

## APPENDIX 2

# Writing Styleguide

### Abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations except where the abbreviated form is more commonly used than the full term (for example, “a.m.” and “p.m.”). For common abbreviations such as “e.g.,” “i.e.,” and “etc.,” use English equivalents.

Abbreviation	English equivalent
e.g. (exempli gratia)	for example
i.e. (id est)	that is
etc. (et cetera)	and so on, and so forth

If you choose to use these abbreviations, use lower case and separate the abbreviation from the following text with a comma (e.g., like this).

### Acronyms

Minimize the use of acronyms as much as possible. They confuse novices, and sometimes even experts forget what they mean. When you do use them, spell them out the first time—for example, “Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).” Use small caps to format acronyms.

To form the plural of an acronym, add “s” (for example, PCBs).

### Affect and effect

The verb “affect” means to influence or produce a change, while the verb “effect” means to bring about.

#### Example

The changes to the Act will affect three departments.

They effected many changes in the organization.

“Effect” is usually used as a noun, and means the result.

#### Example

We felt the effects of the stock market crash.

### Among and between

Use “between” to describe the direct relationship or comparison of two or more items. Use “among” when the relationship is less direct. In other words, use “between” when the relationship of the items is individual; use “among” when the relationship is collective.

### Example

You can choose between steak, chicken, and fish.

John was among the candidates chosen.

### And/or

“And/or” is often used in legal applications. Avoid using it where either “and” or “or” will do.

### Because and since

Avoid using “since” to mean “because”—it’s ambiguous. Use “because” to refer to a reason. Use “since” to refer to the passage of time.

### Example

Because we installed a new system, we can quickly respond to the public.

Since we installed the new system, our response rate has improved by five minutes.

### Between

See *Among and between*.

### Can and may

Use “can” to describe actions or conditions that are possible. Use “may” only to describe situations where permission is being given. If either “can,” “could,” or “may” apply, use “can” because it’s less tentative.

### Example

You can submit the form upon completion. (**Correct**)

You may submit the form upon completion. (**Implies that you have permission to submit the report**)

Use “may” only when you really need to be tentative.

### Example

If you submit the form within two weeks, you may receive approval faster.

### Clichés

A *cliché* is an expression that has lost its originality and impact through overuse. Examples of clichés include “busy as a bee,” “light as a feather,” “with regard to” and “all things considered.” Avoid clichés “like the plague!”

### Colloquialisms

*Colloquialisms* are conversational or slang expressions like “cutting-edge technology.” Avoid them as much as possible.

If the slang expression is acceptable, don’t enclose it in single quotation marks—just use it. If the expression is not acceptable, avoid it altogether.

### Example

It was ‘cutting-edge’ technology.  
(**Avoid**)

It was cutting-edge technology.  
(**Preferred**)

### Comprise

“Comprise” means to include or maintain. The whole comprises the parts rather than the reverse. Never use “comprised of.”

### Example

The department comprises several workgroups. (**Correct**)

Several workgroups comprise the department. (**Incorrect**)

The department is comprised of several workgroups. (**Incorrect**)

### Contractions

Contractions are contracted forms of words with the missing letters represented with an apostrophe, such as “you’ll” and “don’t.” They give your writing a more conversational tone—to the reader they sound more like natural speech.

Contractions are widely used in most business writing. Because they are a mark of informal writing, you may want to avoid them in formal documents.

Be consistent in substituting an apostrophe for deleted letters. Avoid uncommon contractions, and don’t create any new ones of your own.

Don’t use a contraction with a noun to replace “is” (for example, “our network’s connected”). Don’t make a contraction from a noun and a verb (for example, “the supervisor’ll review your work”).

### Dates

Avoid using abbreviations for months. Don’t use “th” or “nd” after a date. Only use a comma when the day is included.

### Example

Nov. 10th, 1997 (**Avoid**)

November 10, 1997 (**Preferred**)

November 1997 (**Preferred**)

### Desire, wish, need, and want

Use “need” instead of “desire” and “wish.” Use “want” when the reader’s actions are optional (that is, they may not “need” something but may still “want” something).

### Example

If you need to confirm receipt of your application, call the branch office.

Select the books you want and sign them out in the register.

## Different

Use “different from” rather than “different than” when the next part of the sentence is a noun or pronoun (that is, two things are being compared).

### Example

Form 123 is different from Form 124.

## Effect

See *Affect and effect*.

## Ensure and insure

“Ensure” means to make sure.  
“Insure” refers to insurance.

### Example

Ensure that the applicant has completed the necessary forms before continuing.

You can insure your house up to its market value.

## Fractions

Express fractions in words or as decimals whenever possible. When you do use fractions, use figures for fractions greater than one (for example, “0.25 litres,” “3.3 metres,” “2½ days”). Spell out fractions less than one that are used alone (for example, “one-third inch,” “three-quarters finished”). But use figures when fractions are part of a compound term (for example, “¼-inch bolt”).

## Gender inclusiveness

Avoid specifying gender. Here are some guidelines:

- Use gender-neutral titles when referring to people (for example, use “chairperson” or “chair” instead of “chairman”). Use generic nouns when referring to specific groups (for example, use “managers” to include both male and female managers).
- Avoid gender-specific pronouns (for example, “his,” “her,” “he/she”). You can:
  - address the reader as “you”
  - repeat the noun (for example, “managers”)
  - drop the pronoun altogether
  - make the noun plural and then use “they” or “their,” which are gender neutral
  - use a passive verb and omit the noun and pronoun
  - rewrite the sentence
- Avoid phrases that make assumptions about gender. For example, “delegates and their wives are invited to attend the breakfast meeting” implies that all delegates are male.
- Avoid always putting men first in phrases such as “men and women,” “boys and girls,” “his or hers.” Alternate the word order in phrases like these, so that neither women nor men always go first.

- Avoid using language that is not parallel, such as “men and ladies” (use “men and women”/“women and men”), “man and wife” (use “husband and wife”/“wife and husband”), and “Mr. and Mrs. John Doe” (use “Mr. John Doe and Mrs. Jane Doe” or “Jane and John Doe”).
- Never refer to adult women as “girls,” “gals,” or “ladies” in situations where you would call men “men.”
- Don’t use “lady,” “woman,” or “female” as adjectives (for example, “lady doctor,” “woman lawyer”) unless gender is relevant. If gender is relevant, use the noun “woman” (for example, “she is the first woman to walk on the moon”) or the adjective “female” (for example, “she is the first female astronaut to walk on the moon”).
- Avoid stereotypical words and phrases (for example, “like a man,” “women’s work,” and “ladylike”).

## Insure

See *Ensure and insure*.

## Italics

Use *italics* when referring to document titles and section references and when introducing new terms.

## Its and it’s

Use “it’s” as a contraction for “it is” (for example, “it’s the right thing to do”). Use “its” as a possessive pronoun (for example, “the store is known for its low prices”).

## Me, myself, and I

Use the pronoun “I” as a subject. Use “me” as an object. Use “myself” when the person receiving the action is the same as the person doing the action.

### Examples

John and me share the computer.  
**(Incorrect)**

John and I share the computer.  
**(Correct)**

It was a valuable experience for her friend and I. **(Incorrect)**

It was a valuable experience for her friend and me. **(Correct)**

I cut myself. **(Correct)**

The waiter gave my sister and myself some good tips. **(Incorrect)**

The waiter gave my sister and me some good tips. **(Correct)**

## Measurements

When writing for a Canadian audience, express measurements in metric, unless imperial or some other measurement is conventionally used (for example, “5 feet 11 inches tall”).

Follow these conventions for describing measurements:

- Use figures for all measurements—even if the number is under 10 (for example, 5 metres).
- Spell out the names of metric units (for example, “25 grams”). Use symbols (for example, “25 g”) only in tables.
- For two or more measurements, repeat the unit of measure (for example, “3.5-inch or 5.25-inch disk”).
- When the measurement is used as an adjective, use a hyphen to connect the number to the measurement unit (for example, “2-inch binder”).
- Express dimensions in figures (for example, “3.5 inches by 10 inches”).

See also *Fractions and numbers*.

## Money

Don’t add a decimal point or zeros to a whole dollar amount in a sentence.

### Example

The first option costs \$1.50, the second costs \$2.00, and the third costs 75¢. (**Avoid**)

The first option costs \$1.50, the second costs \$2, and the third costs \$0.75. (**Preferred**).

Note that amounts less than \$1 are expressed as “\$0.75,” not as “75¢.”

In a column, if any amount contains cents, add a decimal point and two zeros to all whole dollar amounts.

## Myself

See *Me, myself, and I*.

## Names

Be consistent when naming organizations, position titles, document titles, and so on. Capitalize names and use them consistently throughout the document.

## Need

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

## Notes

**Note:** To draw the reader’s attention to something of special importance, create a note like this one.

## Paragraphs

Keep paragraphs short—no longer than four or five sentences if you can. Longer paragraphs are visually intimidating to the reader.

Try to limit each paragraph to one topic, unless you are linking related points. Start a new paragraph when you change topics or shift your focus.

Leave a space between paragraphs. Avoid indenting the first line of a paragraph—this convention is not commonly used in business publications.

## Parallelism

If two or more ideas are parallel, express them in parallel form. Balance single words with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

### Example

Frequent absences can result in suspension or even being terminated.  
(**Not parallel**)

Frequent absences can result in suspension or even termination.  
(**Parallel**)

Balance parallel ideas in a series or items in a list.

### Examples

The department is responsible for creating annual reports, budgets, and financial planning. (**Not parallel**)

The department is responsible for creating annual reports, budgets, and financial plans. (**Parallel**)

White space is important for the following reasons:

- breaks up visual impact
- visual separation of sections (**Not parallel**)
- visually separates sections (**Parallel**)
- focusing attention (**Not parallel**)
- focuses attention (**Parallel**)
- content is broken into smaller chunks (**Not parallel**)
- breaks content into smaller chunks (**Parallel**)

## Passive voice

See *Voice*.

## Percent ( % )

Spell out the word percent. Use the symbol in tables, on business forms, and in statistical or technical information. Be consistent—don't mix the word percent and the symbol %. In sentences that begin with a percentage, spell the number out.

### Example

Price reductions range from 20 to 50 percent.

Forty percent of the population...

## Person

*Person* refers to the point of view or perspective you take when writing: first person (“I” or “we”), second person (“you”), or third person (“he,” “she,” or “they”). This styleguide is written in the second person, because it addresses the reader as “you.”

## Singular and plural forms of personal pronouns

Person	Singular	Plural
first	I, me, my, mine	we, us, our, ours
second	you, your, yours	you, your, yours
third	he, him, his she, her, hers it, its	they, them, their, theirs

Use the “I” or “we” point of view, which emphasizes the writer, when writing correspondence or reports about personal experience—for example, when describing your group’s actions or ideas.

## Example

We have decided not to upgrade our computer system.

Use the “you” point of view, which emphasizes the reader, when giving advice or instructions. For example, when writing a procedure manual, use the second person and the imperative form (that is, tell the reader what to do).

## Example

Complete the form, then submit it to your supervisor.

Use the third person, which emphasizes the subject, when describing what other people have done or should do.

## Example

Writers should decide on a point of view and stick with it.

## Point of view

See *Person*.

## Possessives and plurals

Form the possessive case of singular nouns by adding an apostrophe and an “s”—even if the word ends in an “s.”

## Example

- the Ministry’s responsibility
- Burns’s poetry

For plural nouns ending in “s,” form the possessive case by adding an apostrophe.

## Examples

- Workers’ Compensation Board
- ministries’ budgets

For plural nouns not ending in “s,” form the possessive case by adding an apostrophe and an “s.”

### Examples

- children’s stories
- women’s programs

Instead of using old-fashioned Latin-style plurals, use English-style plurals. The Latin-style plurals are not wrong, just a bit stuffy.

Old-fashioned	Preferred
formulae	formulas
appendices	appendixes
addenda	addendums
indices	indexes

### Prepositions

A preposition links a noun or pronoun to another word or phrase. Prepositions often express relationships—for example, “with,” “to,” “since,” “at,” and so on.

Although some writers avoid dangling prepositions, sometimes they help avoid awkward sentence constructions.

### Example

Where are you going to?

(**Considered incorrect by some**)

To where are you going? (**Awkward**)

Where are you going? (**Better**)

### Presently

Avoid using “presently” as it’s often taken to mean “now” rather than its actual meaning “soon.”

### Pronouns

A *pronoun* is a word that represents a noun—for example, “he,” “it,” “who,” “they,” and so on. The noun a pronoun represents is its *antecedent*.

Use pronouns sparingly. When used too often or incorrectly, they can be ambiguous and can slow reading speed because the reader has to go back to see which noun they represent.

Make sure pronouns agree with their antecedents. If pronoun references are not clear, repeat the noun or restructure the sentence.

### Examples

Thank the writer for their interest.  
(**Incorrect**)

Thank the writer for her interest.  
(**Correct**)

Thank the writers for their interest.  
(**Correct**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, it might break. (**Ambiguous**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, the plate might break. (**Clear**)

If you drop the plate on the glass table, the table might break. (**Clear**)

The plate might break if you drop it on the glass table. (**Clear**)

See also *Gender inclusiveness*.

### Sentences

Keep sentences short and simple. Try to limit them to one idea. The longer the sentence, the more difficult it is to grasp. If it's longer than 30 words, consider rewriting it. Don't link unrelated ideas together with "and" or use semicolons.

Structure your sentences using a simple subject-verb-object sentence order. By sticking to this order, you avoid using the passive voice, use fewer words, and your sentence is easier to understand.

### Example

Applicants (**subject**) appreciate (**verb**) honesty (**object**).

Try not to start sentences with "it" and "there"—these constructions are often vague and wordy, and can usually be restructured to be much more direct.

### Examples

It was not our intention to break the rules. (**Avoid**)

We did not intend to break the rules. (**Preferred**)

There may be resistance to the plan. (**Avoid**)

Some people may resist the plan. (**Preferred**)

There are several options in this proposal. (**Avoid**)

This proposal presents several options. (**Preferred**)

**Spacing after a period** – Use a single space to separate the end of one sentence from the beginning of the next. Word processors automatically put in the required spacing at the end of sentences. Pressing the space bar twice will result in twice the required spacing.

## Since

See *Because and since*.

## Spacing

Don't use hard spaces (the space produced when you press the space bar) to centre or position text—use tabs, indents, or centred alignment.

Use a single space to separate the end of one sentence from the beginning of the next. As a general rule, you should never have two consecutive spaces in a document.

## Spelling and usage

When writing for a Canadian audience, use Canadian, not American, spelling (for example, “colour” not “color,” “centre” not “center”). If in doubt, refer to *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

## That and which

“That” introduces a restrictive clause—a clause that must be there for the sentence to make sense. A restrictive clause often defines the noun or phrase preceding it. “Which” introduces a non-restrictive, parenthetical clause—a clause that could be omitted without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

### Example

The car was travelling at a speed that would endanger lives.

The car, which was travelling at a speed that would endanger lives, swerved onto the sidewalk.

Use “who” or “whom,” rather than “that” or “which,” when referring to a person.

## Their and there

“There” is an adverb used to indicate a place or position other than “here.” “Their” is the possessive form of “they.” Use the plural pronoun “their” only when the noun it’s representing is plural.

### Examples

Your manual is over there.

Their manual needs to be updated.

Contact each employee to clarify their options and rights. (**Incorrect**)

Contact all employees to clarify their options and rights. (**Correct**)

## Then and than

“Then” refers to a time in the past or the next step in a sequence. “Than” is used for comparisons.

## Time

When referring to specific times, use numerals and the abbreviations “a.m.” and “p.m.” with lower-case letters and periods.

### Examples

3:30 p.m.

9:00 a.m.

4:45 p.m.

## Underlining

Use underlining sparingly—it slows reading speed. Don't use it to emphasize parts of the text. If something is very important, give it a separate heading, put it in a text box, or create a note (see *Notes*).

## Verbs

Use the active voice and strong verbs whenever you can. Make sure the verb agrees with the subject of the sentence.

**Voice** – Use the active voice whenever possible. Using the active voice helps maintain the preferred subject-verb-object sentence order. You also avoid introducing the auxiliary verb required by passive verb forms.

### Example

The form is completed by the applicant. (**Passive voice**)

The applicant completes the form. (**Active voice**)

**Tense** – Match the different verb tenses to different types of documents and to the logical time relationships described.

### Example

The applicant will complete the form. (**Future tense**)

The applicant completes the form. (**Present tense**)

Complete the form. (**Imperative form, present tense**)

The applicant completed the form. (**Past tense**)

**Strong verbs** – Use direct, active verbs. Avoid combining weak, vague verbs such as “be” or “do” with the noun form of a verb. Watch out for verbs that end in “-ion” strung together with prepositions (for example, change “creation of the document” to “creating the document”).

### Examples

Our research could be of help to you in making a decision. (**Weak**)

Our research could help you make a decision. (**Strong**)

We did a calculation of the total. (**Weak**)

We calculated the total. (**Strong**)

**Agreement** – Make sure that the noun and verb in your sentences agree with each other—that both are singular or both plural.

#### Example

Power (**noun, singular**) from back-up generators and emergency lighting are (**verb, plural**) routinely maintained as part of the fire plan. (**Incorrect**)

Power (**noun, singular**) from back-up generators and emergency lighting is (**verb, singular**) routinely maintained as part of the fire plan. (**Correct**)

When using an “either/or” sentence format, make sure the verb agrees with the part of the subject closest to the verb.

#### Example

Either the lock or the barred windows is likely to reduce thefts. (**Incorrect**)

Either the lock or the barred windows are likely to reduce thefts. (**Correct**)

#### Voice

See *Verbs*.

#### Want

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

#### Which

See *That and which*.

#### Who and whom

Use the pronoun “who” as a subject. Use the pronoun “whom” as a direct object, an indirect object, or the object of a preposition.

#### Example

Who owns this?

To whom does this belong?

#### Wish

See *Desire, wish, need, and want*.

#### Your and you're

“Your” is the possessive form of you. “You’re” is the contraction of “you are.”

#### Example

This is your coat.

You're in charge today.