

Basic Style Guide for School Webmaster's Websites

There are a few general rules we hope all of our content writers and updaters will remember as they work on School Webmasters sites. If in doubt, we use the Chicago Manual of Style.

The style sheet below, although it does not include all of the specific rules of writing, addresses some of the specific things we encounter on a regular basis in our website writing. We hope it is an easy-to-follow guide that facilitates a smooth writing experience for our copywriters. Please feel free to contact us when you have a question you do not find the answer to here, and we will be happy to add it to the style sheet.

<p>A-C</p> <p>active voice: use active voice when possible</p> <p>a.m. (not am or AM)</p> <p>bachelor's degree (not Bachelor's Degree) when in running text</p> <p>board (not the Board) unless denoting the proper name, e.g., New York City School District Governing Board</p> <p>bold: you may use bold to emphasize text</p> <p>boys basketball (not boys' or boy's) Do not add an apostrophe to a word ending in 's' when it is used primarily in a descriptive sense. The apostrophe usually is not used if 'for' or 'by' would be appropriate in the longer form: <i>basketball for boys</i></p> <p>capital letters: avoid the use of all caps for emphasis</p> <p>centering: left justification is the general rule</p> <p>city council (not City Council) unless denoting the proper name, e.g., the Chicago City Council</p> <p>click here: do not use</p> <p>comma in series: include final comma (before "and" "or")</p> <p>comma between conjunctions: use between two complete thoughts—unless the complete thoughts are very short, e.g., "Please stop by or give us a call."</p>	<p>D-F</p> <p>dates: do not use st, nd, rd, th after dates: "School will begin on August 24, 2012." Place a comma after the year in running text: "May 24, 2012, is the last day of school."</p> <p>district (not District) unless denoting the proper name</p> <p>Department: the Department of Transportation; the Transportation Department</p> <p>department: the department; departmental</p> <p>em dash: (instead of commas, parentheses, or colons) often simply called a dash—used to set off an explanatory element—like we did here.</p> <p>e-mail: use hyphen</p> <p>en dash as "to": to connect numbers such as dates, times, page numbers e.g. 11:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.</p> <p>filenames: remove spaces and symbols (&,%,#). You may use underscores (_) and hyphens (-). It is preferable to begin the filename with a document definer, then indicating the school or district the file is associated with, and finally to end it with the date e.g. 011512 or 2011-12 or 0512. You may use capital or lower case letters. E.g. handbook_abcschool_2011-12</p> <p>firsthand (not first-hand)</p> <p>flier (not flyer) though both are acceptable, the former is first choice in popular grammar guides.</p>	<p>G-I</p> <p>girls soccer (not girls' or girl's) Do not add an apostrophe to a word ending in 's' when it is used primarily in a descriptive sense. The apostrophe usually is not used if 'for' or 'by' would be appropriate in the longer form: <i>soccer for girls</i></p> <p>governing board (not Governing Board) unless denoting the proper name</p> <p>Home page</p> <p>Internet (capital "I")</p> <p>intranet (lower case "i")</p> <p>italics: you may use italics to emphasize text</p>	<p>J-L</p> <p>kindergarten (not Kindergarten) when in running text</p> <p>left justification is the general rule</p>
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	font: type, size, and color should remain consistent throughout the site		
<p>M-O</p> <p>master's degree (not Master's Degree) when in running text</p> <p>News page</p> <p>numbers: spell out whole numbers from one through ten and any number beginning a sentence. To avoid awkwardness, you may want to restructure the sentence. Round numbers—hundreds, thousands, hundred thousands, and millions—are usually spelled out.</p> <p>office (not Office) e.g., “Pick it up in the front office.”</p>	<p>P-R</p> <p>passive voice: avoid the use of passive voice except in cases where the doer is unknown or unimportant or where more “tact” is in order.</p> <p>p.m. (not pm or PM)</p> <p>postal codes: Use two-letter code (CA, AZ, etc.) instead of conventional abbreviations</p> <p>preschool (not pre-school)</p> <p>principal (not Principal) unless using as a title where it precedes the name, e.g., Principal Jones</p> <p>quotation marks: in the U.S., all periods and commas go within the quotation marks. Colons and semicolons go outside. Question marks and exclamation points can go either place, depending on the sentence.</p> <p>ranges in time: use en dash, no spaces (e.g., 1972–1981)</p>	<p>S-U</p> <p>seasons: do not capitalize</p> <p>spacing: use only one space after the period at the end of a sentence</p> <p>state (not State) e.g., the state of California</p> <p>state: in running text, the state name should always be spelled out when standing alone and when following the name of a city. The state name should also be followed by a comma in running text: “Phoenix, Arizona, is the largest city in the state.”</p> <p>superintendent (not Superintendent) unless using as a title where it precedes the name, e.g., Superintendent Jones</p> <p>titles: book, periodical, and journal titles are <i>italicized</i>. Use quotation marks for titles of articles.</p> <p>underlining: don't underline anything on a website because this normally indicates a link and can cause confusion. You may use bold or italics to emphasize text</p> <p>up to date (not up-to-date – in most cases)</p>	<p>V-Z</p> <p>web (the web)</p> <p>web page (two words, if used at all. “This/the page” might be better.)</p> <p>website (one word)</p> <p>World Wide Web</p>

Tone of Voice

- The tone of our sites is very important. Whether the reader of the site is a parent, a student, an employee, or a potential employee, we want them to feel welcome there. While maintaining professionalism, the tone should be warm and friendly.
- Avoid sentences with passive voice. “Students will not be allowed to...” (passive) you might change to “Students may not...” We also remove the “educationese” from what the schools send to us, convert it to a more conversational tone, and eliminate the passive voice.

Commas & Periods

- We put a comma before “and” in a series. For example, “The parents, students, and teachers...”
- It has become proper web practice to put only one space after the period at the end of the sentence.
- Please be sure you punctuate quote marks correctly. In the U.S., all periods and commas are within the quotation marks. (example: “...here is a quote,” and so is “this.”)

Numbers

- In nontechnical contexts, the following are spelled out: whole numbers from one through ten, round numbers, and any number beginning a sentence. For other numbers, numerals are used.
- Where many numbers occur within a paragraph or a series of paragraphs, maintain consistency in the immediate context. If you must use numerals for one of the numbers in a given category, use them for all in that category. In the same sentence or paragraph, however, you may give items in one category as numerals and items in another spelled out.

“A mixture of buildings—one of 103 stories, five of more than 50, and a dozen of only 3 or 4—has been suggested for the area. The population grew from an initial 15,000 in 1960 to 21,000 by 1970 and 34,000 by 1980. Between 1,950 and 2,000 persons attended the concert.”

- Round numbers—hundreds, thousands, hundred thousands, and millions—are usually spelled out (except in the sciences).
- Spell out numbers that begin a sentence. To avoid awkwardness, just restructure the sentence.

Capitalization

- We spell website as one word (we finally caved in to trend, although many dictionaries still show it as two words with a capital “W”).

Time of day

- Except in the twenty-four-hour system, we don't use numerals to express noon or midnight.
 - The meeting began at 9:45 a.m., and we adjourned by noon.
 - Rodriguez was born at midnight, August 21–22.
- When writing the time of an event, we use the lower case letters separated by periods such as “a.m.” and “p.m.” except when there are space limitations (like in a sidebar or table where using periods will throw off the format and then we use a small capital AM or PM and then no periods are required).

Text Styles

- Font type, size, and color should remain consistent throughout the site. Don't try to change it up to add “pizzazz” to the site. This will only cause it to lose its professional appearance.
- Left justification is the general rule. We may center some things in a sidebar or an occasional title, but even then, we do it judiciously.
- You must NOT copy text directly from Word and paste it into the website editor. Either save your document as a .txt file first before copying the text (instead of a .doc or .rtf), or place the text in notepad so that it will strip out the Microsoft code before you paste it. Otherwise the styles in the website will be overridden and display improperly. You can then style your text (bullets, paragraphs, numbered lists, bolded text) using the WYSIWYG editor.
- Don't underline anything on a website. Underlines normally indicate a link and can cause confusion. You can use bold or italics to emphasize text, but not an underline unless it is a link.
- Don't use all caps except occasionally in a title. It is very difficult to read and has become the written equivalent of yelling.
- Always use spell check and grammar check before you place your text within the website editor. Then, proof your content once again after you place it within the website.

Web Writing Styles

- Web writing is different from typical writing because, more often than not, the site visitors will scan it for relevance, rather than read it word for word. Keeping that in mind, present your information in short segments of text written in a concise style with ample use of bullets, lists, etc.
- Avoid the use of passive voice. This creates a degree of distance between the site and the reader, and we want our websites to be welcoming, friendly, and informative. Your writing style should be conversational in tone.
- Beware of too much markup in your paragraphs. Too many links or too many styles of typeface will destroy the homogeneous, even "type color" that characterizes good typesetting.
- Link colors should closely match your text color. It is often difficult to read from the computer monitor without the added distraction of distracting link colors scattered throughout a page.
- **Proof & Spell Check!** Use the best tool. Write your text in a good word processing program with spell-checking, grammar checking, and search/replace features. Transfer your text to HTML only after it you have carefully proofread your content.

Use of Hyperlinks

- Be careful in your use of hyperlinks. While they can add flexibility and extensive information to your page, use caution because if not properly used they can disrupt the flow of the site content. Your hyperlinks should reinforce your message, not distract readers with a minor footnote that takes them to some other website. Most links within your text should point to some other resource or page within your site.
- Minimize the disruptive quality of links by putting only the most salient links within the body of your text. If you have a series of links, consider putting them into a list or series of bullets.
- When you do place links in the body of your text, never construct a sentence around the link. For example, don't say, "Click here for more information." Rather, write the sentence as you normally would and then place the link anchor on the word or words that best describe the additional content you are linking to.
 - Poor: [Click here](#) for more information about our governing board.

- Better: We encourage you to learning more about our governing board and meeting schedules.

Writing Requirements:

- DO NOT plagiarize. Enough said...we all know better than that.
- Keep introductory sentences brief and to the point. They should not detract from the information on the page, but be sure your site visitors know where they are within the site as soon as they arrive on the page.
- We encourage you to go the extra-mile in your writing. Think about what might make this a better and more useful website and add those elements. That one thing sets us apart from our competitors!
- Spell check, proof, grammar check—we're the professionals, and we should present a flawless site to our clients!

A useful Web Style Guide is at: <http://webstyleguide.com/>

Need help? Managing your website just takes more time than you have? Let School Webmaster's team become your staff. It will cost your district less than it would to keep this work in-house. Call 888.750.4556, and let us help your school shine online!