

Style Manual



Produced by the
Public Interest Center
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A Note from the Editors

The Public Interest Center (PIC) compiled this style manual to give Ohio EPA employees a standard guide for use in preparing documents and correspondence. We chose Associated Press (AP) style for the majority of the entries because PIC uses AP style when it writes and edits public documents. Many of you may be familiar with other grammar and style manuals. There are several accepted usages depending on the reference book you use, but we have selected these as the Agency's preferred style to ensure consistency.

Newspaper and magazine style is different from that used by novelists. It is not identical to the English taught in state school English courses. Instead of following patterns that have evolved over thousands of years, journalistic style has been designed for both brevity and clarity. It is our hope that you find this guide useful and informative.

We have made every effort to accommodate comments from employees throughout the Agency who were asked to review the draft of this manual. We welcome your comments, too.

This publication was revised in December 1999, to incorporate changes in Agency language and updated references to the World Wide Web and the Internet.

How to Use the Style Manual

- Entries are listed alphabetically.
- Many entries simply give the correct spelling.
- Several entries include *Right:* or *Wrong:* examples; the *Right:* entry is the preferred usage for Agency documents.
- Examples of correct and incorrect usages are in *italics*.
- Related topics are at the end of the entry in **boldface**.

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Writing Tips

Below are a few guidelines to keep in mind when writing letters, memos, reports, fact sheets and other documents.

- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, avoiding excessive punctuation.
- Write in the active voice instead of passive. If the subject acts, the voice is active. If the subject is acted upon, the voice is passive. The red flag for the passive voice is some variation of an auxiliary verb (*was, will be, have been, is being*), plus a past participle (*built, written, directed*), plus *by* if the actor is mentioned. Here are some examples to follow:

Passive Voice

This book was written by me.

I was given an advance by the publisher.

It was planned that the book would be published (by them) in the fall of 1982.

Active Voice

I wrote this book.

The publisher gave me an advance.

W. W. Norton planned to publish the book in the fall of 1982.

- Avoid using acronyms, if possible. If you use an acronym, always write it out on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses.
- Use language that is easily understood. If appropriate, try to convey technical information in a manner that an eighth grade student could understand.

A

accept, except. *Accept* means to receive. *Except* means to exclude.

acronyms. In general, use them sparingly unless your readership is familiar with them. Always spell out on first reference if they must be used, followed by the acronym in parentheses: *Quality Improvement Council (QIC)*. No apostrophe is needed when making acronyms plural. Example: *PCBs*.

administration. Lowercase: *the administration, the governor's administration, the Clinton administration*. When referring to the current state administration, use *the Taft administration* (include Taft's name). See **governor**.

adviser. Not *advisor*.

affect, effect. *Affect* means to influence: *The game will affect the standings*. *Effect*, as a verb, means to cause: *He will effect many changes in the company*. *Effect*, as a noun, means result: *The effect was overwhelming*. *It was a law of little effect*.

afterward. Not *afterwards*.

Agency. When referring to Ohio EPA on second reference, it is customary to capitalize *Agency*. Note: This is our style and breaks the general rule for avoiding capitalization whenever possible. See **capitalization** and **Ohio EPA**.

agenda. A list. It takes singular verbs and pronouns. *The agenda has been revised*. The plural is *agendas*.

aid, aide. *Aid* is assistance. *Aide* is a person who serves as an assistant.

almost, most. If you can substitute *almost* for *most* in a sentence, *almost* is the word you need.

already, all ready. *Already* is an adverb expressing time: *The shipment had already been made when the stop order arrived*. *All ready* is a two-word phrase meaning "completely prepared." *He was all ready to start work on the project when it was canceled*.

alternate, alternative. *Alternate* means one and then the other: *alternate stripes of blue and white*. *Alternative* means providing a choice between two or more things: *alternative routes*, or something remaining to be chosen: *Is there an alternative to going?*

a.m., p.m. Lowercase, with periods.

amid. Not *amidst*.

ampersand (&). Do not use as a replacement for *and*. Use the ampersand only when it is a part of an official name of a company, product or other proper noun.

annual. An event cannot be described as annual until it has been held in at least two successive years. Do not use the term "first annual." Instead, note that sponsors plan to hold an event annually.

apostrophes. Examples to follow: Plural nouns not ending in s: Add 's: *the alumni's contributions, women's rights*. Plural nouns ending in s: Add only an apostrophe: *the girls' toys, states' rights, the ships' wake*. Singular nouns not ending in s: Add 's: *the church's needs, the girl's toys*. Always use 's if the word does not end in the letter s: *Butz's policies, the fox's den, Marx's theories*. Singular common nouns ending in s: Add 's unless the next word begins with s: *the hostess's invitation, the hostess' seat*. Singular proper names ending in s: Use only an apostrophe: *Achilles' heel, Agnes' book, Socrates' life*. Apostrophes are used to show possession, not to make words plural.

Appalachia. In the broadest sense, *Appalachia* applies to the region along the Appalachian Mountains from Maine into northern Alabama. In a sense that often suggests economic depression and poverty, *Appalachia* refers to parts of eastern Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, southeastern Ohio and the western portion of West Virginia. When using this word, specify the extent of the area in question.

attorney, lawyer. A person with a law degree is a lawyer. A person who acts on behalf of another person is that person's attorney. Therefore, a lawyer can be John Smith's attorney or the attorney for John Smith or even an attorney in the Smith case, but attorney should not be used in such references as "a Columbus attorney" or "an Ohio attorney" or "a patent attorney" or simply "an attorney." When in doubt, use lawyer. Do not abbreviate, and capitalize only when referring to an officeholder's title, such as: *District Attorney Tom Robbins*.

B

bad, badly. *Bad* is an adjective, as in *a bad accident*. *Badly* is an adverb that describes how something is done, as in *the plant was badly maintained*.

because, since. Use *because* to denote a specific cause-effect relationship: *He went because he was told*. *Since* is acceptable in a casual sense when the first event in a sequence led logically to the second but was not its direct cause: *He went to the game, since he had been given the tickets*.

beside, besides. *Beside* means at the side of. *Besides* means in addition to.

biannual, biennial. *Biannual* means twice a year and is a synonym for the word "semiannual." *Biennial* means every two years.

bimonthly. Means every other month. *Semimonthly* means twice a month.

biweekly. Means every other week. *Semiweekly* means twice a week.

board of directors, board of trustees. Always lowercase. A member of the board is a *director* or *trustee*.

brownfields. One word

bureau. Capitalize when part of the formal name of an organization or agency: *the Bureau of Motor Vehicles*. Lowercase when used alone.

C

cannot. One word.

capital, capitol. Capital is the city where a seat of government is located, and it is also used in the financial sense to describe items used by businesses. Do not capitalize. When referring to the specific building in Washington and state equivalents, use *capitol*, which should be capitalized. *The Ohio Capitol is in Columbus*.

capitalization. Avoid unnecessary capitals. Use as part of official name, but not in condensed version. Right: *The Division of Air Pollution Control is located at the Central Office. The division issued a permit.* Wrong: *We released the Strategy today.*

CD-ROM.

chairman. Use *chairman* if the person is a man, *chairwoman* if the person is a woman, and *presiding officer* or *committee head* if the position is theoretical. Do not use *chairperson* unless it is an organization's formal title for an office. Avoid using *chair* unless specifically requested by the person in that position.

chief. See **titles**.

children, kids. Do not use *kids* except in very informal references. When in doubt, use the term *children*.

city. Capitalize as part of a proper name: *New York City*. Lowercase elsewhere: *the city government, the city Board of Education*; and all *city of* constructions. Use *City* on second reference when referring to a specific city government if the context does not require the city name: *We issued a permit to the city of Dayton. The City then began building the plant.*

cleanup, clean up. One word as a noun: *The cleanup will take two months*. Two words as a verb: *The company must clean up the spill*.

collective nouns. Nouns that denote a unit take singular verbs and pronouns: *class, committee, crowd, family, group, herd, jury, orchestra, team*. Some usage examples: *The committee is meeting to set its agenda. The jury reached its verdict. A herd of cattle was sold.*

commitment.

committee. Do not abbreviate. Capitalize when part of a formal name: *the Policy Screening Committee/Workgroup*. Use lowercase on second reference: *The committee met last week.*

continual, continuous. *Continual* means happening over and over, or frequently repeated: *Writing well takes continual practice. Continuous* means uninterrupted, steady, unbroken: *A continuous stream of water flowed from the pipe.*

county. When writing about one county, capitalize: *Wayne County*. When writing multiple counties, lowercase: *Stark, Wayne and Medina counties*. Without a specific county name, use lowercase: *the county budget*. When referring to a specific county on second reference, use *County* when the context does not require using the county name. See **city**.

courtesy titles. For federal, state or county elected officials, address correspondence to *The Honorable (person's name)*. The salutation should read *Dear (title) (name)*. Do not abbreviate *senator* or *representative*. Example:

*The Honorable Joe Smith
Ohio Senate
Columbus, OH 43266*

Dear Senator Smith,

For members of the U.S. House of Representatives, the salutation should read *Dear Congressman or Congresswoman (name)*. Courtesy titles are not necessary for local officials.

D

dash. On most computers, there is a separate key that should be used for the dash. On manual typewriters and other systems, a dash is indicated by striking the hyphen key twice (--). Put a space on both sides of a dash. Be aware that some word processing programs will automatically "correct" your dash. Use the dash to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or an emphatic pause: *Smith offered a plan -- it was*

unprecedented -- to raise revenues. Use a dash before an author's or composer's name at the end of a quotation: "Who steals my purse steals trash." -- Shakespeare.

data. Plural form of *datum*.

database. One word.

dates. No comma between month and year if no day is included. Right: *June 1994. June 1, 1994.* Wrong: *June, 1994.* Always use Arabic figures without *st, nd, rd* or *th*. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only *Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.* and *Dec.* Spell out months when using alone, or with a year alone. Use commas to offset the date from the rest of the sentence: *On July 24, 1994, you sent a letter. Your July 24, 1994, letter was informative.*

degrees. Do not capitalize academic degrees when they are spelled out. *He had a master of science* ('s is omitted). *Specifically, his master's was in engineering* ('s is included when replacing *degree*). Abbreviate degrees when they follow a person's name.

demolish, destroy. Both mean to do away with something completely. Something cannot be *partially demolished* or *destroyed*. It is redundant to say *totally demolished* or *totally destroyed*.

director. Refer to as *Director Chris Jones*. On documents requiring signature, refer to as Christopher Jones. Capitalize *director* only if it immediately precedes name.

dollars. Use figures and the \$ sign in all except casual references (*Can I borrow a dollar?*) or amounts without a figure. (*Dollars are flowing overseas*). For specified amounts, the word takes a singular verb: *He said \$50 is what they want.* For amounts of \$1 million or more, use the \$ and numerals up to two decimal places: *He is worth \$4.35 million.* For amounts less than \$1 million: *\$4, \$25, \$500, \$1,000, \$650,000.*

downgradient. One word. See **upgradient**.

E

either. Use it to mean one or the other, not both. Right: *She said to use either door.* Wrong: *There were lions on either side of the door.*

e-mail. Lower case and hyphenated.

engine, motor. An *engine* develops its own power, usually through internal combustion or the pressure of air, steam or water: *automobile engine, steam*

engine. A *motor* receives power from an outside source: an *electric* or *hydraulic motor*.

enquire, enquiry. The preferred words are *inquire, inquiry*.

ensure, assure, insure. Use *ensure* to mean to guarantee something: *Steps were taken to ensure accuracy.* Use *assure* to make a person sure of something: *I assure you I will be there.* Use *insure* for references to insurance: *The policy insures his life.*

entitled. Use it to mean a right to do or have something. Do not use it to mean "titled." Right: *She was entitled to the promotion.* Wrong: *The book was entitled "Gone with the Wind."*

F

farther, further. *Farther* refers to physical distance: *He walked farther into the woods.* *Further* refers to an extension of time or degree: *She will look further into the mystery.*

fax. The abbreviation for *facsimile*. The noun is not capitalized except when it appears on a form where other headings (*Address, Phone, Fax, e-mail*) are capitalized.

federal. Do not capitalize except when referring to an architectural style or part of a formal name: *the federal government, Federal Express, the Federal Housing Administration.*

fewer, less. In general, use *fewer* for individual items, *less* for bulk or quantity. *Fewer than 10 applicants applied.* (Individuals.) *I had less than \$50 in my pocket.* (An amount) But: *I had fewer than 50 \$1 bills in my pocket.* (Individual items.)

floodstage. One word.

floodwaters. One word.

foreword. A page at the beginning of a publication. Not *forward*.

fractions. Spell out amounts less than one, using hyphens between the words: *one-third, three-fifths,* etc.

fund-raiser. Hyphenate when referring to a person's position or when referring to a social event. *He was a fund-raiser for the organization.*

fund-raising. Now hyphenated as a noun and a modifier in *Webster's* dictionaries. *The fund-raising event.*

G

geographic terms and names. Lowercase *north*, *south*, *east*, and *west* and variations when they indicate direction. Capitalize *north*, *south*, *east*, *west*, and similar terms when they refer to regions: *Northwest Ohio*.

good, well. *Good* is an adjective that means something is as it should be or is better than average: *He is a good pitcher. I feel good* (the idiomatic equivalent of I am in good health). When used as an adverb, *well* means in a satisfactory manner or skillfully: *She performed well at the recital*.

governor. Refer to as *Governor Bob Taft*. Lowercase without a name: *the governor of Vermont*. Always refer to the governor as Gov. Taft (include name). See **titles**.

ground water. Two words.

H

health department. Capitalize only if referring to a specific health department.

highway patrol. Capitalize if used in the formal name of a police agency: *the Ohio Highway Patrol, the Highway Patrol*.

hopefully. Means in a hopeful manner. Avoid using in this context: *Hopefully, the fighting will end soon*. Instead, use *it is hoped* or *we hope* or *I hope*.

hyphen. Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. Avoid ambiguity: *He recovered his health. He re-covered the leaky roof*. Compound modifiers: *a full-time job, a well-known man, a first-quarter touchdown*. For hyphenation showing a range: *He received a 10- to 20-year sentence in prison*.

I

i.e., e.g. *i.e.* is an abbreviation for the Latin *id est*. Say *that is* to avoid misunderstanding. *e.g.* stands for the Latin *exempli gratia*, which means *for example*. To avoid confusion, simply write *for example*.

illegal. Use *illegal* only to mean a violation of the law.

injuries. They are suffered, not sustained or received.

Internet. Capitalized. The abbreviation, *Net* is also capitalized. See **World Wide Web**.

it's, its. *It's* is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*: *It's up to you. It's been a long time*. *Its* is the possessive form of the neuter pronoun: *The company lost its assets. Its' is never a proper spelling*.

J

judgment. Not *judgement*.

L

landfill, landfilling. One word, when used as noun and a verb. *Instead of recycling, the company landfilled the materials*.

leach field. Two words.

legislators. See **courtesy titles**.

liaison.

local emergency planning committee (LEPC). Capitalize only if referring to a specific LEPC. See **health department**.

M

media. A plural noun. *The media were plentiful at the public meeting*.

miles per hour. The abbreviation *mph* (no periods) is acceptable in all references.

more than, over. *More than* generally refers to quantity. *More than 50 people returned the survey*. *Over* generally refers to spatial relationships: *The dog jumped over the fence*.

N

nationwide. One word.

nonpoint. One word.

non-discrimination statements. Ohio EPA has a responsibility to communicate that it is an equal opportunity employer on all publications. This statement should read: *Ohio EPA is an Equal Opportunity Employer*.

numerals. Spell out whole numbers below 10; use figures for 10 and above. Avoid starting a sentence with a number. If unavoidable, spell it out.

O

occurrence.

Ohio EPA. As an acronym, do not precede with the word “the.” Wrong: *the Ohio EPA*. When using the full name, it is acceptable to say *the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency*. Do not use *OEPA*. See **Agency**.

online. One word as an adjective or adverb referring to the Internet domain.

on-site. Hyphenate on-site when using it as a modifier to a noun. *They conducted an on-site visit*. **Off-site** also is hyphenated as a modifier.

P

parentheses. The temptation to use parentheses is a clue that a sentence is becoming contorted. Try to write it another way. Use commas or two dashes as alternatives whenever possible. *Place a period outside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a sentence (such as this fragment). (An independent parenthetical sentence such as this one takes a period before the closing parenthesis.)*

PCBs. No apostrophe needed when making acronyms plural.

percent. One word. Avoid using the % sign. Instead, spell out percentages in text: *Nearly 24 percent of the respondents were women*.

permit-to-install, permit-to-operate. Never capitalize. Context determines whether it should be hyphenated: *Ohio EPA issued a permit-to-install on October 1, 1994. The company obtained a permit to install the facility on October 1, 1994*. Other ways to avoid the term: *installation permit, operating permit*.

pipeline. One word.

policy-maker, policy-making. Hyphenated.

press conference, press release. Use *news conference* and *news release* instead, to include broadcast media in addition to print (press) media.

principal, principle. *Principal* is a noun or adjective meaning someone or something first in rank, authority, importance or degree: *She is the school principal. Money is the principal problem*. *Principle* is a noun that means a fundamental truth, law or motivating force: *They fought for the principle of self-determination*.

punctuation within quotes. Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks. Place other punctuation marks inside where they apply only to the matter being quoted: *John asked, “Did they receive a permit?”* Place marks other than commas and periods outside the quotation marks when they apply to more than just the quoted part: *Did Rachel say, “I’m not interested in the position”? I can’t believe he said, “You aren’t going to the conference”!* The last two references are rarely used in business writing.

Q

quotation marks. Do not use quotation marks to emphasize a word. Use **boldface**, underlined, or *italic* type. Example: *The area is designated **nonattainment***.

R

ranges. The form: *\$12 million to \$14 million*. Not: *\$12 to \$14 million*.

recycling. For any publication that is printed on recycled paper, the following statement must be included: *Printed on recycled paper*. If it is known that the publication is recyclable, this statement can include: *Printed on recycled and recyclable paper*.

regardless. Not *irregardless*.

representative. See **courtesy titles**.

runoff. One word as a noun. *DSW staff discovered that field runoff was the source of the stream’s pollution*.

S

semiannual. See **biannual**.

semimonthly. See **bimonthly**.

senator. See **courtesy titles**.

source water. Two words.

state. Lowercase in most “state of” constructions: *the state of Ohio, the states of Ohio and Indiana*. State should be capitalized when referring to an organization. Right: *She is employed by the State of Ohio. The State of Ohio provided testimony on the bill*. Wrong: *All dogs in the State of Ohio must be licensed*. Or, to eliminate redundancy, just use “Ohio.” Example: *All dogs in Ohio must be licensed*.

statehouse. A place where legislators hold sessions. Capitalize all references to a specific statehouse, with or without the name of the state: *The Ohio Statehouse is in Columbus. The governor will visit the Statehouse today.*

statewide. One word.

stationary, stationery. To stand still is to be *stationary*. Writing paper is *stationery*.

storm water. Two words.

streamflow. One word.

subject-verb agreement. Although the subject and verb might not be adjacent, they must agree in number. Right: *Ohio, along with four other states, was upset by the proposal (Ohio, the subject, was upset).* Wrong: *Ohio, along with four other states, were upset by the proposal.*

surface water. Two words. See **ground water**.

T

telephone numbers. Use parentheses around area codes.

that, which. *That* is the defining, or restrictive pronoun, *which* the non-defining or non-restrictive.

The lawn mower that is broken is in the garage. (Tells which one) *The lawn mower, which is broken, is in the garage.* (Adds a fact about the only mower in question).

their, there, they're. *Their* is a possessive pronoun: *She went to their house.* *There* is an adverb indicating direction: *We went there for dinner.* *There* also is used as a pronoun for impersonal constructions in which the real subject follows the verb: *There is no food on the table.* *They're* is a contraction for they are.

then, than. *Then* is an adverb commonly used to express time and order: *He was young then. He took his hat and then left. First comes alpha and then beta.* *Than* is a conjunction used to introduce the second element in a comparison: *A is taller than B.*

times. Use figures except for noon and midnight, which add clarity. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: *11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m.* Also, use *10 a.m.* instead of *10:00 a.m.*

titles. Capitalize only if the title appears directly before the person's name. Right: *Ohio EPA Director Chris Jones* or *Chris Jones, director of Ohio EPA.* The exception is

President, referring to the President of the United States, which is always capitalized.

to, too. *To* has many uses; check a dictionary for a complete listing. Here are a few examples: *He went to the store. This is a key to the house. He gave a toast to her success. Too* means in addition more than enough, or extremely: *I like football, too. I read too many magazines on the plane. This cake is too delicious!*

toward. Not *towards*.

U

under way. Two words, except when used in the nautical sense of the word.

upgradient. One word. See **downgradient**.

U.S. EPA. Two words. Note that U.S. is offset with periods.

V

village. Apply the capitalization principles in **city**.

VIP, VIPs. Acceptable in all references for *very important person(s)*.

volatile. Something that evaporates rapidly. It may or may not be explosive.

W

wastewater. One word.

we, us. *We* is a subject pronoun for a group: *We are happy to be here. I can't believe we made it.* *Us* is used as an indirect object: *Give us the book. She told us about the verdict.*

wetlands. One word.

wellfield. One word.

wellhead. One word.

who, whom. *Who* is the word when someone is the subject of a sentence, clause or phrase: *The woman who rented the house is responsible. Who is there?* *Whom* is the word when someone is the object of a verb or preposition: *The woman to whom the room was rented is responsible. Whom do you wish to see?*

who's, whose. *Who's* is a contraction for who is or who has, not a possessive: *Who's there? Who's taken this class? Whose* is the possessive: *I do not know whose coat it is.*

workday, workweek. One word.

World Wide Web. Capitalized. Second references of *the Web* also should be capitalized in addition to *Web page*, and *Web site*. However, *home page* is not capitalized. *Note that web page and web site are two words.*

Y

yearlong. One word.

years. Use figures, without commas: 1999. Use an s without an apostrophe to indicate spans of decades or centuries: the *1990s*. Years are the exception to the general rule in numerals that a figure is not used to start a sentence. *1999 marked the first full year of the Central Office at the Lazarus Government Center.*

your, you're. *Your* is a possessive adjective which functions as a pronoun: *your dog, your idea, your coat*. *You're* is a contraction of you are: *You're driving me crazy. You're the new president.*

Sources

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