

The SBL Handbook of Style

SECOND EDITION

SBL Press

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SECOND EDITION

For Biblical Studies
and Related Disciplines

SBL Press
Atlanta, Georgia

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Fifteen years after the appearance of the first edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*, the second edition continues its original goal: “To collect information as much as to dispense it; and more than dictating rules of conformity, it seeks to identify those stylistic points where the disciplines already intersect.” The primary purpose of the handbook was modest, intending not to prescribe a universal standard but to help save time for scholars writing in the many related and intersecting fields of biblical studies. In so doing, it benefited publishers, as they began to expect such stylistic consistency from members of these fields and thereby relied on the handbook as a starting point for their own house rules. The handbook arrived at an especially opportune time, when consistency aided research in digital reference works, aggregated databases, and search engines. The appearance of the handbook in the digital revolution certainly contributed to its wide adoption, but largely it experienced this reception because of its original and modest goal.

The careful reader of *The SBL Handbook of Style* will have noticed “stealth” corrections over the course of the first edition’s seven printings. Through a decade and half, as the handbook became the standard style for biblical studies and as many publishers and scholarly projects adopted it as their style guide or conformed their publications to it, the resource improved in accuracy as errors and inconsistencies were identified. Owners of the original printing, which likely has a cracked binding and loose pages, will find these corrections throughout the second edition.

In addition to corrections, the revisions to the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style* are fivefold. First, this edition includes carefully selected stylistic changes based on the review and recommendation of the editorial board members and consultants. The consultants and editorial board members consisted of scholars and academic publishers, and they, too, consulted with others in their areas of contribution and specialization. The introduction to the second edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style* alerts the reader to the most significant rule changes. Second, the new edition supplements and updates several areas. Third, the handbook has filled in gaps of coverage or added new sections. Fourth, the handbook has reordered chapters and moved the appendixes into the body of the handbook. Fifth, the second edition continues the practice of supplementing *The Chicago Manual of Style*. On the one hand, this edition reduces some differences between the two guides. On the other hand, while the first edition tended toward minimal duplication, relying on users referring to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, feedback from users noted that it would be more efficient to have style guidance in one place. Consequently, the second edition contains more complete information and requires less consultation of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

It is worth restating that the field of biblical studies is remarkably diverse. It is not one field but many, including ancient Near Eastern studies, Jewish studies and rabbinics, Christian studies and late antiquity, and reception history. Members of the Society of Biblical Literature teach in departments of religion, biblical and theological studies, Near Eastern studies, Jewish and Judaic studies, history, anthropology, and literature. For this wide-ranging discipline, the Society of Biblical Literature will continue to evolve, and changes will be reflected in future editions of *The SBL Handbook of Style*.

The SBL Handbook of Style has always been a community resource, crowd-sourced by members of the guild and its many subdisciplines. Its contents reflect this diversity, and the publication is a result of a collaboration of individuals and organizations. Consequently, it would be impossible to thank all those who have contributed to it. The new edition no longer reflects a finite number of named editors. The second edition is a combination of many contributions from readers who submitted corrections and observations, as well as the editorial board and consultants. However, we want to acknowledge the commitment of the original publisher, Hendrickson Publishers, and to thank them for their service to SBL in conceiving the original and offering to SBL this resource. Further, the publisher would like to mention four individuals who were most involved in development of this revision. James Ernest, who was among the original editors, remained insightfully active. Allan Emery maintained the project notes at Hendrickson and delivered to SBL the files in as neat a package as humanly possible. Bob Buller and Billie Jean Collins, among SBL Press's publication staff, bore the weight of managing the revision and adjudicating opinions. Their editorial skill and good judgment are evident throughout.

—John F. Kutsko, SBL Executive Director

SBL Press

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Nearly two years in the making, not counting the fifteen years of countless prototypes, *The SBL Handbook of Style* reflects a collaborative effort between Hendrickson Publishers and the Society of Biblical Literature. This collaboration came upon the heels of a conversation about Hendrickson's style manual with Rex Matthews, then editorial director at Scholars Press, who suggested that Hendrickson Publishers contact SBL associate director Gregory Glover. To Greg belongs much of the credit for working out the details and for putting Hendrickson in touch with David L. Petersen of Iliff School of Theology, in Denver. David reviewed the heart of the work, making suggestions about SBL's style preferences and offering sage editorial input. His patience, expertise, and care for certitude were most appreciated. Typesetting the project posed unique challenges; issues of extraordinary character sets, demanding designs, and constant tweaking by the obsessed editors were handled with great proficiency by Phil Frank, senior production editor, and Darren Hurlburt (who designed the book) and Doug LaBudde, production editors, of Communication Ink, Peabody, Massachusetts. The three set records in skill, endurance, and good humor. Thanks are due as well to Joe Carey for his sharp eye and helpful input. Appreciation is also due Emanuel Tov, the J. L. Magnes Professor of Bible at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Professor Tov graciously provided the comprehensive list of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Appendix F. The generosity of Professor Tov gave the volume an added dimension of usability.

Mark Twain once remarked that he didn't give a damn for someone who could spell a word only one way; he would have hated this book. Precision—spelling that word only one way—is to editors what the Holy Grail was to Arthur's knights. This volume reflects nearly forty years of the editors' collective quests for precision, at least when it comes to everyday decisions associated with publishing in the academic fields of ancient Near Eastern, biblical, and early Christian studies. As most scholars have discovered, trying to maintain consistency in matters of style can be frustrating at best. Often it appears that there are as many ways to do something as there are scholars. Furthermore, the kinds of fine points scholars need resolved are not always addressed in the available resources, and when they are, styles may vary among books, journals, societies, and projects. *The SBL Handbook of Style* attempts to collect information as much as to dispense it; and more than dictating rules of conformity, it seeks to identify those stylistic points where the disciplines already intersect. Thus, *The SBL Handbook of Style* endeavors both to become a resource for making stylistic decisions and to be a basis for future judgments about editing and writing in these fields. Although the volume aspires to be comprehensive within its parameters, the editors realize that total comprehensiveness and consistency remain elusive. It is hoped that this volume will save writers, editors, proofreaders, and students time and energy. Should their effort be taken seriously and scholarly writing enhanced, the time required to make this happen will have been well spent.

—The Editors
Patrick H. Alexander
John F. Kutsko
James D. Ernest
Shirley Decker-Lucke
David L. Petersen

1 INTRODUCTION

The SBL Handbook of Style has been created to help scholars, students, editors, and proofreaders of ancient Near Eastern studies, biblical studies, early Christianity, and rabbinic studies.

Three principles have informed the selection of material and guided the contents of the handbook. First, *The SBL Handbook of Style* should as much as possible reflect usage and not make new law. Therefore it has not imposed an artificial consistency on the different areas of specialization in a multifaceted field such as biblical studies. If an area of specialization had a relatively standard and stable convention, it was adopted. Consequently, for example, the handbook includes several conventions for citing different categories of texts. Reflecting conventions within subdisciplines has its advantages and, of course, its disadvantages, particularly when many are used side by side in a single reference work. A second principle is that the handbook should supplement *The Chicago Manual of Style* (CMS), except in cases when the field very consciously and authoritatively adopts a different standard. Third, scholars and publishers will and should make decisions that trump standard styles. The spelling conventions, for example, have been intended only as a starting point for an author-editor style sheet, although this list includes the type of terminology that should remain consistent throughout any individual work, keeping in mind that consistency enhances discoverability in the digital age.

The second edition has been thoroughly updated to reflect the latest practices among scholars, editors, and publishers as well as to take into account current trends in scholarly publishing. This edition has been meticulously supplemented with important new subject matter that fills gaps in the first edition. Chapters and sections have been reorganized and restructured to be more intuitive and logical. The following list is a selection of the most significant rule changes in this edition, in order of appearance.

RULE CHANGES IN THE SECOND EDITION

Following *The Chicago Manual of Style*, all names form the possessive with an apostrophe *s*. Jesus's and Moses's are not an exception to this rule (4.1.6). In the academic transliteration style for Hebrew, SBL now specifies upside-down *e* (*ə*) for a vocal *shewa*, to distinguish it from *khatef segol* (*ě*) (5.1.1). For the stems/*binyanim*, SBL now uses a consistent general-purpose style of transliteration: *qal*, *niphal*, *piel*, *pual*, *hiphil*, *hophal*, *hithpael*. The previous version was a mix of academic for consonants and general-purpose for vowels (5.1.1.3). Titles of unattributed ancient works are no longer italicized even when they represent a direct transliteration of the ancient language. This rule applies to nonbiblical ancient Near Eastern texts, Old Testament pseudepigraphical texts, Dead Sea Scrolls, apostolic fathers, New Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and Nag Hammadi codices (4.3.3.1, 8.3). In bibliographies and notes, the basic facts of publication (city, publisher, and date) are set within parentheses, while all secondary publication information is now placed outside of the parentheses (6.2–6.4). Series and journal titles are now abbreviated in both bibliography and notes (6). SBL now recommends using two-letter postal abbreviations rather than traditional state abbreviations (8.1.1). SBL now uses all caps without periods for BCE and CE rather than B.C.E. and C.E. (8.1.2). Small caps are no longer recommended for abbreviations of versions or texts of the Bible: NRSV, MT, etc. (8.2).