

A Mini History of Style

The times keep changing, and so must the language we use to write about them: Five telling examples of CP style changes

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SINCE 1940, *The Canadian Press Stylebook* has been the journalist's go-to guide for grammar, vocabulary, and journalistic best practices. As conventions evolve, CP style follows, aiming to establish clarity and congruity within newsrooms across the country.

"The stream is constantly moving the way the stream wants to move," says the *Stylebook's* editor, James McCarten, of social and cultural change. "But you do have to exert at least a little bit of control so you can foster consistency."

Here are five noteworthy CP style revisions that both reflected and ushered in significant progress throughout the last decades:

Seen in: Revision of 7th Edition

"Write woman doctor, woman lawyer, male nurse, male secretary and the like only when sex is pertinent."



Cause for Change: "Women in the media pushed for the gender neutralizing of professions that took place during the '80s," says Penni Mitchell, managing editor of feminist magazine *Herizons*. "On the outside, feminist activists lobbied newspapers. On the inside, women got involved in mundane yet influential things like being on the committees that revise style guides." Adds writer and editor Sarah Liss, "In terms of women and female-identified people in the workforce, we've gotten to a point where I don't feel like we're struggling as a society to understand that women can do it."

Seen in: Revisions to 9th Edition

"Beware of leaving the impression that homosexuals alone, and not heterosexuals, are at risk to AIDS."



Cause for Change: Kelly Toughill was on the HIV/AIDS beat for the *Toronto Star* in the 1980s, and was the first journalist to be dedicated to covering the subject full-time. She was part of the effort to develop a template for the vocabulary around it. "There was a lot of discussion within the *Star* about what was the right language," she says, noting that coverage should be steered by expert health data. Toughill says

that journalists should "...cover [HIV/AIDS] without depicting this in any way as associated with a particular sexual preference or gender, and to maintain the underlying science."

Seen in: 18th Edition

"Indigenous is generally preferable to the term Aboriginal, which is frowned upon by some and best used judiciously."



Cause for Change: According to Karyn Pugliese, former executive director of APTN, the term "Aboriginal" began falling out of the lexicon around 2006, when chiefs organizations determined it to be offensive. "This spread throughout the cluster of chiefs organizations and into universities," she says. Pugliese adds that the term "Aboriginal", without "peoples" affixed, ignored the diversity of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities within Indigeneity. "It is difficult to make that same mistake with 'Indigenous'," she says. "'Indigenous-es' is not a word. You are forced to add 'peoples' to complete the thought." Pugliese says her own preference is to say "First Nations, Inuit, and Métis."

Seen in: 18th Edition

"Whenever possible, confirm with the person how they wish to be described in print, including their preferred pronouns—male, female or gender-neutral pronouns like they and them."



Cause for Change: As a leading LGBTQ2IA+ news publication, *Xtra* magazine began using "they/them" long before Eternity Martis became a senior editor in 2016. "Pressure on the 'keepers' of language makes language more inclusive of all of us," says Martis. "[This] has successfully led to identity changes, such as 'they/them' pronouns being used as a neutral, singular pronoun rather than the gender binaries present in the English language, dictionaries, and media style guides."

Seen in: Online, 2020

"COVID-19 (World Health Organization name for disease caused by strain of novel coronavirus originating in Wuhan, China, in 2019)."



Cause for change: When referencing a new illness, "new" or "novel" must be included on first mention. According to McCarten, "coronavirus" was added to the style guide in January 2020 to distinguish the new strain from the generic virus. However, in mid-February, CP shifted to the term "COVID-19," after the World Health Organization clarified that the terms are not interchangeable. "Coronavirus" refers to a type of respiratory-related disease, whereas COVID-19 describes a new strain of coronaviruses.