



Key Dates in Chicago History

1891: University of Chicago Press Opens.

1906: First book-length guide appears.

1968: Major overhaul to produce 12th edition.

Contributor Information

Jamie Carter
Publisher Alley
jcarter@ybp.com



The *Chicago Manual* Is Online?

Preface

A few years ago, I put a book on my Christmas wish list: *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*. I wasn't the only one—B&T sold 1,995 units of this title that December¹. I became acquainted with the OED in college but had never thought about its creation. I was fascinated with the story behind the esteemed reference.

The OED is massive, though: in my naïveté I tried to buy a set once, and I think it was priced at about one month's salary for me at the time. Once I started in publishing, I found a new, more affordable reference mainstay in the *Chicago Manual of Style*. While the *OED* covered proper usage and derivation of words in the English language, the *Chicago* set the rules for arranging those words in sentences, paragraphs, and on pages. It didn't belabor any tedious grammatical points—rather, it objectively presented a definitive collection of rules and displayed examples that support the vast majority of manuscript preparation in the United States. I bought my first copy, used, in 1995 (the thirteenth edition) for about \$10. It was the first edition to actually include “Chicago” in the official title, and also the first to allude to the role of the personal computer for authors.

I carted the *Chicago* to various jobs for its practical value and also as an ID card: “I’m an editor,” it said. I would have worn a t-shirt if they made them.

In 1998, I upgraded to the fourteenth edition. I didn't consider the book's evolution until I heard about the online edition last spring. I approached CMOS Online about sponsoring the Industry Voices page in Alley Talk, and I thought about the irony of a *printed* reference for the formatting of *printed* work being used online. What would become of the big red book as a badge of honor? No more?

Of course, the *Chicago* has been through many incarnations over the years, and the story of its evolution in print, which began in 1891, is reproduced beginning on page 2. The online version came on the scene in September 2006, and I spoke to Ellen Gibson, marketing manager, to bring the history full circle. Our conversation is below.

Interview

Jamie (AT): Do you get fan mail for the *Chicago Manual*?

Ellen (CMOS): We do! It has a very dedicated following. We get comments wherever the big red book is displayed [or the big *orange* book, depending on your point of view].

AT: Why was it decided to produce an online version?

CMOS: Users called for an online edition—both institutional users and individual copyeditors. The monthly Q&A service [available since 1993] was a vehicle



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1982: The word “Chicago is incorporated in the book’s title.

1993: The 14th edition addresses computers in book publishing.

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for these requests. [In the Q&A service, CMOS editors select 6-10 user questions each month to answer via email.] Those on the Q&A mailing list often asked when the manual would be available online. Today, the questions and answers from the Q&A service are archived in the online edition.

Interestingly, the launch of the subscription site has *not* decreased sales of the print version. Most users of the website say that they need both, each for different purposes.

AT: Is there any other material, beyond the Q&A archive, available online and *not* in the current print edition?

CMOS: The style content is authoritative, so we keep the online edition consistent with the current print edition in terms of style points. The main advantage of the online version is its searchability. In addition to the Q&A archive, a quick guide for citations and some basic tools are online, but these are available without a subscription.

AT: Was the framework developed onsite, or with an outside vendor?

CMOS: It was produced entirely in-house, involving editors of the print edition and IT staff. We have a great IT staff, and we had the subscription model set up already for journal customers.

AT: Can you comment on the user base/audience?

CMOS: We think that the audience for the *Chicago* is actually increasing because of the proliferation of different publishing outlets in the digital age. More and more people consider themselves writers, or find themselves in the position of editing. They look for guidelines in the industry, and to date 250,000 copies of the fifteenth edition have been sold.

AT: Does the *Chicago* have any competition in the area of style guides?

CMOS: In the book world, the manual is pretty much unique. There are other style guides, such as the AP and the MLA. To date, only the AP guide is available online.

AT: The manual includes some “non-style” industry information, such as an outline of the offset printing process. Are there any plans to remove this, or consolidate it in a new volume? Or is the size of the book manageable as it is?

CMOS: The size is manageable. As time goes by, certain items are minimized because they are no longer as relevant. But, they are replaced by new information related to developing electronic processes.

The story is not quite *The Professor and the Madman*, though Ellen assures me that the process of bringing the manual online was plenty maddening. The most unruly years probably came earlier: the manual evolved from a style sheet to a booklet, and then to a 200-page book, in the space of fifteen years at the beginning of the twentieth century. The biggest contemporary overhaul came in 1968–69 with the creation of the twelfth edition (the date prompted me to look up the year of Vatican II, demonstrating a level of reverence that surprised even me!). To follow is a detailed, official history of the printed reference. For subscription information or other questions, visit www.chicagomanualofstyle.



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Also 1993: User Q&A service begins via email.

2003: 15th edition published.

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org; at the same site is a sign-up form for the monthly Q&A service, which is available to subscribers and nonsubscribers alike.

History

“The History of The Chicago Manual of Style,” reproduced with permission from The Chicago Manual of Style Online.

The history of *The Chicago Manual of Style* spans more than one hundred years, beginning in 1891 when the University of Chicago Press first opened its doors. At that time, the Press had its own composing room with experienced typesetters who were required to set complex scientific material as well as work in such exotic fonts as Hebrew and Ethiopic. In that distant time, professors brought their handwritten manuscripts directly to the compositors, who did their best to decipher them. The compositors then passed the proofs to the “brainery”—the proofreaders who corrected typographical errors and edited for stylistic inconsistencies. To bring some order to the process, the staff of the composing room drew up a style sheet, which was then passed on to the rest of the university community. Even at such an early stage, “the University Press style book and style sheet” was considered important enough to be preserved in the cornerstone of the (then) newly constructed Press building in 1903, along with other items from the Press’s early years.

That sheet grew into a pamphlet, and by 1906 the pamphlet had become a book: *Manual of Style: Being a compilation of the typographical rules in force at the University of Chicago Press, to which are appended specimens of type in use*—otherwise known as the first edition of the *Manual*. (See a facsimile of the first edition in PDF format.) At 200 pages, the *Manual* cost 50 cents, plus 6 cents for postage and handling. Now in its fifteenth edition, *The Chicago Manual of Style* has evolved into a 984-page (and \$55.00) reference book, known as the authoritative voice for authors, editors, proofreaders, indexers, copywriters, designers, and publishers.

This hundred-year evolution has taken place under the ongoing stewardship of Chicago’s renowned editorial staff. Suggestions and requests from users have always played a role in revisions of the *Manual*. In adapting to the needs of its users as well as to developments and technological advances in writing, editing, and publishing, the *Manual* has undergone more than a dozen substantial revisions.

One of the most significant was begun in 1968, led by the editorial team of Catharine Seybold and Bruce Young, who rearranged, expanded, and updated the eleventh edition to produce the twelfth edition. The 20,000-copy first printing sold out before the publication date even arrived. By 1969, the *Manual* was an industry leader. Sales of the twelfth edition totaled more than 150,000 copies—the same number as total sales for the first eleven editions.

The publication of the thirteenth edition in 1982 was another notable moment in the history of the *Manual*. It was at this point that *A Manual of Style* became *The Chicago Manual of Style*, a change that reflected the title most often used by the book’s audience. The thirteenth edition incorporated the new United States copyright regulations that became law in 1978, and the production and



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online debuts.

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printing sections of the *Manual* were revised to include the phototypesetting technology that replaced lead type as well as the Linotype and Monotype metal-casting machines of the 1970s. Nearly 200 pages longer than its predecessor, the thirteenth edition addressed, for the first time, the effects of personal computers and word processors, which authors were just beginning to use in preparing their manuscripts.

Although the thirteenth edition briefly touched on this new and radical technology, the personal computer was still a novelty in 1982, and few understood the far-reaching effects it would have on the lives of writers, much less on the publishing industry. But by 1993, eleven years later, computer word processing was becoming the norm, and the *Manual* began to address more systematically the role of computers in writing and editing. The fourteenth edition weighed in at 936 pages and sold for \$40.00. It reflected significant changes in style, usage, procedure, and technology, and contained new and more extensive editing examples based on requests from editors, authors, indexers, and teachers of publishing courses. The fourteenth edition also offered an expanded glossary that included words unfamiliar to publishers just a decade earlier, as well as an updated chapter on copyrights and permissions. New technologies for composition, design, printing, and binding were described, including the preparation of jackets and covers and the process of obtaining and displaying ISBNs and bar codes for the expanded group of self-publishers created by the computer age. Nearly half a million copies of the fourteenth edition have been sold since its debut, helping to bring the grand total of all *Manual of Style* sales to well over one million.

Those who work with words know how dramatically publishing has changed in the past decade, with technology now informing and influencing every stage of writing, editing, and publishing processes. The latest revision of the *Manual* has had to address the needs of a professional audience whose work methods have been transformed since publication of the fourteenth edition. To meet this challenge, Chicago's editorial staff launched a systematic update that would rival, in its breadth and depth, the extensive revision undertaken for the twelfth edition. Work on the new edition proceeded under the direction of Linda J. Halvorson, editorial director for reference publishing, and was captained by the editorial team of Margaret Mahan, Margaret Perkins, and Anita Samen. For the first time in the history of the *Manual*, Chicago's editorial staff drew not only on its own experience, but also on the advice of the *Manual's* first-ever advisory board—a distinguished group of scholars, authors, and professionals from a wide range of publishing and business environments. The Chicago editorial staff also made an official call to users for suggestions and comments on what changes should be made to bring the *Manual* fully into the twenty-first century. The result is a rare accomplishment: a classic book that retains its original style, tone, and usefulness, and fully reflects a wealth of new topics and updated perspectives. The fifteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* has been deeply and comprehensively revised to better serve its audience, that devoted group of professionals who remain committed to words.

Endnote

1. Sales figure from Publisher Alley®.