

APPENDIX 7
STYLE IN NOTES AND DRAFTS*

[*vide* Para. 27 (12)]

The style 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 other 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, as "It is understood" for "I do not understand" or "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 of needless verbosity are preference of "make the assessment" to "assess", "purchase" to "buy", "commence" to "begin" and "omitted to" or "failed to" to the simple "did not" (the two latter ones are very common); "make enquires" for "enquire"; "building purposes" for "buildings". Where "omit" by itself is proper and sufficient, the love of such redundant phrases is displayed as "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". If the Secretary orders that an assistant should be punished "for being corrupt" it does not mean "in order to make him corrupt".

(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.M. He is requested" is better than "The Secretary's attention is invited to OM and he is

* Borrowed from an appendix of Government of Assam Manual of Office Procedure — Secretariat, 1968, which had been adapted from an appendix of the (then) Government of Madras Secretariat Office Manual, 1960.

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 a 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 somewhere 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 instances, "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 in margin". Similarly "Plan marked" could only mean "marked with plans" (Compare "pock-marked"), and "plaint mentioned" neither does nor possibly could mean anything.

(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) Do not ride any phrase to death. Some persons begin every letter with the phrase "with reference to". It is better to vary the phrase so as to make it more 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 is much more emphatic. 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) The fondness for writing "as well as" for "and" and "in case" for "if" presumably arises from the fondness of the users for a longer

expression. "In case if" is a stage further on the downward path. "I am unable to" for "I cannot" and "hand over" for "give" are other common examples of the preference for the longer phrase. "By the time" is sometimes wrongly used for "then". "By that time" means "then". "By the time that" means "when". Always be as definite as possible.

(16) "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.

(17) Tenses and moods are misused in almost every note or draft. The misuse of "had" is one of the commonest errors. The pluperfect "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 1906". "I have been record-keeper since 1906" 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.

(18) "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 1st" 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 pluperfect is the correct English — "Up to January 1st, I had received no reply".

(19) 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 verb in special phrases such as "I have yet to learn".

(20) "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 good", but this is a colloquial phrase. Similarly, "too" has generally a relative sense, that is, it implies excess 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".

(21) The verb "to hope" implies pleasurable anticipation. It is used sometimes instead of a neutral 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".

(22) "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 4 rupees as compared with 8 rupees last year". "As" means nothing in the latter phrase.

(23) Pseudo-accuracy accounts 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. In the same way it is unnecessary to say "The Deputy Commissioner is requested to report whether it is advisable or not to". The use of the word "ask" instead of "order" or "direct" produces a curiously important effect when a lower subordinate is referred to. "The S.D.O. may be asked to report" sounds silly.

(24) On the other hand, the use of such phrases as "at all", "care to", "in spite of" sometimes 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. "It" will be enough if the Deputy Commissioner is not English. The more appropriate phrase is "the Deputy Commissioner need only". Avoid pretentious words such as penultimate". "Last but one" is quite good enough.

(25) "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 label of the value of fifty paise only" instead of "a fifty paise stamp". Addition of the word "only" after any sum of money is in place in a bill or cheque not elsewhere.

(26) "In this connection" at the beginning of a sentence is a favourite bit of hackneyed padding. It means nothing at all. "In returning herewith" a favourite but inappropriate type of opening phrase. It is often aggravated by making the subject of the main sentence different from the implied subject of "returning" or by changing to the passive construction. You can say "In returning I am directed to point out". You must not say "In returning herewith the statement received with his letter the Deputy

Commissioner is informed". But this is quite common. On the other hand, such phrases as "Turning to paragraph it may be observed" and so on ("Regarding", "Concerning", "Considering", etc.), are unobjectionable though "Turning to paragraph 1" is no doubt more strictly correct.

(27) 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.

(28) 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 of/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 to" 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.

(29) "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. "Stamp" is the ordinary English not "label"; and "Envelope" or "letter" not "cover".

(30) 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 "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".

(31) Do not qualify expressions, needlessly. To do so produces flabby style. Words like "it seems" and "it appears" are used when there is really no doubt. "He was absent in his house" meaning that he was elsewhere than in his house, is a contradiction in terms. "Absent from" is correct, but the ordinary English would be "he was not at home", or simply "he was

away" or "was out". "Also" is misused with negatives. "He did not address the letter and did not also stamp it" should be "nor did he stamp it".

(32) "He puts himself up at" or "he is put up at", are wrong. The correct English (and it is colloquial) is "He is putting up at". "Wooden piece" for "piece of wood" is a common error.

(33) "I enquired/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". "Male member" should not be used to mean "male" or "man". You can say "the male members of my family". Do not say "my family members" but "members of my family". "Through" meaning "past" and "cross" meaning "went past" are frequently used, e.g., "I went through the temple", or "I crossed the temple". You "cross" a river or a road when you go from one side of it to the other.

(34) Do not use such phrases as "has breathed his last", or "is no more", for "is dead". "It is high time to do so and so" is an idiomatic English phrase. "As it was high time, the Court adjourned the case till next day" is not English.

(35) "In view to do" so and so is wrong. You can say "with a view to reducing" meaning "in order to reduce", and you can also say "in view of these circumstances" meaning "having regard to them". "In view to" is impossible.

(36) "You should insist on the Under Secretary to reply" is wrong. It should be "should insist on his replying". "Address" is used sometimes as though it mean "ask". "Government will be addressed to reconsider their order" is, strictly speaking, meaningless.

(37) "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".