

Honorifics, be careful

The Craft of Writing · By Simon Townsend · 1 min read

Be careful about using honorifics

As your WordGenius disk will tell you, an honorific is a title or term of respect, as Doctor, Professor, Rt Hon.

The first time you mention a person's name, use their first (given) name and then their surname (or family name).

That is Mary Smith or John Jones, etc.

Be careful about Asian names because often family names (surnames) are used first.

Do not use the honorifics Mr, Mrs, Miss, Master or Ms.

If a person's honorific is Dr, Senator, Professor, etc, use that in the first mention, that is, Dr John Jones, Senator Fred Black or Professor Mary Smith.

Once you have mentioned the person by two names, then refer to them by only their surname.

NEVER in journalism use "the Honourable" for politicians or judges.

And after the first mention, don't use their given names either.

Modern journalism practice is to use only the surname.

Some publications use Mr or Mrs when the person is important, such as Mrs Howard or Mr Rudd. But usually it's surname only.

With "Mary" or "John" it's easy to tell the person's sex, but with "Kerry" or "Alex" it's not clear if it's a male or female, and especially with many foreign names.

So you should find some way to insert (logically) the word she or her, or he or his, to indicate gender.

One exception: if you're writing about a family and they all have the same surname, you'll have refer to each person by his or her first name and surname.

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