

## Proofreading exercise: Commentary

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The following points were inconsistent throughout this piece:

- **headings:** initial capitals or lower case?
- **spelling:** USA or US (for the noun)?
- **train names:** in italic / roman type with quote marks / plain roman type?
- **numbers:** comma/no comma in 1,000s? 1930s or 1930's?
- **parenthetical dash:** long or short?
- **hyphens:** long(-)distance, sleeping/dining/observation(-)car?
- **commas:** serial or not?
- **distances:** imperial (miles, feet) or metric (km)?
- **full points (full stops):** USA but V.I.P.?
- **quote marks (inverted commas):** single or double?
- **accents:** cafe or café?
- **ellipses:** spaced ( . . . ) or closed up (...)?

In many cases, you can't judge which is right or wrong:

- quote marks: there are roughly the same number of single and of double
- parenthetical dashes (these will be discussed in detail in a later module): there is only one of each type: an 'en rule', with a space on either side, near the end of the first paragraph (after 'best-kept secrets'), compared with a longer 'em rule' in the middle of the third paragraph (after 'fruit juice')
- train names: given in three different ways.

However, in some cases you could safely decide in favour of the majority, such as adding a comma to '2200'; four out of the five instances of thousands have this comma, and it makes a number clearer when there are also four-figure dates in the text. Perhaps you could also justifiably change the metric measurement (1,600 km) to imperial as four out of the five measurements are given in imperial, but it's better to check: you might not know whether the distance is 1,000 miles (the imperial equivalent of 1,600 km) or 1,600 *miles*.

When you can't justifiably make a decision one way or the other, it's safest to mark every instance. Note that the first instance explains the problem, then subsequent instances need be identified only briefly (for example, when working on paper, with an encircled pencil cross if there are many of them or if there is little space; when working on screen, highlighter can be useful). Make clear *why* you're raising the query by pointing out the discrepancies.

Pay special attention to items that come in pairs:

- in the second paragraph, the song title 'Chattanooga Choo Choo' is missing its opening quote mark (inverted comma)
- a few lines before the heading *Go West*, after 'challenge!', there's a missing closing parenthesis (bracket)
- in the paragraph beginning 'It's quite magical', the comma after 'California' should be the closing parenthesis that balances the opening one on the previous line.

Note that the number of states is eight, not seven: when the text promises a certain number, stop what you're doing and check that it delivers that number!

Factual errors: at the end of the second paragraph on the first page there are two factual errors: the lake's name is 'Erie' rather than 'Eric' (!), and Chicago is west of New York, not east. It's good to have reference books to hand for a quick check (an atlas, in this case).

*Exercise – Editorial Consistency 2/2*

In the opening description there's a horrendous typo in 'pubic transport': it should, of course, be 'public transport'. This is such an easy mistake to make, and equally easy not to see! Always look twice when you encounter this word. Here, it was doubly hard to spot as it is in italic type.

Word breaks: always check the right-hand edge of text to ensure that any word breaks are sensible and not misleading. There are three bad breaks in this piece:

- in the second paragraph of *Go West*, 'be-drooms' should break between its component parts, 'bed-rooms'
- in the following paragraph, 'beco-mes' breaks mid-syllable and should be 'be-comes'
- in the penultimate paragraph, 'nort-hern' breaks a digraph (two letters that make one sound) – it should break at 'north-ern'.

Pictures: two are mentioned, but only one is provided – and the caption (which should be centred) promises a view of the author wearing an Amtrak baseball cap, but this does not appear. Should there be two separate pictures? Check with the author!