

# Workshop Symbol Code<sup>1</sup>

## Usage

SP reflye	Misspelling.
gram.	Grammar at fault. Consult Strunk's <i>Elements of Style</i> . . . or any good grammar text.
¶	Paragraph. Begin a new one here.
no ¶	No new paragraph needed.
∧	Comma needed. Insert one here.
x ↘	No comma or punctuation needed.
PIC	You have used a possessive for a contraction or vice versa. <i>Its, their, and your</i> are possessives. <i>It's, they're, and you're</i> are contractions of <i>it is, they are, and you are</i> . They're going to take their toll if you're not sure of your usage.
DM	Dangling modifier. Participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence must refer to the grammatical subject. "Failing to understand this sentence, your prose will read awkwardly" means that your prose fails to understand.
sli	Split infinitives tend to always read awkwardly. Try to immediately correct it and to never do it again.
T.	A pointless change of tense. It leaves the reader not knowing when she is.
Frag.	Not a sentence. Technique okay if effective, otherwise not. Here, not.
(saw she) tr.	Transpose. This mark can refer to letters, words, phrases, sentences, whole paragraphs.
# ∧	Insert a space here (between words, paragraphs, etc.)

## Style

V.	This word or passage is definitely vague. Or you have used a generalization or an abstractior, where you need a concrete detail. Specify.
A	Use the active voice. Imagine Bob Marley or Eric Clapton trying to sing: "The sheriff was shot by me."
~	Unnecessary. Delete.
↓ ↑ ?	Compress this passage to half the words for twice the strength. You're writing long. Either you are confusing or the reader is confused or both. What do you really mean?
awk.	Awkward. This sentence is related to the auk, a thickbodied, short-necked bird without grace. Restyle.
rep.	Repetition to unintended or undesirable effect.
∩	Cliché. Use a fresh, original image, simile or metaphor—something you've never heard before, something that makes us see or feel or taste or hear something familiar or unfamiliar in a new way.
MM	Mixed metaphor.
o/w } o/s } o/i }	Overwritten, overstated, overinsistent. You're straining. Understate. Lower the key to raise the effect.

<sup>1</sup> The entries under "Usage" and "Style" were directly quoted (or adapted) from Janet Burroway's *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, second edition. *Appendix A*: 383-386. Entries under "Other Abbreviations" are my own.

conv.

In the exceedingly likely and, one might say, almost inevitable event, in view of your enrollment in this class, that you are not Henry James, the use of convoluted language is considerably less than certain to contribute to the augmenting of your intended effect. Simplify.

Coy  
Pomp.  
prec.  
pret.

Coy, Pompous, precious, pretentious—all meaning that you are enjoying yourself more than the reader is.

chron.

Chronology unnecessarily violated. "She sat down after having crossed to the couch." Except for very special effects, let the reader's mind follow events in their order.

d/t

Unnecessary dialogue tag. "Shut your stupid mouth!" he said angrily." We do not need to be told that he said this statement angrily. If he said it sweetly, then we would probably need to be told.

dial.

Dialect is overwritten. You are probably misspelling too much, so that your character sounds stupid rather than regional. Let the syntax do the work; keep misspellings and grammatical mistakes to a minimum.

int.

Authorial intrusion. You are explaining, judging, or interpreting too much. Show us, and let us understand and judge.

### Other Abbreviations

POV POV?

A jarring shift in point of view. Whose point of view is this? The point of view character's? If you're using a limited pointed of view (first person, third person limited), be consistent from scene to scene, unless you have some important thematic reason for the POV shift.

There were many  
John, ~~who is~~ my

Cut unnecessary "is" verbs. Use strong active verbs. Combine overlapping elements. Tighten. Make your sentences sleek.

98 " "

Set off dialogue from different speakers with new paragraphs. Consider shorter paragraphs to increase readability.

name?

Name things so we can see them clearly. Use a more specific word to characterize and create emotion. Is the tree a mimosa or a Giant Sequoia? Is the car a Yugo or a Suburu Brat? Is the bird a roadrunner or a robin? Is the town Detroit or North Zulch, Texas?

det.

Use a *significant* detail. Let a detail *stand for* a generalization or abstraction. God's in the details. The devil's in the details. Don't bore us with the details. Show *and* tell.

ref.

Vague or unclear reference.

agu.

Subject/verb or pronoun/antecedent agreement error.

CS

Comma splice. Use a full stop between sentences; semicolons are formal. Periods are easiest to read.

[ why the reason

Move [bracketed elements] to tighten or clarify.

scene?

Write a few lines of dialogue or a scene to make dramatize this generalization.

scene?

What's the purpose of this scene? If it's not dramatic or it's conveying exposition you can write directly, consider cutting the scene or cutting it down.

who? where?  
when?

Who's talking? Where are we? When are we?

why?

Why did this character just do what she or he did? Can you set us up better for this not-so-inevitable surprise?