



Creative Girlfriends Press

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Short and Sweet E.I.Y.* Cheat Sheet

**Edit It Yourself*

Using proper grammar and a consistent style of punctuation is like following a recipe: If you substitute aquarium gravel for chocolate chips when making cookies, the results will be jarring. Hitting a grammar or style snag when reading can be just as off-putting (but less harmful to the teeth).

The point is to keep the reader sailing at a nice clip through your text. Show your readers some love by taking a few extra minutes to give your content a careful review.

Some mistakes are frequent offenders and editors know where they live. If you can't hire an editor for your ebook, blog posts or web copy, watch for these scoundrels:

- Mixing **you're** and **your**, and **it's** and **its**. These mistakes are easy to make, but hard to spot. (Read on for more advice on identifying mistakes.) "You're" is a contraction of "you are" and "your" is a possessive pronoun. "It's" is a contraction of "it is" and "its" is a possessive pronoun.

*"**You're** going to love these truffles!"*

*"Those are not **your** truffles!"*

*"**It's** my turn to eat the truffles!"*

*"This shop is known for **its** truffles."*

- **Complementary or complimentary?** "Complementary" means something that completes another thing. "Complimentary" means something that offers praise or is free.

*"The bacon flavor in this cupcake is **complementary** to the chocolate."*

*"These cupcakes are **complimentary**? Score!"*

• **Serial commas** are those that appear before the “and” or “or” in a list. This sentence has a serial comma:

“I like dark chocolate, milk chocolate, and semi-sweet chocolate.”

Most newspapers and magazines do not use serial commas, but scholarly writing often does. You make the call, then be consistent.

• **Compound adjectives** pop up when you use two adjectives to modify a noun, calling for the use of a hyphen.

“I would like to get high-quality chocolate.”

If you’re wondering whether to use a hyphen, consider what would happen if the first adjective happened to fall at the end of a line of printed text. In this case the line would end with “I would like to get high.” Having a hyphen after the word “high” would let the reader know to just keep reading to the next line and not be derailed by that unexpected drug reference.

• Can we talk about your **colon**? We use colons to connect related thoughts or introduce a list. If the line following a colon is a complete sentence, Associated Press style says to capitalize the first letter of the first word.

“It’s my worst nightmare: We’re out of chocolate!”

• **Random capitalization** is an insidious invader, permeating writing like raisins in cookies that should have chocolate chips. Watch for sentences like this:

“Our ice cream flavors are Vanilla, Chocolate and Rum Raisin.”

If your words are getting uppity, try banging those capital letters down to lowercase. Chances are your copy will read more smoothly and maintain its style consistently.

Now you’re privy to some of editors’ pet peeves. If you can set your work aside for a few days or week, you’ll have a better chance at catching mistakes when you re-read it. But if you’re pressed for time, try the “read it backward” method. Read your copy word by word, starting with the last word. Reading backward forces you to look at each word individually and makes any clunkers stand out.

Imagine that you wrote this sentence:

“I get my chocolate form all over the world.”

You might not notice that you typed “form” instead of “from.” Spellcheck won’t catch that error. But if you read the sentence backward as “world, the, over, all, form,” suddenly that wrong word (Wait! Form?) will be more noticeable.

Good luck and happy writing!