



INPUT GUIDE

The SFU Style Sheet

Many game companies (like most newspapers and book publishers) have an official “style sheet” which they expect you to use in writing for them. We have one, but rarely make a big issue out of it; we’re just glad people write anything for us at all!

Here are a few selected elements of our “style sheet” so you can reduce the workload on us. We’ll go to any lengths to fix a good article, and won’t print a bad one now matter how nicely it’s done, but for the most submissions, not having to make a lot of editorial changes just makes it easier — a lot easier — for us to finish one project and move on to another. The best way you can make sure that everybody eventually gets the products they want is to help us make every product easier to do.

The Basics

God invented spell checkers for a reason. Use yours. It will take you a bunch of time and bother to program in all of the strange SFU words like Tholian and Klingon, but it’s worth it.

The single most common mistake we see is in using the word “it’s” as the possessive, i.e., ‘belonging to it’. The word “its” is the possessive, while “it’s” means “it is”. Conversely, we insist on the terms “UIMs” for plural and “UIM’s” for possessive.

Our licensed game systems have their own way they want things done. Steve Jackson says that the term is “GURPS” and never “Gurps” or “gurps”. Wizards of the Coast is rather insistant that “d20” have a small “d”, while West End Games seems to prefer a big “D” for their “D6” game engine. Most of the game industry thinks that game titles and game system titles should be in italics (or even bold-italics).

One of the most common mistakes is to use the acronym “HET” as a word “het” (like “hat” spoken by somebody from Texas). When deciding whether to use “a” or “an” you should mentally spell out the letters, so it’s “an Ach Eee Tee” not “a het”.

As a convention, we use “Impulse #31” (note, capitalize Impulse and use a number sign followed by a numeral) and “Turn #6” rather than “turn 6” and “impulse nine”. *Federation Commander* uses a slightly different form in the case of Sub-Pulse 7:4 (meaning the fourth sub-pulse of Impulse #7).

In fiction, do not abbreviate officer ranks. Your helmsman is Lieutenant Toranaga, not Lt. Toranaga. However, you would not normally say Lieutenant JG Toranaga unless you had a reason to make a point of this in dialog.

Avoid starting a sentence with a rule number. Rule (A3.45) works just fine and it didn’t hurt anything to put the word “rule” in front of the rule number, now did it?

The Queen’s English

Some things are done the way they are done simply because that is the correct way to do them. For example, “e.g.” (which means “for example” in Latin) has to have a comma after the second period. A sample sentence would be: “The Federation has several weapons, e.g., photons, phasers, and drones.” The same thing is true of “etc.” (Latin for “and so on”) and “i.e.” (Latin for “that is” although many think it means “in effect” and it will work that way as well.)

In a series of things, the last two are separated by “and” but there *must be a comma* before the word “and”. Consider this example: “Having won the Gold Hat, I would like to thank my practice opponents, God and the game designer.” If there is a

comma after “God” you are thanking three things (opponents being one, God being the second, and Steve Cole being the third). Without the comma, you are claiming to have played practice games against God almighty and the game designer (who sometimes thinks he is God but that’s another matter entirely).

Avoid using dashes — unless you know when and how to.

It is fairly common to including long chunks of text inside parentheses, but in general usage if the parenthetical comment is at the end of the sentence and is itself a complete sentence, make it a separate (if parenthesized) sentence. (Like, for example, this sentence right here.)

ADB Quirks

Star Fleet is always two words in everything except the title of the game *Starfleet Command*.

We have some things that we want our own way, even if many style books do not agree. When there is a whole sentence and the last word is part of a fragmentary quote, we normally keep the quotation marks inside the final punctuation mark, while the most common stylebooks rigidly insist that the quotes must always include this even when it makes no sense to do so.

Formal Writing vs Gamer Speak

If you’re talking to somebody in the lunch line at Origins, it’s perfectly swell to say “I bricked his alpha strike” (meaning “I heavily reinforced my shield to stop his weapons from hurting my ship”) but when you write your Victory At Origins article, you should not use the term “brick” at all.

Similarly, the common phrase “I fired two standards” is confusing as some people think it means non-overloaded disruptors while others think it means type-I drones or phaser-1s.

In a post on the BBS it’s fine to use shorthand and say “I had 2 pts. in ECM,” but in term papers, tactics articles, and other formal writing for publication you need to use “two points”.

The most common informality is to say “I scored 37 internals” which should really be “I scored 37 points of internal damage”.

SFBOL players have adopted a common short hand of “B60” for a sixty-point (enveloped plasma-S) torpedo from launcher B. Never use this in formal writing. It’s an “enveloped plasma-S from launcher B” and deserves your respect.

Lots of gaming (and BBS) shorthand creeps into tactics articles and should not. The italicized words should NOT be left out of these examples: I armed four overload(s) *ed disruptors*. I announced *that I was raising* ESG #1. I hit a warp *engine box* and a *phaser-3*. I did five points of collateral *damage*.

Technology

We have a certain way we do things and if you don’t do it for us, we have to do it for ourselves. For example, we use the “style” *Shield #1* in most writing. Note that “Shield” is capitalized, a number sign is present, and the shield number is a numeral. You can use *#1 Shield* if you wish, but please not Number One Shield.

The forms phaser-3 and ph-3 are correct; the form p3 is a night club on the television show “Charmed”.

Plasma-S and type-S plasma torpedo are fine. S-torp is not. T-bomb is always hyphenated.

Dialogue

This is the hardest thing for most people to punctuate and needs a whole page of explanations, but quickly....

If the same person is starting a new paragraph, drop the ending quotation mark of the first paragraph.

When a given sentence includes both dialogue and non-dialogue, watch the punctuation carefully, such as:

“Lieutenant Tornaga,” said the captain, turning to the helmsman, “set a course of Alpha Centauri.”

Note the two commas which set apart the words that identify the speaker and sometimes note what he’s doing.