



STYLE GUIDE

Editing is both a science and an art. No two editors will edit in the same way! We understand there is interpretation involved, but there are some basic style guidelines that we ask you to hold to to help us make our books consistent.

We are aiming for what we call a “Clean Speech” standard. This captures the speaker’s voice in content, language, tone, but the information is presented in the best narrative order and grammatically cleaned up. Many of our book authors are also learning to master English. We want their book to not only reflect their stories, but be properly written as well to help them in their language mastery.

One of the hardest things to do is to capture the author’s voice. Some children are funny, some are shy, some are serious. We want to capture the way they speak wherever possible. The best way to do this is to write down exactly what they say in the interview process to be sure that we have heard them clearly. Then we go from there to edit. **Everything in their book should be in first person, using “I” as the speaker.**

We never want to impose our own voice into the student’s book. We just want to bring out his or her voice more clearly. To do that, we recommend organizing the content of the whole narrative, first making sure that the content is in the best-suited place, no matter how rough it looks. Second, we recommend going page by page to organize content on individual pages. After all of that is finished, we then recommend doing a more formal edit. That way we’re sure to capture their own words in a narrative order that makes them sing!

ORDER OF INFORMATION

First, group the right information together. Most My Story Matters books begin with interviews in response to questions. But some information shared for one question better answers another question that may be under another heading. So it’s important to view the book as a whole, then cut and paste relevant information under the most appropriate heading. Think big picture first.

Example:

Heading: I am learning and growing.

Text provided: I love to do science and math. I want to learn more about astronomy. One day I hope to be a doctor. I want to help people.

“One day I hope to be a doctor. I want to help people.” may fit better under the “I dream” heading that comes later in the book.

Heading: I am playing.

Text provided: I like to listen to music. I like Katy Perry a lot. I love to play soccer. I am on the high school soccer team. I am fast. I love to read. My heroes are my parents. They do everything for me. I admire them so much because they sacrifice everything for me. I hope that with this change of coming to the United States, I can one day help them the way they have helped me.

The three sentences about the parents may better fit in the “I am part of a family” section. The last sentence may better fit in the “I dream” section.

Second, in text grouped under the same heading, you can re-order it to have more narrative punch. Hear beyond the words. If you interviewed the student personally, remember your interactions during the interview. How can that interaction help you present this information in the most revealing way? If you didn't interview the student personally, listen to the audio for clues (we hope to be providing this for all interviews in the near future).

Keep the content, but arrange it in a way that orders it with the most thoughtful, in-depth expression at the end of the paragraph, like a punchline.

Example:

Heading: I am playing.

Text provided: My favorite animal is a horse. I want to learn to ride horses. I love to play soccer with my friends. I like Lionel Messi. He's a superstar forward and has an amazing shot. I am a forward, too. I like volleyball. I like badminton. I like to read. I like stories that inspire people. My favorite hero is Batman because he does everything to protect people, to help people. He makes people feel like they don't have to be afraid. Sometimes I watch TV with my brothers and sisters. My favorite TV show is Mighty Med.

One way of presenting this information:

I love doing many different things. Sometimes I watch TV with my brothers and sisters. My favorite TV show is “Mighty Med.”

My favorite animal is a horse. I want to learn to ride a horse one day.

I like to play sports, too. I like volleyball, badminton, and I love to play soccer with my friends. I like to watch Lionel Messi play because he is a superstar forward. He has an amazing shot! I play forward, too. Maybe one day I will shoot like him.

I like to read. I like stories that inspire people. My favorite hero is Batman because he does everything to protect and help people. He makes people feel like they don't have to be afraid.

BASIC EDITING PRINCIPLES

For most editing questions, we follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* with a few tweaks. Here are the some of the most important things to remember.

Capturing Speech

We are trying to capture speech, which is different from capturing the written word or making something literary. People don't speak the same way they write. Many times sentences will begin with the conjunctions "and," "but," or "so." And that's just fine! It may look a little strange, but that's part of emulating speech patterns. The important thing is to capture the ideas and the rhythm of the speaker's voice, provided that we are creating complete sentences (think subject + verb). Leave all the information in the book. Do not take out any information without consulting Amy Chandler or Rebecca Spencer.

When the child switches voice within a sentence, leave it as it is unless the sentence doesn't make sense and a voice change is necessary. For example, the sentence "I'm a good friend because you should stay by your friend's side" switches from first person to second person, but the meaning of the sentence is still clear, so the sentence is fine as is. However, if a child switches tense (such as "She was at the mall and she starts saying..."), it is best to correct this in writing, for the sake of readability. Make sure all pronouns have a clear reference and that the writing makes sense.

I have a mom and a dog. My dog licks my face a lot.

NOT: I have a mom and a dog. She licks my face a lot.

Shorter sentences are best.

Remember that most My Story Matters student authors are learning to read or learning to read English. Every sentence should have a subject and a verb. If you take away a conjunction from the beginning of a sentence (and, but, or so) and the sentence doesn't stand alone, it probably shouldn't be a sentence on its own. Avoid fragments. Avoid run-on sentences. Avoid overly stylized language. The language should reflect the student's own directness and honesty.

Use paragraph breaks to denote change in direction of thought.

It's all right to have short paragraphs. In fact, those are better than a long paragraph of disparate ideas strung together. Remember, we are helping to teach students to discern what a paragraph is for. If the ideas change, the paragraph should, too. Where there are developed, cohesive thoughts that are several sentences long, it is best to create new paragraphs with new thoughts. However, when the thoughts on the page are somewhat disjointed, it is not necessary to create a new paragraph for each new thought.

Formatting the text

When going through text make sure to follow the given template exactly. For example, do not leave lists, bullet points, or otherwise disjointed information on a page. Make sure to write out the information unless the formatting specifically calls for a list. If the page only asks for the first name of the child, only write in

the first name. Do not mess with the size of the text boxes or font unless given the responsibility to do final round editing.

PUNCTUATION

COMMAS

Use commas correctly.

Ah, yes, our favorite punctuation mark: the comma. When to use it? How to use it? Three common constructions: compound sentences, a series list, and place names.

Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is two complete sentences (each with a subject and verb) joined by a conjunction. The famous FANBOYS conjunctions are: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. You should usually use a comma BEFORE the conjunction in this case.

I like pizza, but I don't like hamburgers.

If there is no subject in the second clause (it's not a complete, stand-alone sentence), then you don't need a comma.

I like pizza but not hamburgers.

Series list

A comma (usually called the "Oxford comma") should appear before the conjunction in a series list.

She took a photograph of her parents, the president, and the vice president.

Notice how, if you remove the comma before "and," the sentence implies that "her parents" are the president and vice president.

Distinguish place names.

Use commas to distinguish place names (cities, states, countries). In general, a comma should follow a place name if the sentence continues beyond it.

I am from Zulia, Venezuela, but have lived in Mexico for nine years.
I have lived in Salt Lake City, Utah, for three months now.

An excellent source to review basic comma rules (including FANBOYS):

<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/commas/>.

QUOTATION MARKS

Punctuation Goes Inside Quotation Marks.

Commas and periods at the end of a quote should be inside the quotation marks, whether it's the end of the sentence or not. Question marks should be outside of the quotation marks, unless the original quote/title includes the question mark.

My favorite story is "Little Red Riding Hood."
My favorite book is "Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets," even though I also like "Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban."
My mother asks me, "what do you want to be?"
I asked my coach, "may I be on the team?"

Only one ending punctuation mark should be used with quotation marks.

Have you heard the song "Where Did Our Love Go?"
NOT: Have you heard the song "Where Did Our Love Go?"?

You do not need a comma to separate the text in quotes from the rest of the sentence if it's just a word or phrase that fits into the sentence.

She loves the song "Imagine" by the Beatles, even though it's the first time she's heard it.
He tried to explain the significance of the "A" in "USA."
She wanted to know the meaning of "random acts of kindness."

Use quotation marks for titles.

In the Heritage Makers' text boxes, there is no option for italics. So we have to use quotation marks for every title, regardless of its length or form. (We are working on a fix for this!) So book titles, song titles, and films would all be in quotation marks:

My favorite TV show is "Mighty Med."
I love the movie "Batman."

Per Chicago, names of scripture books are capitalized without quotation marks.

the Quran
the Bible

QUESTION MARKS

When to use questions marks?

A good resource: <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/question.htm>

SPELLING and CAPITALIZATION

Standard Dictionary

For words that are not listed or discussed below, we use the [Merriam-Webster](https://www.merriam-webster.com/) online dictionary to verify spelling.

Numbers as text and digits.

Write out numbers from zero through nine as text. Numbers 10 and above should be recorded as digits. If a speaker says a larger number preceded by “a,” keep it as text.

I have lived in the United States for two years. Before that, I lived in Uganda for 14 years.

I am nine years old.

I have three brothers. They are 17, 15, and 12 years old.

My eight-year-old sister makes me laugh.

I tried a hundred times.

I thought of a million reasons not to leave.

EXCEPTION: When two or more numbers involved describe a range, make them consistent (usually as digits).

I lived in Abu Dhabi from the ages of 6 to 11.

I spent years 7 through 12 in the refugee camp.

They were waiting on paperwork for 8 to 10 years.

Contractions are acceptable.

In formal editing, we generally rule out contractions. But since this book attempts to capture the speaker’s voice, contractions are acceptable. It also helps the student writers to learn English constructions. We prefer that contractions are relatively rare, however.

Capitalization

Capitalize all proper nouns (people and places). Do not capitalize nouns after a possessive.

I love my mom.

NOT: I love my Mom.

It is okay to capitalize family names if the person speaking is addressing a specific person.

I asked, “Mom, where are you going?”

Spell out “United States.”

Spell out United States for every first mention on each page. Abbreviate as U.S. thereafter.

Unless the student specifically mentions “America” to talk about where they live, use “United States.” Remember, we are working with a global population. People who live in the United States call themselves “Americans” without considering how that sounds to people who live in Central or South America. They, too, consider themselves “Americans.” We have refugees who have lived in Venezuela or Mexico who are not “coming to America” for the first time. This term can be offensive to them (yes, there actually have been PhD dissertations written on this subject!).

On the other hand, refugees all over the world think of “America” as the beacon of the American Dream of equality, democracy, and where, if you work hard enough, you can live a good life.

So the rule of thumb is to listen to the student. How do they describe their new home---as the “United States” or as “America”? Use your best judgment about which term to use, depending on the student you’re working with.

Likewise, where there are abbreviations, write out what those abbreviations stand for instead of leaving the abbreviation. For example, write out English Language Arts instead of ELA.

Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives that precede a noun are generally hyphenated:

Two-word adjectives should be hyphenated.
My three-legged dog follows me wherever I go.
They had a one-time-only chance at the lottery.

If more than three terms are combined, quotations marks instead of hyphenation are acceptable:

It’s a “once in a lifetime” moment.

For an exhaustive list of compound adjectives, see *CMOS*: [Compounds and Hyphenation](#).

Accents

For now, Heritage Makers does not accept accents. (We are working on that!)

Product and Company Names

Product and company names should be spelled like the company does:

YouTube, Netflix, Google, Facebook, Snapchat, iPod, iPad, eBay, etc.

EXCEPT: “to google” as a verb is lowercase. “I googled Utah and saw pictures of mountains.”

Correct Spellings of Commonly Used Words

Be sure that the spellings of all commonly used words and names are both correct and consistent throughout the book. Pay special attention to the name of the child and the child’s family members and be sure that the spellings are correct throughout the book.

United States or United States of America (not US, U.S., or America)

Quran

okay

all right

a lot

a while

till (not ‘til). This is the accepted abbreviation for “until.”

I am 16 years old. (**BUT** hyphenated in noun or adjective form: “The 13-year-old plays soccer.”)

T-shirt

hardworking

internet (not capitalized)

email

website **BUT** web page

health care

x-ray

24/7

9/11

Common Spelling Mistakes

it's = it is	versus	its = belongs to it
who's = who is	versus	whose = belongs to who (possessive); “Whose cat is that?”
site (on the internet)	versus	sight (how you see)
every day (each day)	versus	everyday (adjective); “My everyday shoes.”
cue (to start; pool stick)	versus	queue (line, to get in line, as in a phone queue or playlist queue)

there / their / they're

loose / lose

If you have any questions, need clarifications, or want to make a suggestions, please email the Editing Team: editors@mystorymatters.org.

Thank you for your generous service. Your contribution is vital to give life to these students' stories!