MEMORANDUM

REFERENCE: 10 November 1965

TO: All concerned with FORUM

FROM: H.L. Jacobson

DE:

SUBJECT: Copy editing for the FORUM

OBJET:

The title of this memorandum is a limiting one in the sense that the punctuation for the FORUM is often not, repeat not, the same as for GATT correspondence in general.

For example, the GATT "bible" calls for two spaces after a colon and semicolon, whereas printing practices call for one space. The reason for this is that two spaces would be too gaping on a printed page, especially where there are many of them. (Incidentally, in material prepared here or edited from other people's copy, I should welcome a much greater use of the semi-colon to divide consequential series where each unit is, however, a somewhat different category.) By the same token the use of "per cent" in words is very space-consuming, especially in long lists of tariff percentages. The FORUM uses "%" tight up against the number, not separated by a space, lest another number be slipped into the gap.

The United Nations usage of not putting a comma before the last "and" in a series, a lazy modern innovation since my schooldays, still debatable on both sides of the Atlantic, seems to inhibit many writers from using commas in other places even when they are necessary for the sense or helpful for the rhythm of the sentence. For example, where the governing subject does not refer to both predicates, e.g., "The wheat was found to be very acceptable to millers and exporters sold tons of it". A first reading without a comma before "and" gives the meaning "acceptable to millers and exporters".

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It seems to be local practice to distinguish between a hyphen and a dash only by putting spaces on either side of the latter. U.S. editorial practice—which we do not follow—is for three such bars; Swiss printers tell me that to distinguish them, they need two—but in any case touching the words on either side of the dash.

A few minor errors I constantly have to correct, though these should be within the ken of any literate person. "Like" cannot be used co-equally with "such as". A country does not produce articles like shoes, it produces articles such as shoes. "Like" implies a comparison that does not exist in these cases. The first person singular and plural still call for "shall" in the future and "should" in the conditional, especially in print; the use of "I will" and "we would" is barely pardonable in speech. Numbers up to ten are left in word form; thereafter put in cipher form, except at the beginning of a sentence, where the word is always written out.

Note for typists especially: unsolicited underlining on a typed MS. always comes out as italics in print, so don't underline an MS. for emphasis unless you want it italicized in print. Sub-headings should be in initial capitals except for articles and prepositions, and not underlined unless italics are specifically desired.

I am aware that many people think I am overfussy in changing all the erroneous "whicls" to "thats". But this is not just a matter of personal taste even though some superior English (to say nothing of American) writers and editors seem never to have heard of the inexorable rule that "that" is used where the following clause limits the previous subject, whereas "which" is used for a parenthetical phrase that does not limit it. For example, "the measure that changed the course of the country's history" as contrasted with "the measure, which was introduced at the last moment, that changed the course of the country's history". The test of an appropriate "which" is that you can almost always put it in commas, and that its elimination would not change the basic thought of the sentence. The test of a "that" is that, without the "that" clause the subject would have a much wider application. A correct use of "which" can be found in the following: "The Service, which now operates in 43 posts in 31 countries, is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Trade and Industry".

Now for a couple of stylistic matters. "Practical utility" is tautological. The test is that its conceivable opposite "impractical utility" is nonsense. Besides, when you hear a project being described as "practical", "concrete", etc., you sometimes suspect these are cover words to conceal that its utility is really a bit dubious.
Another stylistic manner that is overweight is the constant use of "developing" and "less-developed" several times within the same paragraph. It is almost always possible to use them less by substituting relative and personal pronouns. Watch out for mixed metaphors, a rôle is not filled: it is played. Both these are clichés, however, and all clichés should be avoided.

And, finally, no double adverbs both ending in "ly", as in ".... probably done generally....".

N.B. Since I wrote the above I have been challenged to find authority for the "that-which" and "should-would" distinctions in Fowler's Modern English Usage. To the former, Fowler dedicates five double-columned pages, starting on page 625 of Sir Ernest Gower's revised 1965 version.

The use of "would" for "should", is branded by Fowler discussed on page 549-51 as an Americanism.