

# America in Bloom Style Guide

October, 2016

Contents

## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Writing Well</b> .....	<b>5</b>
	Use short sentences .....	5
	Use short paragraphs .....	5
	Avoid jargon .....	5
	Be consistent .....	5
	Consider your audience.....	5
<b>3.</b>	<b>Quick Tips—Style, Writing, and Grammar Tips</b> .....	<b>5</b>
	Style .....	5
	Writing.....	6
	Grammar .....	6
<b>4.</b>	<b>Editorial Voice and Words and Phrases to Avoid</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Tailoring the Formality of Your Writing to the Audience</b> .....	<b>7</b>
	How formal should your writing be?.....	7
	What makes writing formal or informal?.....	7
<b>6.</b>	<b>Using a Consistent Point of View</b> .....	<b>7</b>
	Three points of view for writing.....	8
	Consistent point of view.....	8
<b>7.</b>	<b>Emphasizing Content</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Formatting Paragraphs</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Numbers</b> .....	<b>8</b>
	Writing out numbers or numerals.....	8
	Writing out or using numerals for dates and years.....	9
<b>10.</b>	<b>Commas</b> .....	<b>10</b>
	Using commas with listed items within sentences .....	10
	Using commas with introductory phrases.....	10

	Correct (but optional) commas .....	10
	Don't use a comma after an introductory phrase that is followed by a verb .....	10
	Using commas with clauses.....	10
	Using commas with conjunctions and with two complete sentences .....	11
	Using a comma to separate a name from a title.....	11
	Using commas in dates.....	11
	Commas after e.g. and i.e.....	12
	Using commas with however .....	12
	Using commas with too.....	12
<b>11.</b>	<b>Hyphenating Compound Words .....</b>	<b>13</b>
	Using a hyphen to prevent mispronunciation or to avoid ambiguity in context .....	13
	Using hyphens with numbers.....	14
	Using hyphens with titles .....	14
	Commonly hyphenated and non-hyphenated words and phrases.....	14
	Commonly used words that are not hyphenated .....	15
<b>12.</b>	<b>Colons and Semicolons .....</b>	<b>15</b>
	Using colons with bulleted or numbered lists.....	15
	Using colons with examples .....	15
	Using colons with quotations .....	16
	Using semicolons to join independent clauses .....	16
	Using semicolons in a series .....	16
<b>13.</b>	<b>Periods .....</b>	<b>16</b>
	Use periods for U.S.....	16
	Use periods for time a.m. and p.m.....	16
	Periods inside or outside parentheses .....	16
	Periods at the ends of bullets.....	17
	Periods using i.e. and e.g.....	17
<b>14.</b>	<b>Symbols.....</b>	<b>17</b>
	& .....	17
	[ ] Bracket sequence .....	17
	... Ellipses .....	18
	* Asterisk .....	18

	! Exclamation Point.....	18
<b>15.</b>	<b>Punctuating and Formatting .....</b>	<b>18</b>
	Using quotation marks with direct quotes.....	18
	Using a comma to set off quoted text.....	19
	Avoid double quotes to emphasize words or phrases .....	19
<b>16.</b>	<b>Abbreviations and Units .....</b>	<b>19</b>
	Defining abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms.....	19
	Abbreviation .....	19
	Acronym .....	19
	Abbreviating and spelling out United States.....	19
	Abbreviating the names of states .....	20
	Using periods with abbreviations.....	20
	Using abbreviations in lists.....	20
	Forming possessive abbreviations .....	20
	Time of day .....	20
	Time in history.....	21
	Abbreviating academic degrees .....	21
<b>17.</b>	<b>Lists and Bullets .....</b>	<b>21</b>
	Introducing lists within text.....	21
	Using parallel structure for each item in the list.....	22

*This guide has been adapted from the EIA Writing Style Guide published by the U.S. Energy Information Administration Office of Communications. You can view the original version at [www.eia.gov/eiawritingstyleguide.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/eiawritingstyleguide.pdf)*

## 1. Introduction

This guide is intended to help writers produce consistent, correct, and readable content. It provides guidance on those style issues—including capitalization, punctuation, word usage, tone— most relevant to writing. It will also save you time. Ever wondered or worried about which was correct: Period or no punctuation for bullets? Which or that? % sign or percent? This guide also includes examples, explanations, advice, and notes. Because the content was written to help you, we welcome feedback, suggestions, corrections, and general comments.

You can quickly find answers to these questions—and most of your style-related questions—in this guide. This will help you produce uniform documents, regardless of function, or publication form. The purpose of the guide is to provide style consistency in all content. It addresses some issues that are particular to web writing, such as writing effective hypertext links. But most of the advice applies to writing you do—evaluation reports, website content, and even PowerPoint presentations.

Are these hard-and-fast rules? This is not a rule book. Unlike grammar, which has specific rules that should not be broken, many style issues are preferences, such as how and when to write out numbers, whether to use the serial comma, or when to use ending punctuation for bullets.

Writers and editors may differ. Famous style guides differ. Our goal is to provide guidance on style issues so that content has uniformity that conveys professionalism. Style consistency enhances our credibility. Inconsistencies in style or misused words will cause users to question the accuracy of our information. A uniform style tells users that we have high quality standards.

If you have a question that isn't covered in this guide, or if there is a topic you'd like to know more about, consult these online references:

- The Chicago Manual of Style, the most widely used style manual.
- Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing, Mignon Fogarty,
- 2008 Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage
- The Elements of Style, William Strunk and E.B. White, 1999

## 2. Writing Well

### Use short sentences

Short sentences are easier to read, so try to write sentences of 20 to 30 words rather than much longer ones. Consider breaking a long sentence into two or eliminating unnecessary words.

### Use short paragraphs

Avoid long paragraphs or large blocks of text. Long paragraphs are daunting and difficult for readers to scan. Try to write paragraphs of four or five sentences, or approximately 100-125 words. Even paragraphs as short as one sentence are fine. Use bullets to highlight lists of points.

### Avoid jargon

Jargon may be appropriate when writing exclusively for experts. As much as possible, choose non-technical terms so all your intended readers can understand what you've written. If you must use jargon or technical language, be sure to explain the term in simple language.

### Be consistent

- Good writing is built on patterns, so be consistent within your content.
- Consistent terminology: Don't call it gasoline in some instances and gas in others.
- Consistent abbreviations: Don't use different abbreviations for the same term. When in doubt, spell it out.
- Consistent punctuation: For example, always use the serial comma (red, white, and blue).

### Consider your audience

The best writers anticipate, and answer, their readers' questions. Identify your intended readers before you begin writing. **Think about what they may already know** and what they will want to know about your topic. While planning and drafting your content, consider their level of expertise, their depth of interest, and the tasks they will be performing with the information you provide.

## 3. Quick Tips—Style, Writing, and Grammar Tips

### Style

- Use the serial comma: red, white, and blue.
- Website and homepage and email: one word, no hyphens.
- Spell out United States as a noun: U.S. oil is produced in the United States.
- Do not capitalize city, town, state, federal, or nation unless it's a proper name (Federal Register). Write Washington, DC, not Washington, D.C.
- Cushing, Oklahoma, not Cushing, OK
- Writing dates:
  - Correct—January 2012; Jan 5.
  - Incorrect—Jan 2012; January, 2012; January '12; January 5th .

- Write 1990s, not 1990's.
- Don't CAPITALIZE or underline for emphasis.
- Use American spelling and usage.
- Punctuating bullets: No ending punctuation (no commas or semicolons) unless they are all complete sentences (then end each sentence with a period).
- Don't link [click here](#) or [here](#). Link to the subject: See the [full report](#); [Register now](#).

## Writing

- Be consistent with % (informal and education content) and percent (formal content) within a document.
- Title case capitalization: Natural Gas Consumption Increasing.
- Sentence case: Natural gas consumption increasing.
- Spell out (or define or link to a full spelling) acronyms the first time used and repeatedly in separate sections of a long document.
- Avoid overuse of due to—try because, as a result of, or following.
- Use since with time (Since 2005, natural gas use has grown.) and because when you want to show cause (Because it was raining, we got wet.).
- Use simple words: additionally → also; utilize → use; in order to → to; numerous → many.
- Don't begin a sentence with a numeral or a year.
  - Incorrect: 2012 stocks are increasing.
  - Correct: Stocks in 2012 are increasing.
  - Also correct: The year 2012 shows increasing stocks.

## Grammar

- Which or that? Which nearly always has a comma before it. If you can use that, use that. These two words are not interchangeable. Which is not a more formal word for that.
- Make bullets consistent: start with verb, verb, verb; noun, noun, noun; adjective, adjective, adjective.
- A person is a who, and a thing is a that.
  - Correct: He is the person who said yes.
  - Incorrect: He is the person that said yes.
- Use an en-dash to mean through or to: the temperature was 70–80 degrees.
- An em-dash is the length of two hyphens. It's used to show a break in thought and is almost always used in pairs.
  - Correct: My sister Amy—who is two years younger than I—graduated from college before I did.
- Hyphens with adjectives: short-term forecast, end-use technology.
- No hyphens with nouns: in the short term, three end uses. i.e. and e.g. must be followed by a comma. It is better to spell out i.e. → in other words and e.g. → for example.
- "Punctuation goes inside the quote marks."

## 4. Editorial Voice and Words and Phrases to Avoid

- Your writing speaks to your readers; it has a voice. We want our writing voice to be professional, clear, and concise. This section covers some of the ways to create voice.
- **Put your main message first** so your readers can quickly get the most important information and then decide if they want to read more.
- Organize your content so that the **information appears in order of importance**, from the highest level to supporting details.
- Choosing active or passive voice
  - Use **active voice** most of the time.
  - In active-voice sentences, the subject is doing the action of the verb.
  - In passive-voice sentences, the object is doing the action of the verb.
  - The **active voice allows readers to scan and comprehend information quickly**. Use active voice to write concisely, as active-voice sentences are normally shorter than passive voice sentences. Use the passive voice sparingly. The passive voice can be used occasionally for these purposes:
    - To emphasize the object of the action, not the doer.
    - When the subject of the sentence (the doer) is unimportant or unknown. In passive voice sentences the doer may be left out.

## 5. Tailoring the Formality of Your Writing to the Audience

### How formal should your writing be?

We tend to favor formal language over informal language. But the formality of your writing depends on both content and audience.

### What makes writing formal or informal?

Avoiding colloquial words or expressions makes your writing more formal.

Formal language: However, the formality of your writing depends on the audience.

Informal language: But the formality of your writing depends on the audience.

Formal language: Why are gasoline prices so high?

Informal language: What's behind high gas prices?

## 6. Using a Consistent Point of View

In your writing, you can choose to use one of three different points of view: first person, second person, or third person. Each point of view expresses a different relationship to the reader. **Generally, third person is most appropriate for writing.**

## Three points of view for writing

First Person is when the person or object is speaking: We can produce steam several ways.

Second Person is when the person is spoken to: You can produce steam several ways.

Third Person is when the object is spoken about: It can produce steam in several ways.

Do not shift point of view. The point of view that you choose will depend on your audience.

Shifting point of view: The following example shifts from third person to second person (you) and is generally inappropriate.

Most commercially available electricity is generated by turbines that convert steam into electricity. You can produce steam in several ways.

## Consistent point of view

This example maintains the third person throughout.

Most commercially available electricity is generated by turbines that convert steam into electricity. Turbines produce steam in several ways.

## 7. Emphasizing Content

We prefer bold text for emphasis.

Italics are used to indicate recommendations.

Never underline for emphasis. Underlining is for links only, although most links are now shown in blue type.

Never use capital letters for emphasis.

## 8. Formatting Paragraphs

Separate paragraphs with a blank line. In evaluation reports, body text is Calibri 10 regular. This is built into the form's styles. The style is called "crit desc". Do not change the format of any of the document's styles.

## 9. Numbers

### Writing out numbers or numerals

Write out numbers from one through nine.

Exceptions: When the numbers refer to percentages (2%), time of day (4:00 o'clock), or measurement (3 inches, 9 miles).

Correct: The five renewable energy sources used most often are biomass, hydropower, geothermal, wind, and solar.

Correct: We did eight experiments with two barrels of oil.

Write out any number that begins a sentence.

Examples: Twenty-two people came to the meeting.

Thirty-one municipalities have proposed commercial nuclear power plants.

## Writing out or using numerals for dates and years

Use numerals to refer to a span of years. You can omit the first two digits of the second number if the meaning is clear.

Correct: The model year 2005-07.

Use all four digits of a year; don't omit the first two digits.

Correct: New investment in clean energy sources soared in 2008.

Incorrect: New investment in clean energy sources soared in '08.

Write out the number associated with a century if the number is below 10. Use lower case.

Correct: Wood fueled the country from its earliest years through the middle of the 19th century.

If you use numerals, do not use the apostrophe between the numerals and the s.

Correct: 1990s

Incorrect: 1990's

For dates

Correct: Jan 3

Incorrect: Jan 3rd

Don't begin a sentence with a year.

Two choices:

Correct but awkward: Nineteen ninety eight was a good year.

Correct: The year 1998 was good.

## 10. Commas

### Using commas with listed items within sentences

Use commas to separate three or more items in a list. Don't forget the comma between the last two items. This comma is often called the serial comma (or the Oxford comma) and is a style choice.

Example: The pump price reflects the costs of refiners, marketers, distributors, and retail gas station owners.

Adding one comma in the second sentence below adds two people to the meaning.

Example: Two girls, Christine and Michelle, studied in the library. (2 people)

Example: Two girls, Christine, and Michelle studied in the library. (4 people)

### Using commas with introductory phrases

Use a comma after introductory words, phrases, or clauses.

Example: After drafting the regulations, the agency called for comments.

Using a comma after a short introductory phrase is often optional, but an introductory phrase of four words or more should be followed by a comma to make the sentence easier to read.

### Correct (but optional) commas

Example: In addition, federal taxes are added to the price of gasoline.

One way to avoid this comma-use dilemma is to change the order of the components of the sentence, so no comma is needed. It depends on what you are trying to emphasize in the sentence.

Example: The United States officially entered the Vietnam War when the Navy destroyers engaged North Vietnamese torpedo boats in battle in August 1964.

### Don't use a comma after an introductory phrase that is followed by a verb

Example: Issuing the regulations begins the review process.

### Using commas with clauses

The words **which** and **that** are not interchangeable. Use the word **which** in cases where the text that follows elaborates on the first part of the sentence. Use the word **that** in cases where the sentence doesn't need a comma to break up the two thoughts in the sentence.

Use a comma before a clause that begins with **which**.

Do not use a comma before **that**.

Example: AIB's conference chairs, which are old, will be replaced. (All of AIB 's conference chairs will be replaced because they all happen to be old.)

Example: AIB's conference chairs that are old will be replaced. (Only AIB's old conference chairs will be replaced, but the new ones will not be replaced.)

Do not use commas if the phrase or clause restricts the meaning such that, if you deleted the phrase or clause, the sentence would be unclear.

Correct: The amendments, adopted in 1960, changed enforcement procedures.

The commas setting off adopted in 1960 signify that the date of adoption informs, but does not restrict, which amendments are being discussed.

Example: The amendments adopted in 1960 changed enforcement procedures.

Without commas, the sentence indicates that the amendments that were adopted in 1960 set forth the procedures. The phrase restricts which amendments are being discussed.

### **Using commas with conjunctions and with two complete sentences**

Use a comma when two complete sentences are separated by a conjunction, such as and, but and or.

Correct: I would like to attend the conference, but I can't find registration information.

Correct: Paul pumped the gas, and Mary got a soda.

Correct: I was hungry, so I went to the store. (two sentences separated by a comma)

Correct: Paul pumped the gas and got a soda.

Incorrect: Paul pumped the gas, and got a soda.

Correct: I was hungry and went for dinner. (one sentence with no comma)

Either put the thoughts in two separate sentences, or, if you put them together, use a comma between the two complete sentences.

### **Using a comma to separate a name from a title**

Correct: John Smith, human resources director, issued the regulations regarding leave.

Don't forget the second comma.

### **Using commas in dates**

Do not use a comma to separate the month from the year.

Correct: October 2016

Incorrect: October, 2012

Incorrect: Oct. 2012

Incorrect: October of 2012

Use a comma to separate the date from the year but not the month from the year.

Correct: October 4, 2012

Correct: October 2012

### **Commas after e.g. and i.e.**

Always put a comma after e.g. and i.e.

Do not italicize e.g. or i.e.

AIB preferred style is to say “for example” or “that is” rather than using these abbreviations.

Preferred: I like ethnic food (for example, Thai, Mexican, and Indian).

Correct: I like ethnic food (e.g., Thai, Mexican, and Indian).

Preferred: The year has four seasons, that is, winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Correct: The year has four seasons, i.e., winter, spring, summer, and fall.

### **Using commas with however**

Correct: However hard I tried, I couldn’t stop eating chocolate.

(no comma after however)

Correct: However, I didn’t gain any weight. (comma)

(Beginning a sentence with ‘however’ is not recommended.)

### **Using commas with too**

Correct: I like it too.

Correct: I like it, too.

Either way is correct.

Style books say the comma puts a little more emphasis on the word too.

## 11. Hyphenating Compound Words

Use a hyphen between words when they are combined to modify the word that follows.

Examples:

- near-term contract
- agreed-upon standards
- long-term forecast
- high-level discussion high-volume wells

Don't use a hyphen in compound words when the meaning is clear without the hyphen and the hyphen will not aid readability.

Examples:

- bituminous coal industry
- child welfare plan
- civil rights case
- per capita

Proper noun compounds: with hyphens.

Examples:

- Spanish-American pride
- Winston-Salem festival
- African-American program

### Using a hyphen to prevent mispronunciation or to avoid ambiguity in context

In some cases, you should use a hyphen to prevent mispronunciation or to avoid ambiguity of a word.

Examples:

- mid-decade
- non-civil-service position
- re-creation
- re-sorting

Sometimes a hyphen is needed to prevent ambiguity in a sentence.

Clear: The scientist tested a new defect-causing gas.

Not clear: The scientist tested a new defect causing gas. The hyphen makes it clear the gas is causing defects.

## Using hyphens with numbers

Use a hyphen when the number is a descriptor and a modifier for numbers between 21 and 99.

Examples:

- 24-inch ruler
- 10-minute delay
- 3-to-1 ratio

## Using hyphens with titles

Do not use a hyphen with a title denoting a single office, but do use a hyphen for a double title.

Examples of single title: no hyphen

- Congressman at Large
- major general

Examples of double title:

- secretary-treasurer
- treasurer-manager

Use a hyphen with the adjectives elect and designate.

Example:

- President-elect
- ambassador-designate

## Commonly hyphenated and non-hyphenated words and phrases

Commonly hyphenated words and phrases

agreed-upon standards  
air-conditioning unit  
around-the-clock basis  
cost-of-living increase  
day-ahead  
day-to-day tasks  
drought-stricken area  
end-use  
English-speaking  
ex-governor  
high-speed line  
land-use restrictions  
large-scale project  
long-term contract

long-term forecast  
low-cost housing  
market-based pricing  
multiple-purpose uses  
non-liquid  
non-profit corporation  
off-highway use  
one-on-one situation  
part-time personnel  
passenger-mile  
self-contained units  
self-control  
short-term outlook  
state-of-the-art technology

### **Commonly used words that are not hyphenated**

breakout (not break-out)  
email (not e-mail)  
lower 48 states or Lower 48 states  
megabytes  
nonrenewable  
wellhead

For more information on hyphens, see: The Chicago Manual of Style, Chapter 6:

## **12. Colons and Semicolons**

The purpose of the colon is to introduce, list, or define something. A colon signals that what comes next is directly related to the previous sentence. The purpose of the semicolon is to signal that two clauses are related, but each clause could stand on its own as a sentence if you wanted them to. A semicolon is stronger than a comma but weaker than a period.

### **Using colons with bulleted or numbered lists**

Use a colon to introduce a bulleted or numbered list if it's introduced by a complete sentence. Never use a colon after a sentence fragment.

Correct: The price that consumers pay for heating oil can change for a variety of reasons: (complete sentence, so the colon is used correctly)

### **Using colons with examples**

Use a colon to introduce an example or explanation of the idea to the left of the colon. The word following the colon is normally lowercase, unless it is a proper name or more than one sentence.

Example: The requirement for claiming a tax credit is clear: you must have purchased the product in 2014.

### Using colons with quotations

When you have a quotation that is at least one complete sentence, you can choose to introduce it with a colon. This option is stronger and more formal than using a comma.

Example: The Administrator said: “The forecast shows rising natural gas production.”

### Using semicolons to join independent clauses

Use a semicolon instead of a period to join two independent clauses to emphasize a close relationship between the two clauses. Do not capitalize the word after the semicolon.

Example: The report is on our website; you can download it.

Use a semicolon between two independent clauses (sentences) joined by a transition word such as therefore and however.

Example: The price of the car is high; however, it includes taxes.

### Using semicolons in a series

Use a semicolon to separate the items in a series when the items already include commas. Example: Our regional offices are in Miami, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; and Phoenix, Arizona.

## 13. Periods

### Use periods for U.S.

Correct: U.S. imports

Incorrect: US imports

### Use periods for time a.m. and p.m.

Correct: 7:00 a.m.

Incorrect: 7:00 am

Incorrect: 7:00 AM

### Periods inside or outside parentheses

Period outside: ...(phrase). If the content inside the parens is a phrase, the period goes outside the close paren.

Period inside: (Complete sentence.) If the content inside the parens is a complete sentence, the period goes inside the close paren.

Use only one period at the end of a sentence, if the last word also includes a period.

Correct: The greatest gains were at Apple, Inc.

Incorrect: The greatest gains were at Apple, Inc..

No periods in abbreviations.

AIB (America in Bloom)

### Periods at the ends of bullets

Correct bullet punctuation:

- Full sentence (period)
- Full sentence (period)
- Full sentence (period)

Correct bullet punctuation:

- Phrase (no period)
- Phrase (no period) Phrase (no period)

### Periods using i.e. and e.g.

Preferred: namely California, Texas, and Alaska (don't use i.e. at all)

Preferred: that is (or specifically) California, Texas, and Alaska

Correct, not preferred: i.e., California, Texas, and Alaska (always use a comma with i.e.)

Preferred: for example, bridge and gin rummy (don't use e.g. at all)

Preferred: including (or such as) bridge and gin rummy. Correct, not preferred: e.g., bridge and gin rummy (always use a comma with e.g.)

## 14. Symbols

### &

Almost never use the ampersand sign; only use it in very informal writing. You can use & if it is part of a proper name (H&M Department Store) or phrase (R&D).

Correct: cap and trade Incorrect: cap & trade

Correct: imports and exports

Incorrect: imports & exports

### [ ] Bracket sequence

First level: [...(...)...] Second level: {...[...(...)...]...}

## ... Ellipses

The most common and formal use of ellipses is to indicate an omission. You use ellipses to show where you've dropped words or sentences from a quote. A more informal use is in email messages, where the ellipsis is used to indicate a pause or break in thought. It can show a list is incomplete or the speaker has left something unsaid. Do not use this form of ellipses in formal writing. Do not use ellipses to mean etc. or to indicate an unfinished sentence. An ellipsis is three dots, never two dots, and never four dots. To form the ellipsis, type three periods in a row and the AutoCorrect feature in Word changes three periods in a row to a single special ellipsis character. If your Auto Correct feature is disabled, you can insert the ellipsis by holding down Alt+Ctrl+ and the period (.)key.

## \* Asterisk

It's a risk to use an asterisk (not pronounced asterix or asterick). An asterisk is usually used as an informal footnote.

## ! Exclamation Point

Never use an exclamation point in formal writing.

# 15. Punctuating and Formatting

## Using quotation marks with direct quotes

Use quotation marks to set off direct quotes. Ending periods and commas go inside the close quote.

Example: The Senator said, "We must pass the legislation during this session."

Do not use quotation marks if the text is paraphrased or not exactly what the person said or wrote.

Example: The Senator said that it is important to pass the legislation in this session.

Periods and commas always go inside the quotation mark.

Example: "Good morning, everyone," said Secretary Chu.

Semicolons and colons always go outside the quotation mark.

Example: I always read The New Yorker's "Talk of the Town"; it keeps me up-to-date on many issues.

When the question, exclamation, or interruption is part of the quotation, the punctuation goes inside.

Example: "But you said the rate was \$6.95 per pound!" he said to the cashier.

When the question, exclamation, or interruption applies to the whole sentence, the punctuation goes outside.

Example: What did the office director mean when he asked, "When will you be finished with the report"?

## Using a comma to set off quoted text

Use a comma to separate text from quoted material when the quoted material is a complete sentence or paragraph. Example: The President said, "All federal employees will have the Friday after Christmas off."

## Avoid double quotes to emphasize words or phrases

In most cases, avoid using quote marks around specific words. Nicknamed "scare quotes," they signal to the reader that this is not how the term is usually used. The intent may be to emphasize the quoted words, but the quotes may actually mislead or confuse the reader.

Incorrect:

- "Free" delivery
- "Down" elevator
- "Licensed" plumber

## 16. Abbreviations and Units

### Defining abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms

Abbreviation will be used generically to refer to abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms.

#### Abbreviation

Shortened form of a word or phrase.

Ph.D. (traditional usage)

PhD (modern usage) preferred

#### Acronym

A word formed from the initial letters of other words. It's pronounced as a word rather than read as separate letters.

AIB (America in Bloom)

### Abbreviating and spelling out United States

Spell out United States when it is used as a noun.

Correct as a noun: Temperatures vary across the United States.

Correct as an adjective: U.S. temperatures vary widely.

Use the abbreviation U.S. when it's used as an adjective, such as when it precedes the name of a government organization or a domestic energy statistic.

Always use periods in U.S. (do not write US).

## Abbreviating the names of states

In running text, spell out the state name when it stands alone or when it follows the name of a city. Do not use postal codes (CA, MI)—except for Washington, DC where the postal code is part of the city’s name—in text or tables or graphics.

Correct: Washington, DC (no periods)

Correct: The earthquake happened near San Francisco, California.

Incorrect: The earthquake happened near San Francisco, CA.

## Using periods with abbreviations

Most abbreviations are written without periods, especially the ones that are pronounced letter by letter, including units of measure.

## Using abbreviations in lists

The Latin abbreviations e.g. and i.e. do not mean the same thing. Avoid confusion by just writing for example, such as, or that is.

e.g. = for example, like, such as; provides examples for the content being discussed.

i.e. = that is, that is to say; provides a descriptive or definitive statement about the statement already made.

ex. = for example. Very informal. Write out for example or such as.

Correct: There are many fun things you can do on the Internet (e.g., read, plan travel, social network).

Always put a comma after e.g. and i.e.

## Forming possessive abbreviations

To form a singular possessive, use an apostrophe before the s.

Example:

AIB's policy on late registrations

To form a plural possessive, use an apostrophe after the s.

Example: The RNs' strike

## Time of day

Use lowercase a.m. and p.m. with periods.

Use space between the number and a.m. or p.m.

If you note ET or PT, don't use a comma after a.m. or p.m.

Correct: 10:00 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Incorrect: 10:00 am and 2:30 pm

Incorrect: 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.

## Time in history

Write 1,000 BC (no periods).

## Abbreviating academic degrees

In traditional practice, periods are added to abbreviations of all academic degrees (M.A., Ph.D., etc.). Omit the periods unless they are required for tradition or consistency.

Example:

Correct: MA

Correct: PhD (Ph.D. is the traditional style)

## 17. Lists and Bullets

Big paragraphs are difficult to read quickly. Bullets make it easier for readers to see your main points. To improve the scannability of content, use vertical lists rather than continuous text to display a series of related items.

### Introducing lists within text

Introduce the list with a statement that encompasses all of the items in the list. Use a colon at the end of the introductory statement if it is a complete sentence. Don't use a colon if the introduction is a phrase (see next section).

Example:

The price that consumers pay for heating oil can change for a variety of reasons:

- Seasonal demand
- Fluctuations in crude oil prices
- Competition in local markets

Example:

The two reasons for increased demand are

- Lower prices
- Higher economic growth

To enhance the scannability of your content, you can add a line of space between introductory text and the beginning of a bulleted or numbered list.

Example:

Carbon dioxide is emitted when burning three fossil fuels:

- Petroleum
- Coal
- Natural gas

Wrap lines under each other, not under the bullet point itself.

Correct bullet wrap:

- There are 104 commercial nuclear reactors at 65 nuclear power plants in 31 states. Since 1990, the share of the nation's total electricity supply provided by nuclear power generation has averaged about 20%.

### Using parallel structure for each item in the list

Begin each item with the same type of word (noun, verb, infinitive, etc.).

Incorrect (not parallel):

How to create effective teams:

- To find the best solution to our problems
- Asking people to help us with the solution
- Identify champions for solution teams
- Strategic goals
- And have regular meetings

Correct (parallel):

To reduce natural gas bills, customers can do three things:

- Check appliances for efficient operation
- Obtain an energy audit
- Reduce thermostat settings

Use the same grammatical form for each item (word, phrase, or sentence).

Correct:

The working group should meet to perform the following functions: (three verbs)

- Evaluate the Department's progress
- Provide suggestions for improving performance
- Collaborate on systems analysis