



Cancer Care Ontario

When to Break the Rules: Leaving the Style Guide Behind

JENNY LASS



Outline

- Why break the rules
- When to break the rules
- Rules to keep
- Client communication
- Making the decision
- Case studies

Why Break the Rules



Why a Style Guide

- Not all set rules
- Ensures consistency
- Strengthens brand
- Improves / speeds workflow
- Empowering

Carol Fisher Saller: A Rule Breaker!



Editor, Chicago Manual of Style Online Q&A
Author, *The Subversive Copy Editor*
2015 EAC conference keynote speaker

Style Guides are Just... Guides

**“Rules, by their very nature,
are oversimplifications.”**

Carol Fisher Saller

**“We are word professionals.
Sticklers are amateurs.”**

Sarah Grey, greyediting.com

Style Guides are Just... Guides

We aren't just rule followers—we're rule makers.



When to Break the Rules



Choose Wisely

“Rules were meant to be broken. But there’s a time and a place.”

Maria Pinto, fashion designer

Staying Current

Language is constantly changing

Oral traditions fastest

Written traditions slower

Written grammar slowest

Context

- Lack of guidance
- Format / type of content
- Layout
- Outdated / wrong / myth / zombie



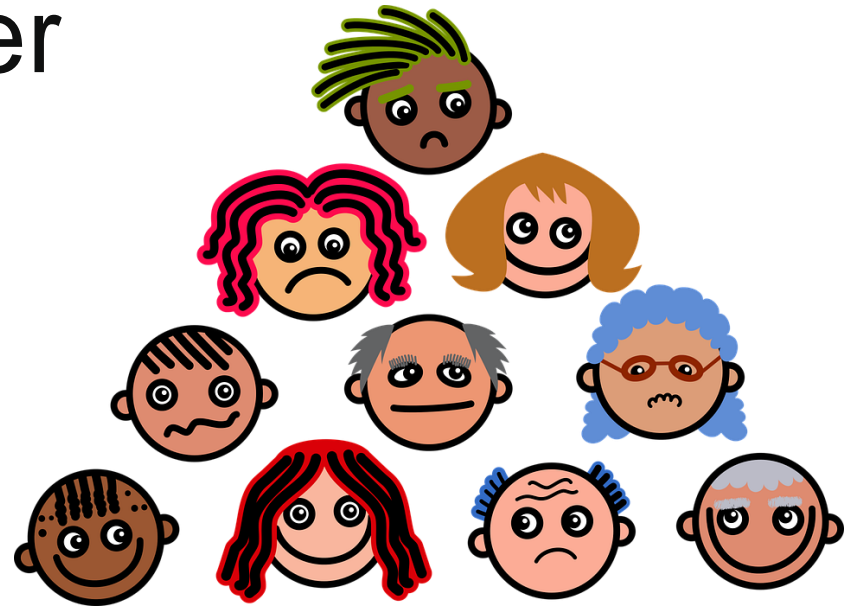
Ease of Completion

- Prevalence
- Tight deadline
- Technical issues
- Risk new errors



Outside Influences

- Client / stakeholder
- Branding
- Corporate culture
- User revolt!



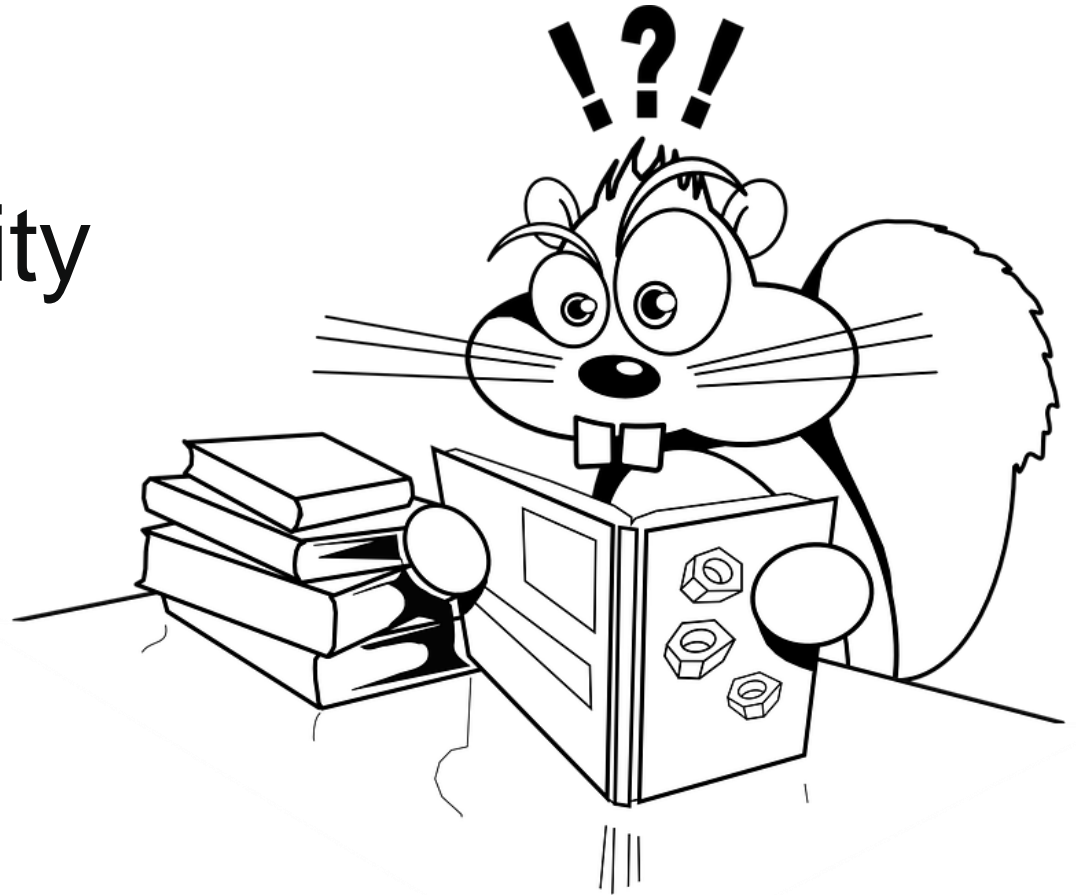
Audience is Key

“The point of knowing the rules isn’t to ‘take a chunk of writing and... grind it through the style-guide mill,’ as Carol Fisher Saller says. The point of knowing the rules... is to make that chunk of writing easier for the reader to understand.”

Rachel Lee Cherry, lastsyllable.net

Comprehension

- Culture
- Gender identity
- Age
- Literacy



Literacy Statistics

- 42% low literacy: >15 million by 2031
- Only 20% high literacy

High literacy audience might have to relay that information to low literacy audience

Language and Culture

- 21% of Canadians = immigrants
- 57% = English as mother tongue
- >200 languages

Social justice issue

Jenny's Laws

- “As” instead of “because”
- Data as plural
- Job title capitalization
- Bullet punctuation
- Numbers
- Outdated rules
- Active voice



Ensign Robin Lefler

Rules to Keep



Different for Everyone



Examples

- Serial comma
- “They” as singular
- More than vs. over
- Verbal nouns
- Capitalizing job titles after names
- Client is always right

Jenny's Laws

- Correct punctuation
- Avoid lack of agreement
- Plain language
- Consistency
- Avoid redundancy



Client Communication



Be Clear and Direct

“The great enemy of communication, we find, is the illusion of it.”

William H. Whyte

When to Communicate

ASAP

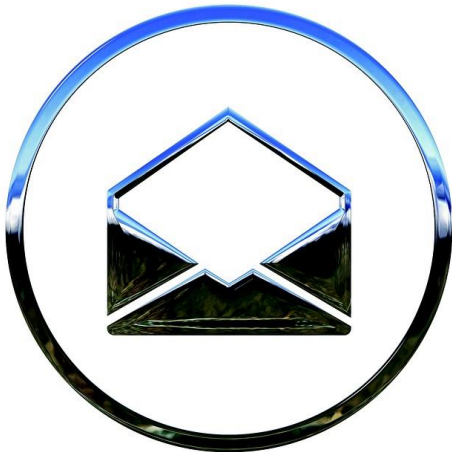
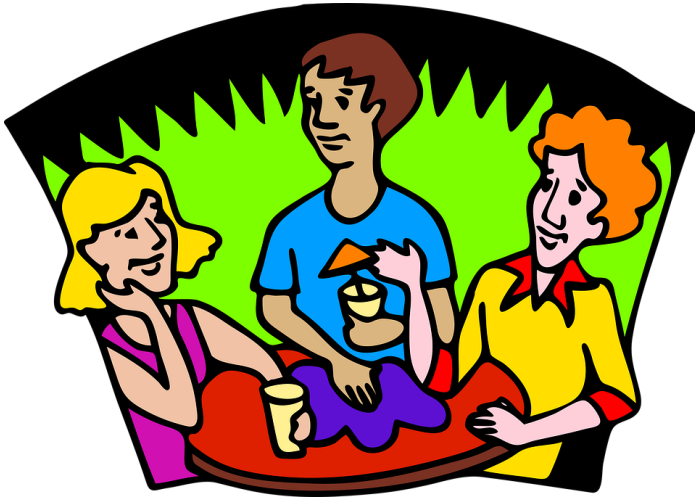
(if it's a major change, and you're clear about your decision and recommendations)

Who to Tell

- Client
- Creative director
- Director / manager / managing editor
- Account manager
- Publisher

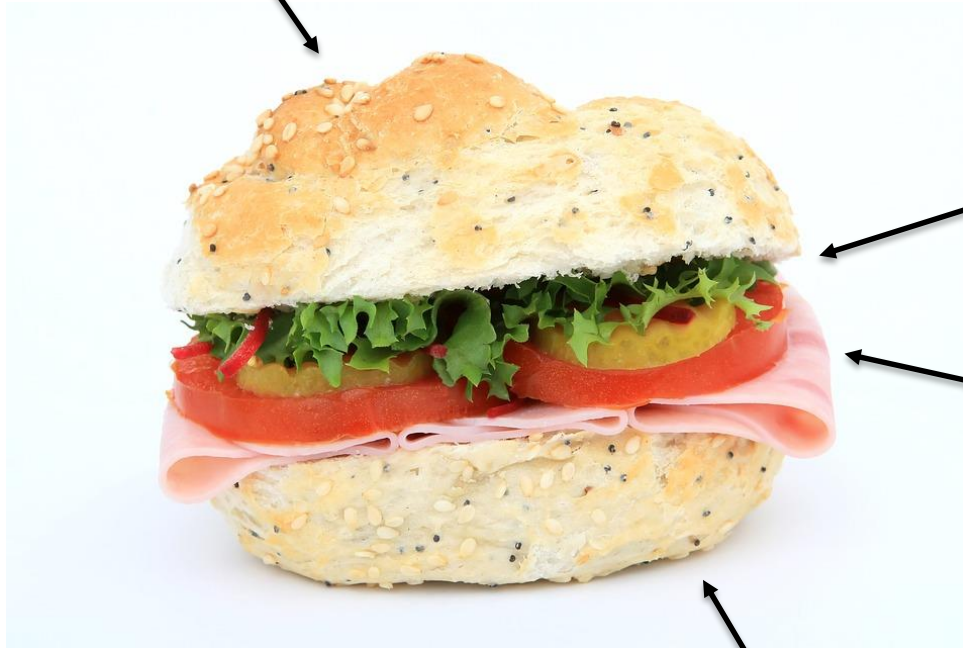
Might be more than 1

Methods of Communication



Progress Sandwich

Project update



Reasons for
change and
example

Benefits
and risks

Summary of next
steps and log
final decision

Push Back

1. Ask why / ensure understand
2. Empathize
3. Show how change meets common goal
4. Suggest alternative

Let it go / escalate

Making the Decision



Questions to Consider

Does it serve your audience?

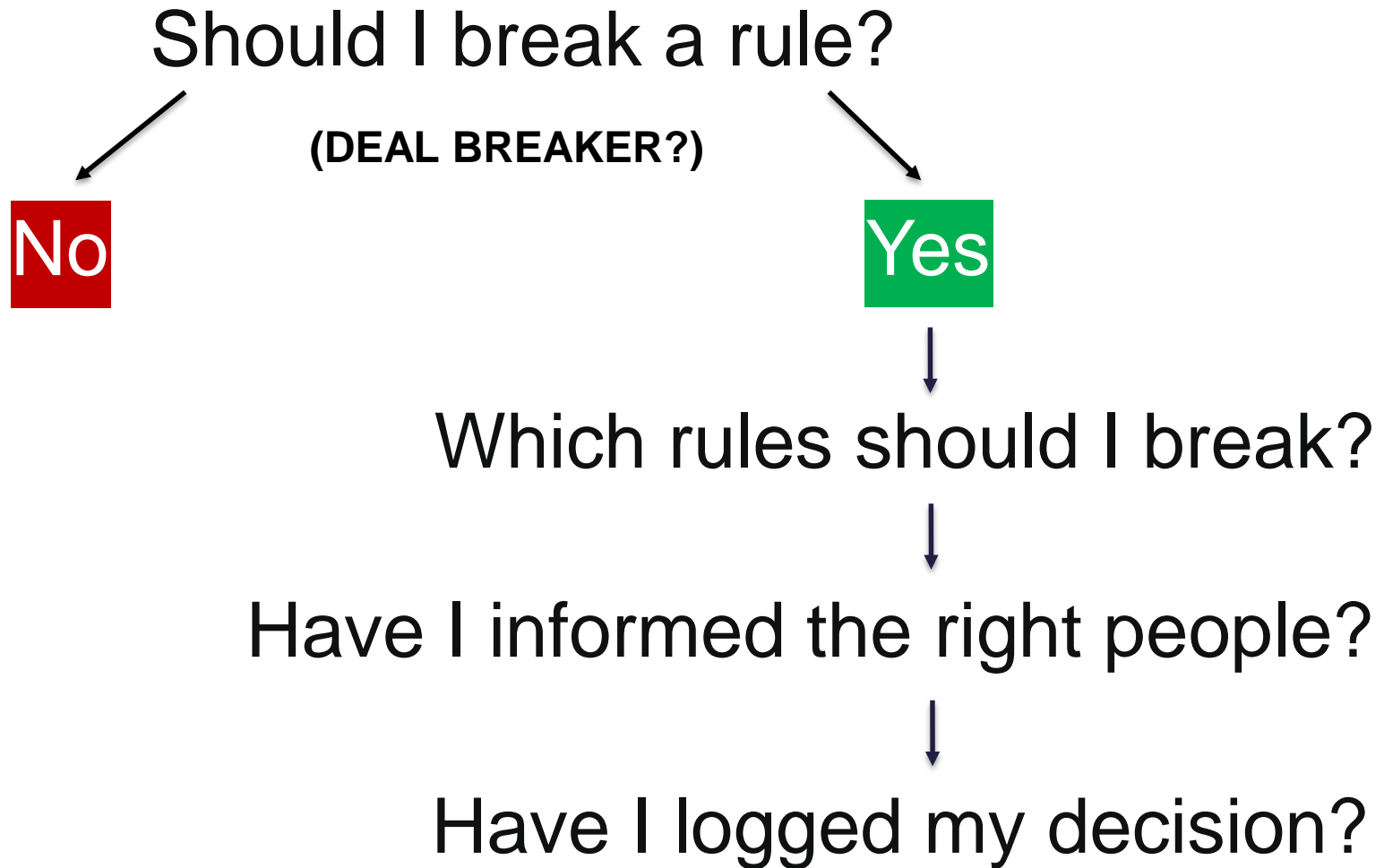
Does it make your client happy?

Does it affect functionality?

Does it harm you / client?



Decision Tree



Case Studies



Case of the Busy Bullets

Your Health is Important

How to stay healthy:

- Talk to your doctor;
- Eat healthy food;
- Get checked;
- Do tests; and
- Take medicines.

Who you can talk to:

- Doctor;
- Nurse;
- Dietitian; and
- Social worker.

Where to get help:

- Hospital;
- Clinic;
- Doctor's office; and
- Laboratory.



Case of the Wonky Web Word

Style guide rule:

Use “percent” when writing for the web.

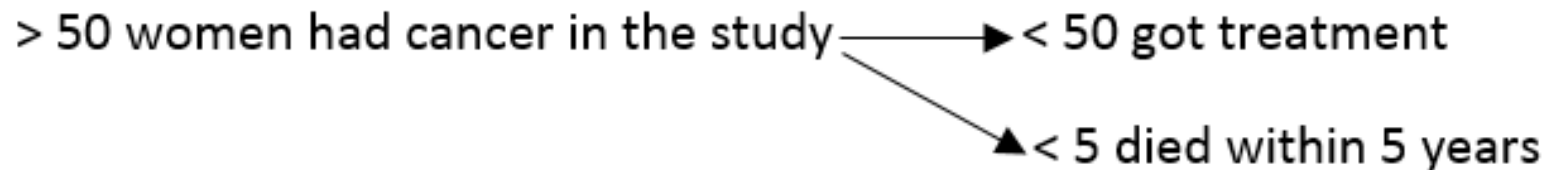
Use “per cent” when writing for print materials.

Case of the Set Space

Style guide rule:

No space between < or > and the number that follows it (e.g., <20).

Completed series of flow charts:



Case of the Scientific Snafu

30 percent of lip cancers are attributable to eating red licorice.



Thank You!

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