Form".

Whatever you are doing to clerical people in writing it is worth being polite in face-to-face encounters. Most clergymen can be addressed as "Bishop", "Dean" or whatever. Anglican clergy in lower ranks should accept "Mr Wong" but may prefer "Father". Catholic priests should be addressed as "Father". Archbishops should get "Your Grace", as should Catholic Bishops. A Cardinal qualifies for 'Your Eminence' and if you should happen to meet the Pope he is addressed as "Your Holiness".

cohort comes from the old Latin word for the tenth part of a Legion so it literally means about 300 soldiers. It is often used metaphorically to indicate a senior person's subordinates and supporters, who in Cantonese would be called small horses. There is nothing critical about it but in Hong Kong, where people tend to assume that any foreign word they do not recognise is an insult, its use may be resented.

collective nouns -- like flock, army, fleet, government, crowd, herd, group, couple -- may be singular or plural according to taste and what seems sensible. At least do not mix the two in the same sentence.

Fowler gives some good examples of how the first part of this works in practice: *The Cabinet was divided*, but *the Cabinet were agreed*. *The party lost its way*, but *the party lost their hats*. He adds comfortingly that "while there are always a better and a worse in the matter, there are seldom a right and a wrong..."

Collective expressions like "youth" when it means young people in general, or "the elderly" are better treated as plural so that it is clear what you are doing. "A couple" are usually plural but change it if it looks stupid.

collisions bring to mind the traditional advice given to young reporters that they should not write *a car collided with a truck* because this suggests that the car was at fault. This has always seemed rather far-fetched to me, but as an alternative is available -- *a car and a truck collided* -- why take chances? At least avoid the awful *a car and a truck were in collision*. Stylebook writers traditionally also point out that you can only "collide" with another moving object, so a car cannot collide with a tree. I suspect this subtlety is wasted on most readers but again alternatives (ran into, etc.) are available.

colony is what Hong Kong was until 1997. The euphemism favoured by the British Government during the last 20 years of its rule over the place was Dependent Territory. We no longer need to use this. However "the territory" as a variation on

Hong Kong has no harmful political connotations and is still usable if needed. "The SAR" is also available for this purpose.

commas in general use present no particular problems; you need to remember only that if a sentence seems, on re-reading, to require a comma to make the meaning clear you should consider whether some more drastic surgery is needed.

There is one particular area where commas do cause problems, and this is in defining and non-defining clauses, usually introduced by the word "which". Writers used to be advised that defining clauses should start with "that" instead of "which", hence providing a useful signal, but this is no longer done, alas.

In *The dog which crossed the road was run over* the "which" clause tells you which dog was the one run over. There was at least one dog which was not run over. In *The dog, which crossed the road, was black* the "which" clause does not define the dog; it merely gives you more information about the animal than you have in the rest of the sentence. The point is that defining clauses must not be enclosed in commas; non-defining clauses must be. And the word is "enclosed": to use one comma and not the other is always wrong.

A related problem comes with people's titles, jobs etc. It is correct to write *Legislative Councillor Mr Martin Lee said ...* but if you put the details after the name (as you should do unless they are very short) they must be enclosed in commas: *Mr Martin Lee, a Legislative Councillor and member of the United Democrats, said ...* Where offices, titles and names are floating about like this make sure that you still know which is the subject of the sentence. Again the commas should come in pairs if used at all. *US President Mr George Bush said ...* is correct: *US President* is adjectival and *Mr Bush* is the subject of the sentence. But *The US President, Mr George Bush, said ...* is also correct: here *US President* is the subject of the sentence and *Mr Bush* is an adjectival phrase in apposition. *The US President, Mr George Bush said ...* is always wrong.

comment when used as a verb needs some care. You should only use it when the remark involved really is a comment -- an expression of opinion -- and not a statement of fact. It would be wrong to write "*the Chief Secretary commented that he would be going to Beijing next week.*" Use "said". There are some other restrictions: "comment" cannot in any circumstances take an object. So you cannot write "*Mr X commented the plan as a bad idea.*" If Mr X "commented on the plan" you still need "that" as well. My advice is not to use "comment" as a verb at all, or at least to reserve it for those occasions when, for legal reasons, you want to label something as a comment as clearly as possible.

communist should be capped only when it is part of a political party's formal name -- *the Communist Party of China (CCP)* -- otherwise lower case -- as when talking about a communist party or a communist person. The label should be deployed with care: UK courts have held that it is defamatory to describe a person as a communist, unless he is. Of course the director of the NCNA will not sue you

for suggesting he is a communist, but the director of the American Chamber of Commerce probably would.

commuters is a word which is gradually losing its specific meaning, but it is not yet synonymous with “travellers”. Someone who commuted was originally someone who travelled over the same route every day, and paid for a monthly pass instead of buying a separate ticket for each trip. It may now be used for any regular passenger over a route -- to and from work, for example. It should not be used for public transport users in general, who are better described as “passengers”. A sentence like *commuters will have to pay higher fares from Monday* carries the misleading implication that only season tickets are going up, and occasional travellers over the same route face no increase.

companies -- each has a registered legal name, complete with penalties for not using it, or for using another unauthorised variation. Companies are legal entities and can sue you if you mix them up to their discredit. And there is no excuse with companies, because the registration procedure ensures that there is only one company with each name. Make sure you know the proper name of any company you are writing about and give it in full on first mention -- including those bits on the end like “Co Ltd”. It is acceptable to abbreviate the following designations, commonly found on Hong Kong companies: Co, Corp, Ltd and Inc. Do not abbreviate “and” if it occurs. A few companies, like Hongkong Bank, Swires, China Light, Hutchinson and Wharf, have short forms of their names which are widely known and accepted.

Company names and other details can be checked on payment of a small fee at the office of the Registrar of Companies in the government offices at Admiralty. But this is too cumbersome if you are just worried about the name. Try the Yellow Pages.

Companies incorporated overseas have a rich variety of letters after their names, which not only help to identify the one concerned but also provide useful clues for connoisseurs to where the company comes from and whether you can buy shares in it. There is a good list of these in *The Economist Stylebook*.

compass points are written all lower-case and all one word: *a northeast monsoon*. More complicated ones may be encountered during the typhoon season and they should be hyphenated -- *Typhoon Sara was 200 miles south-southeast of Hong Kong*. Directions which are part of a place name must be capped: North Korea, South Australia etc.

computers have changed the writing process, mainly for the better. Rewriting, once a daunting task because everything had to be retyped in the process, is now much easier. In fact a common problem for modern writers is difficulty in deciding

when to stop fiddling with the copy. Careful writers should master the use of the “find” and “search/replace” functions because these are a great aid to consistency. The arrival of input by computer requires writers to be aware of some typographical wrinkles not found on typewriters: see **hyphens** and **quotations**. For another microchip fringe benefit see **spellcheckers**.

Congress is usually the upper house of a legislature. In Indian contexts, though, it is a political party.

Consulates and Consulates General represent other countries in Hong Kong. Consulates General are manned by full-time diplomats; Consulates have just a local amateur.

contractions (elisions) -- like I'll, shan't, won't -- are for print purposes only acceptable in direct quotes. In radio and television scripts on the other hand we are seeking an accurate reproduction of normal speech so you have to remember to use them.

controller/comptroller mean the same thing; the second is merely a pretentious variation and should only be used if it is the formal title of the holder of the office (as it is at HKBU).

couple see collective nouns.

councillor means a member of a council. It must be distinguished from counsellor -- one who gives advice.

court martial has an odd plural: courts martial. The British version of these events may be reported like other trials as long as you remember one important point: a verdict of guilty and sentence are always subject to confirmation by higher authority and this fact must be reported with them.

I am not an authority on the PLA's habits in this matter but it seems there are military courts and they usually meet in private. At the time of writing the scope of their jurisdiction in Hong Kong after 1997 is still a topic of fascinated speculation.

courts take caps when a specific one is mentioned -- the *South Kowloon Magistracy*, *Wanchai District Court*. Note some changes in terminology imported from the relevant sections of the Basic Law: the former High Court is now called the Court of First Instance. The Court of First Instance and the Court of Appeal together form the new High Court. The building in which they live may still be called the Supreme Court Building although strictly speaking there is no longer a Supreme Court. There is also now a Court of Final Appeal, which takes the role formerly performed by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. On some matters of legal interpretation there may also be referrals to a body called the Basic Law Committee

of the National People's Congress in Beijing, as happened in the Right of Abode case.

Cultural Revolution takes caps always and only when referring to the one in China which started in the 60s. Use of this as a jovial label for changes in fashion or food is probably inappropriate in Hong Kong. Too many people here remember the real thing.

D

damage is usually an uncountable noun. You can have a lot of damage, a little damage, something badly damaged and so on. But in legal contexts **only** it means a sum of money and is **always** plural: damages are awarded to the winner of a civil case.

data is a Latin plural (singular "datum") which is well on its way to becoming an English singular. It has not yet arrived and should still be treated as a plural for now.

datelines are not used in the TYR.

And this is just as well, because they are usually misleading. A dateline supposedly says where and when the story was filed -- *Hanoi, May 10*. Hong Kong newspapers routinely change the place to somewhere their readers will recognise -- occasionally with embarrassing consequences when a story supposedly from New York includes a later reference to "this New Jersey village of 500 souls". They then often go on to change the date to "yesterday" regardless of the truth of the matter. Both these procedures are dishonest.

dates should be written so: *May 10*. Do not abbreviate the month or put "th" "nd" or any such abbreviation after the number. If the year is given as well (rarely necessary in news writing) then it should be separated from the other number by a comma: *May 10, 1990*. But if the full date is not given you can dispense with the comma -- *May 1990*. Centuries so -- *the 20th century*. Decades do not need an apostrophe: *the 20s*.

date meaning a romantic tryst with a person of the opposite sex is well established in Hong Kong and British English. You may also use "dating" either for the process in general or for the systematic pursuit of one individual's favours. Do not, though, use "date" in the sense, permitted in America, of the person with whom you make a date. You may date someone or make a date, but you should not meet your date.

deceased should not be used. Prefer "died" or "dead". "The deceased" is "the dead man" (or woman) unless circumstances permit something more stimulating like "the victim".

decimals must be in figures -- 24.5 -- and must have a zero if less than 1 -- 0.34. Only exception: gun sizes -- .45 etc.

defuse means to make safe; it comes from the process of removing the fuse from a bomb. "Diffuse" means to spread out or scatter. Do not confuse the two.

demand has rude peremptory connotations and should be deployed with care and restraint. In particular it should not be used to describe a position in negotiations which are usually going to end in a compromise. It is wrong to say *Civil servants have demanded a 12 percent increase* when we know they will settle for ten.

department may be abbreviated to dept, but only in headlines.

despite requires observance of a simple rule. It must be followed by a noun -- *despite the fact that ... despite the poor weather...* If you want to contrast a phrase with the rest of the sentence you must use "although" -- *although the weather was bad ...*

deteriorate cannot be used transitively -- i.e. a thing may deteriorate, but a person or force cannot deteriorate a thing.

diffuse, see **defuse**.

different usually takes "from". Bryson allows "to" or "than" in some circumstances -- Waterhouse does not -- but "from" is always safe. Use it. An additional problem with the other two is that usage varies depending on whether you are in England or America.

dilemma is a rather tired expression for occasions when there are two alternative choices, both unattractive. More ornate writers may speak of the decision-maker being "on the horns of a dilemma". Note that the dilemma only has two horns. This word should not be used where there are more than two possibilities, nor as an elegant variation for knotty problems generally.

discriminate requires a preposition, usually either "against" or "between". You can not say that "Blind people are discriminated" when you mean they are discriminated against.

disinterested is not the opposite of interested as that word is usually understood. Disinterested means impartial (or not having an interest of the kind which might prompt a "declaration of interest"). Judges are supposed to be disinterested, but interested. The word for not interested is "uninterested".

double meanings are the bane of hasty headline writers. If you are lucky they merely look odd. Careless use of ambiguous words like "talks", "bar" or "case" is a common cause, leading to curiosities like:

OIL TALKS

NIGERIAN TALKS IN LONDON

BEXLEY SCHOOLS BAR ROW SPREADS

DRUNK GETS NINE MONTHS IN VIOLIN CASE

Less lucky is the headline writer who produces a classic. Still cherished after many years are specimens like:

UPTURNS MAY INDICATE SOME BOTTOMS TOUCHED

MACARTHUR FLIES BACK TO FRONT

There is also the more recent masterpiece of bad taste:

HEADLESS BODY IN TOPLESS BAR

The worst thing which can happen is an unintended obscenity. Great care needs to be taken with English words with alternative meanings -- a numerous category, alas.

STUD TIRES OUT

This sort of thing is not just a danger to sub editors. The main hazard for reporters is the dangling participle. If a sentence starts with a participle (Being of sound mind, I ...) then the subject of the participle must be the subject of the sentence, and should preferably come immediately after the participle phrase. Neglect of this simple rule leads to things like: *Running naked through the park, a police officer arrested her ...*

Another fruitful source of embarrassment is the highly compressed intro, as in this example from a local publication:

A police officer was shot in the line of duty for the second time in less than a week yesterday as a gunbattle erupted on the streets of Taipo.

He was having a tough week.

drown includes the idea of the victim dying as a result of immersion. It should not be used where somebody has merely got wet and survived. See also **strangle**.

due to must have a noun. *He was absent due to illness* is correct. *He was absent due to his car broke down* is not. You will in most cases get better results if you use "because" followed by a phrase with an active verb in it, even if "due to" is possible.

E

each is singular when it is the subject of the verb: *Each of them was given ...* Be careful, though, to establish whether it is the subject or not. If it comes after a noun then the noun itself is probably the subject and will govern the rest of the sentence: *Members each have their own views ...*

each and every is always a waste of space. "Each" will do.

earthquakes are usually measured on the Richter scale. This measures the power released at the "epicentre" -- the spot where the original movement takes place. Whether the consequences are news depends on a variety of factors -- whether many people live in the region, nature of the local architecture etc. -- but the threshold of news interest for quakes outside the immediate vicinity of Hong Kong is about 6.5.

There are two peculiarities to the Richter scale. The first is that it is logarithmic. Magnitude 2 is not twice as powerful as 1, but ten times as powerful. 3 is ten times more powerful than 2 and so on. This is of no interest to readers. The second is that the scale is theoretically open-ended -- even the end of the world will be on it somewhere in the region of Magnitude 10. This seems to me of no interest to readers either and the ritual news agency phrase "measured X on the open-ended Richter scale" is a waste of space.

ellipsis is the technical term for three full stops together. The result looks like this ... It is used for one purpose only, to indicate that part of a direct quote has been omitted. Thus if you wished to curtail the preceding sentence for quotation purposes you could render it as *It is used ... to indicate that part of a direct quote has been omitted.* In scholarly or literary writing ellipsis will also be used at the beginning or end of quotes if the whole sentence is not given. Newspapers do not bother with this (and usually it will be obvious anyway). See also **square brackets**.

embarrassment afflicts poor spellers.

embassy is the word for a sovereign country's diplomatic mission in another similar country's capital. The mission will usually be headed by an ambassador. Commonwealth countries which still recognise the Queen as Head of State avoid embarrassing the good lady at the expense of confusing the rest of us and use the word High Commission for the building and High Commissioner for the representative.

Note that Hong Kong is not a country and there are neither embassies nor ambassadors here. See **Consulates**.

enclave is an obsolete word. Most native English speakers could neither define it nor suggest circumstances in which it might be used. In Hong Kong it lives on in just one use: writers who wish to avoid using Macau twice in the same paragraph put in *the Portuguese enclave* instead. This is sloppy work. Avoid.

England and the associated adjective “English” occasionally give offence. England is roughly the part of mainland Britain south of Hadrian’s Wall and east of Offa’s Dyke. Add in Wales and Scotland and you have Britain (or Great Britain for nostalgics). Add Northern Ireland (Ulster) and you have the so-called United Kingdom. Add the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands and you have the British Isles. People who are British but not English -- especially the Scots, for some reason - - are often sensitive about it. The language is still English.

enormity means great wickedness; it has nothing to do with size.

en route is two words if you must use it. See **foreign words**.

enquire, enquiry: see **inquire, enquire**.

escalate is a much abused verb and should be left to its proper place in discussions of the finer points of nuclear strategy. If you must use it in other contexts remember that the word is not just a synonym for “increase”; there should be an element of rising without effort and regardless of one’s wishes, as on an escalator.

etc (for “et cetera” meaning “and all the rest”) should be avoided in news writing. If it occurs in a direct quote it should be written out in full.

épée -- note accents.

equivalent takes different prepositions if used as a noun or an adjective. If A is equivalent *to* B then it may also be the equivalent *of* B.

euphemisms should be avoided in news writing if possible. This is sometimes difficult: toilet, lavatory, rest room, public convenience, comfort station, water closet and powder room are all euphemisms. There is a nice line in “Who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf” where the hero says, “show our guests to the euphemism.”

In other areas where euphemism once flourished there is now no excuse. You can and should say someone has died, not “passed away”. Occasional references in China stories to senile leaders “going to meet Mao” are intended to be facetious. Stories about AIDS have made sex, even in its oral and anal variations, mentionable in polite writing.

As well as shaking off the influence of the Victorians (who used to write about hanged killers being “launched into eternity”) you also have to watch out for the PR

people, like the gentleman at Cape Kennedy whose instant comment on the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger was that it was “clearly a major malfunction”. My favourite gripe is the airline industry’s routine use of “near miss” to describe what is actually a near collision.

See also **formal words**.

ex- is the usual prefix for old jobs: the ex-president etc. In copy it is better to use “the former president” but ex- will do in headlines. Note that in this context the hyphen is compulsory. There are a few Latin phrases with “ex” in them (e.g. *ex parte*, *ex officio*, *ex dividend*) and these should not under any circumstances be hyphenated.

exclamation marks (!) should be reserved strictly for exclamations -- *By Jove!* *Ouch!* -- and otherwise avoided.

expatriate is so spelt. “Expatriot” is defamatory.

eyewitness is usually unnecessary. “Witness” will do.

F

fact means something which is true. It follows that *actual fact*, *true fact* and *real fact* are redundant. There is no such thing as a false fact.

Fahrenheit temperatures -- still occasionally found in American copy -- should be converted to Celsius. Deduct 32, multiply by 5 and divide by 9. This is quite accurate enough for weather stories so there is no need to leave the original figure in the text as well.

false scent is Gowers's term for a particular problem: where a sentence is perfectly correct but includes a sequence inside it which appears to mean something else. The example he gives is the sentence "Behind each part of the story I shall tell lies an untold and unsuspected tale of hard work." The reader is likely to be at least temporarily wrong-footed by the phrase "I shall tell lies". News writers need to be particularly aware of this problem because of the danger that printing the words in columns will make the situation even worse:

Behind each
part of the story
I shall tell lies
an untold and
unsuspected tale
of hard work

Far East is a term which bothers some people. We may be in the far east if you are standing in London. From California we are the near west. We ourselves may believe we are the middle. To avoid offence, use *East Asia*.

FBI is a term familiar to all watchers of American television programmes, which means practically everyone, so there is no need to spell out the full name.

federal court is usually a generic term for the higher courts in a federal legal system. As such it will be all lower case. Confusingly there is a body officially called the Federal Court (and entitled to capitals) in Malaysia.

female has, for some reason, a faintly pejorative overtone when used as a noun to refer to women or girls, and should be avoided. There is no objection to the adjective.

few, **a few** imply a difference in emphasis. The first, as Fowler puts it, means some but not many, while the second means some and not none.

Field Marshal as a title may in emergencies be replaced with the shorter “General”, but it must not be abbreviated to “Marshal”.

figures from one to ten should be spelled out. Above ten use numerals 11, 12, and so on. There are, however, numerous exceptions to this rule:

- At the beginning of sentences all figures must be spelled out: *Fifty people were injured when two trains collided ...* This is very bad news if the figure is at all complicated. It is usually better to recast the sentence to get the figure somewhere else. An alternative which is sometimes helpful is to put the figure in less specific terms: *More than 3,000 staff will be laid off ...*

- If the figure is next to another one -- *12 50-seater buses* -- you should spell one of them out, but once again recasting the sentence will usually be a better solution.

- Times are usually given in numerals -- *12.30, 1.45* -- unless the context is very informal, when *about three o'clock* may be preferable.

- When figures are given in tabular form (or near-tabular, as in sports results etc.) the numerals should be used.

- Ordinal numbers are spelled out in text -- *first... second... third...* -- but abbreviated in lists -- *1st... 2nd... 3rd ...*

- Dates always use figures -- *May 15, September 1* -- except for a few days which have become phrases in their own right -- the *Fourth of July, the Double Tenth* ...

- Military forces have a well-established convention of their own: numerals up to and including Divisions -- *the 13th Regiment, the 2nd Battalion, the 7th Armoured* -- but corps use Roman numerals - *VII Corps* -- and armies are spelled out -- *the Eighth Army*.

- In sequences running above ten use numerals throughout.

GIS at one time cultivated the quaint habit of using spaces instead of commas in large numbers, so that a million came out as 1 000 000. Obvious potential for disaster in narrow columns.

Filipinos is the word the people of the Philippines use for themselves. It should not be used as a general adjective for other Philippine things. The variation *Filipina* for ladies from the Philippines is not used by Filipinos (except in a jocular and rather specialised context) and should not be used by you. Filipino is right for both sexes.

finalize offends purists and British readers. Use “finish” or “complete”.

flak meaning heavy criticism or (literally) anti-aircraft fire is so spelt, without a ‘c’.

flu is acceptable for influenza. And for newspaper purposes avian influenza is “bird flu”.

fob is an abbreviation for “free on board”, and is used in quoting export prices. It should be confined strictly to specialised business pages, where it is printed as above: all lower case with no points.

Foreign Secretary in South Asia (India and her neighbours) means the senior civil servant in the Foreign Ministry, not (as in the UK) the minister in charge.

foreign words should be avoided. Many Hong Kong readers have quite enough trouble with English. Where there is a respectable English equivalent (“each year” for “per annum”, “duck in orange sauce” for “caneton à l’orange”) use the English version. Foreign words which have become accepted in English writing, like coup d’état or charge d’affaires may be used without accents. If in any doubt about your readers understanding the foreign word it should be in italics with a rough translation in brackets: *daipaidong* (cooked food stall).

formal words are those used in situations which seem, at least to the user, to call for a more elevated and rarified language than that used in everyday situations. In Legislative Council debates shortages of staff and money become *resource and staffing constraints*; in court cases people who normally walk along the road *proceed along the thoroughfare* (possibly *about their lawful occasions*); in sociological circles people do not read, they *receive communication inputs through printed media*. Only the constant vigilance of the reporter will keep this sort of rubbish out of his copy.

The words below (shorter alternatives on the right) are worth looking at twice:

abandon	drop
accommodation	rooms
accumulate	gather, add
acquaint	tell
acquire	get
administer	run
alleviate	reduce
ameliorate	improve
anticipate	expect
approximately	about
assist	help
attire	clothes
bear	carry
beverage	drink
cast	throw

cease	stop
close	shut
collation	meal
commence	begin
complete	finish/ed
conceal	hide
concerning	about
consider	think
currently	now
demonstrate	show
desire	want
dispatch	send
donation	gift
dwell	live
dwelling	home
edifice	building
endeavour	try
endorsement	approval
envisage	foresee/expect
establish	set up
evinced	show
expedite	hasten/hurry/speed up
experiment	test
extend	give
feasible	possible
following	after
implement	carry out
inform	tell
initiate	begin
lengthy	long
locality	place
luncheon	lunch
manufacture	make
materialise	happen
necessitous	needy
necessity	need
objective	aim
obsolete/obsolescent	out of date
obtain	get
participate	take part
possessed	had
purchase	buy
preserves (n.)	jam
prior to	before
purchase	buy
require	want, need
reside	live
residence	home
soiled	dirty
suborn	bribe
sufficient	enough

summon
superfluous
terminate
transaction
usage
vessel
viable

send for
surplus
end
deal
use
ship
(usually means nothing)

Keith Waterhouse (in *On Newspaper Style*) sounds a note of warning: “An *experiment* is not necessarily a *test*. *Superfluous* is not the same as *surplus*, *anticipate* is not the same as *expect* ...” And so on through further examples. The trouble is that nine times out of ten the user of the word is not as well-informed as Mr Waterhouse, and anticipates when he *should* have expected. By all means do not change automatically, but in most cases you should, after some thought, prefer the smaller, simpler word.

Another aid to simple, direct writing is to use phrasal verbs in preference to longer alternatives: prefer “come down” to “descend”, “put in” to “installed” and so on.

former/latter should not be used in news copy, where readers cannot be expected to hop up and down the column in search of the items referred to. Rewrite the sentence.

forum is now treated as an English word and has the plural “forums”, not “fora”.

fractions should be avoided if possible (you can usually use decimals) except for the everyday ones which can be spelled out: *a half, a quarter, a third...*

fulfil is the correct spelling. But like other similar verbs it takes an extra ‘l’ in “fulfilled” and “fulfilling”, while “fulfilment” is correct. Thinking of another word is not a bad move either.

fund is acceptable as a verb in certain technical financial contexts -- a pension scheme which is funded, for example, has money set aside to meet the obligations expected to come later. But generally when someone is said to fund something it just means he is going to pay for it, and you should say so.

G

gauge is often mis-spelled.

gay still bothers some people when used for homosexuals. But it is probably indispensable at least for headlines. No cap. You should not use “queer” in this context except for direct references to the “Queer eye...” television show.

genus and species are part of the classification system used by scientists to sort out animals and plants. A species (a set of organisms sufficiently similar to interbreed) is known by the two names. The genus name comes first and takes a capital letter; the species name is all lower-case: *Homo sapiens* is us, *Bufo vulgaris* the common toad and so on.

gender is strictly a grammatical term which was adopted by Victorians as a euphemism for “sex”. Modern readers do not need this protection.

gender -- or if you prefer sex -- distinctions are gradually disappearing from the vocabulary, but there are wide areas of uncertainty over some words.

The following no longer have feminine versions: alumnus, aviator, executor, Jew, poet.

The following feminine forms survive: Countess (and similar titles), masseuse, suffragette, and waitress.

Almost all the rest are dangerous. Look out particularly for: stewardess (prefer flight attendant), actress (some of them are quite militant about preferring actor, though they don't get it in the *SCMP*) and authoress (another militant area -- prefer writer).

girls should become women at the same age as boys become men -- 18. The use of “girls” for mature women is rightly regarded as insulting.

God takes a cap, as do Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, Virgin Mary, Allah, Mohamed (note spelling) Thor, Venus etc. Do not capitalise pronouns which refer to these deities.

gospel should be lower-case.

government also does not need a capital. The convention by which it is used without “the” in front of it where “the” ought to be is spreading rapidly but is not yet accepted as newspaper usage.

The use of the initial cap: practice varies. Many publications (including the *SCMP* still insist on an initial

cap when a specific government is referred to -- *the British Government*. Hong Kong English newspapers used to have a useful convention that government had a cap 'g' always, and only, when it referred to the Hong Kong government, which saved some possible misunderstandings. Generally though the trend these days is towards less use of capitals and this is one area where they can be dispensed with.

government bodies, departments and officials take initial capitals if the full official title is given. Note that some officials and departments have a short version of their name which still takes caps. This is unavoidable because the full names are often too long to be used at all. Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no place in your pages but he keeps his caps as the Foreign Secretary. Similarly with Finance Ministry, Foreign Office etc. In later mention shorter versions -- *the minister, the ministry* -- can be left lower-case. Do not call the Foreign Secretary *the secretary* even after he has been introduced. *The FS* is permissible only in light pieces.

governor is no longer used as a title in Hong Kong. The official in this role is now known as the Chief Executive. There are still governors in American states, the Bank of England and school boards. Where there is only one of a particular governor and you are using the title with his name, it takes a cap: *Arkansas Governor Bob Burger*. Do not use the abbreviation Gov. which is often found in American copy.

governor-general is the title of an official found in some former British colonies. He discharges those vestigial constitutional functions which in the Old Country remain with the Queen. If we are talking about a specific example you need to cap both words. The hyphen is also necessary. Plural is governors-general.

GNP and **GDP** can be used without explanation for stories of a specialised business or economics nature. In other stories they should not appear at all.

grave (è) -- see accents.

Gulf, for our readers, means the scene of the Gulf War, which can be referred to simply as *the Gulf*. This is just as well, because the alternatives are contentious. The Arabs call it the Arabian Gulf, which annoys the Iranians. The Iranians call it the Gulf of Iran, which annoys the Arabs. Westerners have traditionally called it the Persian Gulf, which annoys both parties. For that reason I personally find it rather tempting.

guns present the sort of problems with names and numbers which we also find with aeroplanes. Traditionally guns were identified and classified by the internal diameter of the barrel (which is necessarily also the size of the bullet which fits it) and this dimension might range from a 35 mm pistol to a 16-inch naval gun. Sometimes the unit was omitted, as in the .45 (inch) revolver or the 88 (millimetre)

anti-aircraft gun. Note that for this purpose only decimals are not preceded by a zero. So .45 is correct, not 0.45. An occasional alternative is to classify the gun by the weight of the projectile -- a six-pounder, a 12-pounder and so on -- though this is now found mainly in historical contexts. Modern guns, like other weapons, often come with a complete set of manufacturer's name, model number and brand name -- *the Colt AR-15 Armalite* -- which should be given in full on first mention.

H

half is sometimes singular, sometimes plural, depending on what you are talking about. *Half the students were women, but half of the money has gone.*

hangar, not hanger, is the correct spelling for the large shed in which aircraft are kept.

headlines are a subject about which whole books can be, and have been, written. Harold Evans's *News Headlines* is a recommended example. The requirements for a headline are that it should be short enough to be printed in large type and read in one swoop, also that it should without dishonesty persuade the reader, as much as possible, to read the story. Usually (though there are exceptions, especially on feature pages) the easiest way of interesting the reader is to provide the main point of the story, or a substantial part of it. In a news story this should be found in the first paragraph.

When first writing headlines, it is important to decide on the shape and size of the headline before you start writing it. Otherwise the temptation to make life easy by using one line of a very small typeface is irresistible. This will lead to an uninspiring headline and a depressing page design.

Some basic rules for headline writing are:

1. Be active (particularly in choice of verbs)
2. Be concrete (things and people should be there)
3. Be simple
4. Use short words

Headline grammar: headlines are written in the present: *Bus kills man*. Two exceptions, where the revelation is historical --*Churchill plotted Hitler's murder, says historian* -- and where it is a court story and the news point is from the evidence, not from the court happenings themselves. Thus *Robber shot victim* but *Robber gets ten years*. The verb "is" and its parts are omitted, as are all articles.

Headline vocabulary: It is universally accepted that some words may be used in headlines where they would be unacceptable in prose, because of the need for extreme brevity. The following list provides some shorter alternatives for words which often come up. Bear in mind that too much reliance on headline words gives a downmarket tone to a publication. Also you must ensure that headline language does not appear in the copy.

Original word

try

accident

mishap

actor, sports player	star
agreement, arrangement, treaty, etc	deal
anger	rage or ire
argument	row
arrested	held
assent	nod
attempt	bid
bad luck	jinx
cancel/abolish	scrap
criticise	rap, slam (if justified)
difficulty	hurdle
disappointment	blow
discontinue/fire	axe
dispute	row, clash
encourage/increase	boost
exclude	bar
fail to give face	snub
hurry	dash
increase	rise, hike
inquiry	probe
launch/inaugurate, etc	start
leader etc	chief
likely to	set to
mistake	boob (also slang for breast so take care)
	slip
mystery/puzzle	riddle
person disagreeing with others	rebel
prohibit/forbid	ban
promise	pledge, vow
proposal	plan
question/interrogate	quiz, grill
restrict	curb
remove/cancel/reduce	cut
resign	quit
warn	alert

See also **double meanings**.

hectare is the usual measure of land area for official purposes in Hong Kong. A hectare (abbreviation ha) is 10,000 square metres. If you have many overseas readers it is a kindness to tell them that a hectare is roughly 2.5 acres.

hell does not require a capital letter.

her is not an acceptable pronoun for countries, governments or other institutions, which take "it". You may, though the usage is dying out, use "her" for ships.

heretofore, like other words of a similar nature (hitherto, hereunder ...) should not appear in news copy.

high commission is the correct name for the equivalent of an embassy where the host country and the foreign one are in the Commonwealth. India has an embassy in Moscow but a high commission in London, Canberra etc.

There is no such thing as a United Nations High Commission for Refugees; there is only a UN High Commissioner for Refugees. This is a nuisance. The Commissioner has a representative in Hong Kong, an office in Hong Kong and staff in Hong Kong but he does not have a Commission anywhere. This leads to some clumsy phraseology but cannot be helped.

homework is uncountable.

Hong Kong is two words.

Well it used to be one. The convenient consensus on this point was suddenly abandoned by the Post in August 1993 so you have to remember who you are writing for. HK is one word in FEER, Asiaweek, and the Standard; two in the Post, the glossies and overseas publications generally. Our government calls itself the Hong Kong government. Personally I have a mild preference for one word in local publications printing in narrow columns, because "hong" on its own is an established word in local usage. If left on the end of a line without a hyphen it may mislead the reader. The Post stumbled onto an example soon after making the change. The phrase "orders from the Hong" looked like a reference to China Light and Power until you came to "Kong government" at the beginning of the next line.

Hong Kong's official name nowadays is the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. This may be shortened to HKSARPRC, which is still unpronounceable, alas. Do not be tempted to read it "Harpic". This is a brand of toilet cleaner. For all but the most formal purposes "Hong Kong" is acceptable on its own. Likewise "Hong Kong Government" is still a serviceable handle for our government, though in the desperate search for post-handover novelty it now calls itself "The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government" on formal occasions.

Hong Kong place names are a typographical problem. Old books about Hong Kong treat each Chinese character as a separate word, and have places like Wan Chai in them. By the time I reached Hong Kong the universal convention on English newspapers was to treat the name as one word -- Wanchai, Tsimshatsui and even

Meifoosunchuen. But when typesetting was transferred from typists who knew Chinese to computers which did not, unhappy splits started appearing at the end of lines, and readers encountered disconcerting places like Tsimshat-sui, happily passed by expat subs who did not know what the Chinese words were anyway. So the modern practice is to treat some frequently used names -- Wanchai, Mongkok, Chaiwan -- as one word and split the others. The computer can be programmed with the permissible splits for the common names. As the TYR is staffed entirely by people who speak Chinese we do not need to be as conservative as this, and are free to use the approach which is easiest for our readers.

Use the official versions of local names, which will be found in the government publication *Hong Kong Streets and Places*. Subs should watch out for unhappy splits at the ends of lines.

Hong Kong words is the only term I can think of for a few words which survive here and nowhere else. They may generally be used without explanation in copy for local consumption. If in doubt about your readership it is best to provide a translation:

Amah	domestic servant
Congee	rice porridge or <i>juk</i>
Godown	warehouse
Hong	large company
Shroff	cashier
Taipan	boss of a hong (James Clavell says in "Noble House" that this is a little joke perpetrated by the locals on early expatriates, and the word really means brothel-keeper.)
Taitai	well-off housewife
Triad	criminal gang or a member of it
Walla-walla	water taxi

honours are those orders, medals etc given in the name of the old sovereign to members of Hong Kong society. For news purposes we do not add initials to names (OBE, CPM etc) and they are not mentioned except on the occasion when they are awarded. The SAR government has a replacement set which results in the politically docile being decked in various shades of Bauhinia Award. We treat these the same.

hopefully, as in *Hopefully the sun will shine tomorrow* is a controversial matter. Those against argue that the usage is ungrammatical and ambiguous -- also unnecessary because you can write *I hope ...* or *It is hoped ...* Those in favour point out that the example above is no different grammatically from *Happily the sun shone yesterday*, which is perfectly acceptable.

A further more practical objection is that the loose use of "hopefully" frequently has the effect in practice of concealing, or at least avoiding the question of, who is doing the hoping. As such it is a common feature of civil service verbiage.

My personal advice is that every generation picks on one or two usages as litmus tests and decrees that, regardless of strict logic, those who use them are illiterate compared with those who do not. This, friends, is one such test. Accordingly the loose usage should be avoided by writers who wish to retain the respect of their readers.

hyphens should be avoided as far as possible because your page will already have plenty inserted by the computer in the course of justifying the text. A hyphen cannot be avoided in:

- compound adjectives like *28-year-old*, *red-hot*, *taylor-made*, *Hong Kong-born*, unless the first word is an adjective ending in *-ly*. So *a new-born baby* but *a freshly laid egg*.
- in compound words like *re-form*, which would otherwise look like something else.
- in hyphenated names like Akers-Jones.
- to avoid a disconcerting double letter in words like *heart-throb*, *news-stand*, *re-educate* and *hitch-hike*. *Cooperate*, spurned in the UK, is acceptable in Hong Kong.

Hyphens seldom last for long in compound nouns -- birdcage, housewife, fingerprint and railway all used to have one -- and such disappearances should be discreetly encouraged as far as possible.

I

in order to is usually unnecessary. Use “to”.

Indochina is one word.

Indonesian names vary so much in number and purpose that there are no simple rules. In each case the reporter must ask for both the full name (which may be a single name) and the short version, if any, which can be used with Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms.

innocent must not be used as an alternative to “not guilty” in court reports. When used this way in agency copy it should be changed. The verdict “not proven”, which you may come across in Scottish cases, has a particular meaning which is not the same as “not guilty”; it must be reported accurately.

innuendo is a legal term which has a definite technical meaning, although lawyers have not yet agreed on precisely what it is. Avoid the word if possible.

input is best reserved for computer contexts.

inquire, enquire used to be alternative spellings for the same thing. In 1968 Fowler reported an emerging distinction between “enquire” meaning to ask, and “inquire” meaning to investigate. More recently the tendency is for “inquire” to be the accepted spelling in all circumstances, though “enquire” is not yet wrong.

interface should be avoided.

internet does not require a capital. It is, though, now a basic reporting tool. So you should be familiar with the use of google (www.google.com) and be able to find at short notice such useful items as the government phone book, the Laws of Hong Kong, the CIA fact book and a decent on-line dictionary.

interpretation, reinterpretation have been subjected to political manipulation. In terms of English usage the situation is quite clear. If the SAR government seeks a second opinion about a Hong Kong case from a Beijing body then the version of the law supplied is a reinterpretation. However our government insists on using “interpretation”, apparently in the hope that people will as a result overlook the fact that the process involves over-ruling the Hong Kong courts..

interpretive, interpretative are both acceptable.

Interpol is well known to our readers and there is no need to use the organisation’s full name (International Criminal Police Organisation).

-ize, -ise present an interesting specimen of trans-Atlantic word warfare. English traditionally varied its treatment. There was advertize, bastardize, prioritize and there were merchandise, chastise, televise. And so on. Dictionaries, even English dictionaries, usually recommended a “z” but were frequently ignored by writers. The Americans sensibly decided to make spelling easier for themselves and in all circumstances now use the -ize ending. The British reaction has been to adopt, on many publications, the policy of always using the -ise version. Personally I am quite happy with the English system. If you decide to use the American one do not get carried away and start inserting “z” in words which were not formed by adding “ize” to a noun (or at least not in recent memory) like chastise, surmise, compromise, revise, devise and surprise.

its, it’s entail a simple distinction which is often overlooked. “It’s” is the contraction for “it is”. The possessive form of “it” is “its”.

J

jargon is a constant threat to decent writing; it will often simultaneously mystify your readers and waste your space.

Jargon may be defined as the specialised language of a profession, discipline or activity. Within a small circle of habitual users it may perform a useful function by abbreviating complex ideas (sign, symbol, signifier), by providing alternatives to words which are too value-laden or indelicate for scientific use (vagina) or by conveying an idea which nobody else uses at all (soft feature).

All too often, though, jargon is picked up by people who do not need it and inflicted on people who do not readily understand it.

Major perpetrators are:

- sociologists -- *The cognitive affective state characterised by intrusive and obsessive fantasizing concerning reciprocity of amorous feelings by the object of the amorce... all you need is "love"*.
- politicians -- *I believe the present situation clearly indicates that in the second quarter we're going to be in a position where gas rationing may well be a reality ... petrol will be rationed in April.*
- civil servants -- *The treatment of this loan interest from the date of the first payment has been correct -- i.e. tax charged at full standard rate on Mr X and treated in your hands as liability fully satisfied before receipt... Send no money.*
- scientists -- *In normal individuals the lowest concentration in which sucrose can be detected by means of gustation differs from the lowest concentration in which sucrose in the amount employed has to be ingested in order to produce a demonstrable decrease in olfactory activity and a noteworthy conversion of sensations interpreted as a desire for food into sensations interpreted as satiety associated with ingestions of food... A normal person can taste sugar in water in quantities not strong enough to interfere with his sense of smell or take away his appetite.*

And so on. The above examples were first spotted by Bill Bryson (*Dictionary of troublesome words*), Edwin Newman (*Strictly speaking*) and Ernest Gowers (*Plain words*).

The danger of this sort of thing is that it will seep into your writing without your noticing. In this, as in other matters, the price of freedom is constant vigilance.

See also **euphemisms** and **formal words**.

jobs and workers: General job description: *Mr Lau, a nutritionist with the Hong Kong Nutrition Association, said...*

• **district board member** -- *Mr Chan, a district board member for Shatin, said.../Mr Chan, a Shatin district board member, said...*

• **a lecturer** in (something) at (a college/university) -- *Mr Wong, a lecturer in social work at Hong Kong Baptist University, said.../Mr Wong, a social work lecturer at*

Hong Kong Baptist University, said...But professor takes “of” -- Wong, a professor of sociology at ...

• **worker/labourer/labour/staff/employee** -- *Dock workers went on strike last year./We have three labourers on our staff./The company has thirty employees of whom 20 are manual workers and the rest are white collar staff./ All the staff were required to attend a meeting./Ms Chung, an employee [not: a staff] of Golden Radio, said English-language radio had no future in Hong Kong./One member of staff was off sick that day.*

judges are politely addressed as if they only had surnames -- *Mr Justice Wong* if in the High Court, *Judge Wong* in District Courts. Occasionally a District Court Judge will sit in the High Court. He is then confusingly termed a Deputy Judge. Magistrates are treated as ordinary mortals -- *magistrate Mr Arthur Wong ... Mr Wong.*

The surname only arrangement is running into trouble with increasing localisation of the judiciary, which will inevitably produce a multiplicity of judges surnamed Chan, Wong, etc. In such circumstances you would need to use both names, and this argues strongly for doing so all the time.

junk is well established in Hong Kong English usage for the traditional type of boat and needs neither an explanation nor the adjective “Chinese” which is often supplied. But it does have other meanings so headline writers need to handle with care. Note that most junks found around the place are modern leisure craft. If you mean a fishing junk you should say so. The modern boat used by most fishermen in Hong Kong (and usually painted green for some reason) is not a junk; it is a trawler.

K

karats are used to measure the purity of gold -- which for most purposes is too soft to be used undiluted. Pure gold is 24-karat, an alloy consisting of 50 per cent gold is 12-karat, and so on. Not to be confused with carats, which are used as a unit of weight for gemstones. One carat is 200 milligrams.

key as an adjective standing in for “important” -- *key decision, key vote, key player* -- is vague and boring. It may occasionally be necessary in headlines but should not be used in text. At least keep it in front of the noun. The gentleman who says “the hands are key” in the TV ad is a professional sportsman. They are allowed to mangle the language.

kids as a chatty alternative to “children” still bothers some purists but the usage seems well established in Hong Kong. Do not follow the American practice of using it for students of university age, though. It should only be used where “children” would be a realistic alternative.

knights are naked without their first names. Thus *Sir David Wilson ... Sir David*. Under no circumstances is *Sir Wilson* acceptable. If your publication is accustomed to referring to people by their surnames alone then there is no objection to the unadorned *Wilson*. This is useful in Hong Kong, where Sir Davids are common.

See also **titles, Lady**.

knot is the unit used for measuring the speed of ships. One knot is one sea mile (1,852 metres or 1.15 miles) per hour. Note that the “per hour” concept is already included so it is wrong to give a speed in “knots per hour”.

kudos is an old Greek word meaning praise. It is not a plural and there is no such thing as a kudo. Treat it like “pathos”.

Kuomintang is the preferred spelling. KMT is acceptable in headlines.

L

Lady is a traditional title dating back to the Middle Ages and surrounded, as such titles tend to be, by thickets of etiquette. The problem is that there are four possible forms:

1. Lady + family name -- *Lady Windermere*. This form is used by peeresses in their own right (meaning they did not acquire the title through their husbands), as well as the wives of British knights, baronets, barons, viscounts, earls and marquesses.
2. Lady + given name + family name -- *Lady Caroline Lamb*. This is used by the daughters of earls, marquesses and dukes.
3. Lady + husband's given name + family name -- *Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton*. This is used by the wives of the younger sons of dukes and marquesses.
4. Given name + Lady + family name - *Anne Lady Orr Lewis*. This is reserved for the divorced or widowed wives of peers or baronets.

Having identified your species of Lady you then face the problem of a shorter version for use in the rest of the story. The only correct forms are (following the examples above):

1. *Lady Windermere* (no shorter: tough luck)
2. *Lady Caroline* (not Lady Lamb)
3. *Lady Malcolm* (not Lady Douglas-Hamilton)
4. *Lady Orr Lewis* (not Lady Ann)

Note that if a Lady marries a man who has no title, or an inferior one, she keeps her own. He is not promoted, though. So you must write of *Baroness Dunn and Mr Michael Thomas*; she does not become Mrs Thomas and he does not become Lord Dunn. According to rumour an after-dinner joke in which he was addressed as Mr Dunn went down very badly with its victim.

Further details in Debrett's.

lay, lie are easy enough in principle: Lay always has a direct object and lie never does: *When I lie down to sleep I lay my head on the pillow*. The problem is that "lay" is also the past form of "lie", so you would get *When I lay down to sleep last night I laid my head on the pillow*. And the past participle of "lie" is "lain", which sounds as if it ought to be the past participle of "lay" (actually "laid"). You must either learn the things -- I lay, I laid, I have laid; I lie, I lay, I have lain -- or avoid both words altogether.

Legal terms are a difficult area where the desire to write in plain English sometimes has to be restrained by the fear that a paraphrase will miss some nuance of the official word. The following points should be noted:

In criminal cases the Crown prosecutes a defendant who may also be described as the accused. He may be said to admit or deny the charge, or better to plead guilty or not guilty to it. Be careful not to fiddle with the description of the charge. "Causing death by dangerous driving" is a clumsy phrase but you are not allowed to abbreviate it to "killing". At the end of the case the defendant will be either convicted (found guilty) and sentenced or acquitted (found not guilty).

In civil cases there is still a defendant, but the intrusion of other words from the criminal lexicon is potentially disastrous. A plaintiff sues the defendant and the court will find for one or the other of them. Nobody is convicted. The winner may be awarded damages (money) and costs. Sometimes there will be an injunction, which is a flashy kind of court order.

In inquests there is no defendant. The gentleman who chairs the proceedings is a Coroner. If there is a jury they are said to return a verdict; if the Coroner is alone he records it.

In juvenile cases we do not refer to the defendant as "accused" and we do not describe the result as a conviction. It is a finding. The court will "make an order", not "impose a sentence" as it does in adult cases. Newspapers have a right to report juvenile cases (subject to their not revealing the identity of the accused) but this has been exercised to rarely in Hong Kong that it has been forgotten.

The following legal words are Latin; they should be printed in italics (and explained) if you cannot avoid using them: *bona fide, caveat, certiorari, dicta, gratis, habeas corpus, mandamus, nisi, prima facie, ultra vires, subpoena*. Do not use italics for a Mareva injunction or an Anton Pillar order (note caps), which are named after a ship and a person respectively.

likeable is so spelt.

GIS follows American usage on this point, for some reason.

Lord comes from the same antiquated stable as Lady but offers fewer problems. Use it in first reference to Barons -- *Lord Kadoorie* -- and in second and later references to viscounts, earls and marquesses -- *the Earl of Muck ... Lord Muck*. In these cases the given name is never used.

A Lord may, however, instead be a younger (i.e. not the eldest) son of a Marquess or Duke. In this case the given name is always used: *Lord Percy Crumpet ... Lord Percy*. See Debrett's if confused.

license is the verb, "licence" the noun. But in America "license" is used for both.

liquefy is so spelt. Do not insert a second "i".

M

madam, madame present a spelling problem because the version without an 'e' is often used in Hong Kong as a courtesy title for elderly ladies -- *Madam Wong* -- whose marital status is unclear. In this spelling but without the cap it is also used (by GIS among others) to mean the keeper of a brothel. Because of the obvious danger of misunderstandings resulting from this dual use I do not recommend using the word in newspapers for either purpose. If you must use it my personal view is that in all circumstances the word is correctly spelled madame, as it is in French. The usual abbreviation is Mme but in Hong Kong newspapers if we use it at all we spell it in full every time..

mahjong is one word.

Malaysian names will usually be Chinese, Malay or Tamil. Chinese names are no problem -- or no worse than they are anywhere else. The given names are usually not hyphenated. Malay names may be complicated. The prime minister, for example, is Mahathir bin Mohamad. This means Mahathir son of Mohamad and becomes (Mr) Mahathir on second reference. Tamil names are similar but even more difficult. In every case, ask.

major is much overused as a variation on "important". Newspapers and news bulletins are littered with major speeches, major problems, major new developments etc. If tempted, try to think of something more specific.

many should be used for countable items, **much** for uncountable quantities. See **uncountable nouns** for which is which.

mass meaning the religious ceremony does not require a capital. Note possible variations: mass, low mass, high mass, requiem mass. Note also that a mass is not "held"; it may be offered, celebrated, said or (high mass only) sung.

the masses, meaning the people at the "grass roots", presents some dangers. Firstly it must be plural: to talk of "the mass" is meaningless. Secondly the use of "the masses" has a whiff of Marxist rhetoric to it. Better to use "the general public" or some such phrase.

mean, median, mode are useful statistical concepts. The mean is what we usually refer to as the average -- to get the mean age of a class of 31 people you add their ages together and divide by 31. The median is the age of the person in the middle -- who has 15 members of the class older than him or her and 15 younger. The mode is the most popular number -- the age shared by the largest number of

people. In what is known technically as a “normal distribution” they are all the same. Where they are different you can sometimes draw interesting conclusions.

media is a plural. The singular (seldom used) is “medium”. Style book writers dislike “media” as a short, pretentious synonym for our industry.

GIS permits “news media” but prefers “press”, or “news organisations”. The *Economist* prefers “press and television”. *NYT* suggests “printed and electronic press” but will accept “news media” while holding its nose.

memorandum should strictly speaking take the plural “memoranda”, but “memorandums” is now widely accepted. Not a good word for news writing anyway; the shorter “memo” is acceptable in all but the most formal contexts. Plural “memoes”.

metaphors are overworked in much modern writing. If you must use them try at least to avoid mixing them in incongruous combinations. My favourite example of mixed metaphor is Fowler’s specimen: *a virgin field pregnant with possibilities*. Metaphors have an honoured place in editorial and feature-writing, but in news copy a few favourites tend to get over-used. Avoid, for example, that exhausted pair *Commuters/shoppers will have to dig deeper into their pockets when fares/prices rise ...* and *Steady rain did not dampen the enthusiasm at yesterday’s fair/sports day/boat races/orgy...*

meter, metre cause confusion. A meter is used for measuring something: gas meter, thermometer, speedometer. The metre is the basic unit of length in the metric system.

metric system is the old familiar name for what is now known as the *Système Internationale* (pronounced with a French accent). This starts with seven basic units -- metres, litres, grams etc. -- and derives from them a complete set of physical measurements. Unfortunately some of the more remote derivations are concealed behind the names of ancient scientists, which can be confusing.

The system has officially been adopted in Hong Kong, though traditional measurements (like the tael and catty) are resisting vigorously and Anglo-Saxons cling to their miles, pounds and pints.

In matters of this kind it is for newspapers to keep abreast of public usage, not to run ahead of it. Use whatever will be most useful to your readers.

midnight by tradition is the end of a day, not the beginning of the next one. So if you are writing on Monday morning “midnight yesterday” means the midnight which has just passed, and “midnight tomorrow” means Tuesday night.

Bear in mind, in this as in other similar cases, that you must take the reader’s point of view, and if your newspaper will not be read until Tuesday then a further

adjustment is needed: “midnight yesterday” becomes Monday night and “midnight tomorrow” means Wednesday night.

Remember also that midnight means specifically 12.00 pm. It should not be used in looser senses to mean “at night” or “after dark”.

military traps to watch out for:

The traditional ceremony is “Trooping the Colour”, not “Trooping of the Colour”. Similarly “Beating the Retreat” -- which, incidentally, has nothing to do with the usual meaning of “retreat”, and “Changing the Guard”.

The abbreviation for a military company is coy, not co.

A guard of honour is not supplied or staged; it is mounted or (on civil occasions) formed.

Ordnance, not ordinance, for military supplies.

The People’s Liberation Army confusingly includes the people who play with boats and aeroplanes, so that connoisseurs talk about the PLA navy and the PLA air force. Both these organisations have their own command structure. The navy people use navy ranks like admiral and captain. The air force people just use the usual land army labels.

militate, mitigate are confused more often than not. “Militate” (seldom used in Hong Kong) means to have weight or effect against and must take the preposition “against”. *The fact that he had only one leg militated against his playing football for Hong Kong.* To mitigate means to ease or soften. *The effects of the famine were mitigated by shipments of free food from Oxfam.*

In practice “mitigate” and the resultant noun “mitigation” crop up most often in court reports. When a person has been convicted his lawyer will usually make a speech explaining why his client should receive a light punishment, and this may be called a *speech in mitigation of sentence*. Lawyers sometimes use the verb “to mitigate” to mean to make this speech. Reporters should not imitate this, but you should make it clear what is going on if you report the speech, so: *In mitigation, Mr Costly Wong SC said...*

minuscule, not miniscule.

mishap is a useful word for headlines about accidents and such like, but cannot be stretched too far. It must be reserved for minor happenings; anything with fatal casualties is certainly too serious.

money means, for our purposes, Hong Kong dollars. Style in copy is \$5, \$500, \$5.50 (the final zero is required), \$5,000, \$500,000, \$5 million, \$5.5 million (not \$5,500,000). Dollars are Hong Kong ones unless otherwise stated. Do not use HKD for them. If foreign dollars are intended the appropriate abbreviation must be used: US\$, S\$ etc. Many countries have francs: the country must be specified. The abbreviation for pounds sterling is £, option-3 on a Macintosh, and it goes before the

number: £5. Foreign sums of money must always be translated in brackets: *He was paid US\$500 (about \$4,000)*. There is a calculator on the Apple pull-down menu. Serious business publications check exchange rates daily but for TYR purposes this is pointless. Treat the US\$ as \$7.8 and the £ as \$12. Round off the result.

MP is, in British usage, the standard abbreviation for Member of Parliament. In many other countries it is the short term for military policeman. Do not use the abbreviation (for either purpose) unless it is clear which you mean.

Mr, Mrs, Miss or **Ms** (all without points) should precede the full name of everyone in your story, and their surname in later mentions -- *Mr David Chan... Mr Chan*. The unadorned name may be used for a curious combination of folk: entertainment figures, sportsmen, juveniles and criminals including those accused but not yet tried. The *SCMP*, for some reason, adds journalists to this list. If people in the first two categories appear in a context outside their usual one they should be treated the same as the rest of the population: *Singer and actress Ms Liza Wang has been appointed to the NPC...*

As far as Mrs, Ms and Miss are concerned no professional reporter should conclude an interview with a woman without establishing which she uses or prefers. The usual arrangement on newspapers (whose editors tend to be of an age and sex similar to mine) is that Mrs or Miss is used unless the interviewee expresses a preference for Ms. The current TYR policy is that Ms is used unless the interviewee prefers Miss or Mrs. As this is a matter of political rather than aesthetic sensitivity the TYR editors are free to frame their own policy as long as it is consistently followed. TYR reporters should bear in mind that on some publications the free use of Ms is regarded as a symptom of idleness.

Some newspapers, notably The Times, rightly believe it is unfair to strip accused criminals of their titles before the result of the case is known. But this leads to complaints from readers when the accused is ostentatiously guilty of something horrendous, so most newspapers have persisted with the old system.

much see **many**.

music titles go as follows:

- Names of songs go in quotes: *Bob Dylan's "Mr Tambourine Man"*.
- Musical terms, when used to identify a piece, are capped: *Bach's Prelude and Fugue in E flat major*. If the instrument is given first you cap it, if it comes after then leave it in lower case. So a *Piano Concerto* but a *Suite for organ and trumpet*.
- Opera arias, choruses and other short bursts are known by their first few words. These should not be capped but as they are song titles they go in quotes and if they are in a foreign language -- as they usually are -- they should be in italics as well.

- Only in copy which is clearly intended for fanatics do you need to bother with the Opus or other numbers used by music buffs to identify obscure pieces.

Some publications put non-musical words in quotes if they crop up in a title (the "Eroica" Symphony) but this seems both unnecessary and complicated, because at some point you have to regard a familiar title as a whole. This then leads to difficult choices -- is it "The 1812 Overture" or The "1812" Overture?

N

names must follow one simple rule -- they must be spelled in the way the owner prefers, and it is up to the reporter to find out what this is. If the person has managed to undergo a complete change and no longer uses the name to which your readers are accustomed then give the familiar name in brackets after: *Lord Mellifluous (the former Dave Smith) ...*

nautical traps await the incautious reporter. You should not use port and starboard (for left and right respectively), or any other technicalities which will be unfamiliar to your readers. But you should seek to avoid giving offence to those who know the sea well. So:

Sailors serve and live in ships, not on them. Similarly passengers embark in ships.

The usage now has an antiquated air, but ships may still have a gender and be referred to as “she” and “her”, instead of “it”. Mundane floating objects like lighters and dredgers must be “it”, particularly if they have a number instead of a name.

Do not call warships “battleships”. The word has a precise meaning defining a particular class of ship -- and there are only two specimens left in the world. Classifications of warships are in a confusing mess at the moment: if in doubt consult *Jane’s Fighting Ships* or some cheaper reference book..

Be careful with the word “skipper” because it describes a specific qualification -- which only qualifies the holder to drive a fishing boat. The captains of larger vessels are captains.

Do not use HMS, USS or other prefixes before ship names, but remember they do need a definite article.

Where a naval person has a rank which may be confused with an army one (captain, lieutenant) you should make it clear which service he comes from (because it makes a big difference). Usually the context will make it obvious. If not the conventional solution for the British navy goes like this: *Captain Horatio Nelson, RN*. Note that the Chinese navy is part of the PLA, though it has a separate set of ranks along the usual nautical lines.

“Flag” is trappy. A “Flag Officer” is an admiral while he is exercising command -- i.e. for the duration of service in a particular job. Anyone who is an admiral, whether currently employed as such or not, is of “Flag rank”. But the “Flag Captain” is not an admiral; he is the captain of the admiral’s flagship. And the “Flag Lieutenant” is the man who carries the admiral’s briefcase.

nevertheless is not a newspaper word. Use “but”.

newspaper titles should be set in italics, without quotes. “The” is not part of the title, except of *The Times* (London). But when it is given in a foreign language as

part of a foreign name -- *Le Monde, La Stampa, Der Spiegel, and Die Welt* are examples -- you must leave it in. In other cases use “the” according to the usual rules, but not in italics. Most newspapers have rules about how they refer to themselves in their own columns. For us, TYR is fine. Note that though the “T” stands for “the” you have to supply “the” if it is needed (as it usually is).

nobody is one word. For the purposes of the ensuing verb it is treated as singular.

no may be used as an abbreviation for number in tabular matter and for things like buses -- *a no10 bus*. Note no full stop.

no one not noone.

nonetheless has no place in news writing.

none has a curious history. Most writers always treat it as singular, though all the authorities insist, sometimes with considerable vehemence, that this is unnecessary. Nice of them.

not only ... but (also) ... is a useful construction which requires the following of some simple rules (which also apply to *either ... or ...* and *neither ... nor ...*) The basic idea is that the grammatical structure in place before you said “not only ...” must also make sense with what comes after “but also”. Thus if the word after “not only ...” is an adjective then the word after “but (also) ...” must be an adjective -- *the dog was not only fat but (also) lazy*. If the object of a verb comes after “not only” then another object must be provided after “but” -- *he interviewed not only the directors of the firm but also the workers and secretaries*. And so on. In particular note that if there is a preposition in the first part of the construction then you will need to repeat it in the second -- *he was deaf not only to threats but also to rational argument*.

notwithstanding should be avoided.

numbers: see **figures**.

number of the subject influences the ensuing verb, which is usually no problem but occasionally reveals confusion over whether the subject is singular or plural:

- **two subjects** linked by “and” take a plural verb (easy) but if you decide to use “with” or “together with” the verb should be in the singular.

- **alternatives**: *a raw egg or a glass of milk is a good breakfast*.

- **neither ... nor/either ... or**: if both bits are singular, so is the verb; if one is plural, follow the one nearest the verb.

- **neither/either** without an ensuing or/nor are always singular, as are everyone, someone, everybody, nobody, each etc.

- **more than one** is always treated as singular, illogical though that may be.
- **teams** are singular in American -- *the Los Angeles Rams is ...*-- and plural in English -- *Stoke City are....* As these examples show, both styles can look daft. One should try at least to be consistent. Hong Kong newspapers, beset by copy from a wide variety of sources and manned by an international mixture of sub-editors, seem to have given up the struggle.
 - **the number** is singular, as is **the total**. But **a number** and **a total** should be treated as plural. So ... *the number of bus accidents was small...* but ... *a number of buses were involved in accidents...*
 - **a few** are.
 - in phrases like “one of those people who” or “one of those things which” followed by a verb, be careful! the subject is “people” and “things” respectively and the verb should be plural.

If in doubt over an obscure case the problem can usually be solved by recasting the sentence. But this will not save you from errors like *Comprehensive information about the work of this department and the functions of its offices at district level have been sent to you.* “Have” should be “has” but by the time the writer got to the verb he had forgotten that the subject was “information”. Moral: keep your verb near its subject. Another good reason for preferring short sentences.

O

oasis has a strange plural: oases.

occur ... but occurred and occurring.

OK is acceptable only in direct quotes. Note typography: caps, no points, and no hyphen.

one of the ... as in “he is one of the people who” is trappy. When writing a sentence which begins like this, bear in mind that the subject of the ensuing verb is “people”, not “one”, and the verb should accordingly be in the plural.

ongoing is ugly. Do not use it.

on to, not onto.

one man, one vote does not make sense unless you remember to put the comma in. In adjectival use the hyphens go elsewhere: *a one-man, one-vote election*...

optimum does not mean the biggest, longest or any other extreme. It should be reserved for occasions when conflicting requirements have to be reconciled. The optimum speed of a car is not the fastest it can manage, but the one which provides the best combination of safety, economy and saved time.

oral means spoken. So an oral agreement is one which is not written. All agreements are verbal (in words). If you wish to draw attention to the fact that the agreement was oral then the best way is to describe it as “unwritten”.

oust as a verb meaning to remove someone from a body or place is a venerable English word though it now has a strong American flavour and is discouraged by the BBC. “Ouster”, meaning the process of ousting someone, is not used in British English.

overall is one word when it is an adjective -- *the overall effect was...* -- but two words when it is used as an alternative to “in summary” -- *over all, the effect was ...*

The garment -- overalls -- is always one word and always plural.

P

partially should be reserved for situations where you mean the opposite of “impartially”. Where “partly” can be used, use it.

pedagogue, says Bryson, is now a pejorative word, virtually synonymous with “pedant”. This distressing innovation has not reached Hong Kong yet. Here the word is still a pompous alternative for “teacher”.

per is all right in “per cent” but variations like “per annum” (Latin originally) should be avoided. Prefer the English translation “a year” which is shorter.

people is the plural of “person”. Do not use “persons”.

per cent should be written as two words. It may be abbreviated in headlines to “pc”. The symbol % may be used in the TYR because our printing technology can handle it. Most newspapers find that % turns into a mess when printed on newsprint so they only allow it in tables.

phenomenon -- plural phenomena, but this is not a happy newspaper word; try not to use it.

Philippines is often a spelling problem. The people who come from there are “Filipinos” regardless of sex. Filipinos use “Filipina” for something else.

phrasal verbs are a useful aid to economical writing. So make the most of the possibilities like get in.../out.../up.../down.../to.../from.../away or put in.../out.../up.../down.../away, which are usually briefer and more direct than the single-word alternatives. Beware, though, of some American usages where -- at least to British eyes -- the addition of particles goes altogether too far: *beat up on*, *face up to*, *visit with*, *head up*, *lose out on* and *meet up with* are all unacceptable.

ping-pong used to be a perfectly respectable name for table tennis but is now regarded by fans as derogatory. Do not use it.

pistols come in two varieties: the revolver (traditional Wild West type in which the bullets are kept in a revolving chamber) and the automatic (in which the bullets are kept in a clip, usually in the handle). Do not confuse them.

place-names -- many cities and some countries have a name used in English which is not the one the natives use in their own language. The following are usable examples:

English name	Local name
Athens	Athinai
Bangkok	Krungthep
Belgrade	Beograd
Brussels	Bruxelles
Catalonia	Cataluña
Cologne	Köln
Croatia	Hrvatja
Florence	Firenze
Genoa	Genova
Leghorn	Livorno
Lisbon	Lisboa
Morocco	Maroc
Moscow	Moskva
Munich	Munchen
Naples	Napoli
Prague	Praha
Rangoon	Yangon
Rome	Roma
Seville	Sevilla
The Hague	Den Haag
Turin	Torino
Venice	Venezia
Vienna	Wien
Warsaw	Varsava (I think)

As you can see from this list the practice is well established in Europe, though some ancient examples (like Leghorn for Livorno) seem to be dying out. In former colonies (and near misses, like China) people tend to regard the practice as insulting, so you should prefer Beijing to Peking, Xiamen to Amoy, Guangzhou to Canton (except in the name of the KCR) and so on.

Names in the former Russian Empire are being changed wholesale. Moscow is still Moscow but Leningrad has now reverted to St Petersburg. Arabic place names, once off the international airline network, tend to have a variety of Westernised spellings. Many Swiss cities have French and German versions of their names -- Luzern/Lucerne, Basel/Bâle and so on. Belgian place names often have French and Flemish versions, so Bruges, for example, may be spelled Brugge.. At least be consistent within the story.

plurals present numerous problems:

Plurals of letters, figures and abbreviations are formed the same way as other plurals -- by adding 's': *MPs will debate; the gay 90s; temperatures in the 30s...* Do not be tempted to insert an apostrophe.

Add "-es" if the word in its singular form already ends in 's' -- *keeping up with the Joneses, the Marcoses.*

The following words look plural but are not: billiards, draughts (and other games), mumps, measles (and other diseases) and news.

The United States is treated as singular, as is the United Nations, but other looser groupings (like the Gulf States) are not.

The following words look singular but are plural: cattle, people, the Police, the youth (of today) and other groups identified by using "the" with an adjective - the blind, the elderly, the lame, the lazy etc.

The following words look plural but may be singular, the spelling being the same in either case: crossroads, means (as in ways and ...), works (factory), barracks, series, headquarters, corps, innings (cricket/baseball), forceps and gallows.

Foreign words commonly have foreign plurals. Happily most of the words in this category are unlikely to come up in news writing but you should know that the plural of "fungus" is "fungi" and the plural of "phenomenon" is "phenomena".

"Bureau" in government contexts becomes "bureaux". Sorry. Their idea, not mine.

"Agenda" is plural already but the modern style is to ignore this and treat it as singular. "Data" and "media" are always plural. "Consortiums" "forums" and "stadiums" should be preferred to "consortia" "fora" and "stadia". "Index" can become indexes except in very learned circumstances when "indices" may be preferred.

Words ending in "o" follow no sane system; the following are some of the more common ones in plural form:

albinos	archipelagos	armadillos	arpeggios	banjos
buffaloes	calicoes	cameos	cargoes	commandos
concertos	crescendos	curios	dingoes	dominoes
dynamos	echoes	embargoes	embryos	eskimos
fiascoes	folios	frescoes	grottoes	haloes
heroes	impresarios	innuendoes	magnetos	manifestos
mosquitoes	mottoes	oratorios	potatoes	piccolos
provisos	ratios	salvoes	scherzos	solos
sopranos	tomatoes	tornadoes	torpedoes	torsos

See also **uncountable nouns**

political parties need caps only if the full name or something close to it is given -- *the Social Democrat Party ... the social democrats*. Nazi and Nazis are always capped, giving neo-Nazi. Do not cap fascist, communist, liberal, conservative etc. unless part of a name.

possessives are formed by adding 's unless the word is a plural and ends in "s" already. So far so simple. Note that plural words which do not end in "s" need one -- *children's, women's* -- as do single words which do -- *James's*. Possessive pronouns like his, hers, ours, theirs and so on do not take an apostrophe.

post mortem (Latin for “after death”) is accepted by most publications as a short form for “post mortem examination”.

But the SCMP is still holding out.

premises is occasionally a useful word when you want something that can cover a flat, shop, office or factory. On the more numerous occasions when you are actually talking about a particular flat, shop, office or factory it is better to say so. In any case, “premises” is always plural -- *The premises were closed* -- even if there is only one property involved.

prepositions are a problem because they follow no logical rules. Some words require a preposition and are extremely fussy about which one, while others require none or leave you a choice. Similarly some like to be followed by a verb in one tense, some in another. The most obvious trap for reporters is the difference between “reported” and “quoted”. A person is quoted as having said, reported to have said.

There follows an alphabetical list of specimens which are either useful or commonly misused:

abound in	abreast of - as in keep abreast of developments
abscond from (a place)	
absent from	
absolve of (from also acceptable)	abstain from (takes verb+ing)
abut on/to	accede to
accept (a bribe~ etc~ needs no further ad	adornment)
acclimatise to	accomplice--you are an accomplice of a criminal in, a crime
account for (usually)	accrue to
accuse of	acquiesce in
acquit of	adapt to means get used to - adapted for means designed for
addicted to	
adopt as (<i>we have adopted x as our slogan</i> , not for)	
advice - given to someone on something	
afflicted with (not by)	afraid of (or to with verb)
aggrieved by (or sometimes “at”)	agitate for
agree with or to (if followed by a verb)	
aim at (or to with a verb)	alert to
align with	ally with
allocate to	allow for/to (or rarely of)
allude to	antidote to
antithesis of	apathy towards
apologise to someone for something	appeal likewise
argue with someone about something	armed with (a weapon)
arrest someone for an offence, as a criminal, or on a charge	
ascribe to	associate with

atone for	attach to (not with)
attacks (sometimes on)	averse to
believe (takes in for ideas, God etc.)	
benefit from	
chance of (or to)	centre (as verb) on
certain of (or rarely about)	charge for (cash) with (crime)
check ("up on" is not needed)	clear of
coincide (sometimes with)	collide with
combine (with)	comment on (or about)
commit to prison, but for trial and an offence	
compare to (stressing resemblance) but	compare with (stressing difference)
compatible with	
compensate for (a loss)	
compete in a contest with someone, against one person, for a prize	
complacent about	complain of (or about)
comply with	comprise (NO PREPOSITION!)
conditional on	conform to
consist of	consistent with
contrary to	converge on
convicted of (crime)	curious about
In custody (but taken into custody)	
deal in (commodity) with (customers)	
deduct from	defect (verb) from/to
deficient in (but deficiency of)	
defraud (victim) of (loot)	delete from
depend on	deprive of
deputise for	deter from
detrimental to	deviate from
different from	disagree with a person or idea, on or about a subject
discrepancy between	disguised as
dismiss from	dispense with
dispose of	disqualify from
dissimilar to (not from)	distaste for
distract from	(in) distress
divest of	(under) duress
elect (someone) to	elicit (something) from
eligible for	(in an) emergency
emigrate from/to	encroach on
entitle (someone) to	equal to (usually)
(in) error	essential to
exempt from	expert in/at (something)
faith in -- but	faithful to
on (usually) fire	flirt with
full of	
gamble with (stake) on (horses etc) or in (commodity/stocks)	
gifted with (attribute)	grab (at)

grateful to (person) for (favour)	guide to
guilty of (offence)	
(in) haste	heir to
(on) holiday	
hope (verb) for -- but	hope (noun) of
hunger for	
identical with (NOT to)	ignorance (of)
impervious to	impinge on
implicated in	import from/to
improve -- takes "on" only when it means produce a better version	
(with) impunity	incapable of
incentive to	inconsistent (with)
indebted to (person) for (debt)	
indemnify against (=insure) indemnify for (=compensate)	
independent (of)	indifferent to
indigenous to (place)	infer from
inferior to	infested with (rats etc)
inform (someone) of/about	infringe (NOT on)
innocent of (offence)	
inquest on (deceased) into (circumstances)	
insensitive to	insert in
insist on	
install object/person in (place/office)	
insufficient for (purpose/needs)	intrude on
irrelevant to	
(in) jeopardy	
knowledge of (topic)	
laden with (ship's cargo)	level with (is not a verb)
levy on (taxed item)	liable to (usually)
mediate in (dispute) between (disputants)	
member of	minister (verb) to
mitigation of (offence)	mortgage on (property) with (lender)
negotiate with (person) on (issue)	
object to (or occasionally against)	
operate (medically) on (person) for (disease)	
originate in (or rarely "with" but never "from")	
in parliament (but on a Council)	
partial to	participate in
persist in	pessimistic about
ply for hire (what taxis do)	precautions against
preference for	prepare for
present (recipient) with (gift)	preside at/over

press for (=demand)	previous to
prior to -- use "before"	on probation
prosecute for (offence)	
at random	recipe for
refer to	refrain from
in rehearsal	relegate to
relevant to	remote from
reward for	rid of
safe from	send for
sentence (verb) to, but sentence (noun) of	
separate from	similar to
simultaneous with	specialise in
speculate on (when it means wonder about topic) in (when it means gambling in shares etc:)	
at speed	on the staff
at stake	stink of
stop from	
strive for (objective) over (issue)	
submit to	subtract from
superior to (usually)	
swindle (victim) out of (spoils)	swoop on
tend to (except when it means care for)	
on ... terms (as in employment on contract terms)	
in total	
unconnected with	unworthy of
vary from (norm) in (size etc)	vie with (competitor) for
(objective)	
vulnerable to	
wary of	
wide of (the mark etc.)	worthy of

prerequisite, perquisite are not connected. A prerequisite is a necessary condition; a perquisite is a fringe benefit of a job. In light-hearted stories it may be abbreviated to "perk".

press conference is a term which bothers the broadcast media. They prefer "news conference". I will have more sympathy when they stop using the term "tonight's headlines".

prima facie is a favourite of the lawyers and should be left to them as far as possible. There is a *prima facie* case for a proposition when it appears from the evidence in favour only that the proposition may be true. In legal contexts one might

then go on to the stage of a full trial, where the evidence will be tested by cross-examination, and the court will hear rebuttal evidence.

principle is always the noun, “principal” usually the adjective. But the title of a school head is spelled “principal” because it was originally short for “principal teacher”.

prior to should be replaced by “before”.

programme is the correct spelling except in computer contexts where “program” is acceptable.

pronouns need to be used with care because the antecedent may not be as clear to your readers as it is to you -- *If the baby does not thrive on raw milk, boil it.* There are no simple rules except that if in doubt you should avoid using a pronoun at all, and either recast the sentence or use a noun.

proved, proven are an easily avoided dilemma: it is never wrong to use “proved”.

put an end to should be replaced by “stop”.

Q

Quakers (note cap) is the familiar name for the Religious Society of Friends. Only in the most formal stories do you need to give the full title.

They do not have clergy in the usual sense but some congregations have ministers and some of these people prefer to be referred to as *the Rev...* Style as for mainstream churches, for which see **clergy**.

quantum leap is a term borrowed from the more abstruse areas of nuclear physics. It is widely misunderstood and usually mis-used. It does not mean a big jump, as many writers suppose. Avoid.

quotations must follow one golden rule: anything between quote marks must be, word for word, exactly what was said -- or in appropriate cases written -- by the person quoted. You are allowed to do a minimum of tidying up for disorderly or ungrammatical speakers, but this should be done with restraint and great care to avoid changing the meaning.

If you wish to omit part of a quotation you should indicate that something is missing so: *He said, "the government will... not review the policy."* Technically the three dots are called ellipses.

Some publications will let you summarise part of a quote provided you put your summary in square brackets - *"I believe [the US] would be to blame if the hostages were not released," he said.* This seems to me a thoroughly dangerous practice and rarely really necessary. The quote above would be better in reported speech.

If the original remark was in Cantonese and is to be reported in English then there is a difficult balance to be struck. If the translation is too literal it will look facetious; if it is too free it will look implausible. Best try to stick to the words used, directly translated, and make only such changes as are necessary to avoid ungrammatical or outrageous English. If you are reporting a court case use the translation provided by the court interpreter. Try in any event to stick to reported speech as far as possible.

The requirements for quotations will not be met if you translate words spoken in English into Chinese in your notebook, and then translate them back again. If you are going to use quotes in English you must make notes in English.

quotations and punctuation follow common-sense rules: only put the punctuation inside the quote marks if it relates to the part in quotes (rather than to the sentence as a whole) or if the quote itself is a whole sentence. *"Why?" he asked. The PADS was "a terrible mistake," he said.* But *He said the PADS was a "terrible mistake"*.

If the sentence in quotes and the one outside it end in the same place use only the punctuation going outside the quotes -- *Why did you say to him "Why worry"?*

If a quote runs for more than one paragraph the quotes should be reopened at the beginning of each paragraph but closed only after the last one.

Typography: the all-purpose double quote on the Apple keyboard (found between the semicolon and the return key) is not acceptable for professional typesetting purposes. Use the proper double quotes “ and ”. These can be obtained by using the square bracket key (just to the right of P) with the option key for ” and with the option and shift keys for “. The next key to the right (the other square bracket one) produces single quotes ‘ ’ working the same way. Recent editions of MS Word will do all this for you automatically from the old key providing the quote marks in your stories come in pairs. For newspaper purposes double quotes are always used except where you get a quote within a quote:

“My motto is ‘caveat emptor’,” he warned.

The otherwise excellent *Economist Style Guide* has a puzzling passage suggesting that the system above is the American one, and the British habit is to use quote marks the other way round -- usually single, and double only for quotes within quotes. This may be true of book production but is not the practice of most of the British newspapers.

R

rapprochement should be avoided -- particularly by broadcast journalists because if they use it they must pronounce it in the French fashion - *raproshmon*.

ready is not a verb. Use "prepare".

rebut, refute are usually confused. To rebut a statement is to state the case against it -- to refute it is to prove that it is wrong or false. In the interests of preserving journalistic neutrality you should usually, when tempted to use "refute", reject it and prefer "rebut".

Rehabus is one word.

reported speech is an essential part of newswriting. This means you have to learn the way the tenses change, which goes as follows:

Speaker	Report
Simple present "I like you"	Simple past -- He said he liked you.
Present progressive "It is raining"	Past progressive -- He said it was raining.
Past simple "I didn't see you"	Past perfect -- He said he hadn't seen you
Past progressive "I was joking"	Same -- He said he was joking
Past perfect "I had been there"	Same -- He said he had been there
Shall/will	Should/would
Can/may	Could/might
Would, could, might, ought and should	remain unchanged.

restaurateur is the correct spelling for a man who owns a restaurant. Note absence of "n".

road should be written in full in text. "Rd" is acceptable in headlines as part of a road name.

Roman numerals should be used only for military formations (*VII Corps*), royalty (*Henry VIII*), Popes (*John Paul XXIII*), World War I and World War II. For the I you should use cap i, not 1.

Queen Elizabeth II is the queen. The Queen Elizabeth 2 is a ship.

S

said is a good plain English word which you can use as often as you like. Do not without good cause replace it with such words as stated, revealed, disclosed, asserted, claimed, pointed out, declared, argued, continued, added, commented, concluded. Not only is such replacement unnecessary, the replacement words all have subtly different meanings which need to be respected.

Scots -- people from Scotland -- take a perverse delight in complaining if they are referred to as "Scotch". The latter is the traditional English adjective for things from Scotland but is now usually reserved for the whisky. "Scottish" is also available.

seasons -- spring, summer etc -- do not take caps.

Secretaries are the titles of the people who head the government's policy-making branches or **bureaux**. This sort of secretary comes in two varieties -- political figures appointed by Mr Tung and Permanent ones who are career civil servants. Some bureaux have one type, some the other and some both. Make sure you know which sort you have in your story.

semicolons are used in places where a comma would be too feeble and a full stop too much. Usually this is when two closely related statements are made together -- *The teams were ready; the referee was not*. Note that both halves of the divided passage must be grammatical sentences in their own right. Consequently, if you are unsure, a full stop will not be wrong.

Semicolons are also useful in lists when the individual items are long and include commas. *The Executive Council comprises the Governor, Sir David Wilson; the Chief Secretary, Sir David Ford; the Attorney General ...*

semi-monthly strictly speaking means twice a month. Every two months should be "bi-monthly". Alas, many people are confused about this so neither label should be used without further explanation. The situation is the same with "semi-weekly" and "bi-weekly".

See also **biannual**, **biennial**.

seven is an important number. In the days of Sinbad there were Seven Seas: the Arabian Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Bay of Bengal, Mediterranean, Persian Gulf, Red Sea and South China Sea.

There were Seven Wonders of the World: the pyramids, the hanging gardens of Babylon, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Colossus of Rhodes, the statue of Zeus at Olympia and the Pharos (lighthouse) of Alexandria.

There were seven Deadly Sins: anger, covetousness, envy, gluttony, lust, pride and sloth.

The seven dwarfs (in Disney's Snow White) were Bashful, Doc, Dopey, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Sneezy.

The Group of Seven (abbreviation G7) is an occasional economic summit between Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, US and UK.

The Seven Sisters should not be used, because they are a set of women's universities or a row of cliffs, depending whether you are British or American.

sewage is the stuff which goes down the pipes, "sewerage" is the apparatus that deals with it, in official usage. For the rest of the population, "sewage" is the preferred word for both purposes.

since means "from the time that". Using it to mean "because" is correct in American English but offends some stuffy Brits.

situation as in "crisis situation" is superfluous.

so as to is a phrase worth avoiding. Usually it can be replaced by "to" on its own.

some to indicate an approximate figure -- *some 50,000 vehicles use the tunnel every day* -- is correct but over-used. There can be no complaint about its use in the example, where the actual figure varies from day to day so accuracy cannot be expected. It should not be used (prefer "about") when there is one figure but you are giving only a rough version of it. Where you are giving a very large number your readers will realise without assistance that some rounding has taken place -- *Hong Kong's population of 6 million ...*

spellcheckers are found on most computer word-processing programmes and can be a great help. They are particularly useful if you have scanned text into a computer, because the character-recognition software produces the sort of mistakes which spellcheckers are good at spotting -- like mistaking i for l. There are some traps for the unwary:

🍏 Make sure your spellchecker is using the right language. There are many differences between English and American spelling. Most spellchecker dictionaries found in Hong Kong use the American versions.

🍏 Remember that a spellchecker only complains if you use a word which does not exist. It will not, for example, spot "were" used when "where" is required.

🍏 Do not under any circumstances allow the spellchecker to change things without consulting you. It will be bamboozled by things like Chinese names, local places and foreign words. Always look at suggested changes.

split infinitives are one of those little signals (see **hopefully**) which are held, however unjust it may be, to distinguish the careful literate writer from her inferior rivals. The infinitive is the part of the verb preceded by “to”. Thus the infinitive of “go” is “to go”. To split the infinitive is to put another word -- usually an adverb -- between the two parts of it -- *to boldly go*-- as in “Star Trek”. So far no problem. Most of the authorities agree that to split is a stylistic fault, not a grammatical error. Most of them also agree that it is better to split than to write a really awful, or misleading, sentence. Writers should bear in mind though that many readers will wince over a split infinitive. So avoid it if possible.

strangle includes the notion of the victim’s death, so to talk of someone being “strangled to death” or similar is unnecessary. The same goes for “suffocate”.

structure is not used as a verb by careful writers.

student is reserved by native English speakers for those in post-school education, or in America at least in High School. In Hong Kong it is allowed to cover anyone who is studying, even at kindergarten. To avoid misunderstandings, at least say what kind of student you are talking about -- *kindergarten students, school students, university students...*

subjunctives are gradually falling out of use. The main place where you still need one is when the statement in an “if” clause is untrue, probably untrue, or plain unlikely. *If I were you ... If Hitler were alive today... I suggest you go ...*

substitute is not a synonym for “replace”. You substitute thing A for thing B, where thing B was the one originally in position. In the same situation A replaces B or B is replaced by A. You can not say that A substituted B. “Replace” is the easier and better choice outside sporting contexts, where you cannot avoid “substitute”.

In reporting football matches only there is an established idiom with which you can say that Player X was “substituted” as a short form for “taken off and replaced by the substitute”.

such is grossly overused in Hong Kong English. Usually it can be replaced by “this” or “these” when you merely wish to indicate that you are talking about the same thing as you were in the previous sentence. Sometimes it is totally unnecessary and should be deleted.

suicide is a word which should not be used lightly because it upsets survivors. It is best reserved for coroner’s verdicts. It should never be a verb in Hong Kong though this seems to be permitted in Australian English.

Where a body is found in circumstances of an obviously suicidal nature the accepted euphemism is *Police said there were no suspicious circumstances*.

superlatives -- the biggest, best, oldest etc. are a fruitful source of readers' letters pointing out that the alleged record-holder has been beaten. All such claims should be verified -- the *Guinness Book of Records* is the usual source -- or qualified. "One of the biggest" is less resounding, but is also much less likely to be wrong.

supersede is often misspelt.

T

target is an exhausted metaphor which badly needs a rest. Targets of all kinds infest Hong Kong news writing. Often “aim”, “objective” or “plan” would do just as well. The trouble with habits like the use of “target” is that sooner or later the metaphor blurs at the edges. Targets were once hit or missed. Now they are, as Bryson puts it, “achieved, attained, exceeded, expanded, reduced, obtained, met, beaten, overtaken and metaphorically shaken to bits.”

The use of “target” as a verb is even worse, because it usually suffers very badly from ambiguity. Does a headline like *Porn videos targeted* mean someone is collecting porn videos, trying to make more of them or trying to suppress them? We can guess, but we shouldn’t have to.

task as a verb is a great favourite of civil servants. Do not so use it.

tenses denote meaning as much as simple time. There are:

present simple

• Used for regular activity, something done in the past and to be done in the future:

I go to work on the bus./ I live in Causeway Bay./ I like chocolate./ I play tennis on Sundays./ I work in a bank.

• Used for arranged action in the future:

I leave for New York on Sunday./ The flight leaves at 10.30./ I graduate in June.

present continuous

• Used for what is happening at this moment:

It’s raining [now]./ I’m talking [now].

• Used for something that started happening in the past, is continuing now and will continue but end some time in the future:

I’m studying for a degree./ I’m working in a bank now, but I start a new job with a travel company on December 1.

• Used for a planned action in the future:

I’m leaving the office at 6./ He’s seeing the boss at 4.

future simple

• Used for future for a decision being made at the time of speaking (first person):

I’ll go to the ball./ I’ll see you tomorrow./ I’ll walk to the station with you.

• Used for an unarranged action/prediction in the future:

He’ll be back tomorrow./ They’ll be sorry.

future continuous

• Used for something intended and expected to happen, especially something not regular:

I'll be going to lunch at 12 today [usually I go at 1]./ She'll be seeing him around 7.

• Used for an expected activity at a specific point in the future:

At 11 I'll be seeing my tutor, so I won't be able to come./ I'll be earning a lot more money in 1997.

• Used when thinking of someone else who is not with you and what they are likely to be doing at the moment:

She'll just be getting on the plane now./ He'll be opening my letter now.

• Used as a polite way to leave someone:

I'll be going now, Mr Chan.

future/present combination

• In conditional clauses for a likely situation in the future:

If you arrive in good time we'll be able to have something to eat before the film./ If he wins a prize I'll give him \$20.

• In clauses of time in instructions for a prediction that is certain:

When you get to the corner you'll see a supermarket on your right.

future perfect simple

Used to show a time in the future when a current activity will be over:

He will have finished his degree by 1997./ Someone's already borrowed the book and it won't be back until next month, so I won't have been able to look at it in time for the class tomorrow./ If you come home at 8 you won't have any cake because I will have eaten it all by then.

future perfect continuous

Used to show a time in the future when a current activity will come to a certain stage:

In 1997 I will have been studying for my PhD for two years./ Come Christmas he will have been working for this company for 20 years.

"going to"

Used to show intention:

The company is going to move to Singapore next year./ We're going to go for a picnic at the weekend./ I'm going to see if I can change my ticket.

past simple

• Used to show a one-off or limited/completed action in the past:

Yesterday the MTR broke down so I took a bus./ He worked at ATV for a while.

• In negative with knowing verbs, used for something not realised until that point.

I didn't know you had any children./ I didn't realise you'd be busy at that time.

past simple / past simple combination

- Used to show one action happening after another:

He walked along the road and turned left./ I went to the supermarket and then I went to the photo shop.

- Used to show a second action happening in response to the first:

I caught sight of the thief and I ran after him./ He mended the puncture and then drove off.

past simple / conditional combination

Used to show a not-very-likely possibility in the future:

If you went to the show, you'd like it./ If he worked harder he'd get higher marks.

past continuous

Used to show an action that went on for a while at a past time when the time is emphasised:

In 1989 he was working at TVB./ He was studying for a PhD then, but he didn't finish it.

past continuous / past continuous

Used to show two continuing actions going on at the same time:

I was watching the television and he was washing up./ We were making pancakes and the others were making the sauce.

past simple / continuous combination

Used to show that one action was going on when a one-off action interrupted it:

He was eating his lunch when I came in./ They were planning to go for a walk when they heard the weather forecast predicting rain.

past perfect

Used to denote a time before the time referred to:

He had used the spellcheck before handing in the assignment but there were still mistakes./ I met my cousin this summer -- I hadn't seen her for ten years.

past perfect / conditional combination

Used to show something that might have happened but didn't:

If you had been there you would have seen him./ If the council had passed the resolution we'd be able to act now.

past perfect continuous

Used to denote a continuous action that had just finished or was still going on at the time referred to:

He had been living with my parents but decided to buy his own flat when he got married./ I had been planning a big party but I didn't have enough money. He had been walking all day long and his feet hurt.

past simple/past perfect continuous combination

Used to denote a continuous action in the past that was interrupted or followed by another action:

When she finally arrived I had been waiting three hours./ I had been looking for a job for six months when I heard about the vacancy at the Post.

that, which when used in defining or descriptive clauses -- *the words which I use -- the words that I write* -- follow a complex and mystifying set of rules which few native speakers can define and many do not follow. The safe course, if in doubt, is to use "which".

Some stylebooks urge writers to omit "that" in its other main use, after "said" and many similar words -- *He thought that he was a beetle*. This is very much a matter of taste and feel; the safe course if in doubt is to keep "that" in.

Thai names have the surname last, as in English, but the first name is used as the short form in the rest of the story, so Chatichai Choonharon becomes *Mr Chatichai* after his first appearance.

tidal wave is the time-honoured and universally understood phrase for a big wave caused by an explosion, eruption, earthquake, etc. This offends scientists, who point out that tides are caused only by the moon, so tidal waves are not tidal. The scientific word is "tsunami", which few can understand and fewer still can pronounce. Ignore the scientists.

time: our style is to use a 12-hour system with am and pm. If minutes are given there must be two figures, separated from the hour by a point. Examples: 9 am, 10.45 pm, 11.05 am. "Noon" and "midday" are acceptable. See **midnight**

titles: see **Lords, Ladies, academics, clergy, Field Marshal, capital letters, and Mr, Mrs, Miss.**

tonnage (of ships) comes in three varieties: displacement tonnage (used for warships) is the weight of the ship, deadweight tonnage (used for freighters) is the weight of the cargo it can carry and gross tonnage (used for passenger vessels) is a measurement of the size of the ship's enclosed spaces.

tons may be UK (2,240 lbs), shipping register (100 cubic feet) US short (2,000 lbs), US long (2,240 lbs) or in two Spanish varieties (short 2,028 lbs; long 2,272 lbs). Hence the attraction of the unambiguous metric unit, the tonne (2,205 lbs), which

should be used whenever possible. You can spell it “ton” but should use the phrase “metric ton” on first mention if the exact size is of any importance.

total as in ... *a total of* ... is usually unnecessary, and the unadorned figure can be given. If you find yourself fumbling with this word to avoid starting a sentence with a number, try recasting the sentence.

trade names are registered product names which you are legally required to adorn with a capital letter. In the UK and US trade name owners have whole departments whose main function seems to be to write to newspapers complaining about the use of their tradenames without the required cap. Coke, Sellotape, and Big Mac are well-known examples of trade names. If you have the product or its wrapper before you there will probably be a little notice somewhere saying “XXX is a registered trade mark”. Or there will be one of the symbols ®™. So far so simple.

Unfortunately the situation is complicated in Hong Kong by the question whether registration has taken place here, and if so for what purpose. So a trade name, whatever it says on the wrapper, may be registered elsewhere but not in Hong Kong. Another possibility is that it has been deregistered elsewhere (this happens when a registered trade name becomes a general part of the language, like aspirin and hoover) but is still registered in Hong Kong. On the other hand we don't have the letter-writing departments here, so errors are rarely complained of. The way to avoid these problems is to avoid trade names as far as possible altogether by using generic terms. There are some common examples listed under **capitals**.

transportation has no advantage over the traditional, and shorter, **transport**.

trivia is a plural. There is no singular in English. If you need a singular word, try “trifle”.

typhoon signals may be briefly summarised as:

No 1: There is a typhoon nearby.

No 3: There is a typhoon expected here, and

No 8: Go home.

The other numbers have fallen into disuse although 9 and 10 crop up occasionally. Typhoons and Severe Tropical Storms (which may become typhoons) are given code names by some distant weather centre, and such names may be used to describe them in stories. They do not need titles: Typhoon Doris is plain Doris on second mention. Whatever the gender of the name, a typhoon is referred to as “it”, not “he” or “she”.

A hurricane is what they call a typhoon in the Western hemisphere.

Hong Kong now also features rainstorm warnings for occasions when heavy rain and flooding are expected but a typhoon is not. The “red” warning corresponds to the no 3 typhoon signal, the “black” warning to the no 8. Note though that you

are not expected to go home when the black signal is up -- you are expected to stay in a safe place.

U

uncountable nouns are treated grammatically as singular whether the sense is plural or not. You may not add an 's'.

They include:

accommodation, advertising, advice, air conditioning, ammunition, apparatus, bait, behaviour, counsel, congestion, coursework, education, engineering, equipment, evidence, furniture, hardware, health, homework, housework, information, intelligence, knowledge, laughter, legislation, litigation, luck, machinery, milk, news, poverty, prosperity, recognition, research, revision, scenery, slang, software, stability, talent, vengeance.

The following are usually uncountable, though in some special circumstances a plural use may be acceptable:

administration, communication, criticism, concrete, damage, entertainment, flour, food, history, oil, staff, sand, sugar, transport, vocabulary, water, work, and almost anything ending in -ism.

universities: the two oldest ones have well-established abbreviations which can be used without explanation for second references:

The University of Hong Kong -- HKU

The Chinese University of Hong Kong -- CU

The younger institutions are best referred to later in the story by a shortened version of their names:

Hong Kong Baptist University -- Baptist

City University of Hong Kong -- City

Hong Kong Polytechnic University -- PolyU

Ling Nan College -- Ling Nan

The Academy for the Performing Arts is not strictly a university. On second reference it is the APA.

Other terms you may come across:

• "The UPGC-funded institutions"-- HKU, CU, UST, Baptist, City, PolyU, Ling Nan and the Institute of Education.

• "The research universities" -- HKU, CU, UST.

• "Colleges recognised by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan" -- there are about 16 of these, but the only one which is still apparently active is called Chu Hai.

• "Private tertiary institutions"-- only one big one left now, Shue Yan College.

utilise has a strict and specific meaning. Not one user in 1,000 knows what it is (to use something for a purpose other than that for which it was intended). Use "use".

verbal, as in the phrase *a verbal agreement* means containing words -- whether they are written down or not. If you mean that nothing was put in writing then the word you want is "oral".

verbs see **tenses**.

via means "by way of", not "by means of". You can travel to Yaumatei via Mongkok; you cannot go there via bus.

viable has a strict technical meaning in biological contexts, to which it should be confined. As Bryson says "Even when used correctly it tends to make a sentence read like a government document." What could be worse?

Vietnam is one word in our style, an arbitrary preference but convenient because the adjective, Vietnamese, is always one.

Vietnamese names look like Chinese names, in that there is a family name first and (usually two) given names afterwards. However the family names are not much use, mainly because there are only 12 of them and 54 per cent of the population share the same one: Nguyen. So on second reference the person is usually known by the final name; "Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet" becomes "Mr Kiet" for the rest of the story. Occasionally a woman will have four names, the extra one being "Thi" inserted in second place. The rule about using the last name as second reference still applies ... usually. If in doubt, repeat the name in full.

Exception: Ho Chi Minh is Ho on second mention (it is a pseudonym anyway).

vocabulary -- no plural except when referring to whole vocabularies of individual languages.

W

war should be capped if part of a recognised name: the Vietnam War, the Six-day War, and the 100 Years War. World War I and World War II are the preferred style for these two catastrophes - use cap 'i' for the Roman numerals. The Arab-Israeli wars, colonial wars, but the Napoleonic Wars and the Wars of the Roses.

Western names are spelled in a variety of ways, often not apparent from the pronunciation. And owners of names tend to be unforgiving if you get them wrong. Always ask anyone you interview to spell his or her name for you. Then write it down carefully. Make a note of where the caps come in names beginning with Mc or Mac (Macdonald and MacDonald are both possible) and if two surnames are given ask about a hyphen. French people often have hyphenated Christian names (like Jean-Marie) and may need accents on surnames like Debré.

Some traps that await you:

Austin/Austen	Brown/Browne
Bevin/Bevan	Burk(e)
Campbell (the p is silent)	Cholmondely (pronounced Chumley)
Clarke/Clark	Dalziell (pronounced DL)
Davis/Davies	Dickson/Dixon/Dixson
Dunn/Dunne/Donne pronounced the same)	Eliot/Elliott/Elliott
Fitz- usually needs next letter capitalised -- FitzGerald, FitzMaurice ...	
ffoulkes and other names beginning ff do not take a cap	
Frazer/Fraser/Frazier	Gray/Graye/Grey
Holmes (the l is silent)	Kelley/Kelly
Lawrence/Laurence	Llewellyn (note double l)
Mainwaring (pronounced Mannerling)	
Macdonald/MacDonald/Mcdonald/McDonald (of which the last is the burgers)	
O'Rourke/O'Toole (a lot of Irish names start like this -- the O is not an initial)	
Rees/Reese/Rhys	Regan/Reagan
Robertson/Robinson	Scofield/Schofield
Sheehan (pronounced Sheen)	Shelagh/Sheila
Siobhan (pronounced Shivaun)	Smith/Smyth/Smythe (same sound)
Stephens/Stevens	Stuart/Stewart
Tailor/Taylor	Thompson/Thomson (same sound)

will, shall follow a curious convention which, to add to your problems, is different in Scottish English and English English. Most authorities now agree that "will" may be used on all occasions without error.

whisky, whiskey are different. The first is Scotch; the second is Irish.

whom is one of those words which slide happily into a sentence as long as you don't think too carefully about why. As soon as you do the situation gets very

complex. At some risk of offending pedants, you can abstain from it altogether, except in cases where it is directly governed by a preposition -- *To whom was this sent?* Even in cases like this you can get away with “who” as long as the preposition is not right next to it -- *Who was this sent to?* Otherwise, use “who” and hope.

World Wide Web should have caps, but “the web” on second mention. See also **internet**.

would is needed instead of “will” if we are talking about a hypothetical situation instead of a real one -- *the Bill, if passed, would outlaw obscene signs outside residential buildings ...*

Actually these occasions are quite rare. And I do not agree with the authorities who decry as illiterate the newspaper habit of using “will” when writing a long analysis of a proposal. Once you have made the element of hypothesis clear, using a lot of “would” is irritating. Hong Kong newswriting generally suffers from the opposite complaint: frequent use of “would” when there is no good reason to. Write “will” unless you can think of a good reason for using something else.

Y

youth: "a youth" is a young person, who becomes "the youth" on second mention. For no obvious reason the term is usually reserved for males, and regarded as slightly derogatory. If you want young people in general you must use "youth" without an article -- or better still just say "young people".

Difficult words

Some words and phrases have given particular difficulty to TYR reporters over the years. They are here given in alphabetical order.

A

to **accuse** someone of doing something -- *Mr Lee accused the government of using inflation as an excuse for overspending on the project.*

to be **accustomed** to (doing) something -- *He said that he was accustomed to flying with an instructor and was worried about flying solo.*

to **adapt** (something) to -- *The Hong Kong side quickly adapted to Chelsea's tactics and began to fight back.*

to give **advice** on (doing) something -- *The ICAC was prepared to give advice on setting up company guidelines dealing with the acceptance of gifts, said Mr Hung.*

to **adjust** to (doing) something -- *He said that since the children were used to singing with a piano accompaniment they needed time to adjust to Chinese instruments.*

to **advocate** something -- *Mr Tam is one of the main voices advocating the setting up of a pro-China party.*

an **advocate** of something -- *Mr Manuel Woo is an advocate of the imported labour scheme.*

an **affront** to someone -- *The burning of copies of the Basic Law was an affront to the Chinese government.*

to be **afraid** of (doing) something -- *Some AIDS victims refuse to go public because they are afraid of upsetting their families.*

an **agent** for -- *Metropolis is the only Hong Kong agent for Thailand's TK City.*

to **agree** to do something -- *The students agreed to carry out the survey.*

to **agree** with someone/something (doing something) -- *Mr Choi said he agreed with the government setting priorities for the new scheme.*

aid/aids/AIDS/aide need to be distinguished -- *Some correct uses: Foreign aid to Bangladesh dropped last year./The overhead projector is a useful teaching aid./Five new AIDS cases were notified in Hong Kong this month./Mr Chung is an aide to the president.*

to **aim** to do something -- *The organisation aims to vaccinate 80 percent of the children before the end of 1997.*

the **aim** of doing something -- *The organisation was set up with the aim of promoting education about healthy nutrition.*

to **alert** somebody to something -- *USIS gets stories and background material from Washington every morning to alert staff to what is happening around the world, particularly in Asia.*

an **alternative** to -- *The local computer industry has been putting in much more effort into software production, providing clients with an alternative to imported software.*

to express **anger** at something -- *Nearly 500 tenants from Rennie's Mill demonstrated outside the Housing Authority headquarters in Ho Man Tin yesterday.*

express their anger at being neither informed nor consulted by the government about the clearance of their homes.

to be **angry** about something -- *the tenants were angry about not being warned of the clearance of their homes.*

an **apology** for -- *The organisation wants an apology for the Tiananmen showdown.*

to **apologise** for -- *The organisation wants the Chinese government to apologise for the killings.*

to **apply** for (somebody to do) something -- *Employers with relatives on the mainland can apply for them to come to Hong Kong.*

to **appoint** someone to -- *Mr Leung was appointed to the new council.*

an **approach** to -- *"This is the positive approach to keeping Hong Kong clean," he said.*

to seek/get **approval** for something -- *Karaoke disc producers may voluntarily seek approval for individual discs from the Obscene Articles Tribunal.*

to **approve** something -- *Karaoke discs need not be approved by the Obscene Articles Tribunal.*

to **approve** of something -- *Parents may not approve of their children going to karaoke bars.*

to **arrive in** (a named place, a country, a town) -- *We will arrive in Canada on July 3.*

to **arrive at** (a public place) -- *The group arrived at the airport just after 4 p.m.*

to **assure** someone of -- *The governor assured the ICAC commissioner of his continuing support.*

to **assure** someone that -- *Staff demanded that the investment company assure them that there would be no negative return rate on their provident fund.*

to pay **attention to** -- *The Secretary for Security isn't paying enough attention to the issue of illegal immigrant mothers, she said.*

authority/authorities go as follows: *The department does not have the authority to grant unpaid leave./The college authorities allowed him to take unpaid leave./The author of the book is an authority on China./The Chinese authorities ordered the army to attack the students.*

awake is a difficult verb to use properly because it takes a multitude of curious forms in different tenses: awoke, awaked, awaken, awakened. Best policy is to reserve "awake" for use as an adjective and use "wake (up)" as the verb: -- *When my mother came in to wake me I was already awake.*

aware: cannot be used as a verb. You are aware of something. You cannot just aware it. -- *Ms Pang said most people are not aware of the importance of non-academic subjects in the school curriculum.*

B

to **benefit** from (doing) something -- *Local workers benefit directly from joining the fund.*

had **better** do something -- Mr Hung said companies had better issue guidelines on the acceptance of gifts otherwise their employees might find themselves in trouble under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance.

to **blame** somebody for (doing) something -- He blames the government for doing nothing to help homosexuals.

C

to **be capable** of doing something -- If the students think they are not capable of tackling the tasks of the Student Union, they will not bother to join it.

to **be careful** to do something -- His family asked him to be careful to use safe sex methods.

cast past participle is also "cast", not "casted" -- Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him. (1 Kings, 19:19)

to **cater** for -- The restaurant caters for business people rather than families.

to **cater** to -- The 12 channels will cater to the interests of a mass audience as well as to special interest groups.

to **charge** someone with [a crime/doing something (bad)] -- He said a company would not be charged with bribery for permitting employees to receive advantages when it was a matter of business considerations.

to **choose** to do something -- He said schools could choose whether to join the scheme or not.

to **cling** to something -- If these organisations continue to cling to the demand for an apology for the Tiananmen incident their members will soon start to question the rationale behind their stand.

to **commit** oneself to doing something -- "We are urging the government to commit itself fully to improving social services," she said.

to be **committed** to doing something -- Ms Lau said she was committed to improving services as quickly as possible.

to compare has different meanings depending on the word which follows it. If you compare something to something else you imply that they are similar; if you compare it with something else you are looking at the differences. For practical purposes this means that the next word should usually be "with", not "to". -- More people are unemployed compared with last year.

to **compensate** (somebody) for something -- He claimed wholesalers gave discounts to the supermarkets and then raised their prices for other retailers to compensate for the losses they made.

to **complain** to somebody about something -- They complained to the Labour Department about their working conditions

to **complain** of -- The child had complained of backache for several months.

to **complain** that -- They complained that their actual working conditions were poorer than their contract promised.

compliment, complement are different. To compliment someone is to praise them; to complement something is to make it complete or to go well with it. -- I complimented him on his appearance. His tie complemented his shirt.

to **comply** with -- *The company failed to comply with the additional request for letters of credit amounting to nearly \$2 billion.*

to **concentrate** on doing something -- *The road outside is so noisy that students can't concentrate on their homework.*

concern cannot be used as a transitive verb. In other words people do not concern things - though they may be concerned about them or may concern themselves with them. One solution is not to use "concern" as a verb at all. Try "worry about" or "care for/about" instead.

to **concern** somebody-- *News stories are about events that concern readers.*

concern for -- *He showed his concern for the refugees by volunteering to teach them.*

to be **concerned** about -- *"They are only concerned about how much homework is being given, not what their children are learning," she said.*

to have **confidence** in something -- *People who lived in the flats refused to take part in the scheme because they had no confidence in the company's ability to raise funds.*

to be **confident** about something/one would do something -- *Paul was confident about passing the exams/Paul was confident he would pass the exams.*

to be confident of -- *Paul was confident of passing the exam.*

to **conflict** with -- *His pro-democracy activities conflicted with his role as a member of the Basic Law Drafting Committee.*

to **consider** doing something -- *Unions say the government has not considered other ways of easing the labour shortage.*

to **consist** of -- *Wharf Cable's programming will consist of locally produced fare as well as imports.*

to **continue** to do something, to continue doing something -- *There is no point in continuing to run an organisation when there are no clear guidelines for action.*

continuous means without interruption. Things which happen frequently but intermittently are continual.

to **contradict** someone/something -- *"Increasing the rent contradicts the Housing Authority's aim of providing accommodation for the poor," said Mr Chung*

a **contradiction** of -- *"Increasing the rent is a contradiction of the Housing Authority's aim of providing housing for the poor," said Mr Chung.*

to **contribute** to -- *The company said it would refuse to contribute to any pension scheme because it preferred to give other perks to its workers.*

contribution to -- *The co-chairmen kicked off the rally by planting a tree as a symbol of the government's contribution to keeping the territory clean over the past 20 years.*

convicted takes "of", not "for".

convince takes "of" or "that" -- never "to". You may convince someone of something or convince him that something is true but you may not convince him to do something. Use "persuade" instead if you want to follow with a verb. -- *The barrister tried to convince the judge of his client's innocence. He tried to convince the jury that his client could not have committed the crime. He tried to persuade them to acquit his client.*

to take a **course** -- *Those who take the course will only receive an attendance certificate.*

credible, credulous Ideas or stories are credible (you can believe them); people are credulous (they are too willing to believe others).

crisis -- plural crises

criteria is a plural. The singular is "criterion".

critical of -- *The magazine does not publish articles critical of the US government.*

to **criticise** someone for doing something -- *Mr Chan criticised the government for being too passive and for lacking insight in the port development plan.*

to **criticise** something/ someone as -- *They are criticising the Housing Authority's proposal as a contradiction of its own aim of providing housing welfare*

D

to **dare** not do something -- *He dare not report the abuse in case he is blacklisted by the Chinese authorities. (Past tense: He didn't dare (to) report the abuse ...)*

to **dare** someone to do something -- *The boy lost his footing after his school friend dared him to climb the slope.*

data on something/someone -- *I would like to ask you for some data on old people...*

to **decrease** by (an amount) -- *The real wage decreased by 1 per cent.*

to **define** someone/something as -- *Police defined him as a triad according to the law.*

demand for -- *"The actual demand for manpower may be different from our projections," she said.*

to **demand** that someone do something -- *The men started a series of protests demanding that the government release their wives and not repatriate them.*

to **deter** someone from doing something -- *The arrest of members of the Hong Kong Federation of Students who demonstrated outside the New China News Agency earlier this year might have deterred other students from joining student unions.*

to **devote** (time, attention, etc.) to (doing) something -- *The committee members devote 70 per cent to 80 per cent of their spare time to (working for) charity.*

to find it **difficult** to do something -- *He has found it difficult to get a single day's work from contractors since the end of last year.*

to have **difficulty** (in) doing something -- *She had difficulty (in) getting to class because the bus service is so unreliable.*

to **discourage** someone from doing something -- *Doctors and nurses often discourage new mothers from breastfeeding because the staff haven't time to help.*

discrimination against -- *He said the homosexuals' hotline was really a form of discrimination against themselves.*

to **discriminate** against -- *There is no Hong Kong law to stop employers discriminating against women.*

to **discuss** something -- *The legislators discussed a resolution to set up a select committee*

to be **dissatisfied** with -- *Hong Kong people, long dissatisfied with the two local TV channels, welcomed cable TV when it opened in 1992.*

to **doubt** something -- *The Rev Kwok doubts the Basic Law's guarantee of freedom of religious worship.*

to **doubt** that -- *The shop owner, Mr Lai, said he doubted that the telephone had been bought there in the first place.*

to be **due** to something -- *Mr Hui said the increase in complaints was due to the company's borrowing vehicles from Lantau Bus Limited.*

E

to have an **effect** on -- *The taxi fare increase had no effect on custom.*

to be **effective** in doing something -- *Father Lok said the mass media were effective in spreading Western ideas.*

to **put effort** into (doing) something -- *The director of the council criticised the government for putting too little effort into research into accidents involving children.*

to be **eligible** for something -- *People aged 60 and over will be eligible for the discount card.*

to **emigrate** (with "from") is to leave a country. To immigrate (with "to") is to arrive in another one. The two are usually done simultaneously; Hong Kong's emigrants are Canada's immigrants. You can usually avoid making your mind up by using "migrant" but do not use "migrate" because this has a well-established meaning (usually applied to birds) which is to make an annual trip to somewhere warm for the winter.

to **emphasise** something -- *The instructors emphasise safety in the management of the firearms.*

to **emphasise** that -- *They emphasised that guns must be properly controlled at all times.*

an **emphasis** on -- *The emphasis of the course is on the safe management of firearms.*

to **encourage** someone to do something -- *He encouraged social workers never to give up on drug addicts.*

enthusiasm for -- *The groups reconfirmed their enthusiasm for the pro-democracy movement in China.*

to be **enthusiastic** about something -- *Mr Tsao said there were many people who were enthusiastic about writing but had nowhere to publish their work.*

every day are two words except when used together as an adjective -- *an everyday story of country folk.*

to **expect** someone to do something -- *My advice to anyone who plans to go overseas on a package tour this Christmas is: equip yourself well and don't expect the tour guide to help you out.*

F

farther, further -- use the first for distances, the second where you mean "in addition".

to **favour** -- *Some committee members criticised the government for favouring the British by giving the \$7.2-billion contract to the consortium of Trafalgar House and Mitsui.*

fewer, less provide scope for fine distinctions. The rule is that if something is countable -- like people, car crashes, murder cases or whatever -- you should use *fewer*. If it is uncountable -- like water, money, equipment, furniture -- then you should use *less*. *Take fewer baths and use less water.* If you get it wrong you will have plenty of company.

figures on -- *The department does not keep figures on the number of old people who return to China for part of the year.*

find is not as versatile in English as it is in Cantonese. You can only use it when the search has been a success, or is likely to be one. *I am going to find my sister,* is all right, if a bit loose, but it implies that you already know more or less where she is. If you mean to look for something, leaving open the question whether it is actually located or not, you must use "look for" or "seek".

flaunt, flout are often confused. To flaunt something is to show it off; as the ad used to say: *if you've got it, flaunt it.* To flout is to show contempt or indifference for something -- usually a law, the Law in general, or a convention -- *He flouted the law by parking without putting any money in the meter.*

to **forgo** means to refrain from something or do without it. To forego someone is to go ahead of them.

funds/funding for -- *Mrs Yeung said many kindergartens lacked funds for well-equipped playgrounds.*

fowl is the singular and the plural (like sheep, deer and fish). Someone who breaks the rules of the game commits a foul.

G

to be **good for** -- *He said the permit was only good for a year and a new application would have to be made when it expired.*

to **guarantee** (that) someone something / that something will happen -- *Mrs Yau said the legislation would not guarantee trained teachers a reasonable salary / Mrs Yau said the legislation could not guarantee that teachers would get a reasonable salary*

H

to **happen** -- (NB This verb is intransitive) *The accident happened just after 2 pm.*

hanged, hung -- the word for judicial executions, suicides and accidents which result in death is "hanged". "Hung" is used for pictures and other items which are used as wall decorations, etc. It also has a special meaning in the phrase "hung parliament", which has nothing to do with walls -- it means there is no party with a clear majority.

hardly does not mean "with difficulty". It means "very little". If you want to say that someone finds it difficult to do something you cannot say "he hardly does it", which means he only does it occasionally -- *On rainy days we hardly go out at all.*

it's **high time** (somebody/something) did something -- *It's high time China's newspapers were commercialised.*

to **hire** someone as something -- *Many travel agents end up hiring free-lancers as tour guides.*

to place **hope** in -- *Some religious groups are not placing hope in other broadcasters -- they have set up their own radio stations.*

I

(to have) an **impact** on someone/something-- *The railway company announced that it would employ consultants to prepare detailed designs for its plan to reduce the impact of railway noise on people living nearby.*

imply, infer mean different things, at least in careful usage. You imply something if you hint or suggest it: you infer something if you deduce it from the hint or suggestion. The use of infer to mean imply is a habit of great antiquity but still offends fussy readers.

to **impress** someone with something -- *He impressed the students with his wide knowledge of China.*

an **impression** of something -- *He said his impression of China remained vague even after living in Guangdong Province for six months.*

incentive for -- *She said the bleak prospects of employment reduced the incentive for teachers to enrol in training courses.*

include is sometimes used when "comprise" is required. If you say A included B you imply that there was something else in A. Thus it would be correct to say that the Hong Kong football team included two South China players, but it would be wrong to say it included 11 men and a substitute.

to be **inferior** to -- *He said local software was still inferior to imported products.*

to **inform** someone of something-- *The magazine aims to tell the Chinese about what American people think rather than inform them of US government policy, he said.*

to **insist** on doing something -- *She said some workers are stubborn and insist on staying on in their present job instead of taking alternatives.*

insistence on doing something -- *The main reason for the Hong Kong government's insistence on keeping the ban is security, said Mr Lam.*

to **intend** to do something -- *The government does not intend to change the regulations despite pressure from business organisations.*

to have no **intention** of doing something -- *"The government has no intention of solving the problem or giving explanations," said Mr Wan.*

to be **interested** in (doing) something -- *Most youngsters today are not interested in becoming blue-collar workers.*

to **interview** someone -- *The company interviewed nine applicants for the job.*

an **interview** with someone -- *An interview with someone who couldn't get a job should be included in the story.*

to **introduce** someone to someone else -- *He introduced his mother to other homosexual couples.*

to **invest** in something -- *The upheavals in Thailand would not stop Hong Kong people investing in property there, she said.*

an **investment** in -- *The upheavals in Thailand would not reduce Hong Kong's investments in Thailand, she said.*

K

to be **keen** on something -- *The survey found that students were not keen on the new plan.*

(to have) **knowledge** of -- *Untrained tour escorts may not have much knowledge of the countries they take tours to.*

L

to **lack** something -- *They used to be passive and lack confidence, but since the training course they have been more outgoing.*

a **lecturer** at -- *He is a journalism lecturer at Hong Kong University.*

a **lecturer** in -- *She is a lecturer in the Social Work Department at Hong Kong Baptist College, OR, She is a lecturer in social work, OR, She is a social work lecturer.*

to **lecture** in -- *She lectures in social work at Hong Kong Baptist College.*

a **limit** on -- *There is no fixed limit on the time between a reporter's receiving a gift and his or her asking for permission from a superior.*

literally means in the exact and natural meaning of the words. If you say that a Legislative Councillor was literally walking a tightrope you mean he really was up there with only a rope between him and a nasty fall to the council chamber floor. Best not to use the word at all. Generally your readers will take you literally anyway.

to **live** in -- *He lives in Kowloon./ He lives in public housing./ He lives in luxury.*

to **live** on -- *He lives on Lantau./He lives on a public housing estate./He lives on \$3,000 a month.*

to **live** up to -- *Ms Lee is worried that her reputation has been overstated and she won't be able to live up to it.*

M

to be **made up** of -- *Mr Chow said the Travel Industry Council represented the interests of travel agents because it is made up of travel agents themselves, unlike the government-sponsored Hong Kong Tourist Association.*

to **put money into** (doing) something -- *"It is difficult for the government to put more money into implementing full-day schooling because of demand in other areas, such as social services," said Mr Lau.*

N

nauseous is the word for things which cause nausea, not for people who suffer from it.

needy cannot be used indiscriminately for people who need counselling, accomodation, medical help or other sociable goods. It means only those in need of money. *The needy* are the poor.

O

to **object** to something -- *The three parties objected to the government's passing of the new rates bill.*

an **obstacle** to doing something -- *Ms Wong said that the low status of education colleges was one of the big obstacles to attracting highly qualified applicants.*

an **opinion** on something -- *The editorial gave the newspaper's opinion on the subject.*

an **opinion** about someone/something -- *He said he had no opinion about the formation of the new department.*

an **opportunity** to do something -- *All students should have the same opportunities to choose subsidised schools, Mr Cheung said.*

an **opportunity** for -- *Despite its shortcomings, CrossOver had achieved its goal of providing more opportunities for young writers, he said.*

to be **optimistic** about -- *Dr Yeung said he was optimistic about the future of Chinese traditional medicine.*

P

to **participate** in something -- *Through participating in the Asian homosexual organisations' activities, he learned of the "coming-out" process.*

the **permission** of/ **permission** from -- *Reporters may not take any kind of gift from contacts unless they have permission from (or: the permission of) their superiors.*

to **persuade** someone to do something -- *Although the Secretary for Education and Manpower tried to persuade legislators to support the bill, he failed in the face of concerns that it would not address the problems of poor children.*

to take a **photograph** of someone -- *The police took photographs of the demonstrators, the court heard.*

to have one's **photograph** taken -- *The group had their photo taken in Tiananmen Square.*

a **plan** to do something -- *The plot opens when Mrs Martin overhears a plan to kill someone.*

police/the police take a plural verb -- *While legislators are pushing to get the government to crack down on triads, the police (i.e. the organisation) claim that triad activities are not serious in schools. Police corruption was curbed by the formation of the ICAC. Police (i.e. some individual officers) went to a flat in Waterloo Road after receiving a complaint about excessive noise.*

a **policy** for/ on -- *Every company should devise its own policy on accepting gifts, he said. "I want to ask the Urban Council about their policy for dealing with this situation," Ms Lam said.*

the **power** to do something -- *The section of the ordinance concerning the ICAC's power to detain anyone for enquiries for up to three hours was repealed.*

to **praise** someone for doing something -- Ms Wong praised social workers for helping so much in the fight against drugs.

a **prerequisite** for -- He said the main prerequisite for future Sino-British cooperation is that the Chinese government recognise the Legislative Council.

a **press conference** to promote something -- "The Thai property market has good prospects," said Miss Candy Dong, manager of Metropolis Realty, yesterday at a press conference to promote a residential block now being built in Bangkok.

to **prevent** something (from) happening -- Therefore, he said, social workers and police have their roles to play in preventing schoolchildren (from) committing crimes.

the **price** of -- Since 1987 there has been continuous growth in the prices of Thai property.

a **privilege** for someone -- There should be no special privileges for any one group.

the **probability** of doing something -- The probability of finding a cheap flat to rent is very low these days.

the **problem** of -- The problem is one of lack of resources, he admitted.

the **problem** with (doing) something -- The problem with the organisation is that its policies are outdated and it cannot recruit new members

prone means lying face down. If you are facing up you are supine.

a **proposal** to do something -- The Legislative Council has already discussed the proposal to abolish the double-rent policy.

prospects for -- The bleak prospects for promotion discourage teachers from taking training courses.

prostrate means lying down. The occasionally troublesome gland is the prostate.

a **protest** against something -- The students organised a protest against the increase in fees.

to **protest** against something -- Workers protested against the labour importation scheme

to **protest** at/about something -- The students protested at/about the heavy workload

to **provide** someone with something -- The organisation is asking Mr Fung to provide it with a phone and office.

to **provide** something for someone -- Mr Law said the new channel's objective was to provide the latest news for the local audience.

provision for -- The old ordinance contains no provision for direct punishment for unauthorised land use.

R

rack, wrack are sometimes confused. To rack means to torture, originally by stretching. The rack was a common feature of medieval torture chambers. The word survives in the phrase "nerve-racking" which should be so spelt. To "wrack" is an alternative form of "wreck". Use wreck except in the phrase "wrack and ruin".

to **raise** something -- The government planned to raise tuition fees by 18 percent next year.

a **reason** for -- *The reason for introducing the legislation was that there were significant changes in Hong Kong's political, social and economic circumstances.*

a **reason** + verb -- *He had no reason to go.*

a **receipt** for -- *His boss ordered him to sign a receipt for \$13,000.*

to **recommend** someone for something -- *When recommending someone for hospital detention, a doctor will look not only at the person's mental state but also his relationship with his family.*

to **recommend** something to someone -- *There were complaints after one reviewer recommended a certain book to readers, who then found out it was not available in Hong Kong.*

to **refuse** to do something -- *It is pointless to refuse to recognise the Chinese government.*

to **regard** something/someone as -- *Most teenagers in his survey regarded any legal means of getting money as acceptable.*

to **register** with -- *The society is not registered with the government and is therefore illegal.*

to **regret** (doing) something -- *Sir David says he does not regret taking up his post.*

a **remedy** for something -- *Mr Pak said that seminars should deal with measures to avert violence rather than remedies for the problem itself.*

to **remember** someone doing something/something happening -- *"As a doctor's daughter, you should go to university," she remembers her father telling her.*

a **report** on -- *It was not only Ming Pao that had done a report on the adjusting of interest rates, he said.*

a **request** for -- *The company failed to comply with the the additional request for letters of credit worth nearly \$2 billion.*

to **require** somebody to do something -- *Guangdong Province requires women to be married for eight years or more before they are eligible for a one-way permit to Hong Kong.*

to **respond** to -- *The workers responded to an appeal from the union.*

a **response** to -- *There was a positive response to the government's proposal to increase funding for schools.*

to be **responsible** for (doing) something -- *The duty officer is responsible for jotting down all the details of the reported crime.*

to have a **responsibility** to someone -- *The bus companies have a responsibility to the public to provide cheap and frequent services.*

responsibility for -- *The responsibility for providing better living conditions for the needy has been laid on the poor themselves, she said.*

to **restrict** something to -- *Despite the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the activities of homosexuals are still restricted to gay bars and baths.*

a **restriction** on doing something -- *There are restrictions on civil servants borrowing money from colleagues.*

to **result** in -- *The "bomb bag" can go off with a loud explosion that can cause temporary deafness and may result in permanent damage to the hearing.*

a **rise** in something -- *He reported a rise in the profits of the People's Bank of China.*
to **rise** (intransitive) by -- *Tuition fees at tertiary institutions will rise by 18 per cent next year. See raise.*

to play a **role** in doing something -- *The Consumer Council also plays an important role in protecting the interests of purchasers, she said.*

to **risk** (doing) something -- *Smokers risk getting lung cancer.*

a **risk** of -- *Obesity can contribute to the risk of gallstones, apoplexy, rheumatoid arthritis and sleeplessness.*

role as -- *He told students about USIS's role as the public affairs service of the US government.*

S

to be **satisfied** with something -- *Ms Ho said she was not satisfied with Citybus's services.*

to be **scared** of -- *"Even the gweilos are scared of me," said Ben.*

a **scheme** to do something -- *The government introduced a scheme to import labour.*

to **search** someone for something -- *The police then search the suspect for any hidden weapons.*

a **search** for something -- *In its search for a scapegoat, he said, the Chinese government would likely look for another target among Hong Kong reporters.*

to **seek** something -- *People who are dissatisfied with travel agencies' services can only seek compensation through the Small Claims Tribunal.*

to **sentence** someone to (a legal punishment) -- *Xi Yang was sentenced to 12 years in jail.*

shambles means a slaughterhouse. Some readers still object to its use for scenes of disorder or chaos generally, though the (mis)use is well-established and given in most dictionaries.

to **share** something with somebody -- *The young gang members feel they are affiliated to a group, accepted by their peers and have somebody to share their troubles with.*

to be **short** of -- *"We are short of manpower," said Mr Wai of the Environmental Protection Department.*

to **smuggle** something into -- *Police believed the syndicate in Hong Kong had close connections with one in China and together they smuggled ice from southern China into Hong Kong.*

a **solution** to -- *Getting housewives to go back to work is one solution to the territory's labour shortage.*

to **spend** money on (doing) something -- *The government is to spend \$x million on cleaning up the environment in the next three years.*

to **spend** time doing something -- *Legislators spent more than an hour discussing the proposal.*

to **spend** time on something -- *He regretted the many hours he had spent on the book.*

a **spokesman/spokeswoman** for -- *The spokesman for the Catering Industry Workers' Union said . . .*

a **standard** of (something) -- *He said that the general standard of French among Hong Kong students was rising.*

stationery is office equipment; "stationary" means standing still.

story means a tale, "storey" a floor in a building.

stress when used as a noun takes "on". When used as a verb it does not -- *The editor put the stress on the need for accuracy. The editor stressed the need for accuracy.* As the example above illustrates, using "stress" as a verb usually produces a more active -- and shorter -- sentence.

a **student** at -- *Leo Li, a chemistry student at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, said . . .* Better: *Leo Li, a Hong Kong University of Science and Technology chemistry student, . . .*

a **study** on something -- *Mr Lau has just published a study on childhood nutrition in Hong Kong.*

to **subscribe** to -- *Mr So said that viewers would have to pay extra to subscribe to the so-called premium channels, which showed pornographic programmes and violent movies.*

to **substitute** something for something else -- *The thieves substituted fake notes for the real money so that the robbery would not be noticed immediately.*

a **substitute** for -- *The treatment uses methadone as a substitute for heroin.*

to **succeed** in doing something -- *The women succeeded in getting the wages they were due* (NB -- this verb is usually dispensable in the interests of tight writing -- *The women received the wages they were due...*)

to **suffer** is intransitive -- *Mr Lee said it seemed like a long-term policy and could cause many local workers to suffer in the short term.*

to **suffer** from (an illness) -- *The boy was suffering from TB.* (N.B. It would be much better to say ... *had TB*)

to **suggest** (to someone) that somebody (should) do something -- *He suggested that the Labour Department (should) blacklist offending employers.*

support for -- *"What we are doing now is trying to demonstrate our support for democracy by sending Christmas cards to prisoners in China," the volunteer said.*

the **support** of -- *"Losing weight depends on the patience of the individual and the support of his family," he said.*

to **suspect** someone of doing something -- *They suspected him of having leaked the information.*

to be **symbolic** of -- *The excessive use of plastic bags has become symbolic of the way in which we waste valuable resources, he said.*

to **sympathise** with -- *He said he sympathised with those who were unable to vote but could do nothing about it now.*

to feel **sympathetic** towards -- *Mr Leung said he felt sympathetic towards public housing tenants who were being forced out of their flats but didn't have enough money to buy private property.*

to have no **sympathy** for -- *She had no sympathy for those who failed to report by the due date, she said, because it had been well publicised beforehand.*

a **system** for -- *Unlike the European countries, Hong Kong has no registration system for tourist guides.*

T

a **textbook** on -- *She said there was no need to revise the primary school textbooks on health education.*

to **think** of doing something -- *After he failed this test, he even thought of quitting the pilot training scheme.*

it's **time** to do something (see also "high time") -- *It's time to commercialise China's newspapers.*

to **train** someone to do something -- *Mr Ng trains the children to dance in the traditional style.*

to **treat** someone as -- *Mrs Chow said Legco appointees should not be treated as third class members.*

U

unreasonable is not like its Cantonese counterpart; it does not mean "illogical" or "unfair". In English "reasonable" usually means balanced or moderate and "unreasonable" is scarcely used at all except in the phrase "unreasonable demands".

to **urge** someone to do something -- *Mr Tsui and Mr Ho have urged the government to improve relations with the Chinese government.*

V

to **vary** with -- *He said his company's dependence on the two big chains varied with different products.*

to **vary** from one thing to another-- *He said his company's dependence on the two big chains varied from product to product.*

W

to **wait** for something to happen -- *Analysts say local investors will be conservative for a time, waiting for the Thai turmoil to pass.*

to be on a **waiting-list** -- *There are still 150,000 applicants on the waiting-list for public housing.*

to **waste time** doing (something) -- *"I just don't understand why students nowadays waste so much time protesting," he said.*

whether, if should be distinguished. Use "whether" when there are two alternatives -- *I do not know whether to go (or not)* -- and "if" when the meaning is conditional -- *I shall go if I can.*

while should be reserved for occasions when two things happened together -- *While Nero fiddled, Rome burned.* It should not be used as an alternative to "although". "Whilst" is an antique. Do not use it.

to **worry/be worried** that something (verb) -- *Many homosexuals still worry (or: are still worried) about the social aspects of their identity.*

be **worth** doing -- *"It's not worth taking a job that pays \$6,000 for full-day teaching when a shop assistant earns \$7,000 before commission," she said*

to be **worth** one's while (doing something) -- *"It's not worth their while taking a full-day teaching job that pays only \$6,000," she said.*

to be **worthwhile** (doing something) -- *"It's not worthwhile taking a full-day teaching job that pays only \$6,000," she said.*

worthy means "entitled to respect or admiration". You can have a *worthy cause* or a person of some civic eminence may be described as a *worthy*. This is not the way the word is usually abused in Hong Kong, however. "Worth" may in correct usage take a gerund, as in *If a thing is worth doing it is worth doing well*. Or it may take a noun -- *speeding is not worth the risk of getting a ticket*. Or it may take "it" -- *We thought of redecorating our flat but as we shall move out next year it was not worth it*. Or you can use "worthwhile" -- *It is worthwhile to think carefully about your choice of words*. Only very rarely is it correct to say that something is worthy.