

Language of Noting and Drafting

The style/clarity/ precision/format in notes and drafts is as important as their contents. The following will be observed in drafting and also in writing notes:

(1) “Information” is singular. If information is called for on many points, it does not become “Informations.”

(2) The words “Proximo”, “Idem” and “Ultimo” should be avoided. They are not necessarily even abbreviations and they possess no recommendations. On the contrary, they lead to confusion and one has to take the trouble of looking at the date of the letter to find out what they mean. The names of the months must be used instead.

(3) “The same” must not be used instead of “it” or some other simple word.

(4) Such needlessly formal words as “therein” and “thereon” should not be used instead of “in it” or “on it”.

(5) The preference for passive verbs over active verbs generally make the style vague and clumsy, for example

“It is understood” for “I do not understand”

“The date of issue of the order should be reported by him” for “he should report when he issues the order”.

(6) A simple or short word is to be preferred in place of a long phrase.

Examples:

“make the assessment” to “assess”,

“purchase”, to “buy”,

“commence” to “begin”

“omitted to” or “failed to” to the simple “did not”

“make enquires” for “enquire”

“building purposes” for “buildings”

“has been omitted to be entered in the register” instead of “has been omitted from the register”

Another widespread error is the use of “for being” instead of “to be” and “for doing” instead of “to do” and “returned for being stamped” instead of “to be stamped”.

(7) Foreign or classical words and expressions should be avoided as far as possible; vernacular words should only be used when their meaning cannot be expressed equally well in English.

(8) Short sentences should be preferred to long ones

“Secretary’s attention is invited to O.MHe is requested”

is better than

“The Secretary’s attention is invited to O.M and he is requested”.

“In case in which” is a clumsy phrase for which “when”, “where” or “if ” can usually be substituted.

The word “necessary” is usually superfluous in such phrases as “the necessary entries”, “the necessary corrections”, “the necessary instructions”, etc.

(9) The phrase “do the needful” should never be used. Either state definitely what is to be done or say “do what is necessary”.

The word “avail” is very awkward one, as it is reflexive and also takes “of ” after it. It is better avoided. Moreover, if you do use it, you must not say “the leave was availed of ” or “I availed of the leave”, still less “he is permitted to avail the holidays”. You must say “I availed myself of the leave” and so on. But why not simply say “took the leave”?

“Available” also is a bad word. A register “not readily available” may mean anything, for example, that it was needed for reference by one of the members, or had been sent some-where out of the office, or was locked up and the key was elsewhere. It is very annoying to have one’s work increased by having to send a note back to ask what it means.

(10) Split infinitives should be avoided. Write “Kindly to state” and not “to kindly state”.

A very common and equally objectionable feature of official communications is a similar splitting of other verbal phrases.

For instance, “The Deputy Commissioner will, in the circumstances now stated, be requested” is not good English. It is quite as easy to say “In the circumstances now stated, the Deputy Commissioner will be requested to”

(11) Do not write “marginally noted” which could only mean “having marginal notes”.

Write “noted on margin”.

Similarly “Plan marked” could only mean “marked with plans”

(12) Instead of such a phrase as “the figures for 1949, 1950 and 1951 were 256, 257 and 348 respectively” which is confusing, write “the figure for 1949 was 256, that for 1950 was 257 and that for 1951 was 348”.

This is a little, if at all, longer and is perfectly clear.

“Former” and “latter” should also be avoided as they are constant sources of confusion.

(13) Some people begin every letter with the phrase “with reference to”,

It is better to vary the phrase so as to make it definite.

Say “In reply to”, “As directed in” and so on; or begin in narrative form

“In their order Government directed

“ Avoid the phrase “with advertence to”.

(14) In ordinary English “in case” does not mean the same as “if ”

“I shall take my umbrella in case it rains” means “so as to be prepared for rain”.

Nor does “as well as” mean the same as “and”.

It would be absurd to say “a man was 5 feet 8 inches high as well as 21 years of age”

But you might well say that “he was a good painter as well as a remarkable musician”.

(15) “As such” is often misused. It is correct to say “Mr. A was then the Superintendent and as such was bound to report-”but “Mr. A was not then the Superintendent and as such he is not to be blamed” is meaningless.

“While such being the case” is a familiar embellishment of criminal complaints, etc. “While” is here redundant.

(16) Tenses and moods are misused in almost every note or draft. The misuse of “had” is one of the commonest errors.

The past perfect “had” is rightly used to emphasize the priority of one event in the past to another.

It is correct to say “I had gone to bed when the house caught fire” but senseless to say “I had gone to bed at 10 O’clock last night” (“I went” is correct)- unless the meaning is that you had gone to bed before 10 O’clock.

The present tense is wrongly used for the incomplete perfect, as in “I am record-keeper from 2016. “I have been record-keeper since 2016” is correct.

“Government press for a reply” should be “Government are pressing for a reply”.

“The following men now act” is wrong. It should be “are now acting”.

“Act” means “usually act” or, habitually act”; “are acting” emphasizes the fact that they are doing so now.

(17) “Must have” is sometimes misused for “should have” or “ought to have”. “Must have done it” means that he certainly has done it.

It is not to be used to mean that he has not done it but should have.

“Till” is commonly misused in a way that it is positively misleading. “No reply was received till January last” implies that a reply was received on January 1st but it is erroneously used to mean that even on January 1st no reply had been received.

To convey this latter meaning “up to” with the past perfect is the correct English-“Up to January 1st, I had received no reply”.

(18) Distinguish “all the stamps have not been punched” which is ambiguous from “Not all the stamps have been punched” or “the stamps have not all been punched”, which mean that some have been punched and some not.

These phrases are commonly confused. “He has yet to collect Rs.1 ,000”, is not ordinarily modern English. “Still has” is correct. “Yet” may be used with a negative, e.g., “has not yet applied” and is only used with a positive a verb in special phrases such as “I have yet to learn”.

(19) “So” is not equivalent to “very”. It is sometimes written “the peon is so impertinent” “I warned him so many times” meaning “very impertinent”, “very often”.

“Not so bad” means “rather goods”, but this is a colloquial phrase.

Similarly, “too” has generally a relative sense, that is, it implies exacts relatively to a certain standard or object not absolute intensity so to speak (except in a few colloquial phrases such as “it is too bad”); but it is commonly written “it is too hot” meaning “it is very hot”.

(20) The verb “to hope” implies pleasurable anticipation. It is used sometimes instead of a natural word such as “think”, and thereby producing comically inappropriate phrases such as “I hope your honour is ill”.

Omission of articles (a, an, the) is a common fault. It is permissible in a telegram for reasons of economy-not elsewhere.

But articles must be used correctly. The statement “appellant is the inhabitant of Jaipur,” implies that there is only one inhabitant. “An inhabitant of Jaipur” is correct “This is serious omission” should be “This is a serious omission”.

(21) “As to” is common redundant form e.g. “The Deputy Commissioner is directed to report as to whether”, “whether” alone is sufficient.

So also “as against” or “as compared with” are commonly used in comparing figures, where “against” or “compared with” are sufficient and correct.

It is correct to say “as compared with last harvest, the yield was poor”, but not the “yield was 4lakhs as compared with 8 lakhs last year”. “As” means nothing in the latter phrase.

(22) Pseudo-accuracy account for much unnecessary verbiage. “If any” is a common example of this fault. It is quite unnecessary to say “The Deputy Commissioner is requested to report the number of cases if any”. If there are none, the Deputy Commissioner will say so.

(23) On the other hand, the use of such phrases as “at all”, “in spite of” sometime sounds needlessly discourteous as well as unidiomatic. “In spite of three reminders the Deputy Commissioner has not at all cared to reply” is rude as well as un-English.

Avoid pretentious words such as “penultimate”. “Last but one” is quite good enough.

(24) “I am directed to request that you will be so good as to furnish me with information as to whether” is the sort of stuff that we come across frequently.

“I am directed to enquire whether” means exactly the same and is not unduly curt.

Never use several words where one will do.

Do not write “make an application” but “apply” or “a liable of the value of one hundred only” instead of “a rupee stamp paper”.

Addition of the word “only” after any sum of money is in place in a bill or cheque not elsewhere.

(25) A needless anxiety to avoid repetition gives rise to various faults. Sometimes, instead of repeating a man’s name, an assistant will say “the individual” which is not good English.

The use of “former and latter”, “respectively” and “the same” have been mentioned already and also come under this head.

(26) The words “Comprise”, “compose” and “consists” are confused with each other.

It is written “the land comprises of 3 plots” or “is comprised of”.

The correct forms are “the land comprises/ consists/ is composed of three plots”.

It is also written “the old building was substituted by a new one”.

You can say “a new building was substituted for the old one” “or” “the old building was replaced by a new one”.

“Dispose it off” is a common error for “dispose of it”,

also “tear off” for “tear up”

and “stick up” for “stick in”

(You can stick a thing “up” on a wall of course but not “up” in a book).

“Stick up too” is used for “Stick to” itself a slang phrase.

“He stuck up to the agreement” is wrong.

It is also written “slips have been pasted” and the “papers have been stitched” whereas “pasted in” and “stitched (or preferable ‘Sewn’) together” are correct.

(27) “Agree” and “tally” cannot be used actively. Figures may agree or tally. You cannot “agree” figures or “tally” them.

Generally use unpretentious words rather than pompous ones.

“I went to camp” not “I proceeded”, “live” or “dwell”, not “reside”.

“Instead of” is much more usual in ordinary English than “in lieu of”, which is a phrase used mainly in legal documents.

(28) You cannot say “He told/expressed that he was unwilling”.

It must be “he told me that he was unwilling”, “he expressed his unwillingness”, “he expressed himself strongly”.

“Enough of money” is not good English. Say “enough money”.

“of follows”, “enough” when for any reason it is necessary to use “enough” as a substantive, e.g. “I have had enough of this” “I don’t know enough of the language, to “but I know enough English to....”

“None” for “no one” is obsolete or poetical. Do not write “None made any offer” but “no one made any offer”.

Do not say “it is not used by any” but “but it is not used by anyone”.

Do not say “this is known to all” but “everyone knows this”.

“There is no use of sending” is wrong. It should be “it is no use sending”, “it is no use to send” or “there is no use in sending”.

(29) “Inquired/enquired into the witness” is another frequent mistake. You “examine” a witness and “enquire into” a case.

But one does not “investigate into a case”, one “investigates it”.

(30) “Government sanctioned a peon to the Deputy Secretary” should be “for the Deputy Secretary”. “Petitioner wants that the land should be transferred” is wrong. It should be “wants the land transferred/to be transferred.”