

# GUIDELINES OF THE ENGLISH ACADEMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The English Academy of Southern Africa has approved the following guidelines on *abbreviations*, on *the hyphen* (also the compounding of words in English), and on the *ampersand*, the *solidus* or *oblique*, and *words ending in -ize/-ise*.

## 1. Abbreviations

Although aware that companies, institutions, and other organizations apply their own 'house rules', the English Academy recommends that generally accepted practice and the guidelines suggested below should be followed. Consistency and clarity in the use of abbreviations are essential.

Full stops are *not* used when an abbreviation ends with the same letter as the word for which it stands, e.g. Mr, Mrs, Sgt, Dr, Cpl, Bros, ft, pd (paid), Ltd, St, wt (weight), and Rd.

General practice in English is to use a full stop or period wherever the abbreviated form does *not* conclude with the last letter of the word, e.g. Prof., Rev., Capt., Gen., Hon., Maj., esp., Co. (but Coy in military context), rep. (representative), prep. (preparatory), p. (page), and pp. (plural of page).

Scientific and technical abbreviations do not take full stops. Examples are km (kilometre) and kg (kilogram). Symbols for chemicals follow the same usage, for example Na (sodium), H (hydrogen), C (carbon), Cl (chlorine), and O (oxygen). The letters 'R' and 'c' are symbols for rand and cent, and also do not take full stops. When the time is written according to the 24-hour clock, the 'h' is in the lower case without a full stop, for example 13h20.

Initial letters making up a new word which is pronounced as a word do not require full stops, e.g. MOTH (Memorable Order of Tin Hats), HART (Halt All Racial Tours), and STOPP (Society of Teachers Opposed to Physical Punishment). These acronyms are normally written in capital letters.

Note that acronyms made up of a mixture of initial letters and portions of words (which are pronounced as words) also do not have full stops. Furthermore, it is acceptable to write these acronyms with an initial capital letter and subsequent letters in lower case if the organization concerned also follows this usage, e.g. Escom, Unisa, Iscor, Putco and Sasol.

Initial letters generally known as standing for the thing designated are usually written without full stops, for example ISBN, CSIR, SAAF, RAF, SAA, RSA, TPA, HSRC, SPCA, JMB, BBC, SABC, SABS, SATS, IBM, GPO, UK, USA, TV, and GST.

It is general practice to omit full stops in abbreviations of university degrees, for example Dip Ed, BA, BSc, LLB, HED, BA Hons, BEd, MA, MSc, MBA, DPhil, DEd, DLitt, and PhD.

In Latin abbreviations the full stop is preferably used after an initial letter and a truncated form, for example e.g., i.e., etc., viz., op.cit., et al., loc.cit., ad lib., a.m., p.m., p. (page), and pp. (pages).

However, uppercase Latin abbreviations do not require the use of the full stop, for example AD (precedes the date unlike the English abbreviation BC which follows the date), QED, RIP, NB, and PS. Compare the French RSVP.

The abbreviation for number is No. (from Latin *numero*) and should be used only before digits.

It is inadvisable to omit the full stop where ambiguity or misunderstanding may ensue, as in f.o.r. ('free on rail').

Usually a person's initials are written with a full stop, on the principle that these are individual variants, not recognized or established abbreviations. One should, however, note an increasing tendency to delete the period after a person's initials.

## **2. Hyphens; and the Compounding of Words in English and the Role of the Hyphen in such Compounds**

The following is an outline of the circumstances in which words are ordinarily hyphenated. Bear in mind, however, that the trend

in the spelling of compound words has been away from the use of hyphens and towards consolidation.

A hyphen is used in compounds containing a prepositional phrase (mother-in-law, barrister-at-law, stay-at-home).

Noun + noun compounds. Exemplified by word-groups such as the Paris-Rome express, an actor-manager (two appositional nouns), city-state, soldier-statesman.

Standard or technical units of measurement ending in a word such as ton or pound or year: as foot-ton and foot-pound, light-year.

Compounds formed with doer, maker, worker and keeper are sometimes hyphenated: wrong-doer (SOED), mischief-maker (SOED), book-maker (SOED), mine-worker (Chambers), time-keeper (SOED, which gives also timekeeper). Hyphenated compounds of this kind are becoming exceptional; the tendency is towards the coalescence of the word elements. The new *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (it was first published in 1979) gives these words as wrongdoer, bookmaker, timekeeper. It does not list either mischief-maker or mine-worker, which, in any event, is more particularly a South African expression; in Britain and the USA the term is miner.

Noun + adjective compounds. To avoid ambiguity a hyphen should be used in a compound adjective: first-class, navy-blue, water-cooled. What has to be kept in mind is that words used to qualify or modify a noun are not hyphenated when on their own and serving a different purpose. Thus, one refers to 'a first-class compartment' (the hyphen is needed) but to 'travelling first class' (no hyphen).

Adjective + adjective compounds. Exemplified by word-groups such as the Franco-Prussian War, the Serbo-Croatian War, the Anglo-Boer War, the Anglo-Zulu War.

Compound modifiers formed with present or past participles are usually hyphenated when preceding a noun: a good-looking man, a well-nourished child, a well-loved piece of music. The phrases are not hyphenated in other positions:

The man was good looking. The attack was well planned.

A hyphen is used in numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine: twenty-first birthday; thirty-five. Fractions are hyphenated when used as modifiers, but when used as nouns are usually written as two words: one-half kilometre in length; four-fifths of the world's surface.

Most compound words written with *self* are hyphenated: self-contained, self-government. A hyphen is used with other prefixes (*ex-*, *pre-*, *pro-*, *all-*) to nouns, and with the suffixes *elect* and *designate*, for example, ex-boxer, anti-apartheid, pre-war, pro-British, all-American, all-important, president-elect.

There are hyphens between some prefixes ending with a vowel and the root word which begins with a vowel, especially if the root word begins with the same vowel: re-elect, semi-independent, pre-exist, de-ice.

Hyphens are used to avoid confusion and creating a wrong impression: a sick-berth attendant (it is not the attendant who is sick); a Dutch-cheese importer (the cheese not the importer is Dutch); a coarse-cloth manufacturer; to re-cover a chair (to recover from an illness).

The suspensive (or deferent or annunciatory) hyphen is used to carry the modifying expression from one word over to the next in contexts such as these: two- and three-word compounds, four- and six-cylindered motorcars.

Eric Partridge in his article on hyphenation (*Usage and Abusage*, p. 149) concludes, regretfully, that he has '... merely skimmed the surface ...' of the subject. Regretfully, this is what has been done here also.

A more detailed guide to the complexities of hyphenation or compounding would be what appears in the entries of one of the recognized, recently published dictionaries of English.

### 3. The use of words ending in -ize/-ise

Certain verbs such as advertise, analyse, apprise, chastise, circumcise, comprise, compromise, despise, devise, disfranchise, disguise, enfranchise, excise, exercise, improvise, incise, premise, supervise, surmise, surprise, and certain nouns such as demise, enterprise, expertise, franchise always end in -ise. In most cases -ize/-ise is a matter of choice. The use of -ise presents fewer problems than the use of -ize. Whatever choice is made, usage should be consistent.

### 4. The use of the Ampersand Sign (&)

Ampersand (&) is a sign for 'and'. & may be used in names of firms, e.g. Smith & Jones. In all other writing *and* should be used.

## 5. The use of the Solidus (/)

Solidus is only one name for a sign also variously known as oblique, slash, slash mark, virgule, oblique stroke, stroke, diagonal, separatrix. Some uses are the following: to write fractions ( $1/4$ ); to denote ratios (km/h); and to separate alternative words (and/or).