

Keeping to the Code: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Evolution of Technical Style Guides  
in the Computer Age

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## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving husband Andrew, and my parents for their support.  
In memory of David Foster Wallace.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Drs. Eyman, Lawrence, and Hawk for their excellent teaching, help, and support.

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## ABSTRACT

### KEEPING TO THE CODE: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF TECHNICAL STYLE GUIDES IN THE COMPUTER AGE

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This thesis provides a rhetorical analysis of technical style guides beginning with the history of technical writing and style guides, the evolution of style guides, and individual case studies, concluding that a style guide must be kept up to date or otherwise be rendered irrelevant.

## INTRODUCTION

It is important to study and examine style guides from a rhetorical and genre-based position because if there is no social action involved, the style guide becomes static and useless, with no purpose. In other words, if no one responds by taking action such as making appropriate changes to their documents upon reading the style guide, it becomes useless. My argument is that a style guide must respond to this need or else render itself obsolete. In addition, style guides must respond to the changing world of technology and anticipate how they will affect writing activities in the workplace.

I decided to study technical style guides because I am a technical writer and I use style manuals on a daily basis in my work. In the first organization in which I worked, Tier Technologies, Inc., we had a strong style guide in place. This ensured that all of our documentation was uniform and consistent, despite the fact that there were many authors. This varied greatly with other organizations that did not have an established style guide. At my second company, InterImage, Inc., there was no corporate style guide. Instead we used templates and boilerplate styles to compose documents. Therefore, all the headings and fonts were universal and consistent within the documents, but the voice often differed due to different authors. The organization would have greatly benefited from having a corporate style guide.

My current organization, Creative Information Technology Inc., (CITI) does not have a style guide. They rely upon me, the sole technical writer, to implement templates

and good, consistent style. In turn, I rely upon manuals such as the *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*. Because we work on a government contract, jargon is common and it is difficult to enforce the plain language mandate. It is difficult to operate in an environment without a style guide; there is no available list of acronyms and abbreviations, so I don't know what people are referring to unless I ask. The only consistency is that most documents are edited by me, so the style is uniform.

Style manuals influence the way that we write and how we view the written word and its ultimate use. For this thesis, first I will provide a history of style guides in order to determine how knowledge of past style guides is obtained and transmitted to what we have today and what we will have in the future. Essentially, how have style guides changed over time? Second, I will conduct a rhetorical analysis of the genre of style guides, using specific examples to pick apart the various pieces and sections of what makes up a style guide and why those parts are there in the first place. I will also discuss how effective these style guides are in achieving their goals and aims within the context of several organizations in which I have worked. Third, I will discuss how technology in the computer age and the dawn of the Internet have influenced and affected style guides and their use within several specific examples of organizations. The overall claim of this thesis is that that style guides must be utilized in order to achieve their goals and aims, according to Carolyn Miller's idea of genre as social action. In her view, "genres are both communal and situation, arising from and providing resources for members of

particular communities in particular social situations.”<sup>1</sup> “Genres also help to shape the discourse communities in which they arise.”<sup>2</sup> Style guides help to shape the technical community into one of structure and uniformity.

In addition, knowledge of past style guides influences how we write today, as well as how technology has allowed for hyperlinked and more accessible style guides. The theory is that the closer a style guide follows its own rules and adheres to its own prescriptions, the more authority it will have. In addition, the more technologically advanced and accessible, the more it will be utilized, thus fulfilling its rhetorical purpose.

Mark Bright says in his article “Creating, Implementing, and Maintaining Corporate Style Guides in an Age of Technology,” that “corporate style guides have become more and more necessary as a result of increasingly available office technologies. Word processing and online technologies have made manuals of style invaluable tools that help organizations ensure an ethos of professionalism through communication consistency.”<sup>3</sup> However, the moving target of technology affects style guides.

Little research has been done in the genre of style guides or on style in general to date. *Research in Technical Communication*, focuses on theoretical as well as practical approaches to technical writing. One of the chapters written by Broadhead offers what was in 1985 referred to as “a first and comprehensive bibliography of style in technical

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<sup>1</sup> Henze, Brent R. “Emergent Genres in Young Disciplines: The Case of Ethnological Science.” *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13:4 (2004), 396.

<sup>2</sup> Henze, 396.

<sup>3</sup> Bright, Mark R. “Creating, Implementing, and Maintaining Corporate Style Guides in an Age of Technology,” *Technical Communication*, 52:1, February 2005, 47.

writing.”<sup>4</sup> When research into the style of language used in science and technology began, theories developed describing how texts were written, while later approaches have instead focused on explaining why texts are written the way they are. Inger Lassen’s paper, “Accessibility and Acceptability in Technical Manuals,” deals with this latter issue. Lassen cites researchers who have greatly contributed to these theories. This field has performed significant research in how good style are achieved in writing. However, all of their work was done in the 1990s and none have dealt with 21<sup>st</sup> century technical style guides and the issues that they face.

So, while some research has been done in the field of style, there is little information compiled about the history of style guides, specifically technical style guides. Thus far, contemporary style guides have not been studied in particular; how those guides create and reflect specific understandings of what constitutes good style in 21st century organizational settings.

While grammar rules may not change as fast as a teenager can send a text message, the terms that we use for technology continue to develop and evolve. It is immensely important that all technical documentation be readable, usable, and functional according to its purpose. As technology is changing at a rapid pace, technical style guides must struggle to keep up with the times. Because technology is changing so rapidly, technical style guides should be continually revised and kept up to date in order to be effective.

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<sup>4</sup> Lassen, Inger. Accessibility and Acceptability in Technical Manuals. John Benjamins: Amsterdam, 2003, 2.

The rhetorical situation in formal writing is analogous to the act of being a social creature in a given society generically. According to Carolyn Miller, “Situations are social constructs that are the result, not of ‘perception,’ but of ‘definition.’ Because human action is based on and guided by meaning, not by material causes, at the center of action is a process of interpretation. Before we can act, we must interpret the indeterminate material environment; we define, or ‘determine,’ a situation.”<sup>5</sup> Style guides demand social action because of the rhetorical situation in which they are placed. Therefore, they must be adhered to in order to achieve their rhetorical goals. In this thesis I will examine whether several style guides indeed are effective in demanding social action by looking at the way they are written.

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<sup>5</sup> Miller, Carolyn. “Genre as Social Action.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 70 (1984), 156.

## PART I: A HISTORY OF STYLE, TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, AND STYLE GUIDES

The modern style guide and technical style guide as we know it came about as a result of a long history of writings on style, the birth of modern technical writing, and the development of early style guides such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Here I will discuss this history of rhetorical style because before analyzing technical style guides, it is important to know and understand the history of traditional rhetorical style as style is a rhetorical practice and style guides are a way of structuring that practice. Brent R. Henze writes, “Although it is certainly important to understand how dominant genres evolve and function as long-standing disciplines, it is equally important first spring to life.”<sup>6</sup>

Technical communication and its growth and place in society paved the way for the need for documented rules and regulations. This section will provide a brief history of technical communication and its production of the modern technical style manual. In addition, I will provide a brief overview of several prominent style guides that have been influential as building blocks for technical style guides that have emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>6</sup> Henze, 396.

According to Aristotle, style is the third canon of rhetoric, after invention and arrangement. The systematization of rhetoric comes from Aristotle, who set up the five part canon. His treatise, *The Art of Rhetoric*, discusses elements of style and describes rhetoric as a human art or skill. The author of early writings on style defined style broadly, as “the adaptation of suitable words and sentences devised” in *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*. This textbook on rhetoric was formerly attributed to Cicero, but is now of unknown authorship, but is still used widely as an instruction book on rhetoric. It is the oldest surviving Latin text on rhetoric, dating from the 90s BC. Therefore, it provides valuable insight into early thought regarding style that is still valid and in use today. In the book, good style was defined as speech expressed with taste, with artistic composition, and distinction. “Taste” included correct grammar and the proper use of terms. Each rhetor may choose from among three kinds of style: grand, middle, or simple. “The Grand type consists of a smooth and ornate arrangement of impressive words. The Middle type consists of words of a lower, yet not of the lowest and most colloquial, class of words. The Simple type is brought down even to the most current idiom of standard speech.”<sup>7</sup>

Each kind of style has a potential pitfall: for grand style, the danger is for the language to become “swollen.” For middle style, one might end up with writing that is “slack” or “drifting,” in other words, lacking in form or strength. For simple style, the danger is that the rhetoric will have “meager” or “vulgar” style. Therefore the author offers the following solution: “But in speaking we should vary the type of style, so that

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<sup>7</sup> Rhetorica ad Herrenium, Book IV, 265.

the middle succeeds the grand and the simple the middle, and then again interchange them, and yet again. Thus, by means of the variation, satiety is easily avoided.”<sup>8</sup> This is important to note because it provides a means of analyzing texts according to the three types of style that may be employed. This rubric is still a valuable method for such analysis.

The author of *Rhetorica ad Herennium* wrote “To be in fullest measure suitable to the speaker’s purpose such a style should have three qualities: Taste, Artistic Composition, and Distinction. Taste makes each and every topic seem to be expressed with purity and perspicuity.”<sup>9</sup> Writing style can be seen as a rhetoric of its own, recognizing the available means of persuasion and knowing when and when not to use them in written discourse. Style persuades by convincing the reader that the writer has a strong grasp on the language, conveys their message with clarity, concision, cohesion, coherence, correctness, and consistency and convinces the reader to take a certain action, form a belief, or make a decision.

All writing has style, whether effective or ineffective. What constitutes good style depends on rhetorical situation. If style exists in all forms of writing it is the situation under which a style guide was created that makes it rhetorically valid. The rhetorical purpose of a style guide is to persuade the user to implement all the available means and tools of good writing, from grammar, syntax, spelling, punctuation, and word choice. Good style, like art, can be subjective. However, experts in the field adhere to specific rules regarding grammar that have evolved over time and impart those rules to

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<sup>8</sup> Rhetorica ad Herennium, Book IV, 265.

<sup>9</sup> Rhetorica ad Herennium, Book IV, 271.

the rest of us. Correctness is then decided by the few, based on a general consensus. Whether or not the general public adheres to the rules is another issue.

The style guide can be seen as its own genre, one with many interpretations, iterations, and forms. According to Brent R. Henze, “Although it is certainly important to understand how dominant genres evolve and function in long-standing disciplines, it is equally important to learn how disciplinary genres first spring to life – particularly how the earliest adherents of a new discipline come to share an understanding of the most salient rhetorical constraints of the discipline and the most appropriate manner of responding to those constraints.”<sup>10</sup> It is also important to know the history of technical communication and the exigence behind the writing of the first technical style guide.

It was the Greeks, the inventors of rhetoric, who first recognized the need for effective style in both speech and writing and had the faculties to write books about style. India in 4th century B.C. marked the locus of the study of grammar, with Panini’s grammar of Sanskrit. The Greeks had Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus* and approached the study of grammar through philosophy as did the Romans later on. The formal topic of the *Cratylus* is ‘correctness of names’ and concentrated primarily on nouns.<sup>11</sup>

Early Greek and Latin grammars mainly aimed to define the parts of speech and were not concerned with foreign languages, and it was not until the Middle Ages that grammarians became interested in languages other than their own. In the 19th century, early grammarians realized that languages have a history. The scientific grammatical

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<sup>10</sup> Henze, Brent R. “Emergent Genres in Young Disciplines: The Case of Ethnological Science.” *Technical Communication Quarterly*. 12:14 (2004), 396.

<sup>11</sup> “Plato’s *Cratylus*.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Oct 4, 2006  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-cratylus/> March 2009.

analysis of language then led to “comparative linguistic attempts at the genealogical classification of languages.”<sup>12</sup> The 20th century showed further development of grammatical analysis and was greatly advanced by the theories of structural linguistics and transformational-generative grammar.<sup>13</sup>

The history of technical communication provides some insight into the exigence or need for the technical style guide. The 17<sup>th</sup> century serves as the beginning of modern technical writing, primarily due to the visionary ideas of Francis Bacon, a scientist and prominent thinker of his day. Francis Bacon began a project for a methodical practice of science based on biblical authority; seeing that there was a need to create a standard scientific method. He simultaneously set out a project for social authority located in a secular state, adding a political component to his scientific philosophy. Bacon described his mission as “the collecting and perfecting of a Natural and Experimental History, true and severe (unencumbered with literature and book-learning), such as philosophy may be built upon...so at length after the lapse of so many ages, philosophy and the sciences may no longer float in air, but must rest on the solid foundation of experience of every kind, and the same well examined and weighed. I have provided the machine, but the stuff must be gathered from the facts of nature.”<sup>14</sup> This “stuff” is technical information, solid facts that were essential to life in Bacon’s world, but had been limited to the few until they were written down in a language that all could understand. Bacon sought to bring science to the ground where it belonged, and the language of science with it. As of yet,

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<sup>12</sup> “History of Grammar,” *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, 6th ed. 2007  
<http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/society/A0858447.html>. March 2009.

<sup>13</sup> “History of Grammar”

<sup>14</sup> Longo, 39.

no specific style guide existed to aid Bacon in his missions, but the groundwork had been laid.

By bringing science and philosophy “out of the ether and into the world,”<sup>15</sup> Bacon rationalized the study of the low arts, such as mechanics, chemistry, mining, and metallurgy, based on their “benefit to mankind.”<sup>16</sup> . In *Spurious Coin*, Bernadette Longo states, “In the tradition of [Francis] Bacon’s public science, “technical writing participates in a social system that was established to democratize knowledge, and taking experiential secrets for manipulating nature out of the realm of magic and making them legitimate subjects for scientific experimentation.”<sup>17</sup>

Longo posits that it was this that made Bacon’s efforts into a political movement as “science for Bacon was more than a method for achieving human dominance over Nature, it was a method for achieving social dominance for science through the promise of increased security and an improved human condition.”<sup>18</sup> As Longo concluded, Bacon’s efforts resulted in the fact that “technical language would become the lingua franca of this scientific society and its institutions.”<sup>19</sup> What was still needed was guidance about the style in which technical information was documented, in order to maintain consistency, clarity, cohesion, coherence, correctness, and concision, but as of then it was enough that technical and scientific information had been brought to the people. Bacon sought to shape specific understandings of style by making it easier for

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<sup>15</sup> Longo, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Longo, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Longo, Bernadette. *Spurious Coin: A History of Science, Management, and Technical Writing*. SUNY: New York, 2000, p 38.

<sup>18</sup> Longo, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Longo, 43.

the common people to understand. He sought to move away from a high, formalized style that was inaccessible by the people.

Centuries later, a miner turned technical writer and editor by the name of T.A. Rickard wrote the first modern technical writing text. Rickard described a social system in which “scientific and technological knowledge is the currency that keeps society’s economy circulating.”<sup>20</sup> Francis Bacon also saw this social system as necessary to the development of scientific and technological knowledge. Rickard felt that the act of translating scientific knowledge into technical language was something that engineers “should contribute cheerfully to the general fun of scientific knowledge for the betterment of living conditions” and that “scientific and technical knowledge is wealth made visible through the coinage of technical language.”<sup>21</sup> He placed an intrinsic value on knowledge, specifically that which is communicated through technical language to people so that it can be understood by laypeople.

Rickard’s ideas about technical writing’s role in Western cultures were articulated in what Robert Connors calls ‘the first technical writing textbook’ (“The Rise” 332) originally published in 1908. Longo goes on to describe how “modern ideas of science and technology gained dominance over scholastic, speculative knowledge that was dominant in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England. This transformation of dominant knowledge, largely carried out by Francis Bacon and his followers, gave the term “technical writing” meaning through its relationship to scientific knowledge.”<sup>22</sup> This first instance of

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<sup>20</sup> Longo, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Longo, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Longo, 23.

providing meaning to the term technical writing is valuable to the technical communication field that emerged as the century went on. It was based on the need to communicate scientific and technical knowledge beyond the scholarly realm to ordinary people who could then wield its power.

In Rickard's technical writing textbook, the first chapter after the introduction is entitled "Spurious Coin." In this chapter, Rickard discussed the debasing of technical language in mining and metallurgy through the adoption of foreign and "vulgar" terms. Rickard argued to an audience of educated men that they are responsible for maintaining the purity of technical language. Unlike the people of lowly birth, these educated men could use more refined language and only chose to emulate lowly practitioners in "an attempt to spurn their scholastic heritage."<sup>23</sup> This, according to Rickard, was inexcusable.

In 1910, Rickard read a paper entitled "Standardization of English in Technical Literature" before the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy in London. In this paper, he set out the purpose of language and of technical writing:

The purpose of language is to convey ideas; the intent of technical writing is to transmit accurate information, whether as fact or theory, from one man to another, to the gain of all.<sup>24</sup>

This concept is further explained by the idea of transmittal of information, in which both the sender and the receiver have the power. However, the difficulty lies in that even though "fact is filtered from supposition," there can still be discrepancies of interpretation

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<sup>23</sup> Longo, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Longo, 62-63.

and misunderstanding. This is a difficulty presented any time information is transmitted from one person to another.

Through this effective conveyance of clear ideas, technical writers and engineers could each contribute what knowledge they possessed to what Rickard called a “general fund” or “knowledge for the betterment of all.”<sup>25</sup> This idea of a general fund showed that technical and scientific knowledge contributed to society as a whole and could improve the world in which we live in a way that had not been done before. This was a new idea that would elevate the field of technical communication.

According to Longo, in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, technical writing was one of the jobs carried out by engineers and scientists who needed to communicate knowledge to people. As Rickard described this process in 1910, engineers and scientists had “an obligation to contribute to a ‘general fund’ or scientific and practical knowledge to further their work and the progress of humankind. They made their contributions directly to this fund through the currency of technical communications. In this scheme of knowledge-making, technical communication was within the fields of science and engineering and clearly relied on scientific knowledge for its stamp as genuine currency.”<sup>26</sup> However, it was still the engineers and scientists who were responsible for technical writing, not separate technical writers. It became clear that technical style guides would be an important tool for such engineers and scientists who lacked training in writing and documentation.

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<sup>25</sup> Longo, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Longo, 135.

By the end of World II, however, technical communication did not clearly fall within the realm of engineering and science as it had in earlier days. Textbook authors George Crouch and Robert Zetler, for example, were not engineers as Rickard had been; they taught in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh. Their 1948 *A Guide to Technical Writing* was organized more like a traditional composition text based on forms of writing rather than the topical organization of Rickard's earlier *Guide*. In the preface to his second edition, Rickard described his role as a former engineer who had become a better-than-average technical writer through his practical experience as a writer and editor. He wanted to contribute his knowledge of technical writing to the general fund so that other engineers could benefit from his experience. Because he was writing from his personal experience, Rickard organized the material in his book, which can be seen as a technical style guide, according to engineering concerns with language at the turn of the century: abbreviations, numbers, education, hyphens, word usage, titles, pronouns, journalistic language, grammar, etc. Readers of Rickard's *Guide* followed the author's path through the culturally shaped observations and interest of one engineer-turned-writer who presented his writing rules from the editor's desk, not the professor's lectern.

In contrast, Crouch and Zetler placed themselves primarily within the academy due to their experience as teachers, while also differentiating technical writing from general composition courses. Working from this academic base, Crouch and Zetler organized their material in chapters according to formal categories: "The Business Letter: Form and Substance," "Types of Technical Letters," "The Technical and Semitechnical

Article,” “The Technical Report.” To this they added “Speaking techniques,” a “medium of technical communication reminiscent of the oral traditions of early rhetoric-based education;” a chapter on “Language usage” that included topics such as outlines, sentences, paragraphs, coherence, unity, and emphasis; and an “Index to English Usage” that included grammatical rules. In Longo’s opinion, “this organization resembled earlier composition textbooks dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>27</sup> This organization serves as the basis for many modern technical style guides of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Back at the turn of the century, Rickard introduced arguments that were to form the foundation for the discipline of technical communications: clear, concise exposition to convey accurate ideas; correct English as the ‘lingua franca’ of science and technical communication; consideration of an audience and making information clear for that audience; meaning as residing outside language; technical communication as a pathway to scientific information. He said, “Technical writing is the currency of scientific knowledge; the stamp of science renders writing valuable; technical language must remain pure to safeguard scientific knowledge as the universal standard of value.”<sup>28</sup> Good writing was judged by the effectiveness of the conveying of ideas from one mind to another, and in order to be effective, ideas should be conveyed in clear, vivid language that meant exactly what the writer intended. Accessibility and acceptability, and maintaining the purity of language as technology and terms evolve lies in the formation and use of style guides such as *Fowler’s Modern English Usage*, *The Elements of Style*,

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<sup>27</sup> Longo, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Longo, 70.

*The Chicago Manual of Style*, and other style guides that persuade users to employ consistency, clarity, correctness, concision, coherence, and cohesion in their writing.

With the advent of technical writing came the need for standardization and styles. Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* did not appear until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and *Fowler's Guide to Modern Usage* came at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Here I am going to provide a chronological history of a few important examples of style guides from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century before moving on to analyze contemporary works. It is important to see what kind of style guides existed and how they have influenced current style guides. The first, a *Short Introduction to the English Grammar* is important because it is the first grammar book. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is perhaps the most widely used style guide on the market today and certainly the most well-known. *Fowler's Modern English Usage* is not a style guide, but a usage guide, which is important because most style guides also include information on usage and must refer to books such as Fowlers. *The Elements of Style* is a concise treatise on style that is widely used and admired. It provides a succinct summary of many of the rules that *The Chicago Manual of Style* expounds upon. *A Style Manual for Technical Writers and Editors* is an example of an early modern technical style guide. All of these works have influenced contemporary technical style guides.

Before contemporary technical style guides appeared, the first grammar book, *Short Introduction to the English Grammar*, was written by Robert Lowth in 1762. It served as a precursor to style guides such as the Chicago Manual of Style. In Lowth's own words,

The English Language hath been much cultivated during the last two hundred years. It hath been considerably polished and refined; its bounds have been greatly enlarged; its energy, variety, richness, and elegance, have been abundantly proved, by numberless trials, in verse and in prose, upon all subjects, and in every kind of style: but, whatever other improvements it may have received, it hath made no advances in Grammatical Accuracy.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1891 when the University of Chicago Press first started, *The Chicago Manual of Style* was created. At that point, the press had its own composing room with typesetters who were required to set complex scientific material. Professors brought their handwritten manuscripts directly to the compositors. According to the History of The Chicago Manual of Style on their website, “The compositors then passed the proofs to a group known as the “brainery”—the proofreaders who corrected typographical errors and edited for stylistic inconsistencies. The staff of the composing room drew up a style sheet, which was then passed on to the rest of the university community.”<sup>30</sup>

Even at such an early stage, “the University Press style book and style sheet” was considered important enough to be preserved in the cornerstone of the newly constructed Press building in 1903, along with other items from the early years of the Press. That sheet became a pamphlet and three years later was presented as a book: *Manual of Style: Being a compilation of the typographical rules in force at the University of Chicago*

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<sup>29</sup> Lowth, Robert. *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, preface p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.” Chicago Manual of Style Online. 2007. [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about15\\_history.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about15_history.html). March 2009.

*Press, to which are appended specimens of type in use.* This iteration became the first edition of the *Manual*.<sup>31</sup>

In 1968, *The Chicago Manual of Style* underwent significant revisions in order to adapt to the needs of its users as well as to developments and technological advances in writing, editing, and publishing. Catharine Seybold and Bruce Young rearranged, expanded, and updated the eleventh edition and the twelfth edition was produced.<sup>32</sup>

According to the website, “The publication of the thirteenth edition in 1982 was another notable moment in the history of *A Manual of Style*. It was at this point that it became *The Chicago Manual of Style*, a change that reflected the title most often used by the book’s audience.”<sup>33</sup> The thirteenth edition included the new United States copyright laws of 1978 as well as phototypesetting technology. For the first time, this edition dealt with the personal computers and word processors.<sup>34</sup> “Although the thirteenth edition briefly touched on this new and radical technology, the personal computer was still a novelty in 1982, and few understood the far-reaching effects it would have on the lives of writers, much less on the publishing industry.”<sup>35</sup> However, by 1993, computer word processing was becoming the norm, and the *Manual* began to address the role of computers in writing and editing.

According to the website, the fourteenth edition “reflected significant changes in style, usage, procedure, and technology, and contained new and more extensive editing

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<sup>31</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>32</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.” Chicago Manual of Style Online. 2007.  
[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about15\\_history.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about15_history.html). March 2009.

<sup>33</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>34</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>35</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

examples based on requests from editors, authors, indexers, and teachers of publishing courses.”<sup>36</sup> The fourteenth edition had a more extensive glossary with words that had been foreign to users only ten years earlier, and also included an updated chapter on copyrights and permissions. The *Manual* described “new technologies for composition, design, printing, and binding, including the preparation of jackets and covers and the process of obtaining and displaying ISBNs and bar codes for the expanded group of self-publishers created by the computer age.”<sup>37</sup>

In its current fifteenth edition, *The Chicago Manual of Style* is now known as “the authoritative voice for authors, editors, proofreaders, indexers, copywriters, designers, and publishers. This hundred-year evolution has taken place under the ongoing stewardship of Chicago’s editorial staff.”<sup>38</sup> The Manual has always been open to suggestions from its readers and the most recent revision of the *Manual* has had to address the needs of a professional audience whose work methods have been transformed since publication of the last edition. “To meet this challenge, Chicago’s editorial staff launched a systematic update that would rival, in its breadth and depth, the extensive revision undertaken for the twelfth edition.”<sup>39</sup> Chicago’s editorial staff relied not only on its own experience, but took the advice of the *Manual*’s first-ever advisory board that included scholars, authors, and professionals from a wide range of environments in publishing and business. The Chicago editorial staff also called for users to make

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<sup>36</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>37</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>38</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>39</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

suggestions and comments on what changes should be made.<sup>40</sup> This included the following:

- “Updated material throughout to reflect current style, technology, and professional practice
- New coverage of journals and electronic publications
- Comprehensive new chapter on American English grammar and usage by Bryan A. Garner (author of *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage*)
- Updated and rewritten chapter on preparing mathematical copy
- Reorganized and updated chapters on documentation, including guidance on citing electronic sources
- Streamlined coverage of current design and production processes, with a glossary of key terms
- New diagrams of the editing and production processes for both books and journals, keyed to chapter discussions
- Descriptive headings on all numbered paragraphs for ease of reference.”<sup>41</sup>

While *The Chicago Manual of Style* was still in its early iterations, H.W. Fowler’s *Dictionary of Modern English Usage* was first published in 1926. While not a style guide, this dictionary of usage has helped style guides to establish proper word choice and usage. Fowler was a former schoolmaster and first compiler of the Concise Oxford Dictionary. He wrote in a “linguistic tradition which regarded grammar as primarily

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<sup>40</sup> “The History of the Chicago Manual of Style.”

<sup>41</sup> “What’s New in the Fifteenth Edition of the Chicago Manual of Style.” Chicago Manual of Style Online. 2007. <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about15.html>. March 2009.

prescriptive, i.e. as essentially a system of laying down rules; yet he had a genuine concern for the ordinary user coping with the difficulties of writing and speaking good English, and rarely abandoned good sense for pedantry”<sup>42</sup>. This idea of prescription verses description has been influential in style guides that have emerged since. It has become one of the primary differences between various style guides that either choose to describe and provide examples of correct usage, or mandate the proper format.

The first revision of *Fowler* was by Sir Ernest Gowers in 1965. Gowers was a senior Whitehall civil servant whose view of English was “deeply affected by what he regarded as the excesses of bureaucratic language;”<sup>43</sup> his guidance on speaking and on writing English, published in *Plain Words*, mainly addressed the world of “officialdom.”

<sup>44</sup> This idea of plain language can be seen later on in government style guides such as the *Government Printing Office Style Guide* and smaller agency guides such as *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics*.

In 1996 R.W. Burchfield, formerly Chief Editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, was an Oxford lexicographer whose “knowledge of language is rooted in the historical tradition of collecting and assessing evidence of the ways in which language is used and the ways in which it changes.”<sup>45</sup> The usage dictionary has undergone many changes since 1926. The first edition of *Fowler’s Modern English Usage* used the British National Corpus, which began in 1994 as a collection of 100 million words of modern English assembled by a collective of academic and industrial partners. The Oxford

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<sup>42</sup> Fowler, vi.

<sup>43</sup> Fowler, vi.

<sup>44</sup> Fowler, vi.

<sup>45</sup> Fowler, vii.

English Corpus (OEC), developed by Oxford University Press, with a half a billion words and includes extensive materials drawn from Internet websites, was used for the second edition. Usage guides such as *Fowler's* provided information for future guides such as Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* which emphasize proper word choice and usage.

While the *Chicago Manual of Style* presents an extensive look at all aspects of writing style, *The Elements of Style* was being written at the same time, in a much smaller form. William Strunk Jr. taught composition at Cornell University, where he wrote a small booklet for the instruction of his students called *The Elements of Style*, in 1918, probably the most popular simple guide to writing ever published. It was full of rules such as "avoid overwriting," "revise and rewrite," and "be direct." Within the handbook, Strunk wrote: "Vigorous writing is concise."

Elwyn Brooks (EB) White, the author of *Charlotte's Web* and other classics, revised and enlarged *The Elements of Style*. He wrote that "the living language is like a cow-path: it is the creation of the cows themselves, who, having created it, follow it or depart from it according to their whims or their needs. From daily use, the path undergoes change." White's efforts to develop a style guide stemmed from this desire to make sure that such changes did not infringe upon correct usage of the language.

*The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White as we know it first appeared in 1957. Later, Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* was revised several times. The second edition was published in 1972. In 1979, E.B. White refurbished Chapter IV with words

and expressions of a “recent vintage.”<sup>46</sup> In addition, four rules of usage were added to Chapter I. The manual is still considered to be an excellent example of the principles it explains. “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary part.”

According to E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* was William Strunk’s “attempt to cut the vast tangle of English rhetoric down to size and write its rules and principles on the head of a pin.”<sup>47</sup> It includes seven rules of usage, eleven principles of composition, a few matters of form and a list of words and expressions commonly misused. *The Elements of Style* is prescriptive in nature as White observes: “the reader will soon discover that these rules and principles are in the form of sharp commands, Sergeant Strunk snapping order to his platoon.”<sup>48</sup> On October 9, 1997, *The Elements of Style* became available online. On September 19, 1999 a new, revised fourth edition was published.

So far I have discussed more traditional style guides from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One way to see how far we have come along with technical style guides is to look to past examples of technical style guides. In 1962, the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation published a style manual for technical writers and editors. The preface reads:

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<sup>46</sup> Strunk Jr., William and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Allyn and Bacon: Boston, 1979, xii.

<sup>47</sup> Strunk, xi.

<sup>48</sup> Strunk, xii.

One of the chief products of industrial firms and governmental agencies is technical writing – information in the form of reports or technical manuals...good technical writing is necessary if a publication is to be useful. Companies expect their scientists and engineers to report the results of their investigations clearly and concisely.<sup>49</sup>

This manual was written in the era when technical writers were beginning to take over the work that had been previously done by engineers, but it seems that the audience of this manual is engineers. Regarding style, the manual states, “good technical writing is most often characterized by an uncomplicated, direct style and by careful diction.”<sup>50</sup> This would be particularly important to a company like Lockheed, which at the time was involved in missiles and space group.

Like most technical manuals, *A Style Manual for Technical Writers and Editors* addresses format issues such as headings and pagination, tables, illustrations, equations, and references, as well as a section of accepted usage in sentence structure and paragraphing, punctuation, spelling and compounding, numbers and abbreviations. This manual also deals with the special features of the technical report, the technical proposal, and the technical manual. It is not exhaustive, but comprehensive in dealing with these topics.

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<sup>49</sup> Reisman, S.J. ed. *A Style Manual for Technical Writers and Editors*. Macmillan: New York, 1962, v-vi.

<sup>50</sup> Reisman, vi.

## PART II: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

In this section, I will analyze a series of style guides from a rhetorical and genre-based perspective, discussing audiences and purpose of contemporary organizational style guides. My claim is that style guides are meant to be prescriptive as opposed to descriptive. As rhetoric, style guides respond to the social situation. The main theoretical principle and assumption behind this analysis is that genre is social action (Miller, 1984). Because genre is a social action, the genre of a style guide must result in social action on the part of the user. I will discuss how effective these style guides are in achieving their goals and aims.

I will examine several manuals for their coverage, emphases, claims about good style, and justifications – and infer from this examination how “good style” is defined. My analysis will focus particularly on word usage and terminology, since technical terms and word choices have been particularly influenced by computers and the Internet. I will examine the guides’ effectiveness in achieving their goals; break down how they are structured and why the structure matters. I will look at accessibility and also whether the manuals are prescriptive or descriptive, as well as look at the differences in form and audiences.

I chose to examine one style guide for each of the organizations in which I have worked in the past three years as well as two industry standards. They vary in size, shape, and scope. For the rhetorical analysis, I will use the *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*, *Read Me First! A Style Guide for the Computer Industry*, the style guide and writing guide that I developed for BAE Systems, and *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics*. These manuals, with their organizational audiences and purposes, define and shape our understanding of “good style” for 21st century professional and technical writing.

*The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*, (*MSTP*), touts itself as “the essential reference for technical writers, editors, journalists, and everyone else who writes about computer technology.” The manual of style was developed in 1995 by Microsoft’s senior editors and content managers and attempts to capture the current standards and best practices for delivering technical communication that are clear and consistent. Compared to the first edition, published in 1995, the third edition has added new coverage on addressing the needs of a global audience, accessibility concerns, and the latest technical terms and acronyms. In addition, there are sections on usage, grammar, punctuation, tone, formatting, and common style problems. While the first edition had a disk version of the manual included, the third edition offers a CD.

In the third edition of the *MSTP*, it is noted in the introduction that the organization of the manual has been overhauled due to its growth and evolution. “Since the second edition, the language and concepts of software have changed a great deal. New technologies beget new technical terms. More people are writing content for

information technology professionals and software developers. The Internet has become ubiquitous.”<sup>51</sup> It is this very omnipresence that has rendered many terms to be less formal, and the Internet itself reduced to lowercase status in the general lexicon. The *MSTP* is determined to maintain the formality and uniformity of the language by using the title case and insisting upon its use.

I chose *Read Me First: A Style Guide for the Computer Industry* as a direct comparison to the *MSTP* and as another example of an industry standard for information technology organizations. This style guide is aimed at information technology workers and computer professionals as well as computer engineers. This is the second edition and since the first edition, “the globalization of technical products has increased and online delivery has become a fast-growing means of delivery for technical documentation. *Read Me First!* has been extensively revised in response to these changes. The highlights of this revision are as follows:

- “A more logical organization of chapters
- Addition of a chapter on online writing style
- Addition of a chapter of constructing links
- Addition of a chapter on writing tasks, procedures, and steps
- Extensive revisions to the chapters that discuss the following topics:
  - Writing for an international audience
  - Legal guidelines
  - Working with illustrations

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<sup>51</sup> [The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications](#), xix

- Writing about graphical user interfaces
- Incorporation of guidelines for easing the translation of documents.”<sup>52</sup>

Last summer I began work as a documentation specialist at the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). One of the first things that I asked about was whether a style guide existed in the agency. I was handed a small green booklet. *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is “intended to ease the preparation of manuscripts for publication at the Bureau of Labor Statistics and to obtain stylistic consistency”<sup>53</sup>. While the majority of the text addresses authors’ obligations and stylistic matters, the guide first describes the various types of Bureau publications, and operating procedures for the Office of Publications and Special Studies (OPUBSS).

The Office of Publications and Special Studies, Bureau of Labor Statistics, prepared this guide as one of the goals established by its Strategic Planning Committee in 1994-5. Following a preparatory class in writing style to be presented Bureau-wide in 1999, additional contributions to this edition came from senior editorial and OPUBSS management staff. “The guide’s origins, however, stem from the many BLS editors, past and present, whose invaluable notes collected in a black 3-ring binder over the decades have established the standards of good style that are contained in this book.”<sup>54</sup> According to the booklet, “BLS authors have something worth saying, in analytical terms and in data presentation, but our authors’ first obligation is to express themselves as simply, directly, and as objectively as the subject matter permits.” This statement by Herbert C. Morton,

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<sup>52</sup> Read Me First, a Style Guide for the Computer Industry, 2<sup>nd</sup>., Sub Technical Publications: Palo Alto, 2003, xxi.

<sup>53</sup> A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, i.

<sup>54</sup> A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, i.

the Associate Commissioner of Publications at BLS from the late 1960s to the late 1970s, sums up the mission of a BLS writer.

The Department of State has a brief online style guide through *Diplopedia*, a wiki that is used for foreign affairs information. I chose this particular style guide as I am currently working on a contract with the Department of State. The sections that are included are an introduction, links, headings, abbreviations, referencing cables, and article titles. In the introduction, the first sentence is “A consistent style is important for increasing readability and reader comprehension.”<sup>55</sup> It also suggests that further formatting questions should be addressed by the *Wikipedia Manual of Style*. This *Diplopedia Manual of Style* addresses the needs of a wiki in particular, with its specific needs and features, such as the ability to be updated by users.

#### WHAT IS GOOD STYLE?

My first point of analysis is how the style guides view and present style. A universal definition of style is of course important when analyzing style. All of the style guides I looked at have a view of style that demonstrates how information is presented. Good style is defined explicitly within *Read Me First!*:

If content is what you communicate, then style is how you communicate. Writing style is determined by all the decisions that you make while creating a document, such as the type and tone of information you present, choice of words, language and format consistency, use of technical terms, and so forth. In the literary world, style is judged in part on artistic grounds, which may be highly subjective. In the

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<sup>55</sup> *Diplopedia*, [http://diplopedia.state.gov/index.php?title=Diplopedia\\_Style\\_Guide](http://diplopedia.state.gov/index.php?title=Diplopedia_Style_Guide), March 2009

field of technical documentation, however, experience and practice have provided objective criteria for evaluating style.<sup>56</sup>

*Read Me First!* suggests that it is experience and practice that allows for the evaluation of style, not necessarily following the prescriptions of style guides. Style then is determined by what you, the writer, have experienced in the rhetorical situations that have been repeated. This then leads to practicing good style.

The definition of good style is implicit in *The Diplopedia Style Guide* in that it must first and foremost be consistent or readers will not understand it or view the articles as authorities on their subject matter. Online style is less formal than print, but it must demonstrate consistency. The rhetorical situation is different and therefore the action is different for the genre of online writing. The rhetorical situation is that people are looking for information on how to write *Diplopedia* articles, which are different than other types of writing. For example, links are used to go to related material and must be inserted properly in order to work.

*A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is the style guide specifically for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Its preface states that “the treatment of style in this book is selective; no attempt has been made to write a comprehensive style manual.” Rules and examples of usage that are not pertinent to BLS have been removed, as well as rules on which there is little disagreement, such as grammar. The guide recommends that the latest edition (1984) of the *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual* be deferred to for additional details and that references to the *Manual* in this guide are to that

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<sup>56</sup> Read Me First!, 63.

edition. For matters on which the Government Printing Office does not comment, the guide states that many other excellent style guides exist. Therefore, the definition of good style is referred back to how the *GPO Style Manual* defines it. *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* does not itself make an effort to define good style.

The *MSTP* makes many implicit and explicit claims about good style. It claims that good style is the result of knowing your audience, keeping to the code of prescriptive grammar and proper word usage. It emphasizes following the rules in order to maintain consistency. Social action is effectively required upon reading and use of the guide. This is perhaps why the *MSTP* is so widely used and successful. Chapter 9 of the *MSTP* addresses common style problems that can lead to “confusion and misunderstandings.”<sup>57</sup> For example, when dealing with procedures, the *MSTP* advises using the preferred method that most accurately reflects the audience’s needs if there is more than one way of performing the task. Capitalization may seem trivial, but it is rhetorically important. For instance, the *MSTP* recommends never using all uppercase for emphasis, but using italics instead. The effect caused by using all uppercase is that the reader is being yelled at, which is not a favorable effect. In the same way, overuse of capitalization causes the reader to lose what is important in the text; it is better to have a specific reason when capitalizing a word. The general idea is to be conservative with items such as capitalization, bolding, and italics. Too much bolding and italics confuses the reader as to what information is being emphasized when everything seems emphasized.

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<sup>57</sup> MSTP, 117.

Common to most all style guides is a section on grammatical elements, which the *MSTP* says, “leaves little room for opinion.”<sup>58</sup> One of the most important concepts is the use of active vs. passive voice. Rhetorically, the active voice is the stronger option. Another admonition is to avoid using verbs as nouns and nouns as verbs, which is all too common in our lexicon today. For example, to “friend” someone on Facebook is to add that person as a friend; to “text” someone is to send them a text message. The *MSTP* says to “involve the reader in the discussion.”<sup>59</sup> This would suggest that the use of “you” is acceptable. They suggest using second person when writing for developers or information technology professionals and to use third person to refer to the reader’s end user. Again, this is a matter of rhetorical effectiveness and tone because using first person in a manual is too informal and third person is more appropriate to the situation.

Microsoft style is essentially making sure that the applications and user interface match the documentation that goes along with it, the essence of any good style. They rely on rigorous rules and standards that are to be followed precisely. In turn, *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor* emphasizes plain language and defines good style as mostly concise, which is a pitfall for a lot of government documents.

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<sup>58</sup> *MSTP*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> *MSTP*, 165.

## USAGE

My second point of analysis is that of usage. Usage must first and foremost be up-to-date in a style guide. The first edition of the *MSTP* is set up as an A-Z Style Reference book. Therefore, the usage entries are mixed in with things like code commenting conventions. One way to tell if an entry is related to usage (but not always) is if it includes “vs.”, such as “if vs. when vs. whether” which tells the reader the correct word choice needed to avoid ambiguity. In contrast, the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition has a whole section for its usage dictionary. However, the use of “vs.” to indicate proper usage still applies. *Read Me First! A Style Guide for the Computer Industry* also contains a section on word usage, albeit much shorter than that of the *MSTP*. It is set up in a table format, unlike the dictionary format of the *MSTP*. The *MSTP*'s usage dictionary is more useful because it is more extensive and because it provided examples that are delineated better than *Read Me First!*, using bold to indicate that there is an example, “correct” or “incorrect.” The tabular format of *Read Me First!* presents the information with more authority however because people tend to view information in tables as being factual and therefore more reliable. *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* does not have a section on usage, but relies on the *Government Printing Office Style Guide* for that information.

Part Two of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *MSTP* is the all important usage guide which again emphasizes consistency. One result of this approach is reducing “the number of decisions that writers and editors are forced to make”.<sup>60</sup> It seems that this is foundational in the use of style guides such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* and the *MSTP*. The fewer

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<sup>60</sup> *MSTP*, 197.

decisions that need to be made, the fewer opportunities for mistakes and disagreements occur. Therefore, if Microsoft decides that “click” is better than “click on,” that is one less squabble for writers. In addition to the usage dictionary in the second half of the manual, *MSTP*'s Chapter 3 has a section on word choice; which provides general rules of usage (as opposed to specific dicta). An example of *MSTP*'s rule framework includes the following advice: “always use the simplest and most specific word possible. Do not *eschew* when it is good enough to *avoid*.”<sup>61</sup> Another important rule is: “Use only one term for one concept and use terms consistently. This guideline is particularly important for technical terms, but it also applies to standard English words. Although the use of synonyms may be more interesting to read, worldwide users – and not only worldwide users – may assume that your choice of a different word indicates a subtle distinction.”<sup>62</sup>

#### PRESCRIPTION VS. DESCRIPTION

The third point of analysis is that of prescription vs. description. I would posit that for the most part, the *MSTP* and *Read Me First!* are prescriptive, because of the use of words such as “avoid” that the manuals positions throughout. “Avoid” is a firm command, as is “do not” and the *MSTP* uses both. The very fact that the *MSTP* is labeled as a “manual” and not a “guide” is telling that it is prescriptive and not descriptive in nature.

Chapter 11 of the *MSTP* discusses rules for punctuation which, like Chapter 10, leave little room for opinion. Consistency is of course the most important key with regard to grammar and punctuation, which is something that the *MSTP* itself upholds

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<sup>61</sup> *MSTP*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> *MSTP*, 63.

within the manual. It follows its own prescriptions regarding tables, lists, bullets, graphics, etc. Chapter 12 provides a list of acronyms and abbreviation which must be used consistently and correctly in order to avoid confusion. The *MSTP* is careful not to use acronyms without defining them first and including them in the glossary.

Abbreviations are avoided as well.

*A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* expresses itself simply and directly as well, with a prescriptive tone to the reader. When used, *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* enforces good style in BLS documentation with its clearly written prescriptions. Whether or not people at the BLS do indeed write in plain language is one thing, but *A Matter of Style* is certainly written in plain language itself. If writers and editors lead by example with plain language, perhaps it will infiltrate through the rest of the Bureau. The main emphasis of plain language demonstrates the government's need for understandable documents that are both accessible and acceptable. Thus, the definition of good style as plain language is explicit in the booklet. This idea is shaped by the negative implications of documentation that is difficult to understand, verbose, lengthy, incoherent, and inconsistent.

*Read Me First!* follows its own advice by using the style that it prescribes. It avoids style that could offend the reader, such as humor and sexism. This manual is prescriptive in nature, similar to the *MSTP*, using language such as “do not,” “avoid,” and “never.” It recommends using bulleted lists for the purpose of organizing information and uses a lot of bulleted lists itself within its text. This device encourages scanning, which is a useful reading technique when you are trying to find specific information and

don't want to read every single word. Each page of the manual is also broken up into topics with headings and subheadings, which it also recommends. This allows the reader to jump ahead to the information they are looking for and to skip over other information, saving time.

According to *Read Me First!*:

The mechanics of writing guidelines in the first chapter work well for computer documentation, but other style guides might suggest different rules that are equally effective. In most cases, which rules you follow doesn't matter as long as you are consistent within your document or documentation set.<sup>63</sup>

This would suggest that rules are important to follow, regardless of which set of rules you choose to adhere to.

Similarly, the *MSTP* serves a rhetorical agenda: to institute and preserve the language and purposes of Microsoft as evinced by the introduction:

Style is a matter of convention and consensus, and the guidance here does not describe the only correct way to write. Our primary aim is to help Microsoft writers and editors maintain consistency within and across products. *MSTP* is not a set of rules, but a set of guidelines that have been discussed and reviewed by experienced writers and editors across the company. These guidelines represent their expertise and opinions of what best serves Microsoft and its customers. If you do not work for Microsoft, we hope the decisions we have made will lighten the load of decisions you have to make in your workplace, but we do not presume

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<sup>63</sup> Read Me First!, 1.

to say that a different approach would be wrong. It just would not be Microsoft style.<sup>64</sup>

While this quote would suggest that the *MSTP* is a set of guidelines, the language of the manual indicates that the rules are meant to be prescriptive, using words such as “avoid” and “do not.” The most important aim is consistency, which would imply that it is best to follow all of the rules provided. The advice is to follow a set of rules, whichever rules you choose to follow.

To compare differences in usage, *Read Me First!* says not to use a hyphen in the following situation: “For industry-accepted terms, do not hyphenate compound words that are generally accepted as single words, such as online, database, and email.”<sup>65</sup> However, the *MSTP* says to always hyphenate e-mail. “Do not use as a verb; use *send* instead. Use e-mail to refer generically to an electronic mail program or to refer collectively to e-mail messages. After you have established the context of electronic mail, it is all right to use *mail* instead of *e-mail*.”

Correct

Check your e-mail for messages.

Scroll through your e-mail to find the message you want to read.

You have new mail.

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<sup>64</sup> Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Microsoft: Redmond, 2005, xix.

<sup>65</sup> *Read Me First!*, 23.

Use *e-mail message* or *message* to refer to an individual piece of e-mail. Do not use *e-mail* as a synonym for *message*. If you use *message* alone, ensure that the context makes it clear that you are not referring to instant messaging.

Correct

Send us an e-mail message with your comments.

You have two new messages.

Incorrect

Send us an e-mail with your comments.

E-mail us with your comments.

You have two new e-mails.”<sup>66</sup>

This entry hasn't changed since the first edition of the *MSTP*, fifteen years ago. The use of e-mail has since become ubiquitous and therefore it makes sense that the rules should change. E-mail is now used as a verb and noun. Most people would not use the phrase “e-mail message” when e-mail suffices. These prescriptions have become out of date in this particular case.

## ACCESSIBILITY

The fourth point of analysis is that of accessibility. Chapter 8 of the *MSTP* demonstrates the importance of accessible content, which is very important in the age of computers and the Internet. No one should be excluded from using an application or a Website based of their particular disability, whether they be physical or technological. This includes providing alternative text, text links instead of just images, brief link text,

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<sup>66</sup> *MSTP*, 252.

distinctive link colors, closed captioning, transcripts and descriptions of audio content. Accessible writing must be clear and concise, short and to the point, with simple sentence structure. The *MSTP* recommends keeping most sentences to one clause, which the manual is careful to do itself. In addition, the use of both pictures and written text is important. However, with graphics, they recommend not using color coding alone, hard-to-read color combinations, screened art, and keeping text in a uniform space. The Internet is a visual place, and most applications are as well, so it is important to make the most of the space, text, and graphics, while keeping accessibility in mind. The manual limits its use of graphics, but uses images of the user interface as examples to coincide with the text, which is very effective.

In terms of accessibility within the manual, Chapter 6 of the *MSTP* deals with indexing and attributing in order to provide users with the ability to locate the information they are looking for. This chapter discusses the difference between print indexes and online indexing, which must be treated differently, providing the best practices for both options. This is one reason why terms should be uniform, accurate, and consistent. Users need to know which terms they are looking for, without much confusion. The concept of indexing is very important for writers to try and assess what words a user will look for first. There has to be a well thought out system in place for indexing to work. Key words are important and must be consistent. For example, the *MSTP* recommends that the most important word be placed first and should probably be a noun, such as “commands.” Gerunds may also be used, with *MSTP*’s example being “copying,” but not a word like “creating” which may be too vague. What seem to be

redundant entries can also be useful by rearranging the order of the terms such as “paragraphs, deleting” and “deleting, paragraphs.” It is hard to tell which one the user will look for first, so both are necessary. This is a practice of getting into the users head and figuring out all of the different options that they might use in order to find information and not assuming that just one will suffice.

The *MSTP*'s index is very well organized and very extensive. Multiple words choices are used in order for the user to be able to find what they are looking for. The *MSTP* also provides a list of styles to be used for indexing keywords, such as avoiding the use of articles and prepositions at the beginning of a word as well as using lowercase unless the term is a proper noun or case-sensitive, which is particularly important in online indices where the term is capitalized in the help topic and wouldn't be found otherwise.

In terms of the style guides themselves being accessible, *Read Me First!* is not available online, and therefore lacks 21<sup>st</sup> century accessibility. It cannot be updated rapidly to keep up with changing terminology and technology. The *MSTP* is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, published in 2004, which was five years ago. It is perhaps time for them to publish a new edition to meet the needs of changing technology, most specifically the Internet. Otherwise, users will find the manual to be out of date, useless, and will not regard it as authoritative and it will lose its power. An online version, like the one for *The Chicago Manual of Style*, would prove to be useful as it would be easy to update when necessary.

The *MSTP* is also available on CD as an e-book, which should address the new needs of technology and having an interactive style guide. A hyperlinked style guide is useful for navigating between topics and easily finding what you are looking for. However, the table of contents is not hyperlinked. There are no internal hyperlinks within the PDF, just a linked navigation with bookmarks on the left-hand side. You can search the usage guide alphabetically by clicking the letter of your choice. The CD also includes the *Microsoft Computer Dictionary* and the *Microsoft Encyclopedia of Networking* as additional resources. All in all, the *MSTP* is not as accessible as it would be if it were available on the Microsoft website.

Because it is available online, *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is accessible. It is also handy as a desk reference. *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is built off of the Government Printing Office guide and serves as a smaller tool for a smaller audience. It is a small booklet that was published in 1999 and also exists as an online version with hyperlinked terms and definitions. This makes it extremely accessible to BLS employees who can access the manual from their computers. In addition, updates and corrections can be made quickly and easily.

#### AUDIENCE

The fifth point of analysis is that of audience. The tone of the writing should reflect both the audience and the situation in order to be appropriate, which the *MSTP* does. The audience of the *MSTP* is IT professionals, home users, and engineers. It is therefore important that the style be broad enough to cover all levels of the information without being too broad or too specific. The audience is then expected to follow the

prescriptions laid out in the manual, and the result must be action taken in order for the manual to be truly effective. The rhetorical use of empathy in the writing, according to the *MSTP*, is also useful in conveying to the reader that they are understood and valued. Readers of the *MSTP* know that Microsoft understands their needs and presents the information that such a user would want and leaves out superfluous information. From a rhetorical standpoint, the manual is very effective. The *MSTP* is written appropriately for its specific audiences.

The audience for *The Diplopedia Style Guide* is Department of State employees who are writing *Diplopedia* articles. Therefore, the tone of the manual is specific to government employees and those familiar with governmental language. As a result, the manual is not particularly useful to those outside of government agencies. However, those writing for wikis might find some of the advice on writing for the web to be pertinent.

Chapter 7 of the *MSTP* moves on to the important topics of tone and rhetoric in technical writing. Of utmost importance is establishing an “authorial voice.”<sup>67</sup> In addition, “tone helps establish the relationship between the writer and the reader and is a major contributor to the personality of the writing. Being sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities assures them that their potential is important to us. Removing other bias from your content is also essential.”<sup>68</sup> The power of the author comes in as rhetorical devices can be used to avoid insensitivity and produce the most effective message. Consistency of tone is paramount, which can be difficult when more than one writer is

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<sup>67</sup> MSTP, 105.

<sup>68</sup> MSTP, 105.

working on a project. With the *MSTP*, an authorial tone is established and it is impossible to tell that an editorial board worked together to compose the manual as it is very organic.

*A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* recommends that BLS authors should clearly present their information to their fellow specialists, drawing on the specialist's terminology, if it shortens and clarifies their writing. Most BLS publications, however, are intended for nonprofessional readers. Therefore, if an author expects to be read by a wide audience, the manual suggests that they should avoid jargon and write with their audiences' needs in mind. The audience for *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is primarily BLS employees who are tasked with documentation.

#### FORM

The sixth point of analysis is that of form. According to Carolyn Miller, "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence."<sup>69</sup> She goes on to say that "form shapes the response of the reader or listener to substance by providing instruction, so to speak, about how to perceive and interpret; this guidance disposes the audience to anticipate, to be gratified, to respond in a certain way."<sup>70</sup> In light of this, the *MSTP*'s form helps the reader to anticipate each part. In terms of the order of the sections, I would place content formatting and layout first, and add documenting the user interface before content for software developers, the fourth section. I would do this because I think it's more important to know how to format the content and layout pages before dealing with the content of the user interface.

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<sup>69</sup> Miller, 159.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, 159.

The general form of the *MSTP* is headings to separate topics and then bulleted lists or tables that contain information. There aren't large chunks of text, but instead information is broken up into small topics and there are screen shots and images of buttons to break up the text. This makes scanning for information easy. The guide uses a lot of examples of correctness as well, catching the eye with the use of bolded text.

*Read Me First!* similarly uses headings to divide topics as well as bulleted lists and tables. The manual begins with a section on the mechanics of writing, much like a tradition style guide such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*. This is followed by constructing text or formatting, and then sections on writing style and online writing style. The headings in *Read Me First!* are larger than those in the *MSTP* and there is more white space, so the information is easier to read and find. The examples are delineated by bolded text just like the *MSTP*, which is useful. *Read Me First!* does not make much use of images or screen shots, which would be useful in breaking up chunks of text. The only section with graphics is appropriately the one on working with illustrations.

*A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics* is set up with headings and bullets, but the font is very small and the sections are not well delineated from each other. This may be due to the small size of the guide. There is much text in paragraph form and very little white space or graphics. This is again probably due to the economy of size. A section on language, tables, and charts is more like a traditional style guide. However, there is no index to help you find the information you might be looking for specifically. The booklet is obviously not meant to be a complete and exhaustive style guide.

In conclusion, the *MSTP* democratizes knowledge by providing a style guide free of Microsoft jargon. Microsoft's practice serves to shape the world around it by prescribing a certain way to communicate technical information. It seems that those driving new technology are also in control of the language that is used to describe it. Microsoft has an agenda for its style guide; the purpose is to convey and spread Microsoft style to Microsoft employees, first and foremost, and then to provide usage and style advice to regular information workers, computer users, and developers. The *MSTP* is successful in its agenda. *Read Me First!* does not have the same Microsoft agenda, but it also serves to democratize knowledge by providing a style guide that is easy to use and easy to understand.

The BLS's agenda for *A Matter of Style* is to convey to BLS employees how to create documents that make use of plain language and avoid governmental jargon. The State Department's *Diplopedia* has a similar agenda. Both achieve their goals of presenting a prescriptive style for employees to follow. *A Matter of Style* and *Diplopedia* are both accessible online, which makes for ease of use and the ability to be updated and modified regularly. The *MSTP* and *Read Me First!* both achieve their goals of conveying proper style, but they must adjust to the needs of the technological world in order to remain useful.

### PART III: CASE STUDY AT BAE SYSTEMS

The BAE Systems Enterprise IT Document Structure Guidelines is a document that I put together in February 2008. BAE Systems IT did not have an operating style guide, so I was tasked with creating one. I have chosen to examine this style guide as I am intimately familiar with its contents. Like Microsoft, Enterprise IT recognized the need for uniform documentation standards across all of its document work products. This guide details the structure of documents created and maintained within the Enterprise IT. The organizational process improvement initiative required that standard process information be documented for use throughout the organization. The purpose of these guidelines was to define the structure of documents that comprise the organization's process improvement documentation. Documentation should follow the format prescribed in the templates developed for program plans, policies, processes, procedures, design documents, and service descriptions. For other documentation, such as work instructions, this style guide should serve as guidance for technical writers, editors, and authors.

Like Microsoft, *The Enterprise IT Writing Guide* recognized the need for uniform documentation standards across all of its document work products. This guide details conventional writing, style, grammar, and punctuation and style that is to be maintained

within the Enterprise IT. The goal was to provide an intuitive, on-line, desktop guide containing helpful hints and guidance to improve the quality and consistency of written products. IT intended for this guide to be an evolving resource; additional topics and updates will be incorporated as needed. The guidelines in this handbook are based on the *United States Government Printing Office Style Manual (GPO Style Manual)*, 2000 edition. The *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, Third Edition* was also used to add a technical style guide. In addition, terminology and usage guidelines that are BAE Systems preferred styles have been included. As with all company style guides, these rules and conventions have been modified to incorporate industry vernacular as well as terminology used by BAE Systems.

First, I put together the document structure guidelines for BAE documents, including the required header, footer, fonts, headings, lists, and tables. The idea was to have a common look and feel, no matter the subject of the document. Next, I put together a writing guide that was made up of rules from the GPO Style Guide and the *MSTP*.

The *Enterprise IT Writing Guide* that I wrote for BAE Systems is organized into major sections, with guidelines that address areas of concern to BAE Systems authors and editors. The audience is then broad – IT professionals and engineers alike.

For the BAE style guides, I started out by acquiring and reading the *Government Printing Office Style Guide*, which is what the Federal Government subscribes to, and therefore, government contractors do as well. I also used *The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications (MSTP)* as a resource. While some style guides such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* deal with proper grammar, many technical style guides don't go

into detailed specifics about grammar rules, but refer to other resources such as *The Elements of Style* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*. So, I decided to split the BAE style guide into two separate documents: one is a *Document Structure Guidelines* and the other is a *Writing Guide* with grammar and other suggestions for writing documents more clearly. I split the document due to its length; however, the *Writing Guide* is still 99 pages, which is bordering on the lengthy side of the spectrum.

The response was generally positive, but the length of the *Writing Guide* made proper usage prohibitive, according to the Vice President of Enterprise IT. He did not feel that anyone would actually use it because it was simply too long. I did not have time to pare it down before I left the organization, but if I had, I would have simply referred to the GPO Style Guide and the *MSTP* as did *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics*, the next style guide that I encountered. There is no need to have an extensive writing guide that covers all grammatical and style issues when ones already existed. However, it is important to address specific style issues that are pertinent to a particular organization regarding logos, marketing, and specific language, which the *Document Structure Guidelines* does.

This document provides information on page setup, main body bullets, lists, breaks, and text. It includes document style guidelines for text within the main body of a document, with type style, headings, and then a section for standards for graphics including screenshots, which are prevalent in technical documentation. It is a 13 page document that is also located in PDF form on the company intranet.

My style guide for BAE is a 96 page document that is also located in PDF form on the company intranet, but it is not very interactive, like *The Chicago Manual of Style* online. Therefore, BAE employees may have difficulty using this document. One problem with both documents is that they were not assembled by a committee or a team or with input from engineers or other information workers, so the point of view is singular. The documents are also difficult to update and distribute hard copies to employees if changes occur rapidly. An online version, not just a PDF, would be ideal to keep updated. Notices would have to go out to employees to announce that changes have occurred.

I learned a great deal from putting together this style guide. I learned that it is best to keep your guide concise and not try to include an entire grammar and usage guide within the manual when you can simply refer to manuals such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* for the bulk of that type of content. I learned that keeping the guide accessible to users makes a big difference as to whether it will actually be used. A guide that exists but is not in use is irrelevant. You also have to gain buy-in from engineers, managers, and writers in order to bring a style guide into usage. This is not an easy task. In order to keep users up to speed with technological changes and their effects on documentation, it is important to develop style guides in the future that address these changes.

## PART IV: THE FUTURE OF TECHNICAL STYLE GUIDES

Demand for technical writers increased with the continued growth of technology in the 1960s, particularly in the electronics, aeronautics, and space industries. Each decade has increased the viability and popularity of computer technology. At this point in time, more and more information is moving to the Web, requiring the work of technical writers to design and develop future generations of online help systems. In the future, “the Web will become the greatest technical writing library imaginable.”<sup>71</sup> This technology will enable greater levels of accessibility to users who will have access to these libraries. With the Web as a repository of information, the democratization of knowledge will continue as Bacon desired. This section will discuss how style guides are responding to changes in technology and terminology.

Due to the development of new technologies over the centuries, the nature of writing has been constantly evolving. The pen, the printing press, the computer and the mobile phone are all technological developments which have altered what is written, and the medium through which the written word is produced. Particularly with the advent of digital technologies, namely the computer and the mobile phone, characters can be formed by the press of a button, rather than making the physical motion with the hand.

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<sup>71</sup> “History of Modern Technical Writing” Proedit, 2007.  
[http://www.proedit.com/technical\\_writing\\_history.asp](http://www.proedit.com/technical_writing_history.asp). March 2009.

Written communication can also be delivered with minimal time delay (e-mail, SMS), and in some cases, instantly (instant messaging).

Technical manuals seem to be a way of preserving an agenda, if democratizing knowledge is a kind of agenda in itself. Style guides shape our future by prescribing how we document technical information and how we make it accessible to all people. If future anthropologists stumbled upon the *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publication* a thousand years from now, they would surmise from it about our culture that we value consistency and concision in our language and that we adhere to certain rules and regulations in order to avoid chaos. They would imagine that we value order in general as a society. Style guides shape our future by dictating how we operate under a specific code.

Technology has allowed for hyperlinked and more accessible style guides. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The Elements of Style*, *A Matter of Style at the Bureau of Labor Statistics*, and the *Diplopedia Manual of Style* are all available in an online form. People are less and less likely to use hard copy references when they are working on a computer; therefore, it is beneficial to have a style guide available online. It is cheaper and easier to update an online style guide rather than constantly reissuing a hard copy. Accessibility also plays a major role. Technical style guides must become accessible online in order to be more widely used in the coming decades of this electronic age. If they are not used, they will quickly become irrelevant within the rhetorical situation.

## DIPLOPEDIA

The *Diplopedia* in general caters to an audience that works at a computer and uses the Internet for looking up information. The *Diplopedia Manual of Style* is a new kind of style guide, one specifically written for a wiki format. It is itself a wiki and can be added to as well, which makes it a fluid document that can be augmented as technology changes. The manual is written as a model for other *Diplopedia* articles on how to make updates to articles.

A regular style guide, prior to the Internet, does not have a section for how to use links within an article. The use of headings is important in order to be able to include the proper sections in the hyperlinked table of contents. There are special instructions on how to do this properly, using wiki markup. The abbreviations section is a truncated version of what you might find in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The section on referencing cables is specific to the Department of State, which uses links to cables in something called a WebGram. The article titles section briefly suggests using titles that can be used as an encyclopedic Departmental reference rather than that in a magazine which can have long titles that are difficult to search. *Diplopedia* articles have short titles that can be references like an encyclopedia.

Included in another area of the *Diplopedia* website is principles for writing articles for the *Diplopedia* itself. For one, all articles are to be written from a neutral point of view, or otherwise noted, and should be non-authoritative as they are not final products. This feature is what makes a wiki very different from other encyclopedias which are static in nature. Plain language is also recommended. It says, "Using

acronyms, jargon, and inside references will slow down their learning process, and the *Diplopedia* site will be less effective as a result.”<sup>72</sup> The reference used is another website, PlainLanguage.gov.

## TECHNOLOGY

According to Mark R. Bright, “modern office technologies have also influenced the accessibility, role, and content of corporate style guides. The saturation and availability of online communication has led to the migration from traditional paperbound guides to online media such as intranets and external Web sites.”<sup>73</sup> With this move, the future of style guides may only be online and not in paper versions, in the same way the newspapers have moved to the online medium. Bright continues, “Meanwhile, requirements for the content of a corporate style guide have begun to change in response to template technologies that automate document design and layout.”<sup>74</sup> Bright is here referring to the use of templates in word processing programs that can automatically set up a document with the organizations preferred style and format. This would in some ways eliminate the need for a corporate style guide if the documents automatically adhere to them. With templates, however, comes the need for style guides in that it becomes necessary to form one voice in the documentation. Writing according to the prescriptions of a style guide can ameliorate the problem of documents with multiple voices due to multiple authors.

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<sup>72</sup> *Diplopedia Style Guide*, [http://diplopedia.state.gov/index.php?title=Diplopedia\\_Style\\_Guide](http://diplopedia.state.gov/index.php?title=Diplopedia_Style_Guide) March 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Bright, 47.

<sup>74</sup> Bright, 47.

## TERMINOLOGY

For one, the terminology constantly needs to be updated. In Helmut Felber's paper "Basic Principles and Methods for the Preparation of Terminology Standards", he defines terminologies as "aggregates of terms, which represent the systems of concepts of the various subject fields" and are the most important tools for the following:

- "Systematization of knowledge (that is, conceptual classification for each scientific discipline).
- Transfer of knowledge, skills, and technology.
- Translation of scientific texts.
- Formulation of subject information.
- Retrieval of stored subject information (indexing languages, thesauri, classification.)"<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, terminology standards play an eminent role in regulating the technical language. According to Felber, "terminology standardization should encompass three stages: (1) terminology research; (2) agreement on the terms, the definitions, and the systems of concepts; and (3) dissemination of the preferred standardized terminologies."<sup>76</sup> These stages must occur before a new term can be established. It seems difficult for this process to really occur in today's world of technology and for terms to be truly vetted in this way. The terms that actually make it into style and usage guides are vetted by

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<sup>75</sup> Interrante, C.G. and Heymann, F.J. eds. Standardization of Technical Terminology: Principles and Practices. ASTM: Philadelphia, 1983, 3.

<sup>76</sup>Interrante, 4.

committees, but terms are also casually thrown around by the media and journalism, quickly making their way into our common lexicon.

According to *Read Me First!*, the World Wide Web is a “relatively recent medium. No solid consensus has been reached on industry standard terminologies for browsers or navigation.”<sup>77</sup> It is this lack of industry standards that requires such manuals like the *MSTP* and *Read Me First!* to establish standards. The manual then provides some usage guidelines. Felber states that “the preparation of terminology standards requires the application of principles and methods that guarantee harmoniously structured and unified terminologies in all standards, at the both national and international level.” Apparently these preparations are getting increasingly more difficult with the advent of the Internet. *Read Me First!* suggests using a capital “w” when discussing items on the World Wide Web that are accessible through the Internet. Using a lowercase “w” is reserved for discussing general web references or an intranet site.

Felber believes that “such principles and methods exist for national and international terminology work, based on the one hand on terminology science and on the other hand on practical terminology work. The need to train subject specialists in the application of these principles and methods is generally acknowledged.” It is indeed specialists who put together such technical style guides as the *MSTP* or *Read Me First!* Training needs to continue in order to ensure that proper terminology is maintained. According to Felber, the methods and aims of lexicographers and terminologists vary. While lexicographers record the usage of certain semantic units (description of

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<sup>77</sup> *Read Me First!*, 228.

terminology), standardizing terminologists must prescribe terminology for usage; that is, they must evaluate concepts, systems of concepts, terms, and term elements. “Thus terminologists are the judges and creators of terminology.”<sup>78</sup> Users then look to style guides for proper usage and are responsible for proper usage themselves.

Bernadette Longo’s position regarding technical language is that “in the worldwide traffic of ideas as a commodity, technical language is not valued because of its intrinsic beauty, as poetry might be valued for its aesthetics.”<sup>79</sup> Longo continues, “Instead, technical language is valued because it is a conduit for scientific knowledge – it represents science. As long as technical language bears this representation (the stamp of science), and *only* this representation, it can have value.”<sup>80</sup> This view of technical language suggests that it must remain true to its scientific roots and not be muddled by influences of society and the common lexicon.

Of course, with each new term, a corporate style guide should be updated. According to Gabriel Lanyi, “if a company has no corporate style guide, it is the senior editor’s responsibility to develop one; if a style guide exists, it is the editors’ collective responsibility to enforce it.”<sup>81</sup> This idea of enforcement is crucial. If a style guide exists but no one uses it, it is rhetorically useless. Good style is enforced in several ways. Setting a good example is one way to institute good style. Holding writing seminars is another method of gaining buy-in. One thing that Lanyi doesn’t mention is involving the

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<sup>78</sup> Interrante, 4.

<sup>79</sup> Longo, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Longo, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Lanyi, 61.

developers in the process of writing the style guide and asking for their input, therefore providing them with a sense of ownership.

## UPDATES

Lanyi also reminds editors that the corporate style guide is to be continually updated to reflect changes in the company's products, policies, and style. Previously neglected topics must be addressed, and rules that are no longer applicable must be disregarded. Lanyi comments that "In this regard, whether a style guide is in existence or a new one is being forged, the editors constantly use the guide in two ways: they refer to its existing parts for guidance and they augment it where it is deficient."<sup>82</sup> In this way, a corporate style guide is a living, breathing document that must undergo various periodic iterations in order to stay relevant to the company's style as well as to technology and the marketplace.

Bright says "more people are using communication technology; therefore, more people need to understand and reference corporate style guides to maintain consistency."<sup>83</sup> Style guides must then keep up with the technology that drives communication. Bright notes that "rapidly evolving technology requires frequent style decisions and updates to existing guides in response to new terminology and operations changes (for example, e-mail or email; login, log-in, or log in). As new technologies reach acceptance in the culture, language and jargon attached to these advancements begin to work their way into our routine communications."<sup>84</sup> It is then up to style guides

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<sup>82</sup> Lanyi, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Bright, 50.

<sup>84</sup> Bright, 47.

to remain current and keep up with changes in technology, especially changes in terminology.

According to Bright “A corporate style guide is only as good as its latest revision. Because of the rapidly changing technology environment, the need for routine updates is critical.<sup>85</sup> The future of style guides lies in the ability to move them online and have them accessible to users in an electronic format. Users are more likely to use a style guide in this format and for their particular rhetorical situation. The answers to Bright’s questions – “what specific information do users reference? How often do users refer to the corporate style guide? Are users more likely to use a corporate style guide in book or electronic form? How will technology continue to develop the corporate style guide? –<sup>86</sup> would be found through the use of surveys and questionnaires that could be provided within an organization to its employees in order to discover people’s thoughts on style guides. This would be an extremely valuable tool to aid in the future development of style guides.

It can be difficult to get people to care about using a style guide. According to Erin Hallmark’s article, “How to Maintain an existing Corporate Style Guide: Suggested Solutions for Editors,” “a style guide is only as good as those who use it.”<sup>87</sup> First, the guide’s location must first be accessible to all employees, which has been determined to be online for optimal usage. Print document tend to get lost or destroyed more frequently, and they’re also harder to maintain and keep current. An online guide keeps

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<sup>85</sup> Bright, 50.

<sup>86</sup> Bright, 50.

<sup>87</sup> Hallmark, 21.

information up-to-date more quickly and accurately, and it can be accessed by everyone everywhere at any time. Employees can also reference information more quickly and provides the capability for enhanced searching. In this case, technology is part of the solution, not just a problem.

The future of technology is certainly more global than it has been before, and style guides must keep up with the trend. Technology is the exigence that drives the changing situation and therefore there is the need to revise guides with an eye on technologically situated social action.

## CONCLUSION: KEEPING TO THE CODE

In this thesis I discussed whether several style guides are effective in achieving their goals and aims. I examined whether style guides are meant to be prescriptive or descriptive in nature. I analyzed what style guides do as rhetoric and determined that today's style guides are preserving or trying to enforce consistency above all.

Since the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, style guides have continued to evolve along with language usage and terminology. Francis Bacon helped technical writing to be accessible to lay people who needed to be able to understand information just as they needed to be able to understand the liturgy of the church. T.A. Rickard encouraged the purity and preservation of technical language in order to make it rhetorically effective. Technical writing as an individual discipline emerged out of the ether of engineering and science during the World War II. In the computer age, style guides must evolve more quickly in order to keep up with technology's changing language.

Are style guides all about “keeping to the code” or are they merely “guidelines”? Style guides by nature are meant to be prescriptive as grammar rules are prescriptive. A style manual tells you what to do and why it should be done in that particular way. Using language such as “avoid” and “do not,” it is pretty clear that these are rules that are prescriptive in nature and meant to be adhered to. In spite of this, style guides such as the

*MSTP* are quick to say that they offer mere suggestions or general guidelines, but the rhetorical language would suggest otherwise. Rhetoric within the genre achieves its purpose when social action is the result. As rhetoric, style guides convince the reader to follow the rules so that clarity, cohesion, coherence, concision, correctness, and consistency will be achieved. Style guides are most effective when they are followed completely.

Allen concludes that “all in all, CSGs (Corporate Style Guides) will become an ever-increasing benefit for tomorrow’s restructured company that will most likely require an increasing number of documents generated by fewer technical communicators.” In addition, “corporations using a CSG to help generate more effective documents...will have a competitive edge over corporations not using a style.”<sup>88</sup> Having uniform documents helps to represent a company positively and serves to promote their particular brand.

Today’s style guides are meant to preserve the way that language is intended to be used in order to stave off chaos within organizations. They provide a baseline or a snapshot of standardized terminology for that particular time and must be updated regularly. They are trying to enforce an element of purity within the language, and most important, consistency. Style guides serve to lead by example. If not the style guide will go unused in the rhetorical situation and render itself irrelevant; it will not have served its purpose.

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<sup>88</sup> Allen, 242.

Style guides are a unique genre. They must be persuasive or they are useless. Style guides are persuasive when the user takes action and writes according to its code or prescriptions. The future of style guides lies in online accessible versions that are interactive and hyperlinked and can be easily updated and amended. Style guides are here to stay and are necessary for an organization to function optimally and efficiently. Organizations that keep their style guides up to date, including Microsoft, will profit from the uniformity of their documents in the future.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Rachel P. Wimer graduated from W.T. Woodson High School, Fairfax, Virginia, in 1998. She received her Bachelor of Arts in English from Washington College in Maryland in 2002, graduating cum laude. She won the Washington College Writer's Union Award in 2002. She was the 2008 recipient of the Cynthia Wynn Herman Scholarship from George Mason University. She currently works as a technical writer for Creative Information Technology, Inc. She will receive her Master of Arts in English with a concentration in Professional Writing and Editing from George Mason University in May 2009.