
STYLE GUIDE

About Style Guides

A style guide is a reference document for proofreading and copy editing. It records an organization's preferences for style standards and practices. It includes in-house rules and references which standard of editing is used e.g., *Chicago Guidelines of Style*. Style guides have absolute rules as well as strong recommendations for the purposes of consistency and professionalism on language preferences, formatting and layout decisions, spelling preferences, grammar, punctuation, popular acronyms, and capitalization.

Division staff are to use this *Editorial Style Guide* in conjunction with the Division's *Visual Identity Guidelines*. This guide reflects the editing guidelines under the *Chicago Guidelines of Style*.

Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviating any words that the audience may not understand immediately. For common abbreviations, include a period.

E.g. Capt. Smith wrote a memo for Mrs. Mayfair, reminding her to pick up a pound of apples at the store.

Use periods with abbreviations ending in a lowercase letter and for initials within names.

E.g. "Dr." "pp." "et al."

E.g. "T.S. Eliot"

Do not use periods with abbreviations appearing in all capitals, university degrees (even if they end in a lowercase letter), when an entire name is replaced by initials, or for provinces using two-letter postal abbreviations.

E.g. "ASBA", "GYPSD"

E.g. "BA", "PhD"

E.g. "JFK"

E.g. "AB", "BC"

Acronyms

Spell out full name on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses. It is okay to use the acronym after that. Do not include the acronym if there are no subsequent references to the acronym in the document: in this case, just spell out the name. Do not use acronyms for government or any of its ministries. Do not use periods between for places: BC (not B.C.), USA (not U.S.A.). Use MLA, not M.L.A. Note: it is acceptable practice to use MLA on first usage and not write out Member of Legislative Assembly. Do not use FNMI: spell in full as First Nations, Métis and Inuit, or replace with Indigenous.

E.g. Grande Yellowhead Public School Division (GYPSD) reported a surplus last year. GYPSD is projecting a similar financial outlook for the current year.

To make an acronym plural, just add s (no apostrophe).

E.g. There were 16 CEOs in the boardroom.

Ampersands

Avoid using ampersands (&) in general text, headings, or subheadings—use “and” instead. An ampersand may be used in charts or tables where space is tight, or when it is part of a company name or book title.

Capitalization

After a colon

Do not capitalize the word after a colon.

E.g. I’m about to list several things: one, two, and three.

Book titles

Titles of books and documents are always in title case (everything but articles, conjunctions, and prepositions capitalized).

E.g. Today I finished *Anne of Green Gables*.

Department names

The names of departments, divisions or branches are always lowercase except for a proper name. Do not capitalize ministry when referring to Education. Do not capitalize “government” in *provincial government* or *Alberta government*. Capitalize both words in the proper name, which is “Government of Alberta”. When in doubt, refer to *The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling*.

E.g. The people in the planning branch love to play games.

E.g. The people in the Capital Planning Branch love to ...

E.g. The ministry will...

Always capitalize the full and proper names of institutions, organizations, courses of study and documents and legislation, but use lower case in other references.

E.g. the Education Act, **but** the act

E.g. Alberta School Boards Association, **but** the association

E.g. Science 10, **but** science class

Note: names of languages are always capitalized, e.g. English class

E.g. Ministerial Order 10/2012, **but** the ministerial order

E.g. Grade 12 class, **but** the grades

Job titles

The Division generally uses what is known as the “down” style for capitalization. Down style means that only the first word and proper names are capitalized. Job titles are capitalized only

when referencing a specific person; otherwise, they are lowercase.

E.g. The staff is excited to meet Jessie, the new Communications Manager.

E.g. The role of the communications manager is to . . .

The exception is to always use “up” style (always capitalize) the following job titles:

E.g. “Elder”, the “Division”, the “Superintendent”, the “Board”, the “Principal”.

The Premier, the Speaker of the House and all Cabinet Ministers have the title “Honourable” added to their names. Other MLAs do not.

Headings and subheadings

Capitalize **important** words (everything but articles, conjunctions, and prepositions) in headings—the same goes for subheadings. Also try to use the four-letter rule – lower case all words under four letters.

CORRECT: 10 Things to Know about School Marketing and Media

INCORRECT: 10 Things To Know About School Marketing And Media

Other capitalization tips

Capitalize all major words in the title and subtitle.

Do not capitalize “a”, “an”, or “the” **unless** it is the first or last word in a title or sub-title.

Do not capitalize “and”, “but”, “for”, “or”, “nor”, “to”, “as”

Contractions

Do not use contractions (it’s, you’re, they’re, she’s): use (it is, you are, they are, she is).

Formatting

Book and eBook titles, magazine and newspaper names, reports, and titles of proclaimed legislation should be in italics.

E.g. My favorite movie is *Blade Runner*, which is based on the book *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick.

Write titles of legislation in italics, **but** only when being referred to by their proper name.

E.g. the *School Act*, **but** the act

Note: Names of strategies, projects, programs, events, and legislation that has not yet been proclaimed in force, are capitalized, **but** not italicized.

A part or section of a larger work is put in quotation marks. (This includes a chapter of a book, the title of an article in a magazine, etc.)

E.g. Chapter two, “World War Terminus,” talks about a war that was so bad they skipped the numbering system.

E.g. The *Edmonton Journal* article “How to Tell if Your Child is a Genius” provides examples.

E.g. Check out the blog post “How to Eat Healthy” for more information.

Ensure the font and spacing is consistent and correct through the document. GYPSD preferred

fonts are Arial, Calibri, or Times New Roman, size 11 or 12.

Watch for correct margins and justification. It is recommended to have one-inch margins; set text left-justified.

Always use single spaces between sentences.

Put one space after periods.

Headings and subheadings should use headline-style capitalization (Initial Capitals **not** ALL CAPITALS).

Use page numbers if appropriate.

Ensure all necessary documents are attached and referenced at the end of the document.

Proofread for grammar and spelling – see list of frequently used words.

Watch that names, dates, and numbers do not break over two lines.

Use Division templates when available.

Ensure the final document's layout aligns with the *Visual Identity Guidelines*.

Ensure all public and Division branded documents have been signed off by the appropriate supervisor (and communications if required).

Carbon copies

After cc: tab to 0.5 inch

If cabinet ministers are to be copied, list in [order of precedence](#). Check for the correct order.

MLAs are copied in alphabetical order according to last name.

Ensure that required carbon copy notations are listed in the proper order, with correct titles.

Lists

If a bullet point is a complete sentence, treat it as such: capitalize the first letter of the first word and end it with the appropriate punctuation. If it is not a complete sentence, lower case the first letter of the first word and use no punctuation.

If you are using a series of bullet points that are not complete sentences, format them this way:

- This is the main point:
 - this is the sub-point;
 - this is the second sub-point; and
 - this is the third sub-point.

Tip: Try substituting the word “mainly” in place of a colon before a list to check if a colon works or not.

Do not add “including” before bulleted lists as it is redundant.

Be consistent, for example, start each bullet with the same verb tense.

Avoid having more than one sentence in each bullet.

Numbers

Write out numbers up to and including nine, except in per cents (see below) and hard data. The exceptions to this rule are if you have a list of numbers that includes numbers under and above nine: in this case, just make the list consistent (see the second example). Other exceptions are dollar amounts, school grades, percentages, phases of projects, and page numbers.

E.g. Of the 20 marketing employees, only three decided to go to the party.

E.g. The table was stocked with 2 cakes, 10 pizzas, and 24 sodas.

E.g. \$ 1, Grade 3, 7 per cent, page 6, Phase 1

Write out numbers at the start of a sentence.

E.g. Twenty-two of the experts agreed.

Be consistent in a paragraph, using all words or all numerals in referring to similar things.

Use the format 2019/2020 for the fiscal year, not 2019/20 or 2019-2020. For periods greater than one year, use a hyphen.

E.g. 2019-2021

Write out dollar amounts as: \$54.67, \$1,000, \$324,567, \$14,567,534, and \$9 million.

Write numbers less than \$1 in cents, i.e. 76 cents.

Always place a zero before decimals.

E.g. 0.5 kilometres

Dates

Always place a comma after the year if used in a sentence. Write format as “month, day, year”.

E.g. On September 1, 2019, she went to the school.

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers (adjectives describing the numerical position of something) should always be written out.

E.g. First, third, tenth.

Per cents

Use per cent, not percent or %. Spell out number when it starts a sentence.

E.g. The survey results showed that 70 per cent of marketers tweet.

E.g. Sixty per cent of marketers also use Facebook.

Phone numbers

Use this format: 719-430-0124

Time

Use this format: 9 a.m. /9 p.m.; 9-10 a.m.

Punctuation

Apostrophes

In general, only use an apostrophe when you need to form the *possessive* of the word; not the plural. The exception to this is the plural of it, which is “its.”

E.g. The new CFO’s office had its own entrance.

E.g. A hard day’s work.

E.g. Laura’s book was damaged by the rain.

Singular: Add an apostrophe and “s” whether the singular noun ends in “s” or not.

E.g. The Jones’s album went platinum.

E.g. Everyone stared at Charles’s new car, a Tesla Model S.

Plural possessive: Only add an apostrophe when the noun ends in “s”. Add an apostrophe and “s” when it ends in a letter other than “s”.

E.g. “lawyers’ fees”, “Smiths’ vacation”, “children’s toys”.

Commas

Use the serial (Oxford) comma before the “and” or “or” in lists, and when the list includes three or more items.

E.g. Idea generation, content creation, distribution, and ROI optimization.

Use closing commas.

E.g. Your MLA, Martin Long, forwarded a letter, **not** Your MLA, Martin Long forwarded a letter.

Never omit a comma if there is a chance your sentence will be misread.

E.g. Don’t eat, Grandma! **not** Don’t eat Grandma!

Use after FANBOYS (coordinating conjunctions).

E.g. “for”, “and”, “nor”, “but”, “or”, “yet”, “so”

Ellipses

Use non-spaced ellipses, like this: ...

Hyphens

Use hyphens in numeric ranges but try to use “to” (instead of a hyphen) when including a numeric range in a sentence.

E.g. Numbers 11 to 25 are from the second experiment.

E.g. 9-10 a.m.

When words form a compound adjective and stand alone in a sentence, do not use hyphens. Do use hyphens if they are before a noun they modify – second example.

E.g. She is twelve years old.

E.g. She is a twelve-year-old girl.

Quotes

Use said (not says) when quoting someone.

E.g. “The general consensus is not to sing at work,” said Sally.

Always use double quotation marks with single quotation marks inside.

E.g. “I read the article ‘The Dog’s Computer,’” said Tom.

Periods and commas *always* go inside quotation marks.

E.g. “I was driving my car,” Michelle said, “when a deer jumped over the trail.”

Question marks and exclamation points go inside quotation marks only when they are part of what the speaker is saying.

E.g. Denise said, “Would you like fries with that?”

E.g. Denise asked if John would like fries with that. Can you believe he said, “I would”?

Colons, semicolons, and dashes always go outside quotation marks.

E.g. The following should report to the boardroom: managers, directors, learning services staff, and senior team members.

Quotations under two sentences are usually run in a text: longer quotes should be set out as extracts in the document.

Voice and Tone

GYPSD strives to produce clear, consistent, instructive content. Here are a few notes on the voice and tone to use in writing for the Division.

- Use active voice, not passive
- Write in business formal language
- Be helpful
- Use short sentences: use clear and understandable language (watch for jargon)
- Always write in third person, not first
 - E.g.** never use “I”, “we”, “your”
- Use opening paragraphs, closing greetings as appropriate

If the document is to respond to one or more concerns, ensure that all are addressed.

Word Choice

Between vs. among

Use *between* with two people or things and *among* with three or more people or things.

Effect vs. affect

To *affect* means to produce a change or influence something.

E.g. How will the new invoicing structure affect the payroll department?

An *effect* is a change that has occurred.

E.g. The effect of the new invoicing structure will be negligible.

Affect is a verb 99% of the time; *effect* is a noun 99% of the time.

E.g. vs. i.e.

E.g. stands “for example”.

I.e. stands “that is”

Insure, ensure, and assure

To *insure* means to protect against financial loss.

E.g. You are insured against theft.

To *ensure* means to make certain or to confirm.

E.g. Track your feedback to ensure your success.

To *assure* means to promise. (We assure a person.)

E.g. I can assure you that your revenues are recorded accurately.

Which vs. that

Which, when used correctly, is part of a nonrestrictive clause, which is preceded or set off by commas. This clause is not essential to the meaning of the sentence and can be taken out without changing the meaning.

E.g. The dog sled race, which was grueling, took place two weeks ago.

That is part of a restrictive clause, which is not set off by commas. This clause is essential to sentence meaning and cannot be removed.

E.g. The dog sled races that take place in Anchorage are especially intense.

Rule of thumb: if the *which* in the sentence sounds funny with a comma in front of it or around the entire phrase, the sentence probably needs to be using *that*.

Use “which” or “that” to refer to things, and “who” to refer to people.

E.g. Ministries that wish to participate...

Other Notes

Always respond to inquiries in kind.

E.g. email to email; phone to phone; letter to letter.

Websites are generally set in Roman (not italics) and title capitalization. If hyperlinks are in a document, ensure they work.

Always use the same tense to be consistent: all past tense or all present tense.

Use first name for people upon second reference.

E.g. Tom Jones wrote a letter. Later, Tom went to the post office.

Starting a sentence with a conjunction, such as “and” or “but” is okay.

Always double-check the accuracy of all dates, facts and figures.

Use an email signature that includes full name, job title, and GYPSD or school logo. Salutations

are at the discretion of the writer; however, ensure that it is business professional.

Ensure names are spelled correctly.

When using pronouns, make sure they are in agreement with the noun they are replacing. Singular nouns require singular pronouns and plural nouns require plural pronouns.

E.g. the board passed a resolution at its meeting, **not** the board passed a resolution at their meeting.

Use “staff” as plural.

E.g. Education staff are; **not** education staff is

It is preferable to use more gender-neutral language. Use an article instead of a pronoun or substitute a neutral pronoun (third example).

E.g. they, their, them; **not** “he” or “she”

E.g. The author should review his work carefully, **but** The author should review the work carefully.

E.g. A teacher may have access to more technology in a wealthy school than she will in a poorer district. **Change to** A teacher may have access to more technology in a wealthy school than one will in a poorer district.

Do not put periods in postal information: NE (not N.E.)

Avoid phrases that have redundant pairs.

E.g. “past history”, “unexpected surprise”, “end result”, “often times”.

Cut out unnecessary expletives (phrases that do not add any structural or grammatical meanings to the sentence).

E.g. “all things considered”, “as a matter of fact”, “as far as I am concerned”, “at the present time”, “by virtue of the fact”, “exists”, “for all intents and purposes”, “for the most part”, “manner”, “type of”, “for the purpose of”, “have a tendency to”, “in a manner of speaking”, “in my opinion”, “in the case of”, “in the final analysis”, “in the event of”, “in the process of”, “the point I am trying to make”.

Word List – Frequently Used Words and Spelling Preferences

Aboriginal (capitalize)	boardroom	School Superintendents, CASS
Alberta government	bottom line (n.)	
Alberta School Boards Association, ASBA	bullet point	company-wide (adj.)
Alberta School Councils' Association, ASCA	busing (not <i>bussing</i>)	copywriting
a lot (not <i>a lot</i>)	buy-in (n.)	Education Services Centre, ESC
a.m. (not am, AM)	Canadian Parents for French, CPF	decision maker
the Board of Trustees	CEO/CFO	the department
the Board	cheat sheet	departmental
Board Chair	Chromebook	the Deputy Minister
the Board Chair	cloud-based (adj.)	the deputy ministers
	College of Alberta	the Division (always

capitalize)	home-schooling (followed by n.)	okay (not o.k. or OK)
the Education ministry	Honourable (capitalized)	onboarding
Elder (capitalized)	how to (followed by v.)	per cent
enrol (not <i>enroll</i>)	how-to (n.)	p.m. (not pm, PM)
enrolled	how-tos (plural n.)	PowerPoint
enrolment	iPad	the principal
Facebook	iPhone	Principal
the federal Department of	Indigenous (capitalize)	Program of Studies (used to refer to a particular program)
the federal departments of	Infographic	the program of studies (used as a general reference)
firsthand	Instagram	Province of Alberta
follow up (v.)	Internet	provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan
follow-up (adj.)	kilometre	province-wide (hyphenate)
Francophone (capitalize)	kindergarten	the province
fulfil (not fulfill)	Leadership Quality Standard, LQS	provincial government
fulfilled	LGBTQ+	the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, PSBAA
fulfilment	LinkedIn	reuse
giveaway (n.)	literacy	retweet
Government of Alberta (capitalize)	long-term (adj.)	skillset
governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan	longterm (n.)	SMART Board
the grades of	mathematics	smartphone
Grade 10	midnight (not 12 p.m.)	Snapchat
guidance counsellor	Ministry of Education	sneak peek (n.)
hereinafter	the Minister	social-emotional (hyphenate)
Hinton Learning Services Centre, HLSC	the ministers	social media posts
home schooling (not <i>homeschooling</i>) (v.)	the ministry	social media managers
	the ministries of Education and Human Services	standalone (adj.)
	MLA, not M.L.A.	start-up (n. and adj.)
	MLA, (followed by ward)	
	MLAs	
	noon (not 12 p.m.)	
	numeracy	

subject-matter experts
(SMEs)
Superintendent of
Schools (capitalize)
the Superintendent
Superintendent
Leadership Quality
Standard, SLQS
Teacher Quality
Standard, TQS

team member
The Learning
Connection, TLC
town councillor
travelled (not traveled)
the Trustees (capitalize)
Trustee
tweet
Twitter

walk-through (n.)
web
webpage
website
World Wide Web
year-old
(followed by n.)
years old
YouTube

When in doubt about a word that is not listed here, refer to the [Merriam-Webster's Dictionary](#).

When to Use Em Dashes and Semicolons

Em dash

Em dashes (-) are the width of a lowercase “m.” They are used to indicate added emphasis, a pause, or a change of thought.

Em dashes are the “wait for it” of punctuation, creating a pause that is conversational in tone, while still drawing your eye to the next sentence or phrase fluidly.

Em dashes can have the same effect as a colon, but with more of an artistic spin, and less of an abrupt stop.

E.g. I’ve been looking for a girl like you - not you - but a girl like you. (Groucho Marx)

Semicolons

When independent clauses are joined by an adverb, a semicolon precedes the word and a comma is used after (the adverbs this applies to are: however, indeed, moreover, nevertheless, then, therefore, thus).

E.g. She said this; however, she meant that.

Semicolons can be used to link two related independent clauses (complete sentences), or to separate items in a list separated by a comma, or the list is long or complex.

E.g. My aunt came over to visit today; she brought her yappy little dog.

E.g. We went to so many awesome places on our trip: London, England; Madrid, Spain; Berlin, Germany; and Miami, Florida.

The semicolon can also be used more creatively, if it is conjoining two independent clauses (complete sentences), and does *not* include a conjunction (with, and, but, because, for, etc.):

CORRECT: Someday I’ll have to teach you how to use a crossbow; it’s a solid piece of weaponry.

INCORRECT: Someday I’ll have to teach you how to use a crossbow; because it’s a solid piece of weaponry.

UK vs. American English Spelling

Either spelling is acceptable in Division content but be consistent in using the same spelling throughout the document. Here is ea quick list of some common words that have different spellings:

UK	American
whilst	while
colour	color
an historic	a historic
US or USA	U.S.
Dr, Mr, Mrs	Dr., Mr., Mrs.
judgement	judgment
adviser	advisor
ageing	aging
co-operate	cooperate
data-base	database
eg	e.g.,
etc	etc.
vs	vs.
organisation	organization
emphasise	emphasize
acknowledgement	acknowledgment
plough	plow
kilometre	kilometer
behaviour	behavior

Resources and References

The Division's *Editorial Style Guide* has relied on several resources:

- [Chicago Guidelines of Style](#)
- Einsohn, Amy, and Marilyn Schwartz. *The Copyeditor's Handbook*, 4th ed. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019
- [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)
- [The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling](#)
- The Government of Alberta's [Government Identity Program](#)
- [Canada.ca Content Style Guide](#)
- [upland Kapost](#)
- Government of Alberta's [Government Organizational Structure](#)
- GYPSD's [Visual Identity Guidelines](#)