

## **WRITING STYLE GUIDE**

The intention of this guide is to achieve consistency across all communication used to the general public and the media. The emphasis is on clarity and consistency in writing all materials.

### **1. Repetition**

When writing descriptive copy for the web and media be aware that you have character/word counts that you must adhere to. To maximize this limited space do not repeat information that is stated

Capture the essence of your project/topic in this description and then add a web address to a page where you can offer very specific details about your project.

### **2. Know your audience**

If event publications are aimed at broad audiences whose members have different levels of education and proficiency in English, use clear and plain language to make printed materials – including online communications – easy to read and understand. You should not assume that readers share a common vocabulary of abbreviations, art language and technical terminology. Include all potential readers by using straightforward statements and explaining any unusual terminology. Keep it simple.

### **3. Sentence Structure**

Here are a few tips and reminders on sentence structure that will help you be clear and maximize the effect of your words:

- Generally, use an active rather than passive voice. In sentences written in active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb. Example of active voice: The dog bit the boy. Passive voice: The boy was bitten by the dog.
- Avoid using long, complicated sentences. They will make it difficult for the reader to understand you and will obscure your message.
- Delete non-essential words or phrases. Consider turning a long sentence into two shorter sentences.

### **4. Common voice and tense**

Avoid using first person (especially the singular "I" and plural "we") and second person ("you"). Write all of your copy in the third person (*He, she, it, and they*). Avoid statements like: We invite you to ...

In regards to tense, in most cases you should write all copy in the future tense to express intention.

### **5. Abbreviations**

Abbreviations can be convenient shortcuts for writer and reader alike, as long as readers understand the abbreviations. It is essential to spell out the words the first

time an expression or an organization's name appears in your document, with the abbreviation indicated in brackets.

## **6. Numbers**

Observe the following guidelines when using numbers in your copy:

- In general, spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and above. Examples: three, 12, and 8,500. Use figures for fractions: 6.25.
- When a sentence begins with a number, spell it out even if the number is more than 10. Example: Twenty-three people and 14 dogs boarded the ferry.

## **7. Titles**

Where it's necessary to identify the title of an art work, a publication, or a song within your copy, please use italics.

## **8. Editing and proofreading**

It's important that you take the time to check your work before you submit. A good rule of thumb (when time allows) is to read your copy three times: once for content, once to edit and once to clean it up.

Obtaining another person's opinion is worthwhile during the revision stage. It is particularly important to involve someone who is good with details to assist with proofreading before you submit your copy for printing and posting.

It's crucial that you take the time to spell check your work. Take advantage of your automated spell check in Word to help to identify basic errors in spelling. The grammar-check feature in Word is useful for flagging passive voice and overly long sentences.

### **Guidelines for editing and proofreading**

Editing tips:

- Remove redundant words, phrases and sentences.
- Replace long words with shorter ones.
- Make sure verb tenses are consistent.
- Change passive voice to active voice.
- Check to see whether the most important information is placed near the beginning of the piece, not buried in the middle.
- Watch for ambiguity or vagueness, and correct it.
- Avoid using jargon and clichés.
- Check facts, telephone numbers and web addresses for accuracy.

- If you have the opportunity, arrange to have someone from your intended audience read your draft and identify any concerns about the content.

Proofreading tips:

- If proofing your own work, start by using spell check to identify possible errors.
- Read or scan the material once in its entirety to check for problems
- Start again and scrutinize each individual word for misspellings and incorrect usage. In this step, avoid getting caught up in the flow of the writing, when your eyes may see what they expect to see rather than what is actually on the page or screen.