In prose, bad spelling is rarely accepted. In mathematics, notation abuse is often condoned. Excuses are worn. In education, bad notation is a disservice to students: annoying the bright ones (even if they cope), confusing others (subject to teachers’ whims). Notation is not just language but a tool for effective thinking. Others noted how abuse causes errors, “easily undermining the students’ confidence in mathematics”. Examples are added, even about basic equality. It is shown how abuses can be avoided unobtrusively, helping mindful teachers to do everything right by example and making proper notation routine for students.

As a reaction to ill-conceived formalism in the 1960’s, there is now overshoot in the other direction, and some mathematicians advocate using only prose, especially in “advanced” work. At frontiers, known tools may not always suffice, but rejecting tools should not be made a principle: symbolism is a later development phase and needs maturing. Bad notation causes a vicious circle. Especially for logic thought, the impracticality of classical formal logic is no reason for shirking but for improvement. Examples show the opportunities. Balance can be restored, so that prose and well-designed symbolism can coexist, as students have seen in algebra. (Received September 15, 2013)