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DCBS *Stylebook*

A guide that covers important writing topics, including grammar, plain language, and punctuation.

MARCH 2013

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Foreword

As a state agency, our job is to provide good customer service. A big part of that is conveying clear and concise messages to our external and internal customers.

The DCBS Communications Section is here to help you provide that important information. While it seems that plain language has been forgotten in the past couple years, it is important now more than ever. We are all faced with limited resources. If we as an agency can get our message across in an understandable way, it can decrease our customers' confusion and the number of follow-up phone calls we will receive for clarification.

While I have helped many of you write your publications in plain language, I will be the first to admit that I don't have all the answers. I hope this updated stylebook will be another tool for you.

This stylebook has some additions that you need to know: email is now one word with no hyphen; website is now one word, lowercase; and use the terms staff members or employees instead of staff.

The table starting on page 58, which will help you write clearly and concisely, has some new additions as well. Among those is use "affect" or "effect" instead of "impact."

You can request free copies of the DCBS Stylebook from Communications, 503-947-7868. You can also find the DCBS Stylebook on our internal website, cbs.state.or.us/internal/.

If you have any questions about this stylebook or editing in general, call me at 503-947-7868 or email me at mark.peterson@state.or.us.

Mark Peterson
Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services

Plain language

Plain language — also called Plain English — is communication your audience understands the first time they read or hear it. Language that is plain to one set of readers may not be plain to others.

Oregon law requires executive department agencies to prepare public communications in plain language (ORS 183.750). This includes publications, forms and instructions, licenses, agency notices, and administrative rules. A document meets the plain language standard if it, whenever possible:

> ❯ Uses everyday words that convey meanings clearly and directly

> ❯ Uses the present tense and the active voice

> ❯ Uses short, simple sentences

> ❯ Defines only those words that cannot be properly explained or qualified in the text

> ❯ Uses type of a readable size

> ❯ Uses layout and spacing that separate the paragraphs and sections of the document from each other

You can apply plain language to all kinds of communication — from letters and rules to newsletters and brochures.

The state plain language site, http://plainlanguage.oregon.gov/, includes plain language examples from other state agencies. The site contains a one-page style guide, which offers quick tips for putting plain language into everyday use. You can print the one-page guide and keep it at your desk. It is at http://plainlanguage.oregon.gov/OSL/PL/plain_language_guide.pdf.

The DCBS stylebook contains a table starting on page 58 that can help you write in plain language. For example, replacing *accounted for by the fact* with *because* can make your sentence much clearer and more direct.

You can find examples — as well as some great writing tips — on the federal plain language website, www.PlainLanguage.gov.

Using reference materials

DCBS uses the Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law as one of its main references because of the publication's clarity and relative ease of use. This doesn't mean that DCBS always follows AP style, but it does mean that AP's stylebook is a reference that DCBS writers should have and use.

Everyone who writes should have an up-to-date dictionary. Professional writers and editors use dictionaries every day. That's because words aren't always written the way we think they are, and sometimes they don't mean what we think they mean. Plus, everyone has days when the simplest word just looks wrong.

Language constantly changes. Because our mission doesn't include speeding the evolution of written language, consult your dictionary. In it, you'll usually want to select the first choice among spelling options.

The AP stylebook recommends Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fourth Edition.

You may find these reference works indispensable:

The Elements of Grammar by Margaret Shertzer

The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White

Barron's Dictionary of Finance and Investment Terms

Legal Thesaurus by William C. Burton

A current Oregon Blue Book

As for online resources, try these:

http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/. Grammar Girl Mignon Fogarty provides short, friendly tips to improve your writing.

http://www.arts.uottawa.ca/writcent/hypergrammar/. HyperGrammar, a website from the University of Ottawa, has good explanations of grammar terms that aren't covered in this stylebook.

The role of the Communications Section

All written materials intended for broad distribution to the general public must be sent to the Director's Office Communications Section by publications contacts in each division, according to DCBS Communications Policy (COM-06).

Although it's common for people to be concerned about the cost of writing, editing, and design services, using them can actually save your division money. To make the most of Communications' services, you or your publications coordinator should bring formatting and design ideas to Communications and talk to graphics specialists who will then design your document for your approval. [See the inside front cover for information about Communications' services.]

The editing process

You may wonder what an editor does. In a nutshell, the editor's job is to make things easy on the reader. In being the reader's friend, editors make writers (and agencies, in the case of state editing) look better, too. Editors ensure that press releases and newsletters adhere to journalistic style and that other documents and publications are consistent and error-free before they are printed or posted to websites.

Much editing depends on a publication's purpose. Sometimes it's necessary or desirable to edit for length to get text on one line, prevent bad end-of-line breaks, or to fit text on one page or around a graphic element. Sometimes the opposite is true, and an editor needs to add words or sentences for one reason or another.

Here is a list of editing considerations:

> Does the publication include all the information that a reader might need to know?

> Is the content consistent with the goals, values, and mission of DCBS?

> Are things where the publication says they are? (Pages, tables, charts, pictures and captions, phone numbers, statute references, etc.)

› Are explanations included when they're needed — if so, are explanations clear and complete?

› Is information presented logically and clearly, or does it need reorganizing?

› Do the words and paragraphs — and the entire publication — convey the intended meaning or match the goals?

› Are spelling, punctuation, and grammar correct?

› Did the writer use DCBS style when capitalizing, abbreviating, and punctuating, even in headlines, bylines, and captions?

› Consistency: Is the publication consistent throughout in spellings, references, indents, spacing, headings, numbering, subheads, captions, hyphens, alignment, page numbers, and font sizes and styles?

› Was the piece written wordily: "*completely* finished," "add *up* these numbers," "*final* outcome," "*usual* customs"?

› Does the writing shift from second to first person, past to present tense, conversational to bureaucratic language, low to advanced comprehensibility, etc.?

› Are lines too long for the size of type, is there balance in the layout, and does the format make sense considering the goal of the publication?

Choosing punctuation

How often have you read through a document for the first time and had to reread paragraphs or sentences because what you thought you read just couldn't be right?

Incorrect punctuation often causes this difficulty. Punctuation should help readers make sense of the information you're giving them.

ampersand (&)

Use the ampersand when it is part of a company's formal name: Procter & Gamble, Oregon Health & Science University. The ampersand should not otherwise be used in place of *and*. DCBS is the Department of Consumer and Business Services. It is fine to use an ampersand in a chart or graph to save space.

apostrophes

Apostrophes are used for possessives and contracted forms of words. Simple plural forms of words don't have apostrophes. Therefore, *governments, committees, taxes, donations*, and *volunteers* don't have apostrophes.

Decades ('70s, '80s, '90s) are shortened plural forms: they *do not* use an apostrophe before the *s*. The apostrophe belongs before the number in the "tens" position. Note: The apostrophe before the decade should look like the one used in contractions (can't, won't) and possessives (Mike's, Jennifer's).

An exception to the "simple plural, no apostrophe" rule is plural versions of letters or numbers when not using an apostrophe might cause confusion.

Examples: "How many A's are in that? Did the Oakland A's play? Add 12 24's in that column."

bullets

Bullets are for highlighting important information. They can make lists easier to read and provide variety in a layout. However, they lose their effectiveness through overuse.

Just splitting an otherwise readable sentence into bullets will not make it more clear or more noticeable — it will probably just be more difficult to understand. Items best suited to bulleting are simple, important points or steps. Clearly explain what is to follow in the bulleted list. (Example: "You must satisfy all of the following requirements:") When bulleting a list, which typically means three or more items, omit the semicolons and ands at the ends of lines. If you need punctuation, use periods.

Bulleted items should be similar. Don't mix gerund phrases (gerunds are verb forms that end with -ing and function as nouns) with imperative sentences. An example of **how not** to set up bulleted lists follows.

You can improve your writing by:

> Balance is important.

> Perhaps rewriting will help

> If you have questions, call us at 503-000-0000.

> Check!

> Do you understand bulleting?

The problem with the preceding list is the lack of consistency. None of the items logically follows the lead-in to the list. The bulleted items are a mix of simple sentences, a question, and imperatives. Lengths vary, and punctuation is not applied consistently.

The following list is a **good example** of a bulleted list.

The ombudsman's staff can give you straight answers about the following:

> Worker rights and responsibilities

> Insurer rights and responsibilities

> Time-loss benefits

> Medical benefits

> Claim closures

> Litigation processes

> Claim disposition agreements

> Disputed claim settlements

colons

A colon introduces complete sentences, lists, quotations, or dialogue. Before you use a colon, be sure you've got a list, not just two or three items that could be more clearly presented in a regular sentence using commas. Example: "Required documents include a birth certificate, driver license, Social Security card, and a permission slip from your mother." Many writers automatically insert a colon after *include*. Only if you omitted *include* would you use a colon.

For clarity's sake, use a complete sentence to introduce lists. Example: "The credit will be granted when your business submits the following items: …."

If you are introducing a single quoted sentence, use a comma. Example: The team leader said, "I'm not going to be here after tomorrow."

commas

Commas are undeniably valuable in the quest for clarity, but they are often misused, and their misuse produces confusion.

DCBS uses the serial comma, which means we add a comma before the *and* in a simple series. Example: "The builders, manufacturers, and inspectors agreed that the ruling was unfair." Technically, a serial comma is not necessary. But we try to use them consistently to prevent occurrences such as this:

"Her favorite types of sandwiches are meatball, bologna, cream cheese and peanut butter and jelly."

There are two ways to interpret this sentence. The person either likes a cream cheese and peanut butter sandwich and a jelly sandwich, or she likes a cream cheese sandwich and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Use a comma when two modifiers are equal and could be separated by *and*. Example: "the etched, jeweled artwork (the etched *and* jeweled artwork)."

Do not use a comma when a descriptive word is part of the noun phrase: "dilapidated wood-frame structure, cold Midwestern night, antique Model T Ford, 4-year-old orange-and-white Koi."

Generally, use a comma to introduce a sentence with a phrase: "When the bus broke down, he hitchhiked to work." But don't use one if the phrase is at the other end of the sentence: "He hitchhiked to work when the bus broke down."

You don't need a comma in a short sentence with an introductory phrase when the comma's absence wouldn't cause confusion: "During the night the owls left the attic."

Use a comma in compound sentences, which contain two independent clauses. When you write a compound sentence, clauses are linked by "and, or, but, nor, or yet" and a comma, semicolon, or colon.

Examples: "The factory is closing, and hundreds of workers will be unemployed." (coordinating conjunction and a comma)

"The factory is closing; hundreds of workers will be unemployed." (semicolon, no conjunction)

"The factory is closing, and one effect will be immediate: Hundreds of workers will be unemployed." (independent clause, comma, independent clause, colon, independent clause)

Do not use a comma if you have a single subject and a compound verb: "We are flying to Jamaica and visiting our cousins." ("We" is the subject; "are flying and visiting" is a compound verb). If you have a compound sentence in which each independent clause has its own subject and verb, use a comma: "We flew to Jamaica for a vacation, and a storm sent us home again."

Use a comma to set off nonessential (nonrestrictive) phrases or clauses. Nonessential means that the sentence makes sense without the phrases or clauses. Example: "The candy, which had been picked up from the floor by the janitor, was eaten during the celebration."

The clause set off by commas is nonessential because neither we nor the folks who ate the candy had to know the information between the commas for the sentence to make sense. If your intent had been to inform the people that they had eaten dirty candy, you might have written the sentence this way: "The candy that had been picked up from the floor by the janitor was eaten during the celebration." The clause is essential here.

Use commas to separate day-month-year sequences. Examples: "He arrived Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2012." "Jan. 1, 2014, is the target date." Don't use commas if you're writing just the month and year. Example: "We finished that project in June 2011."

Use commas in city-state sequences: "We're presenting the project in Augusta, Ga., and Helena, Mont."

"We're going to Washington, D.C., in June."

"It's a Washington, D.C.-based corporation."

"We saw Washington, D.C.'s monuments while we were there."

The most important thing to remember with commas: **Commas should make things clearer to the reader.**

contractions

Contractions are shortened forms of more than one word. Contractions make writing more informal. However, some contractions, such as *I'd* and *won't*, can mean more than one thing. Don't choose the contraction if it might be misunderstood or if your writing is considered formal (notice of compliance, official letters, memos, etc.). Never use the contraction *ain't*, unless it's in quoted material. Even then, don't use it for an outside audience.

dashes

Dashes are used to end a sentence with a surprising element or to set off a long clause or phrase that makes the main information clearer and more distinctive. Example: "His platform — a dazzling display of rhetoric as confusing as often as it is clear and incisive — may be the chief weakness of the campaign."

Dashes are stronger than commas, less formal than colons, and more relaxed than parentheses. Use when a comma, colon, or parentheses won't serve. As with parentheses, make sure the clause set off by dashes isn't too long.

Don't use dashes when hyphens should be used, as in dates and times. Examples: "The office will be open 8 a.m.-6 p.m. every weekday." "Their record was 23-2 for that period."

Dashes are used to separate; hyphens are used to bring things together.

ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis tells readers something has been omitted, the speaker has hesitated, or more material exists than is being presented. If you use an ellipsis at the end of a statement, add a period also (four dots). Don't use an ellipsis at the beginning of a quote if you are not omitting material. Using your word-processing program's ellipsis symbol is preferable to using period, period, period, because the spacing between periods may not remain equal, and your word processor will split periods (but not ellipses) at the end of a line. Put a space on either side of the ellipsis.

exclamation points

Used to express a strong emotion or surprise. You will seldom, if ever, need them in business writing.

hyphens

Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words.

Example: "The government is working to increase the number of small-business contracts." Omitting the hyphen, it's not clear whether the business contracts are small or the contracts are for small businesses.

Hyphens also link compound modifiers, which are two or more words that express a single concept. Examples: *A first-quarter touchdown* and *a full-time job*. The only exceptions are the adverb *very* and all adverbs that end in *-ly*. Example: *An easily remembered rule.*

Use hyphens to separate times and numbers in a series, such as *5-7 p.m.* and *Chapters 15-26*.

When a large number must be spelled out, use a hyphen to connect a word ending in *-y* to another word: *twenty-one, fifty-five, etc.*

Use hyphens when a prefix ends with the vowel that begins the next word and when both the prefix and the next word begin with vowels that could make the word confusing to the reader, e.g., *re-employment* (reemployment) and *extra-attentive* (extraattentive). Other examples include *pre-existing, pre-empt, re-enact, and re-enter.*

Words such as *overregulated, overrun, and overripe* that have double consonants *do not* need hyphens. You don't need hyphens in percentages or dollar amounts (*4 percent rate, $4 million project*).

Hyphens differentiate between words such as *refund* and *re-fund* (to fund again), *reform* and *re-form* (to create again), *resent* and *re-sent* (sent again) and *resign* and *re-sign* (sign again).

Usually, prefixes needing a hyphen include *all-* and *anti-*.

For the prefix *ex-*, don't use a hyphen for words that use *ex-* in the sense of out of: *excommunicate, expropriate*. Hyphenate when using *ex-* in the sense of former: *ex-convict, ex-president*.

For the prefix *pro-*, use a hyphen when using words that mean support for something: *pro-union*, *pro-business*. In most other cases, no hyphen is needed: *pronoun, profile, produce*.

For the prefix *co-*, retain the hyphen when forming nouns, adjectives, and verbs that indicate occupation or status: *co-author, co-chairman,*

co-defendant, co-host, co-owner, co-partner, co-pilot, co-respondent, co-signer, co-sponsor, co-star, co-worker. Otherwise, don't hyphenate: *coed, coeducation, coequal, coexist, coexistence, cooperate, cooperative, coordinate, coordination.* Note: *Cooperate, coordinate,* and related words are exceptions to the rule that a hyphen is used if a prefix ends in a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel. Two exceptions regarding *co-*: *co-insurance, co-payment*.

For the prefix *non-,* generally you don't need a hyphen, unless it's a proper noun or in an awkward combination, such as *non-nuclear.* Examples: *noncomplying, nonprofit, nonsense, nonbinding.*

For the prefix *mid-*, do not hyphen unless a capitalized word follows: *mid-America, midterm*. Use a hyphen when *mid-* is before a figure: *mid-90s*.

For the prefix *wide-*, hyphenate (*wide-open, wide-angle*), except for *widespread*. For the suffix *-wide*, no hyphen is needed. Examples: *departmentwide, nationwide, statewide, industrywide*.

There are many exceptions to hyphen rules. If you're not sure, contact an editor or check a dictionary.

italics, bolding

Often, it's not apparent why writers have used italics or bold text. If you're using italics for emphasis, don't overdo it. Use bold for more emphasis. Use italics and bold sparingly if you want readers to pay attention. Most bolding, italicizing, and underlining for emphasis can be avoided by careful wording. The result is easier on the brain and the eyes of the reader. If you use bold and italics too much, the plain text is the only thing that will stand out.

parentheses

Parentheses are used to give more information. Think of parenthetical information as an aid to the reader. Forms often benefit from parenthetical information because it can be instructive in less space than a full sentence.

If the material within parentheses is a full sentence, capitalize the first word and use a period inside the parentheses. If the material is an incomplete sentence referring to material in your sentence, lowercase the first word in parentheses (unless it's a proper noun); put your end punctuation after the parenthesis.

Example: "Today, more than 50 percent of Oregonians have employer-sponsored health coverage (insured and self-insured)."

Do not use (s) to make something plural, such as this form example: List business owner(s). Make it plural: List business owners. Readers won't be confused if there is only one owner.

You may use brackets or another set of parentheses for parenthetical material within parentheses. Example: "State law [ORS 656.005(28)] requires ..."

periods

Periods end sentences. Don't double-space after periods at the end of sentences. You will leave unsightly white "tracks" throughout a page of type.

If you have a bulleted list of elements that are not full sentences, you don't need periods or other end punctuation; the bullets and the white space separate the elements of the list. However, if one of the bulleted items needs periods, use periods at the end of each of your bulleted entries.

quotation marks

Quotation marks enclose direct quotations. If quotations continue into another paragraph, you don't need close-quote marks, but you do need open-quote marks at the beginning of the next paragraph and close-quote marks when the quote ends.

Example: "We are excited to be part of the e-permitting family," Wilsonville Building Official Martin Brown said. "We believe that the e-permitting service is another way to provide great service to our customers.

"It is our goal to make the permitting process easier, and we believe this is a great step to accomplishing that goal."

Quotation marks are used for titles of books, lectures, movies, plays, poems, songs, speeches, television shows, and works of art.

Don't use quotation marks for names of magazines, newspapers, or reference books.

Quotation marks may be used around words or phrases that the reader may not know, nicknames, or tongue-in-cheek references. Avoid using quotation marks around words or phrases that would otherwise be clear, as the quotation marks cause doubt: Your investment is "secure" with us. This chicken is "fresh." It causes people to think you mean the opposite.

The period and comma always go inside of quotation marks.

Semicolons always go outside of quotation marks.

Whether or not other punctuation goes outside of quotation marks depends on whether it's part of the quoted material. Examples: The lawyer asked, "Did you actually see her fall?" Did you read "The Powers That Be"? In the latter example, the question mark is not part of the title of the book.

quoting

Quotations can be effective for adding facts, validity, variety, and tone.

Said is the safest choice to use with quotes. Avoid the temptation to use *laughed*, *stuttered*, *uttered*, *elucidated*, *claimed*, *snorted*, *demanded*, *whined*, etc. These words make editorial comment and may be incorrect or even libelous. *Says* implies that the quoted person frequently utters these words.

When you quote someone, start a new paragraph and enclose the quotation in quotation marks. Avoid partial quotations and putting single words in quotation marks.

When you identify the speaker within the sentence, you'll need another set of quotation marks, but no capital letter at the beginning of the second part of the quotation. Example: "In this case," Meyer said, "we can't proceed until the money is committed, and the money won't be committed until we have something more to show them."

semicolons

A semicolon should clarify and help organize information.

Use a semicolon when two independent clauses are not linked by a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *or*. Example: "Fall was shifting to winter; potholes on the city's main streets were suddenly four inches deeper than they had been in September."

If independent clauses contain internal punctuation, use a semicolon even if a coordinating conjunction is used. Example: "He packed his briefcase with paper, pens, a calculator, and books; and, most important to him, his daughter's drawings of the baby."

Also use a semicolon when two independent clauses are linked by a conjunctive adverb such as *however*, *nevertheless*, or *therefore*. Example: "They hadn't made reservations; however, a stranger at the desk offered to check out early to provide them a room."

Another use is to clarify a series that contains material set off by commas. Example: "He said that leadership requires the following: an ability to manipulate; a sure feel for the symbolic content of actions, whether that may be eating in the cafeteria with front-line workers or driving a Volkswagen; narrow-mindedness that allows leaders to stay focused on the main event; and skepticism — even mistrust — beneath a sunny, inspiring exterior."

There are other uses for semicolons. Refer to the list of reference works on pages 4 of this stylebook.

spacing

Use one space after a period or colon. Don't space between initials with an ampersand (*L&I Building)* or between initials used in place of first and middle names (*H.R. Pufnstuf).*

time, punctuation

If you say, "I dedicated four years to this project," there is no need for an apostrophe. If you say, "His four years' experience qualifies him," you are making years possessive and you need an apostrophe. Likewise with "two days' pay, three weeks' vacation, and spring break's activities." To avoid using the apostrophe, use a hyphenated form of the words, such as a "three-week vacation," a "two-day paycheck," etc., or say "four years of experience."

underlining

Use one of these options instead of underlining for emphasis: italics, bolding, a box, shading, small caps, or a larger type size. Underlining cuts off the descenders of lowercase letters and may be mistaken for a Web link.

DCBS terms

Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS): Located in the Labor and Industries Building (L&I Building), 350 Winter St. NE, Salem, OR 97309; website: dcbs.oregon.gov.

Divisions

> Building Codes Division (BCD): bcd.oregon.gov

> Central Services Division:

>> Financial Services: oregon.gov/DCBS/FABS/pages/index.aspx

>> Information Technology and Research Section: www4.cbs.state.or.us/ex/imd/external/

> Division of Finance and Corporate Securities (DFCS): dfcs.oregon.gov

> Insurance Division (INS): insurance.oregon.gov

> Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division (Oregon OSHA): osha.oregon.gov

> Workers' Compensation Division (WCD): wcd.oregon.gov

Offices

> Director's Office: egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/DIR/index.shtml

>> Employee Services
>> Communications Services

> Ombudsman for Injured Workers (OIW): egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/OIW

> Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance Program (SHIBA): oregonshiba.org

> Small Business Ombudsman (SBO): egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/SBO/

Boards

> Management-Labor Advisory Committee (MLAC): egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/MLAC/

> Workers' Compensation Board (WCB): wcb.oregon.gov

Grammar

American poet Carl Sandburg once said, "I never made a mistake in grammar but one in my life and as soon as I done it I seen it." The difficulty of grammar wasn't lost on the Pulitzer Prize winner. Hundreds of books about grammar are on the market. This stylebook isn't meant to provide every rule. It's just a tool to help with some general tips about grammar.

Agreement:

The subject of your sentence should agree in number with the verb and with pronouns used to represent the subject.

Wrong: "DCBS told their employees about the new law."

Correct: "DCBS told its employees about the new law."

DCBS is a department, a single entity, so it takes a singular pronoun.

Agreement can be confusing when there is a prepositional phrase after the subject of the sentence:

"One of the bills passed this session regulates payday lenders."

The subject of the sentence is one, not bills, so the verb (regulates) is singular.

Here are some other tricky ones:

anybody, anyone
These pronouns use singular verbs: "If *anybody* accepts that proposal, it will be miraculous."

everyone, everybody
Everyone is always a singular pronoun, and everybody is usually a singular pronoun: "*Everyone* had his or her own problems. *Everybody* was there."

Writers often use plural pronouns with everyone, even though everyone is singular: "*Everyone* must submit their applications." For the sake of agreement, it should be "*Everyone* must submit his or her application." Writers who dislike his or her (even though that is correct) should select plurals throughout: "Applicants must submit the forms, which they can mail, fax, or deliver."

agenda

Although agenda (a list of things to be done) is plural, it uses a singular verb: "The *agenda* for this Friday's meeting is daunting." Agenda is commonly made plural by adding an *s*.

average of

The phrase takes a plural verb in a construction such as: "An *average of* 100 new jobs are created daily."

data

Data is a plural noun that normally takes plural verbs and pronouns. However, data could become a collective noun and take a singular verb when it is regarded as a unit. For example: "The *data* have been carefully collected" (individual units). "The *data* is sound" (a unit).

likely

Use a form of the verb "to be" with *likely*, as in, "The situation is *likely* to correct itself," not "*Likely*, the situation will correct itself." Remember that "to be" is conjugated irregularly: *I am, you are, he is, we are, you are, they are*.

media

Use *media* are. However, remember that "the media" is plural for the technical portion of the information — distribution industry — television broadcasts, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, etc. The human portion of the information-distribution industry is not "media," they are members of the press, reporters, etc.

myself, yourself, himself, herself

Many people use these reflexive pronouns instead of the simple personal pronouns, (*I, me, you, he, him, she, and her*) in sentences such as this: "Send copies to my assistant and *myself*." The pronoun to use in this example would be *me*. If the pronoun is the subject of a sentence (the doer of the action), the pronoun will be *I, he, she, they*. If the pronoun is in the objective case (the recipient of some action), the pronoun will be *me, him, her, them*. Try removing the other parties from the sentence. For example: "Send a copy to *myself*" is not correct. Instead, you should write "Send a copy to *me*."

series

It is singular, even when it means *a series of meetings*, *a series of publications*, etc. So, it takes a singular verb: "A *series of meetings* has been held to discuss this topic."

staff

Staff is singular, *staffs* plural. Example: "The *staff* was able to help with the mailing." "*Staffs* from Employment and Revenue were helping DCBS staff with restructuring central services." If you are referring to DCBS employees, either call them employees or staff members.

noun-pronoun agreement

If a noun is plural, its pronoun later in the sentence must also be plural. Trying to be politically correct often leads to errors here, as does using the singular (a victim, in this case) and then trying to avoid using the correct he or she in favor of they.

Here is an example of **how not** to write it: "Civil law allows a victim to file suit within three years of when *they* realize *they* were injured."

Technically correct, but clumsy: "Civil law allows a victim to file suit within three years of when *he or she* realizes *he or she* was injured."

The following is a **good example**: "Civil law allows victims to file suit within three years of when *they* realize *they* were injured."

Pronoun case:

Subjective case
A subjective personal pronoun indicates that the pronoun is acting as the subject of a sentence.

Examples: *I, we, you, he, she, it, they*

Objective case
An objective personal pronoun indicates that the pronoun is acting as an object of a verb, compound verb (was looking, will meet), preposition (for, of, to, in), or infinitive phrase (to walk, to paint, etc.).

Examples: *me, us, you, him, her, it, them*

Subjective and objective pronouns are often mixed up. Many of us were told as children to always say something like this: "John and I." However, that only works when the pronoun is in the subject. If the pronoun is acting as an object, it is: "John and me." Examples: "Kim and I went to the store." "She gave the brochure to Phil and me."

active/passive voice

Impart life into your writing by having subjects *perform* the actions (active voice), rather than having actions *performed on them*. Example: "Because of a rumor about the insurer's financial failure, the policy of the company was canceled." Rewrite in the active voice: "The company canceled its policies when it heard a rumor of the insurer's impending financial failure." The active voice is more direct and concise.

Tip: The prepositions, *by, to,* or *for* can signal the passive voice.

ambiguous pronouns

These are pronouns, often at the beginning of sentences, that aren't easily identified by the reader, such as *it*, *they*, *their*, and *them*. Proofread for and replace such pronouns.

collective nouns

Nouns that denote a unit take singular verbs and pronouns: *class, committee, crowd, family, group, herd, jury,* and *team*. Examples: "The *committee* is meeting to set its agenda. The *jury* reached its verdict."

dangling modifiers

Avoid modifiers that do not refer clearly and logically to some word in the sentence. Dangling: "Taking our seats, the game started." (*Taking* does not refer to the subject, *game*, nor to any other word in the sentence). Correct: "Taking our seats, we watched the opening of the game." (*Taking* refers to we, the subject of the sentence).

possessive nouns

Here are eight rules for forming possessives:

› If a singular noun doesn't end in *s*, add *'s*: *book's, record's, year's*.

› If a singular common noun ends in s, add *'s* — unless the next word begins with *s*. If it does, add an apostrophe only (includes words with *s* and *sh* sounds.): *the boss's machine*, but *the boss' stronghold*; *the witness's testimony*, but *the witness' story*.

> If a singular proper noun ends in *s*, add an apostrophe only: *Tim Roberts' copy*.

> If a noun is plural in form and ends in an *s*, add an apostrophe only, even if the intended meaning of the word is singular (such as mathematics or measles): *poems' meanings, the witches' executions, the measles' misery, mathematics' theorems, the Marine Corps' spirit, DCBS' divisions*.

> If a plural noun does not end in *s*, add *'s*: *women's rights, oxen's yokes, media's successes*.

> If there is joint possession, use the possessive form only for the possessive closest to the noun: *Sonny and Cher's divorce, her husband and children's future, Kate and Charles' Porsche*.

> If there is separate possession of the same noun, use the correct possessive form for each word: *Faulkner's and Robbins' novels, Tanzania's and Paraguay's allies*.

> In a compound construction, use the correct possessive form for the word closest to the noun: *Society of Friends' annual report, father-in-law's intransigence, Postal Service's rate hike, attorney general's opinion*.

Sometimes it's hard to say whether you need a plural noun or a possessive form of the noun. For instance, AP Stylebook lists *Veterans Day* (with no apostrophe), *Teamsters Union, Professional Golfers' Association, Retail Clerks International Union,* and *National Governors' Association*. When in doubt, look it up.

possessives of personal pronouns

Ours, yours, hers, its, and *theirs* do not have apostrophes. Don't confuse the contraction of *it is* (*it's*) for the possessive pronoun *its*. Try using the uncontracted form *it's*, and see if it makes sense. *The cat licked it is fur* obviously is not correct.

Examples: "*It's* important to fill out each section of the form." "The insurer touted *its* affordability."

preposition pileup

Don't be careless when using prepositions, as in this sentence: "When he came to after the freeway pileup he was out of a job, partially off his rocker from the pain, and with from about $20,000 to $50,000 in bills eating up savings that had been pared down to practically nothing."

Try to replace verb forms that include prepositions, such as *face off*, *lift off*, *pry up*, *come to*, *lay out*, *fill up* and *circle around* (which is redundant, anyway), with one-word verbs.

split constructions

Split constructions can create confusion. An infinitive is a "to" form of a verb, such as *to dance*, *to paint*, *to create*. To split an infinitive means to interject a word or words between the "to" and the rest of the verb, as in the following example: "We intend to as soon as possible design new forms." That sentence could be better: "We intend to design new forms as soon as possible."

Auxiliary verbs may be split when writers think of information to include and pop it in without regard to its distance from the main verbs. The following is an example of a split verb: "The committee will after it has met several more times and appointed a subcommittee to complete the rough draft." The auxiliary and main verb, *will complete*, ought to be kept together for clarity's sake. Commas will *not* save this muddled situation. Example: "The committee will complete the rough draft after it meets several more times and appoints a subcommittee."

Subjects and verbs also need to remain close. Note how the material interjected between the subject and verb make this sentence difficult to understand: "The 2011 report, a compilation by various interested departments providing input about their own progress in the areas of workforce and career development, will be published soon." There are 20 words between the subject and the verb, which is a stretch for the reader. Example: "The 2011 report will be published soon. The report is a compilation from various departments."

Another problem is splitting the verb from its complement (object, adverb, descriptive phrase). Note the difficulty a reader may have with this sentence: "Parents protested last week by the Salmontowne fountain the staining chemicals that had been added to discourage children from playing in the fountain."

Stick with the subject-verb-object arrangement that best answers the question: "Who did what to whom?"

Try the sentence this way: "Last week by the Salmontowne fountain, parents protested that staining chemicals had been added to discourage children from playing in the fountain."

Capitalization

Too many capital letters can clutter your writing. So make sure when you do use capital letters, it is necessary. Here are some guidelines:

administrative law judge

Capitalize when used as a formal title before a name (Administrative Law Judge Duffy Bloom), but lowercase in other situations (The administrative law judge ruled for the injured worker).

acts/bills

Capitalize names of acts — *the Americans with Disabilities Act* — but lowercase *the act*. Bills in the Legislature are capitalized and use numerals: House Bill 3343, Senate Bill 125, HB 243.

baby boomer

Lowercase, no hyphen.

bullet points

Capitalize the first word in each bullet point in a list (see page xx).

capitol

Capitalize *Oregon Capitol* and *the Capitol* when referring to the building.

chapters

Capitalize chapter when used with a numeral in reference to a section of a book or legal code. Always use Arabic figures: Chapter 3, Chapter 12. Lowercase when it stands alone.

compositions

Capitalize the principal words in the names of books, movies, plays, poems, operas, songs, radio and TV programs, works of art, etc. Examples: "Clan of the Cave Bear" and "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom."

court

Court is lowercase when not in proper name: appeals court; uppercase without Oregon in the name: The Court of Appeals ruled against the insurer.

governmental bodies

The proper noun rules are different for government bodies such as the Oregon Legislature. Capitalize when you are referring to the Oregon Legislature, Oregon House, and Oregon Senate. Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped, but the reference is still to that specific body: *The state Legislature, the 2007 Legislature, the Senate,* and *the House.*

Lowercase legislature if you are using it generically: "No legislature has approved the amendment." Note: This differs from AP style. Capitalize federal OSHA only if it starts a sentence.

government terms

Capitalize *U.S. Census Bureau*, but not 2010 *census*. Capitalize *U.S. Postal Service*, but not *post office*. Capitalize *U.S. Customs Service*, but not *customs*, as in "He went through *customs*." Capitalize *Social* and *Security* in *Social Security number*.

governor

Capitalize and abbreviate as *Gov.* or *Govs.* when used as a formal title before one or more names: *Gov. John Kitzhaber.* Capitalize and spell out when used as a formal title before one or more names in direct quotations. Do not capitalize if there is not a name after it. "The governor spoke at the Capitol."

headers

When writing headlines, subheads, table titles, lists, column headings, and tables of contents, capitalize only the first word.

holidays

Capitalize all holidays. Examples: New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, Presidents Day, Easter, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

jurisdictions

Capitalize *State of*, *City of* when referring to the governmental body. *The State of Oregon* issued the order. Otherwise, lowercase it: "I live in the state of Oregon." Lowercase on second reference or when used as an adjective: *the state*, *the city*. Capitalize county when part of the proper name — *Marion County*, *Washington County* — and lowercase *the county* on second reference. If you are referring to more than one county, lowercase: "They drove through Marion and Linn counties."

page
Capitalize when used with a page number: Page 2, Page 14.

proper nouns
Capitalize proper nouns, but lowercase their common-noun versions.

For example: *Department of Consumer and Business Services, Building Codes Division, Winter Street, Willamette River, Preferred Worker Program, Employer-at-Injury Program*, *the Workers' Compensation Board*, and *Mortgage Lending Section*, but *the department, the division, the street, the river, preferred worker, employer at injury, the board,* and *mortgage lending*.

In plural uses, lowercase department, but capitalize the proper name element: *the departments of Labor and Justice*.

seasons
Lowercase spring, summer, fall, winter, and derivatives such as *springtime* unless part of a formal name: *Winter Carnival, Summer Olympics*.

sentences/parentheses
Capitalize the first word in a sentence, but do not capitalize the first word of a sentence in parentheses unless the parenthetical statement stands alone. Example: "When the phrase is inside the sentence (this is an example), do not capitalize. (Capitalize in this example.)"

titles
Do not capitalize job titles unless they precede and are part of a name.

For example: *DCBS Director Pat Allen*; *DFCS Administrator David Tatman*; *Pat Allen, director of DCBS*; and *David Tatman, administrator of DFCS*.

trademarked names
Examples: *Sheetrock* (a plasterboard made of gypsum); *Kleenex, Spam, Dumpster, Dixie cup, Formica,* etc.

Do not use the copyright (©), trademark (™), and registered trademark (®) symbols. Exception: Use the registered symbol when talking about the American Medical Association's CPT® codes.

Numbers

Numbers are crucial to DCBS. We often rely on data to regulate businesses. So, our publications have a lot of numbers. However, too many numbers can be intimidating to the reader and make your sentences confusing. Make sure all the numbers you use are necessary to make your point. Charts and graphs can be a great way to display a lot of numbers in a readable way. Then, you don't have to worry about covering the numbers in the text; instead, you can use the text to put the numbers in context. Here are some guidelines for using numbers in text.

figures or words?

The general rule is to spell out numbers under 10 and use figures for the numbers 10 and up. There are, however, many exceptions, such as:

› Percents: *5 percent, 2 percent, 0.5 percent*

› Millions, billions: *2 million, 8 billion*

› Monetary amounts: *$1, 5 cents*

› Inches, feet, yards, other measurement units: *The storm left 5 inches of rain. He is 6 feet 6 inches tall.*

› Weights: *The computer weighed 9 pounds.*

› Ages: *the 5-year-old girl; the girl is 5.*

› Speed: *The car slowed to 7 miles per hour; winds of 7 knots to 9 knots.*

There may be other cases when using numerals would improve the readability of your publication. Call the DCBS editor if you are unsure.

Spell out a number that begins a sentence. If the number is too long, rearrange the sentence so that the number is not at the beginning. The exception to this rule is when a year begins a sentence: "1951 was a good year in Oregon."

Be careful when giving ranges: *2 million to 3 million* (not 2 to 3 million), *12 percent to 13 percent* (not 12 to 13 percent).

911

Use on all references for the emergency call number. Not 9-1-1. However, it is 9/11 when referencing the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

decades

Don't use apostrophes after the numerals: *the 1970s, '80s*, and *'90s*.

dimensions

Use figures and spell out inches, feet, yards, etc., to indicate depth, height, length, and width. (Note: height is the only one of the four words that doesn't end in an *h*.) Hyphenate when used as adjectives before nouns. Examples: "It's a 9-by-12 room." "The building was 36 feet tall." "The room is 9 feet by 12 feet."

fractions

Spell out amounts less than one unless you are working with a large number of fractions. Example: "The snow was three-fourths melted by this afternoon."

Whole numbers with fractions may be written without a space (instead of a hyphen) after the whole number and a back slash for the fraction: 2¼, 3¾, 12½. For publications, fractions will be converted to super- and subscript. You can also convert fractions to decimals: 2.25, 3.75, 12.5.

no. for number

Use as the abbreviation for number in conjunction with a figure to indicate position or rank and capitalize it: *No. 1 man, No. 3 choice*. If you are using *no.* for *number* because you don't have space for *number* in the form or table you are creating, you can pluralize it - *no.'s*.

percent

Spell out *percent* (50 *percent*), unless it's in a table. Always use figures and decimals, not fractions. Repeat percent with each individual figure. Example: "He said 10 *percent* to 30 *percent* of the electorate may not vote." It takes a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows an "of" construction. Example: "He said 50 *percent* of the membership was there." It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an "of" construction. Example: "He said 50 *percent* of the members were there."

percentage change

A percentage change between two numbers is determined by dividing the difference between the new value and the old value by the old value. Example: 10,000 hearing requests increased to 10,500 requests, the percentage increase would be 5 percent: (10,500 – 10,000)/10,000 = 500/10,000 = 0.05 = 5 percent.

A change between two percentages should be reported as "percentage point" increase or decrease to limit confusion. Example: If you increase from 1 percent to 2 percent, it is a 1 percentage-point increase. However, it is also a 100 percent increase. The reason we use "percentage point" is that if the beginning and ending numbers aren't given, and those numbers are both percentages, a reader won't know for sure whether you're talking about a percentage increase or a percentage-point increase.

ratios

Do not use "to" when numbers come before ratio: "The ratio of employees to managers is 8-to-1. The 11-1 ratio must be completed by 2014."

telephone numbers

Use figures: *503-947-7868*. Parentheses are no longer needed for the area code. If extension numbers are needed, use a comma to separate the main number from the extension: *212-621-1500, ext. 2*. For toll-free numbers, omit the "1." Example: "Call our toll-free number, 800-222-3333." Note that *toll-free* has a hyphen. Always indicate if a number is toll-free. Do not use periods to separate numbers.

temperatures

Use figures for all except zero. Use a word, not a minus sign, to indicate temperatures below zero: The day's low was minus 8. Thursday's low was 12 below zero. The day's high was expected to be 9 or 10. Temperatures get higher or lower, but not warmer or cooler.

time

Use figures, except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours and minutes. Omit the double zero: *7 a.m., 8 a.m.*, etc. Don't say *6 a.m. in the morning*, or *3:30 p.m. in the afternoon*. Lowercase and use periods in *a.m.* and *p.m.*

Computer terminology

Computers are an important part of daily life. However, the terminology isn't always clear. It can be confusing to figure out if the correct word is disc or disk, online or on-line, and Web site or website. Below are rules for some commonly used terms.

anti-virus, anti-spyware

Hyphenate both.

app

Short for application, it is acceptable on first reference for a cellphone application.

disc, disk

Use the *disc* spelling for phonograph records and related terms (*disc jockey*), and for disc brake. Use *disk* for computer-related references (*floppy disk, hard disk*) and medical references such as *slipped disk*.

cellphone, smartphone

One word, lowercase.

double-click

Hyphenated word, lowercase.

email

Acceptable in all references for electronic mail. Use a hyphen with other e-terms: *e-book, e-business, e-commerce, e-permitting*.

Internet

One word, capitalized.

home page

This refers to the front page of a website. Two words, lowercase.

login, logon, logoff

Write "*log on* to your computers, and don't forget to *log off* when you leave," which are verb forms. As adjectives, use without hyphens or spaces: "Your new *login* procedure is as follows …."

online

Related to the Internet, *online* is acceptable. One word with no hyphen.

RSS

An abbreviation for Really Simple Syndication, it can be used in all references.

social media

Online tools that people use to connect with one another, including social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

text, texting, texted

Acceptable in all uses as a verb meaning to send a text message.

Twitter

A Twitter message is a tweet. The verb is to tweet, tweeted.

website, Web, webpage

The Associated Press has finally changed website to one word, lowercase. The words *webcam, webcast, webpage,* and *webmaster* are also lowercase and one word. However, Web is still capitalized, because it is a shortened version of World Wide Web. Web address is also two words with Web capitalized. The Web is not the same as the Internet, but a subset; other applications, such as email, exist on the Internet.

Wi-Fi

For the wireless networking standards. Capitalized and hyphenated.

Use "Plain Language" to improve your writing

When material is in plain language, the audience finds what it needs, understands what it finds, and uses what it finds to meet its needs. Some of these points are elements of the House Bill 2702 Plain Language Standard.

❶ Think about your audience first.

Is it a document for the public? Does it provide technical information to a licensee? Even if it is technical, make it clear. Tell yourself: I want to write clearly and effectively to my audience.

❷ Focus the message around facts (who, what, where, when, why, how).

Clearly state your purpose. Are you asking, telling, or acknowledging? Is there a deadline or timeframe?

❸ Include only relevant information.

We often try to provide all the detail possible instead of just the information needed. Put the most important information at the beginning of the document, then follow up with the details later.

❹ Fit the writing style to the message.

A policy statement (formal) is different from a thank-you letter (semi-formal), which is different from a newsletter story.

❺ Use short, simple sentences.

Keep most sentences to one thought.

❻ Use words your audience understands.

If you must use a technical term, define it. Use abbreviations, acronyms, and jargon sparingly, if at all. Use everyday words that have clear meanings.

Instead of ......**Cease**, use ......**Stop**
                    Procure..........**Get**
                    Terminate.....**End**
                    Utilize.............**Use**

❼ Use present tense and active voice.

Present tense and active voice are more clear and direct. Active voice describes who does what to whom.

Example:

Do: "**All businesses must complete form B.**"

Don't: "**Form B must be completed by all businesses.**"

❽ Let technology help you.

Microsoft Word® and other word processing programs have grammar tools that can help highlight passive voice, long sentences, and other common writing challenges. Online tools can also evaluate clarity and readability.

❾ Design visually appealing documents.

Use an easy to read type-face (hint: many newspapers and books use Times or Arial fonts). Use a layout that spaces out paragraphs and sections of the document from each other. Bold headings or bullets can make documents more readable and highlight important points.

❿ Test your message.

Try out your rewritten document on someone who does not know anything about the subject. Or, try reading it aloud.

Go to **plainlanguage.oregon.gov** for more resources.

Clear • Relevant • Brief • Active

Proofreading/editing marks

You may see the following marks on copy that comes back to your division from Communications. You may use these marks to indicate changes.

¶ Salem — The Department of.................................new paragraph

as of Thursday. The new president................................ paragraph

the future leader.

The speaker then .... no paragraph

50 years later.. spell out

group each had 6 members........................... transpose, spell out

Sublimity, Oregon, is the location ....use abbreviation

The Ore. woman was the head .... don't abbreviate

The department of consumer and.................capitalize (uppercase)

as a result, This will be .... lowercase

the bandleader raised his .... remove space

New information has shown....................insert space (also ⌣#⌣)

the Medicare *stet* recipients will ....retain, keep as it
was originally

The ruling *is* a fine example...insert word

according to the the source...delete

⌐Important⌐...bold face, center
or BF in margin

John Jones⌐... italics, flush right

⌐John Jones .... flush left

⌃ ....insert comma

⌄ ....insert apostrophe

⌄⌄ .... insert quotation marks

⊗ or ⊙ or ⌃...insert period

= ⌄..hyphen

m or |—|... dash

Acronyms and abbreviations

The professional world is busy. We often use acronyms and abbreviations in our spoken and written work. It's much easier to say or write DCBS than the Department of Consumer and Business Services. However, it is important to correctly use acronyms, abbreviations, and terms so the audience isn't confused.

Acronyms

Acronyms are OK to use internally for our programs and divisions with long names, but be careful when using them in publications that go out to people who may not be familiar with our programs. Always spell out on the first reference, and if you must use an acronym in subsequent references, put it in parentheses on the first reference.

Example: *Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS)*

If you use the name only a few times in a publication, spell it out each time. If you use the name only once, there's no need to include the acronym at all. Exception: Oregon OSHA can be used in all references.

Remember that we may not be the only organization using a certain acronym. For example, according to acronymfinder.com, the Preferred Worker Program acronym — PWP — has at least 150 other meanings, and Building Codes Division (BCD) has at least 200 more.

Note: An abbreviation is not an acronym.

For terms specific to your program or division, provide definitions for the reader — either in the text or in a glossary.

Some divisions have publications that define terms and acronyms. Here are the links to Oregon OSHA and Workers' Compensation Division publications:

Oregon OSHA acronyms:
http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/osha/pdf/resource/Acronyms.pdf

Workers' Compensation Division terms and abbreviations:
http://www.cbs.state.or.us/external/wcd/communications/publications/terms.html

Abbreviations

addresses

Numbered addresses use abbreviations *Ave., Blvd.*, and *St.: 350 Winter St. NE*. Spell them out when there is no number: *Winter Street NE*. Always spell out similar words, such as *drive, road, alley, court*, etc.

Use *P.O. Box* and *ZIP code.*

ATM

It's not ATM machine, as the *M* in the abbreviation stands for *machine*.

building

Never abbreviate. Capitalize when part of proper name: *Labor and Industries Building*.

dates

Abbreviate *Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.,* and *Dec.* when using with a specific date. Spell out when using alone or with a year alone. Examples: "On Aug. 15, 2012, the governor signed the bill." "She started her job Dec. 13." "The meeting was in January." "The governor signed the bill in August 2012." *March, April, May, June,* and *July* are never abbreviated.

In business and news writing, dates should be written without an -st, -nd, -rd, or -th after the numeral.

dd/mm/yy

Many people draw a blank when they see this shorthand request for entering day, month, and year on forms. Avoid it or explain that you need two digits for each — if you really do.

e.g.

E.g. is Latin for exempli gratia, which means "for example." It is used in expressions similar to "including," when you are not intending to list everything that is being discussed. If you are ever confused, skip e.g. and write out "for example." Use a comma following e.g.

Example: "The Workers' Benefit Fund supports a variety of programs, *e.g.*, Reopened Claims Program and Handicapped Workers' Program."

Do not use etc. with e.g. It is redundant.

hazmat

This may be used as an abbreviated form for hazardous materials. Example: "The *hazmat* team arrived within 27 minutes of the accident."

et cetera or etc.

Et cetera means *and the rest*. *Etc*. is usually harmless; however, if you are detailing steps a company must take to comply with a government process, and stick *etc*. at the end, you could cause problems. If the *etc*. you are referring to is important, it's important enough to explain. Don't use with e.g. It is redundant.

i.e.

I.e. is Latin for id est, and roughly means "that is." It is used in place of "in other words," or "it/that is." It specifies or makes things clearer. If you are ever confused, skip i.e. and write out "in other words." Use a comma following i.e.

Example: "Plug-in proponents point to off-peak hours — *i.e.*, nighttime — as the time when the majority of cars would be plugged in."

state names

When referring to a state in a sentence, spell it out. Example: "She was born in Kansas."

When a city name accompanies the state, use its abbreviation. "He came from Salem, Mass., to Salem, Ore."

When offering addresses, use postal codes. State abbreviations and postal codes follow:

Ala./AL, Alaska/AK, Ariz./AZ, Ark./AR, Calif./CA, Colo./CO, Conn./CT, Del./DE, D.C./DC, Fla./FL, Ga./GA, Hawaii/HI, Idaho/ID, Ill./IL, Ind./IN, Iowa/IA, Kan./KS, Ky./KY, La./LA, Maine/ME, Md./MD, Mass./MA, Mich./MI, Minn./MN, Miss./MS, Mo./MO, Mont./MT, Neb./NE, Nev./NV, N.H./NH, N.J./NJ, N.M./NM, N.Y./NY, N.C./NC, ND./ND, Ohio/OH, Okla./OK, Ore./OR, Pa./PA, R.I./RI, S.C./SC, S.D./SD, Tenn./TN, Tex./TX, Utah/UT, Vt./VT, Va./VA, Wash./WA, W. Va./WV, Wis./WI, Wyo./WY

tables

Exceptions can be made to normal abbreviation rules to make words fit; make abbreviations clear.

versus

Use *versus* except in discussion of court cases, in which you use *v*. Examples: "There was an 'us *versus* them' mentality." "In Hendricks *v*. Justine, the court set precedent." In headline writing, *vs*. is acceptable to save precious column space: "West Salem Titans *vs*. South Salem Saxons expects a big draw."

Alphabetical list

The following alphabetical listings cover words or phrases that are not in this stylebook's other sections, but can help you improve your writing.

a, an
Use the article *a* before consonant sounds: *a historic event*, *a one-year term* (sounds as if it begins with a w), *a united stand* (sounds like you). Use the article *an* before vowel sounds: *an energy crisis*, *an honorable man* (the h is silent), *an MCO* (sounds like em), *an 1890s celebration* (sounds like eighteen nineties).

a lot
Not *alot*; it is two words.

able-bodied
It's hyphenated. "The worker is *able-bodied*."

accept, except
Accept is to receive, *except* is to exclude. Example: "He *accepts* the investigator's findings, *except* for the electrical code violation."

access
Except when referring to computer data, select another verb. "He removed the safety guard to *access* a piece of wood jammed in the roller." Substitute *reach*, *extract* — even *get*.

accordingly
Use *so* when you mean thus, hence, or therefore.

accused
A person is *accused of*, not *with*, a crime.

adage
A long-established saying; *old adage* is redundant.

adapt, adopt
Adapt means to change. *Adopt* means to vote to accept or to take and follow. Examples: "They *adapted* the existing format to suit their needs. The committee *adopted* her proposal."

addendum
Singular for an addition, *addenda* is the plural form.

adopt, approve, enact, pass
Amendments, ordinances, resolutions, and rules are adopted or approved. Bills are passed. Laws are enacted.

adverse, averse

Adverse means unfavorable or hostile, and should be used to modify the noun it is next to, as in the following: "He had an *adverse* reaction to the pain medication." *Averse* is the word you want when you mean reluctant to accept or endorse it: "I am *averse* to that proposal."

advocate

As a verb, it means to support by argument, and it is not used with *for* or *against*. There is no such verb phrase as *advocating for* (or *against*) something. Examples: "She *advocates* consumer rights. As a union leader, she *advocates* higher salaries." As a noun, an advocate is a person who speaks or writes in support of a cause or person. Example: "He's an *advocate* for workers' rights."

affect, effect

Affect, as a verb, means to influence: "Medical documentation *affects* the return-to-work program." *Effect*, as a noun, means result: "The *effect* of reading all these formulas is more confusion." *Effect* as a verb means bring about or cause: "He will *effect* many changes in the company." (The best way to figure this one out is to mentally insert influence, result, and cause to determine the correct usage.)

afterward

Not afterwards.

aka

Stands for also known as; no spaces.

allude, elude, refer

Allude means an indirect reference. *Refer* means to assign or attribute to or to direct someone somewhere for help. *Elude* is a verb meaning to escape. Examples: "That paragraph *alludes* to a problem we had with the recent training session." "The motorcyclist attempted to *elude* the police." "The new guidelines *refer* readers to the Oregon Revised Statutes for specifics."

allusion, illusion

Allusion means an indirect reference. *Illusion* means an unreal or false impression. Examples: "The *allusion* was to the company's poor safety record." "The broker created an *illusion* of investing the person's money in solid investments."

all right
Two words. Not *alright*.

alternate
A substitute is an *alternate*, but don't use *alternative* in place of *alternate*. An *alternative* usually implies a choice between two options.

alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae
Use alumnus (alumni is plural) when referring to a man who has attended a school. Alumna (alumnae is plural) is for similar references to a woman. Alumni is for a group of men and women.

amok
Not *amuck*.

among, between
Among is used when there are more than two things or people involved, *between* when there are two. Examples: "The boss divided the work *among* Janice, Dave, and Mark." "She stepped *between* you and me."

and/or
This clumsy construction can often be avoided with a simple *or*. If not, use the words required to avoid the slashed construction. Example: "The judge may levy a $200 fine, a jail sentence, or both."

and/also
This is redundant. Pick one or the other.

annual
An event is not annual until it has been held in at least two consecutive years. Do not use first annual.

another
Not synonymous with more or additional, this means one or more of the same. It is incorrect to say, "They had 200 employees and hired *another* 150." Use *more* or *others*. "They had 200 employees and hired 150 more."

anticipate, expect
Anticipate means to expect and prepare for something; *expect* does not include the notion of preparation. Examples: "They *expect* a record crowd. They have *anticipated* it by adding more seats to the auditorium."

any
Often unnecessary: If you have *any* questions…. Just say, "If you have questions…."

DCBS *Stylebook*

appraise, apprise
Appraise means to estimate the characteristics of something. *Apprise* means to inform, give notice to, or advise. Write "I've been *apprised* of the circumstances," not *appraised* — or, better yet, "Simpkins explained the circumstances."

arbitrate, mediate
A judge or a panel with authority may *arbitrate* by hearing evidence and deciding outcomes. To *mediate* is to act as a go-between during negotiations, with no authority in final decisions.

assist
Use with *in* or *with*, not *to*. And consider using *help* instead of *assist*. "*Assist* employers in determining appropriate solutions" is improved by writing "*Help* employers find solutions."

assure, ensure, insure
Assure means to convince or to inform confidently. *Ensure* means to make sure or make certain. *Insure* is best used to refer to insurance. Examples: "*Assured* of the appropriateness of the next step, they proceeded." "Please *ensure* that you complete the form." "We will *insure* your business only if you move it out of the flood plain." *Ensure* is often overused. Make sure you really mean it, or alternately, use *make sure* or *make certain*.

attorney, lawyer
In common usage the words are interchangeable. Technically, however, an *attorney* is someone (usually, but not necessarily, a *lawyer*) empowered to act for another. Such an individual occasionally is called an attorney in fact. A lawyer is a person admitted to practice in a court system. Such an individual occasionally is called an attorney at law.

Lawyer is a more precise word if you are talking about someone licensed to practice law. Somewhere along the line, someone decided attorney sounded more dignified than lawyer. But lawyer is a perfectly good word. "Sarah Jones is the attorney for John Cleever, and she is a lawyer."

basically
Skip it. Just state your facts.

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

begs the question
To *beg the question* is to argue a point by assuming as proved the very thing you are trying to prove. If you mean *raises the question*, write that.

biannual, biennial, bimonthly, biweekly, semiweekly
Biannual means twice a year, *biennial* every two years. *Biweekly* means every other week; *semiweekly* means twice a week. *Bimonthly* means every two months; *semimonthly* means twice a month. Make certain your readers know what you mean, preferably by avoiding these terms.

buzz word
Buzz word originally meant a pseudo-technical cliché, empty of meaning. Today, *buzz word* is often used to mean trend, idea, or tool. Describe what you mean instead of using *buzz word*.

canceled
In American English, it has only one "*l,*" as does *traveled.* Not *cancelled*.

cannot, can't
Not can not.

capital, capitol
Capital is money and the seat of state government. *Capitol* is the building itself.

cease
Use *stop* or *end*, except if you are referring to a *cease-and-desist order*.

censor, censure
To *censor* is to delete or suppress. To *censure* is to criticize harshly.

chairperson
Using this genderless word for *chairman* and *chairwoman* is acceptable. If you know Jane Smith chairs a committee, it is fine to use *chairwoman*. If an election is planned, i.e., you don't know the gender of the election winner, it's fine to use *chairperson* or *chair*.

child care, day care
Two words, no hyphen, in all cases.

citizen, resident

A *citizen* is a person who has acquired the full civil rights of a nation either by birth or naturalization. Cities and states in the United States do not confer citizenship. To avoid confusion, use *resident*, not *citizen*, in referring to inhabitants of states and cities.

clearly

Don't get into the habit of beginning with *clearly*. Concentrate on writing with clarity instead of using *clearly*.

compared to, compared with

Use *compared to* when the intent is to assert, without the need for elaboration, that two or more items are similar. Example: "She *compared* her work for women's rights to Susan B. Anthony's campaign for women's suffrage." Use compared with when juxtaposing two or more items to illustrate similarities or differences. Example: "There were 31 workplace deaths in 2005, *compared with* 46 in 2004."

complement, compliment

Complement is a noun and a verb denoting completeness or the process of supplementing something. Example: "The new software will *complement* the existing product." *Compliment* is a noun or a verb that denotes praise or the expression of courtesy: "The director *complimented* the employees for their hard work."

comprise, consists of, is composed of

Comprise means includes or contains. The whole comprises the parts. *Comprised of* is never correct. Examples: "This set of reference books *comprises* 20 volumes." "This schedule *comprises* five meetings and three seminars." "This report *consists of* the research findings of three professors." "This book *is composed of* many entries."

connote, denote

Connote means signify or suggest or imply something beyond the explicit meaning, *denote* means to mean or be a mark or sign of. "A visit by an OSHA official does not *connote* an inspection." "The sign on the door *denotes* the company is going out of business."

continual, continuous

Continual means over and over again. *Continuous* means unbroken. To remember which is which: *Continuous* ends in o-u-s, which stands for "*o*ne *u*ninterrupted *s*equence."

criterion, criteria
Criterion is singular: "Our most important *criterion* for qualification is experience …." Criteria is plural: "The qualifying *criteria are* on Page 216."

currently, presently
Currently, meaning now, is often redundant. If something is happening, it has to be happening currently. However, if you need a word meaning now, *currently* is preferable to *presently*, which means soon.

cut off (verb) cutoff (noun and adjective)
"He *cut off* his finger." "The *cutoff* date for applications is Monday."

cutting edge
Avoid this and explain what you mean instead.

database
Database is one word.

daylight saving time
Not savings. There is no hyphen. Lowercase daylight saving time in all uses. Daylight saving applies from 2 a.m. on the second Sunday in March until 2 a.m. on the first Sunday in November.

dependent
Not *dependant*.

desire, wish
Desire is a little strong when you ask if someone wants to be on a mailing list, and *wish* is a little ethereal. Use *want*, *prefer*, or *like*.

desist
Use *stop* or *end*, except if you are referring to a *cease-and-desist order*.

discreet, discrete
Discreet means cautious, tactful, or judicious. *Discrete* means separate. Examples: "She was *discreet* in not talking about her co-worker's problems." "The collaborative has two *discrete* functions: managing community centers and administering recreation programs."

driver license
It's not *driver's license* in Oregon. Nor is it capitalized. Other types of licenses don't need to be, either: *plumbing license, hunting license,* etc.

each and every
Use one or the other, not both.

employees and management
Everyone who works for an agency is an *employee*. The distinction may be between union-represented employees and management employees or managers and line employees, but all are employees.

envelop, envelope
Envelop is a verb meaning to wrap up in, *envelope* is the noun for a paper container for a letter.

entire, full
Entire means not lacking any of the parts, whole. *Full* means holding or containing as much as possible, filled.

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

equal, equaled, equaling
As an adjective, it means "of the same quantity, size, number, value, degree, intensity, quality as another." When people speak of a *more equal* distribution of wealth, what is meant is *more equitable*. Also, *equaled* and *equaling* only have one "l." Not *equalled* or *equalling*.

facilitate
The first meaning of *facilitate* is to make easier: "Careful planning *facilitates* any kind of work"; therefore, "facilitate a workshop" is a questionable use of *facilitate*. Substitute *help, run, direct, manage, administer, teach*, etc.

facility, structure
When referring to buildings, neither of these is as precise as *building*.

farmworker
one word.

fewer, less
When referring to numbers of individual items, use *fewer*. When referring to quantity, amount, or bulk, use *less*. Example: "There are *fewer* applicants this year, and they appear to have *less* experience."

firefighter
One word. The preferred term to describe a person who fights fires is *firefighter*.

firm
A business partnership is correctly referred to as a *firm*. "He joined a law *firm*." Do not use *firm* in references to an incorporated business entity. Use *the company or the corporation* instead.

first aid, first-aid
First aid (noun) can be a lifesaver if proper *first-aid* (adjective) training has been given.

fiscal, monetary
Fiscal applies to budgetary matters. *Monetary* applies to money supply.

flammable, inflammable, combustible
Flammable and *inflammable* have similar meanings. Use *combustible*, if possible.

flaunt, flout
To *flaunt* is to make an ostentatious or defiant display: "She *flaunted* her intelligence." To *flout* is to show contempt for: "He *flouts* the law."

flounder, founder
A *flounder* is a fish: to flounder is to move clumsily or jerkily, to flop about. To *founder* is to bog down, become disabled, or sink.

flyer, flier
When you mean a handbill, AP style calls for *flier,* although both *flier* and *flyer* are acceptable. You'll notice that *flyer* is in common use at DCBS, and that's fine. When you mean an aviator, use *flier.*

forego, forgo
To *forego* means to go before, as in foregone conclusion. To *forgo* means to abstain from: "The CEO will forgo a salary next year."

foreign phrases
In general, avoid using foreign phrases unless they are universally accepted in English. If you use them, as in medical or legal terminology, place them in italics or quotation marks and explain them if there is a chance your audience won't understand them.

forthcoming
It means about to appear, coming, ready when needed. If you mean candid or straightforward, use *forthright*.

free
Free is fine in place of *without cost* or *no-cost*.

from, to
If you use from when writing about a range, also use to: *He was the chief elevator inspector from 2001 to 2009 (not 2001-2009).*

full time, full-time
Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: "He works full time." "She has a full-time job."

fundraising, fundraiser
One word with no hyphen in all cases.

good, well
Good is an adjective that means something is as it should be or is better than average. *Good* should not be used as an adverb. When used as an adjective, *well* means suitable, proper, healthy. When used as an adverb, *well* means in a satisfactory manner or skillfully. Examples: "She is a *good* listener." "I did *well* on the test."

grade, grader
Hyphenate when combining terms: second-graders, an eighth-grade class.

health care
Two words in all cases, except if it is part of an organization's name.

help, assist
Writers seem to shy away from *help* in favor of *assist*. Both are fine transitive verbs meaning to contribute strength, effort, means, or assistance — but *help* is short, simple, and clear. Examples: "Using this checklist will *help* applicants make a complete filing." "This checklist will *assist* applicants in making a complete filing."

he or she, him or her, himself or herself, etc.
Construct sentences to avoid using "him or her," "he or she," etc. For instance, "The applicant should include personal references for *himself* or *herself*. *He* or *she* may …" could be written, "Applicants should include personal references. They may …." Don't shorten to slashed versions such as *him/her*. However, if you should use phrases such as *the employee may call this number for help*, don't write, in the next sentence, *They* (referring to the employee) *may call* …. Write *He* or *she* ….

hire vs. employee
Although it may be technically correct as an informal noun, calling someone a *hire* is impersonal personnel-services jargon, and could be compared to *unit* or *cog*.

helpline, hotline, infoline
Not *help line, hot line,* or *info line*.

impact
This is usually a noun meaning collision or violent striking together or a verb that implies wedging or forceful striking. Example: "The *impact* caused both jumpers to lose consciousness temporarily." In this sentence, "The report's *impact* on the day-to-day operations will not be known for months," it would be better to use *effect* or *influence* in place of impact. Similarly, there are better choices for impact in these sentences: "His election *impacted (affected)* the company's plan drastically. We will discuss in detail the federally *impacted (affected)* areas." Generally, the best thing to use would be affect or effect if that is what you mean. For affect/effect rule, see page 38.

in, into
In indicates location: "He was *in* his office." *Into* indicates motion: "She walked *into* her office."

incessantly
It means unendingly or continuously, so unless that is what you mean, select another word, such as *frequently*.

indict, indite
Indict means to charge with a crime. *Indite* means to write or compose. Examples: "The court will *indict* him on seven charges of fraud." "She *indited* a poem about her husband."

infeasible, unfeasible
Both are adjectives meaning not feasible. They are interchangeable.

instantly, instantaneous
Use *instantly* (an adverb) to mean at once, immediately. *Instantaneous* is an adjective meaning occurring presently or without delay. Examples: "The new system allows job seekers to *instantly* see all of the job openings." "The video-streamed class allows participants to get *instantaneous* feedback from the instructor."

its/it's
It's is a contraction of it is. To show possession, use *its*, as in, "*Its* coat was matted and dirty." If you are ever confused, say the word as *it is* to see if it makes sense for an apostrophe.

I'd like to — say, take this opportunity, thank you
Writing such phrases at the beginnings of letters may help you organize your thoughts, but after you draft them, remove the *I'd like to* phrases. It's obvious that you were writing, taking the opportunity, etc., and that you liked it, wanted to, or felt obligated to pretend you did.

judgment
It has no *e* after the *g*. Not *judgement*.

jurisdiction
Jurisdiction means the right, power, or authority to administer law. However, it is jargon so avoid it if you can. Try using *building department, utility, etc.*

just, only
Remember that, for clarity, these words should immediately precede the word or phrase that they modify. "The committee *just (only)* needs to raise $300" is quite different from "The committee needs to raise *just (only)* $300" or "*Just (only)* the committee needs to raise $300."

kudos
This is a singular word and takes singular verbs. Do not use kudo.

last, past
When referring to something someone did in the past, don't use *last* unless the person died after that, as in this sentence: "His *last* job was with the Department of Consumer and Business Services." The same goes for other references to something in the past. Example: "Over the past five years, Oregon OSHA has completed more than 12,000 consultations with employers."

lay, lie
Lay (lay, laid, lain) is a transitive verb and always has an object. *Lie* is intransitive and never has an object; its principal parts: *lie, lay, lain, lying*. Examples, lay: "*Lay* the phone on my desk when you are done." "Joan *laid* the phone down." "She has *laid* the phone on the desk." Examples, lie: "I *lie* down on my break." "He *lay* down and closed his eyes." "He has *lain* there all day." *Lie* also means to tell an untruth: "He will not *lie* under oath." "He *lied* when pressed."

left-handed (adjective), left-hander (noun)
Hyphens for both. However, *left hand* as a noun is two words. Same rules for *right-handed*, etc.

less than, under, fewer
These words are not interchangeable. Generally, use *less than* for quantity, use *under* when you are referring to a spatial relationship (something located relative to something else), and *fewer* for number. Examples: "He made *less than* $50,000 a year." "You must install it *under* the eaves." "*Fewer* than a dozen people showed up."

level the playing field
This could be misunderstood, and it creates an opportunity for mixing metaphors, as in "We intend to level the playing field, open up new vistas, and fry some pretty big fish." Explain yourself and avoid fad phrases.

like, as, as if, as though
Like should compare nouns and pronouns, not introduce clauses. It is correct to say, "He looks *like* a bulldog," or "It looks *like* a disaster." It is incorrect to say, "The contractor put in the plumbing *like* he had never done it before in his life." Better: "The contractor put in the plumbing *as though* he had never done it before in his life." Do not use *like* in place of *such as*. Instead of: "DCBS has many divisions, *like* Insurance," say: "DCBS has many divisions, *such as* Insurance."

literally
Speakers often use *literally* when they mean its opposite, *figuratively*: "I was *literally* crushed by the crowd at the concert." *Literally* means adhering to the strict meaning of the word.

livable
Not *liveable*.

method and methodology
Method means a procedure or planned way of doing something. *Methodology* means a system of methods within a discipline, such as science.

minuscule
Not *miniscule*.

moot point
Moot's first definition is *debatable*, although it is frequently used to mean *irrelevant*. In law, *moot* may mean *theoretical, hypothetical*, or *not actual*.

more importantly, most importantly
Write "*More important*, we need to assess the effect of the new regulations." *Importantly* is an adverb that tells how something was done: "He strode *importantly* to the lectern."

more than, over
If you mean amounts or numbers of something, use *more than*. If you mean location, use *over* or *above*. Examples: "There were *more than* a million stars in the sky *over* the Rockies." "He contributed *more than* $40,000."

needless to say
If it's *needless to say*, don't.

neither, nor
These words come as a set when used as conjunctions, so don't separate them. If you use *neither*, use *nor*, not *or*. *Neither* can also be used as a pronoun meaning *not either,* (*Neither can go*) or an adjective (*neither part*). Example: "*Neither* the homeowner *nor* the mortgage lender had signed the contract."

null and void
Use one or the other.

OK
Choose this over *okay* or *O.K.*

off-site, off site
Off-site is the adjective: "He is at an *off-site* meeting." *Off site* is an adverb: "She is working *off site*."

on-site, on site
On-site is the adjective: *on-site* inspections. *On site* is an adverb. Example: "She's working *on site* in Hillsboro."

Oregon Administrative Rules and Oregon Revised Statutes
Use *OAR* and *ORS* on first reference when using the rule or statute number. For example: *OAR 918-030-0015, ORS 480.665*. Examples: "The Amusement Ride Inspection Report must accompany the Amusement Ride Application *(ORS 460.330)*." "Refer to *OAR 918-008-0120* and our website for more information." In cases without the rule or statute, spell out. Example: "The *Oregon Revised Statutes* allow the Building Codes Division to collect fees."

oversight
Oversight can mean a failure, lapse, omission, or blunder, as well as management. Because of this, *authority, monitoring, administration,* or some other word may be preferable.

parameters, perimeters
Limits or boundaries in informal usage, *parameters* is primarily a mathematics term. Do not confuse with *perimeters*, which means limits or boundaries in a physical (as opposed to mathematical) sense. Examples: "Beyond the *perimeters* of the brick fence was everything the dog had ever wanted to see and sniff." "The company expanded its *parameters* for acquiring poorly performing commercial real estate debt."

part time, part-time
Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: "He works part time." "She has a part-time job."

people, persons
If you have more than one *person*, use *people*.

per
In most uses, *per* can be replaced by *a* or *an*. Although we still say *20 miles per gallon*, we don't say *She makes 40 grand per year.* **Do not** write "Send the information to Joe *per* Sally's instructions." Say "Send the information to Joe, as Sally asked." Write "Applicants must respond in writing, according to ORS 656.241," **not** "Applicants must respond in writing, *per* ORS 656.241."

perform the work of
Such constructions can often be shortened. Examples: "He installed the manufactured home." "She was the chief operating officer."

phenomena, phenomenon
Phenomena is plural of phenomenon: "The *phenomena* were indisputable."

pique, peak, peek
Pique is to excite, but also to affect with sharp irritation or resentment; *peak* means high point or to reach the highest point; and *peek* means to glance quickly or furtively. Example: "It *piqued* his interest when he *peeked* at the *peak*."

plead, pleaded, pleading
Do not use the past tense form *pled*.

pore over
To study; it's not *pour over*, although one could conceivably appear to be pouring oneself over a text.

premier, premiere
Use *premier* (adjective) for first in rank, chief, leading. Use *premiere* for first public showing. Examples: "The British Columbia *premier* said the public works projects were important for the province." "The film will *premiere* in Portland."

principal, principle
Principal as a noun means a person in first rank or authority. *Principal* as an adjective still means first in rank or authority. Example: "The *principal* outlined the *principal* uses of the student behavior code." *Principle* is always a noun, and means a truth, doctrine, or rule of conduct. Examples: "The *principle* 'treat others as you would wish to be treated' was apparent."

proactive
A word created as an opposite to *reactive.* Most reference materials call it a nonword. Substitute words that describe what you mean: *active, progressive, assertive, aggressive*, etc.

promptly, punctually, timely
Promptly means done, performed, delivered, etc., at once or without delay. *Punctually* means at the time or times appointed. *Timely*, as an adverb, means seasonably or opportunely. Select the one that works best according to context. It's not unusual to see "the claim must be processed timely," in which *timely* probably is not as good a choice as *punctually*.

prone
This means lying face down. *Supine* means face up. If you say someone was *lying on his back, prone in the mud*, you'll confuse people. *Prone* can also mean *having a tendency to,* as in "She's *prone* to disappearances when meetings occur."

proved, proven
Proved is the verb, *proven* the adjective. Example: "His theory was eventually *proved*." "It was a *proven* theory."

Q-and-A format
Acceptable in all references for question-and-answer format. Do not use quotation marks in a Q-and-A.

Example how to do a Q-and-A:

Q: Do I need workers' compensation insurance?

A: The State of Oregon requires almost all employers to carry workers' compensation insurance for their employees.

ranges
Writers often use ranges incorrectly. For instance: "The packet's contents *range* from forms to hot tips for making your process run smoothly." Think about the range you are claiming exists: What might be within this range? Newspaper clippings, department-store catalogs, downloadable music, gardening tips? It's better to write, *as varied as* or specify the items in this so-called range, although it requires more work.

rebut, refute
Rebut means to argue to the contrary; *refute* means to prove to be false or erroneous. Try *deny, dispute, rebut*, or *respond to*.

reign, rein
The leather strap for controlling a horse is a *rein,* hence figuratively: *seize the reins, give free rein to*. *Reign* is the period of a ruler is on the throne. Example: "The king began his *reign*."

reluctant, reticent
Reluctant means unwilling to act. Example: "He is *reluctant* to enter the collapsed building." *Reticent* means unwilling to speak. Example: "The inspector is *reticent* to explain why the building collapsed."

resolve, solve
Resolve means to determine or come to a definite decision about. *Solve* means to find the answer or explanation to a problem, clear up.

resonate
This means to exhibit or produce resonance or to resound. Do not use *resonate with* to mean *sounds good, makes sense, is preferable*, etc.

restaurateur
No *n*. Not *restauranteur*. The operator or proprietor of a restaurant.

right-handed (adjective), right-hander (noun)
Hyphens for both. However, *right hand* as a noun is two words. Same rules for *left-handed,* etc.

sign-up, sign up
Hyphenated when a noun (Example: "The *sign-up* starts Monday") or an adjective (Example: "The *sign-up* day is tomorrow"). Two words (no hyphen) in verb form (Example: "*Sign up* to receive notification").

since, because
Avoid using these interchangeably. Use *since* to denote periods of time and *because* when you are offering a reason or cause. Examples: "Oregon's occupational injury and illness rate has decreased every year *since* 2004." "They got a payday loan *because* they had a medical emergency."

single most, single best, single biggest
Single cannot correctly modify superlative forms like *best*. Put *single* in front of what it modifies. Example: "She made the biggest *single* donation."

spill, spilled, spilling
Not *spilt* in the past tense.

stakeholder
This is often used to mean someone who has some level of interest in a project or venture. However, the dictionary meaning is most often someone who holds wagers in a bet, so we may not be using it as precisely as we could. Use words that best explain to whom you are referring. Examples: *Our readers, taxpayers, licensees, attendees, etc.*

startup
One word (noun and adjective) to describe a new business venture.

state-of-the-art
Imprecise. Try *most current version, energy-saving, more efficient, improved, economical, prototype, ideal, etc.*

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

such as
Used without a comma when the phrase is restrictive, which means it is crucial to the fundamental meaning of the sentence. Example: "They created the incident-management system to deal with events such as fires, earthquakes, and terrorist acts."

Use commas when the *such as* phrase is descriptive and not crucial to the sentence. Example: "You may want to bring personal items for your own comfort, *such as* water bottles, blankets, sunscreen, and sunglasses."

that, which
Use *that* when you want to restrict meaning in a sentence and *which* when you want to elaborate. Note *that* and *which* in the following sentence: "The announcement *that* had been planned for May 17 was postponed, *which* was a good thing."

If you are using commas correctly to set off clauses, the clauses set off are most likely *which* clauses, meaning that they elaborate, but are not crucial to the sentence.

Consider this sentence: "The workers' compensation premium assessment, *which* pays for the administration of workers' compensation and workplace safety programs, will remain at 6.2 percent in 2013." When you remove the nonessential clause, the sentence still makes sense: "The workers' compensation premium assessment will remain at 6.2 percent in 2009."

(See also **who, that** entry.)

theirs
The possessive of *their* has no apostrophe. Example: "That is *theirs*."

there's
This is the contracted form of *there is*. Example: "*There's* the file I needed."

time frames
If you use this, make it two words; however, you probably can and should be more specific. Try *deadline, schedule, recommended response time, within 30 days, etc.*

timeline
One word, lowercase.

time loss
Two words unless it modifies other words: *time-loss benefits*.

timely
Avoid using timely as an adverb (*payments will be made timely*). When using timely as an adjective (*Payment must be made in a timely manner*), substitute "Payments must be made *promptly*, according to the schedule, within 30 days of the filing, etc."

toward
Not *towards*.

traveled
In American English, it has only one "*l,*" as does *canceled*. Not *travelled*.

two-by-four
Spell out as a noun (same for other lengths, including two-by-six, one-by-two).

ultimate
Don't use for *last*, if *last* is what you mean. Don't say *ultimate* outcome; outcome is sufficient.

unique
It means one of a kind. Do not describe something as *rather unique* or *most unique*.

uncommon expressions
Be careful about using what you may consider well-known expressions in business writing. They are not well-known to everyone and may be inappropriate. Don't mutilate expressions: "iron out the bugs" instead of "iron out the wrinkles" or "remove the bugs."

under way
Two words.

upward
Not *upwards*.

usage
Usually, *use* is the word you want. Example: "PUC reports showed the public's *use* of power purchased from other states was higher this year than last year."

user friendly
Don't use. It may not be "friendly" to the user at all — we don't know.

venue
Correctly used to refer to courtrooms or other sites of trials. Not the best choice for sites of meetings and concerts.

verbal agreement
Don't use for oral agreement. *Verbal* means consisting of words, both written and spoken. Almost all agreements are *verbal*, and they may be written or oral.

very
Often unnecessary.

who, whom
When you are talking about the subject of any action, even the subject of a verb within a sentence, use the subjective *who*. If the person you're talking about is the object of some action, use the objective *whom*.

"To *whom* did you give that notice?" [You did give that notice to whom? (him/her/them]

"Who is going?" Not *him* or *her* is going, but *he* or *she*.

who, that
You can use both pronouns when referring to people. However, if you are writing about an individual, use *who*. If writing about people who are a collective or anonymous, use *that*. Examples: "John Smith, *who* denied being noncompliant, did not appeal the citations and surrendered his license." "The committee *that* made the recommendation disbanded."

Note the *that* example is in a restrictive phrase — that is, it is essential to the meaning of the sentence it is in. A nonrestrictive phrase would contain *which*. Example: "The company, *which* is located in Portland, filed for bankruptcy." Without the nonrestrictive phrase, the sentence still makes its point.

who's, whose
Who's is a contraction of *who is*. Example: "Who's going?" *Whose* is the possessive form of the relative pronoun *who*. Example: "*Whose* coat is this?"

workplace, worksite, workforce
Workplace, worksite, and *workforce* are all one word, although your spell-checker may not agree. *Workroom, workshop, worktable, workweek, workbench,* and *workbook* have also morphed into single words.

X-ray
Use this form for noun, verb, or adjective. It is always capitalized.

you're
This is the contracted form of *you are*. If *you're* using it correctly, *you're* not confusing it with *your*, the possessive pronoun. Example: "If *you're* going to the meeting, don't forget *your* pen."

Writing clearly and concisely

Writing clearly and concisely for the public, as well as our co-workers, is important. The following table provides alternatives for often-used phrases that aren't clear or are redundant. For example, "ask" is much better than "make inquiry of."

Don't use this	Use this
a majority of	most
a meeting was held	we met, the committee met
a number of	many
absent	lacking, without
accede	agree, grant, allow
accounted for by the fact	because
accustomed to	used to
additional	more, extra
additionally	and, also
advance planning	planning
advise	tell, inform
aforementioned, aforesaid	preceding
ahead of time	before the deadline or meeting
alleviate	ease, reduce, lessen
almost never	seldom, hardly ever
along the lines of	like
amongst	among
and also	and
are of the same opinion	agree
as a consequence of	because
as a matter of fact	in fact
ascertain	discover, find out
at some point in time	when

Don't use this	Use this
at this (or that) point in time	now or then
attain	reach, achieve, accomplish
based on the fact that	because
bottom line	what this means, the outcome
brief summary	summary
by means of	by, with
cognizant of	know about, aware of
commence	start, begin
compendium	summary, outline
completely full	full
component	part
concerning	about
consequently	so
constitute	form, make up
construe	interpret
deduct	subtract, take away, take off
deem	consider, treat as
defer	postpone, put off
definitely proved	proved
denied making a statement to the effect that	denied
despite the fact that	although, despite
determine	decide
dialogued, entered into dialogue	talked, discussed, began discussions
do a study of the effects of	study the effects, study
document the names of participants	record, list
due to the fact	because

Don't use this	Use this
during the course of	during, while
elucidate	explain
emanate from	come from, stem from
emergency situations	emergencies
end result	result
endeavor	try, attempt
establish	form, create, set up
even as we speak	now
eventuate	result, occur, happen
fabricate	make
facilitate	help, run, direct, manage, administer, teach
failure to	if you do not
fewer in number	fewer
final outcome, settlement	outcome, result settlement
finalize	end, finish, complete
first of all	first
first priority	priority
foreseeable future	until further notice, in the future
for the duration of	during, while
for the purpose of	for, to
for the reason that	because
forward (verb)	send, give
furnish	give, provide
future plans	plans
give encouragement to	encourage
give rise to	cause
great majority of	most

Don't use this	Use this
has the capability to	can
has a need for	needs
have a tendency to	tend to
having regard to	about
henceforth	from now on
heretofore	until now
if this is not the case	if not
immediate future	soon
impact	affect, effect (see pages 38, 47)
impart	give, pass on, tell, inform
implement (verb)	do, carry out
in a number of cases	some
in a position to	can
in a satisfactory manner	satisfactory
in a very real sense	in a sense
in accordance with	according to, in line with
in case	if
in conjunction with	with
in connection with	about
in-depth	thorough
in lieu of	instead of
in my opinion	I think
in order to	to
in receipt of	get, have, receive
in regards to	regarding, about
in relation to	toward
in respect to	about
in spite of	despite

Don't use this	Use this
in some cases	sometimes
in terms of	about
in the event that	if
in the nature of	like
in the possession of	has, have
in view of	for, as
inasmuch as	because
including, but not limited to	including
initiate	begin, start
integral part	integral to, part of
irregardless	regardless
it has been reported by Smith	Smith reported
it is apparent that	apparently
it is believed that	I think
it is clear that	clearly
it is doubtful that	possibly
it is often the case	often
it is suggested that	I think, they believe, etc.
it is worth pointing out	note that
it may be that	I think
it may, however, be noted	but
it was indicated that	he said, she said
it was decided that	I decided, the committee decided
joint cooperation	cooperation
lacked the ability to	could not, couldn't
large in size	large
learning experience	experience
make an adjustment to	adjust

Don't use this	Use this
make decisions about	decide on
make inquiry of	ask
necessitate	require, need, have to
nonattendance	absence
not less than, not more than	at least, or less
notwithstanding	even if, despite, still, yet, but
of a confidential nature	confidential
of great practical importance	useful
off of	off
owing to the fact that	because
past experience	experience
period of time	period
peruse	read, study
preventative	preventive
prior to	before
prioritize	rank
proactive	active, progressive, assertive, aggressive
procure	buy
provide a summary of	summarize
pursuant to	under
referred to as	called
reimburse	repay
remit	send
remuneration	pay, wages, salary
remunerative employment	paid work
render	send, make, give
reside	live

Don't use this	Use this
root cause	cause
serve to make reductions	reduce
shall	must, will
supplementary	extra, more
take into consideration	consider
terminate	end
the law provides that	the law says
the question as to whether	whether, if
there are people who are	some people are
there is reason to believe	I think
theretofore	until then
utilize	use
verbally reported	said
verify	check, prove
was of the opinion that	believed, thought
was witness to	saw
we wish to thank	we thank, thank you
whether or not	whether
wish	want
with a view to	to
with reference to	about, concerning
with the possible exception of	except
with the result that	so that

Notes

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