



# Didion style guide

By Yiu-On Li

## Conventions

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### References

- [\*MLA Handbook, 9th ed.\*](#)
- [\*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary\*](#)
- [\*Garner's Modern English Usage, 5th ed.\*](#)

### Adjectives

- use Garner's adjective order (ordered from first to last):
  - 1. opinion
  - 2. size
  - 3. physical quality
  - 4. shape
  - 5. age
  - 6. color
  - 7. origin
  - 8. material
  - 9. type
  - 10. purpose
  - odd carbon-black metallic material (1, 6, 8)
  - short plastic child's hammer (2, 8, 10)
  - really big blue cowboy statue (1, 2, 6, 9)
  - large round Italian cheese wheel (2, 4, 7, 8)
  - big old brown canvas fishing hat (2, 5, 6, 8, 10)
  - beautiful new purple-sequined twirler uniform (1, 5, 6, 8, 9)
  - amazing gigantic vertical Chinese dinosaur sculpture (1, 2, 3, 7, 9)
- if coordinate adjectives are related to each other, delete the comma:

- tumultuous affair-ridden marriage (affairs cause the marriage's tumult)

## Citations and quotes

- use numerals for page and chapter numbers
- in-text citations are typically placed at the end of the sentence before the period: "No one had ever called her beautiful, but there had been something about her a compelling fragility, the illusion not only of her bones but of her eyes" (Didion, *Run River* 16).
- if it would improve clarity or prevent misattribution of ideas, place in-text citations directly after the quote or statement
  - In *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski argues that, instead of "digging down" or "standing back" (52), readers should be "forging links between things that were previously unconnected" to make "something new" (173, 174).
  - Canada's literary history has been described as "a fractured discourse" (Howells and Kröller 2), an idea echoed by a Jewish Canadian novelist who writes in French and feels she occupies a position "neither fully within nor fully without" (Robin 182).
  - Despite the timeliness of "styles of suspicious reading that blend interpretation with moral judgment" (Felski 86), other styles should be considered.
- for in-text citations, include the author's last name, shortened title of work if author has more than one work cited, page number if applicable, and parentheses: (Didion, *The White Album* 3)
  - if any of this information has already been included in the regular sentence, you may remove that information from the citation to prevent redundancy: (Didion 3), (*The White Album* 3), (3)
- for in-text citations of audiovisual works, include the time in place of the page number: (Didion 00:09:31)
- for a quote of more than four lines in length, set it in a block indented half an inch from the left margin and spaced 10pt before and after
  - for in-text citations of block quotations, place the citation after the final period and any ellipses (as opposed to before the period, as you would do with an in-text citation for running text)

- add [sic] (not italicized) after an error in a quote to indicate that the error is present in the original

## Numbers

- use MLA numbers style in most cases: spell out numbers that can be written in one or two words
- spell out a percentage or an amount of money that can be written with three words or fewer (word count includes the unit, such as “dollars”):
  - eighty-three dollars
  - seventy-five cents
  - one thousand dollars
  - eleven thousand dollars
  - \$250 million
- use numerals for numbers with decimals: \$7.3 billion
- if any number in a sentence requires numerals, all other numbers (of the same type) in that sentence also become numerals, even if they would normally not be: John jumped 121 times, while Jim jumped 49 times
- no apostrophe when referring to the whole decade: 1960s

## Punctuation

- correlative conjunctions do not have a comma separating them:
  - not only . . . but also
- possessive apostrophe for proper nouns:
  - Didion's fiction
  - *Play It As It Lays's* Maria (apostrophe and 's remain unitalicized)
- use em dashes—not hyphens or en dashes—to set off asides:
  - I'm no architect—I'm scared of heights—but I sure don't want to live *there*
- essay titles are enclosed in double quotation marks: “Why I Write”
- to omit parts of a quote, use three periods with nonbreaking spaces between each: “John . . . was interesting.”
  - if the omitted part falls immediately after a sentence, use four periods with nonbreaking spaces between each: “John was interesting. . . . But so was Jane.”

- when placing a quote after a colon, the first letter of the quotation should follow the case of the source material
- lowercase what comes after a colon unless
  - the word is normally capitalized
  - the colon introduces more than one sentence
  - the colon introduces a rule or principle
  - the colon introduces a question

## Miscellaneous

- use distributive possession with pronoun-antecedent agreement:
  - these characters, at their core, are similarly vexed and apathetic

## Index

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### A

- *After Henry*
- ahold
- all too (idiom)
- American Academy of Arts and Letters, the
- American Dream, the
- among (preposition)
  - as opposed to *amongst*
  - refers to collective and undefined relations, as opposed to *between*

### B

- bachelor's degree
- Barack Obama, US President
- Barnes & Noble
- Barnes & Noble Classics section
- Beatles, The
- between (refers to one-to-one relations, as opposed to *among*)
- *Blue Nights*

- *Book of Common Prayer, A*

## C

- California
- Californian
- Carson McCullers
- Celine
- Charles Manson
- Charlotte Douglas (*A Book of Common Prayer* protagonist)
- close-third
- Coca-Cola
- connection to (physical connection)
- connection with (relationship)
- contrast with (verb; as opposed to *contrast to*)
  - in contrast with
- coworker
- crisscross (verb)
- cultlike (adjective)

## D

- Dan Wakefield
- David Thomson
- *Democracy*
- detail-by-detail
- Donner Party

## E

- Everett McClellan (*Run River* character)
- eyeline

## F

- fictional (adjective; as opposed to fiction [adjective])

- first person (noun)
- first-person (adjective)
- Flannery O'Connor

## G

- generalized anxiety disorder
- genre-bending
- genre-crossing
- get ahold of
- Gold Medal in Belles Lettres and Criticism
- gold-mining (adjective)
- goody-two-shoes (adjective)
- Griffin Dunne

## H

- Harrison Ford
- head-on
- headfirst
- hippie culture
- Hollywood

## I

- in and of itself
- "In Bed"
- inner life
- innermost (adjective)

## J

- James Jerrett Didion
- Jane Bowles
- Janis Joplin
- Joan Didion

- *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold*
- John Gregory Dunne

## L

- *Last Thing He Wanted, The*
- *Let Me Tell You What I Mean*
- lifelong
- lifetime achievement award (PEN Center USA award)
- Lily Knight McClellan (*Run River* protagonist)
- Linda Kasabian
- Linda Kuehl
- *Los Angeles Times* Woman of the Year

## M

- Mad Hatter, the
- Malibu
- Maria Wyeth (*Play It As It Lays* protagonist)
- Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the
- mental health awareness
- *Miami*
- Michiko Kakutani
- more so (adverb)
- mother–daughter (en dash)
- murder–suicide

## N

- National Book Award for Nonfiction, the
- National Book Foundation, the
- National Humanities Medal, the
- National Medal of Arts, the
- NBC
- neuroticism
- nevertheless (in spite of something happening)

- New Journalism (writing style)
- New York City
- New York Times Book Review, The
- newlywed
- nine-to-five
- nonfictional (adjective; as opposed to nonfiction [adjective])
- nonetheless (in contrast to something that happened or was said)
- NPR

## O

- obsessive-compulsive disorder
- “On Self-Respect”

## P

- *Paris Review, The*
- partially (to some extent)
- partly (physical parts of something)
- passenger seat (adjective)
- PEN Center USA
- *Play It As It Lays*
- plotline (noun)
- point of view
- *Political Fictions*
- pop culture (adjective)
- psychiatric
- psychiatric report
- Purex

## Q

- Quintana Roo



## R

- real life (noun)
- real-life (adjective)
- real time (noun)
- real-time (adjective)
- Rorschach
- *Run River*

## S

- Sacramento
- *Sacramento Bee, The*
- sake (noun, Japanese alcoholic beverage)
- *Salvador*
- *Saturday Evening Post, The*
- self-respect
- skin-deep (adjective)
- slice-of-life
- *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*
- *South and West*
- stand-in (noun)
- *Star Wars*
- surface-level (adjective)
- Susan Stamberg
- Sylvia Plath

## T

- third person (noun)
- third-person (adjective)
- time period
- toe the line
- Tom Brokaw
- toward
- trailblazer
- true to form

## U

- upwards of (adverb)
- University of California, Berkeley
  - Berkeley

## V

- *Vegas: A Memoir of a Dark Season*
- *Vogue*

## W

- *We Tell Ourselves Stories in Order to Live*
- *Where I Was From*
- *White Album, The* (Joan Didion book)
- *White Album, the* (The Beatles album)
- white-picketed (adjective)
- “Why I Write”
- window-shopping (noun)
- with regard to
- Woodstock
- word for word (adverb)
- word-for-word (adjective)
- Writing & Literature major
- writing (noun; as opposed to writings [noun])

## Y

- *Year of Magical Thinking, The*

## Z

- Zoloff