WSSDA

WASHINGTON STATE SCHOOL DIRECTORS' ASSOCIATION

2016 Style Guide

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WSSDA

Washington State
School Directors' Association

STYLE GUIDE
Introduction

This style guide is for use in all written materials from the Washington State School Directors' Association. This includes materials for both print and the Web.

We used a variety of well-known sources to develop this guide. We are particularly indebted to the work of the Illinois School Boards Association, which provided a sample of its own guide.

A list of references is included for additional assistance. We developed this list with the most common types of WSSDA products in mind, including written policy, newsletters, flyers, Web postings and email communications.

This guide should address most applications, including punctuation, readability, common words and phrases, citations, fonts and logo usage. We will update this guide and welcome suggested changes or additions.

Please contact us if you have suggestions or questions about applying these guidelines. We are also available to review any documents prior to publication or discuss any of these issues.

**Michael Wilson, Director of
Communications and Marketing,
WSSDA**

The *AP Stylebook* is widely used as a writing and editing reference in newsrooms, classrooms and corporate offices worldwide.

AP publishes a new spiral-bound Stylebook each spring. Basic Books publishes a perfect-bound paperback AP Stylebook every other year.

GUIDE USAGE
FAQs

What is a style guide?

A style guide is a set of standards for the writing and design of publications, either for general use or for a specific document, organization, or field.

What is a style guide not?

It's not meant to dismiss a communicator's voice or diminish creativity. It's not meant to complicate things, although it might seem to at first. It's also not a writing guide, but we have resources for that, too.

When should I use the style guide?

Use the style guide any time you are not sure about the correct capitalization, punctuation, grammar, format, word, phrase, etc. If you don't find the answer, email the communications department. We can find an answer and update the style guide.

Why do we need a style guide?

A style guide helps the organization maintain consistency in its writing, grammar, design and branding. It also helps ensure the publications follow accepted grammatical rules and best practices for writing. By providing direction, a guide can also eliminate the waste of time in trying to decide what rule to follow, since different authorities can disagree on how grammar should be applied.

WSSDA SPECIFICS
Punctuation

Periods

If a sentence ends in a URL, or an email address, the closing punctuation - usually a period - should be included. There is less danger of Web users trying to make the sentence-ending period part of the URL than in the past.

In a sentence that ends with an abbreviation, do not include two periods. For example, "the conference was held in Washington, D.C." is correct. If it ends with a question mark or exclamation mark, do include the period.

Use of periods in degree abbreviations is preferred: B.A., M.S., Ed.D

Use only one space after a period at the end of a sentence.

Comma Use

WSSDA does not use the serial or Oxford comma rule. We follow the AP guideline. We omit the serial comma before the conjunction – usually "and" or "or" - except where it prevents misreading. An example of where the comma is necessary is: "To my parents, Ayn Rand and God." Without the comma, the suggestion is that the writer's parents are Ayn Rand and God. A comma after Rand eliminates the confusion.

Generally use a comma when linking two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a conjunction, such as ''and." For example, "The governor will announce the budget cuts Thursday, and all of the press will be listening." Don't use a comma if the sentence has only a compound verb and the subject isn't repeated: She dropped the gun and surrendered. AP does allow you to omit the comma for two short clauses with expressly stated subjects. For example, "He gave me an apple and I ate it.

Use only one space after a period at the end of a sentence.

(Punctuation continued)

Hyphens and Dashes

A hyphen connects related words for clarity: president-elect

Compound modifiers get a hyphen while nouns do not: consensus building (noun), consensus-building (adjective). For example, "The consensus-building exercise resulted in true consensus building."

Dashes can be used to set off clauses in prose as an alternative to a comma. Add a space before and after the dash: Most people—school board members included—like cookies. Em or en-dashes, which are longer than a hyphen, are preferable in this use. An em-dash can be created by holding down the Alt key and typing 0151 on the **numeric keypad**.

Capitalization

Dash: -
En-dash: –
Em-dash: —

Capitalizing titles and headers

Both sentence case and title case capitalizing is allowed for titles and headers, although the choice must be consistent in any single document or product.

WSSDA generally uses sentence case in headers and titles in narrative pieces such as newsletter articles, press releases and email blasts. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized. For example, the headline for a newsletter article would be written as "Improving your board through self-assessment."

In flyers and other marketing materials, we often employ what is called "title case." Here we follow the AP rule. We capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions with four or more letters. For example, a headline on a flyer might read, "Time to Subscribe to eClippings." Sentence case is also appropriate for marketing materials. Generally, this decision is made by the designer.

Following AP, we use what's known as downstyle. Words are lowercased unless a rule says to capitalize them. For example:

• Capitalize common nouns that are part of a proper name, such as Libertarian Party and Spokane River. Do not capitalize in plural use, such as the Libertarian and Green parties or Columbia and Snake rivers.
• Capitalize the full, formal name of an organization or event, such as the Washington State School Directors' Association or the WSSDA Annual Conference. Do not capitalize if it is a partial reference, such as the association or the annual conference. The same applies to school board and school district.

(Capitalization continued)

Personal titles

Capitalize formal titles that come directly before a name: "The students were delighted when they heard they would meet President Bush." Do not capitalize titles when they come after the name: "John Smith, superintendent, advised the school board to approve the policy." Never capitalize job descriptions: shortstop, police officer, attorney and so on.

Do not capitalize the governor, the principal, the teacher or the superintendent, even if it is referring to a specific person.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

As a general rule, use only abbreviations that would be recognized by your audience. A few, such as NASA, FBI and CIA, can be used on all references. They do not need to be spelled out.

All familiar acronyms and abbreviations are acceptable in headlines. In text, however, the name should usually be spelled out in full near the beginning of the narrative.

If the abbreviation is generally sounded out as a word, for example WASA or WSSDA, you do not use an article before it. For example, it should be "WSSDA is set to testify on Thursday," not "The WSSDA is set to testify…" On the other hand, where the abbreviation is sounded out by letter, you do generally place the article before it. For example, "The FBI is investigating" or "The CIA would not comment on the matter."

Readability

Research shows that when it comes to business communications, as opposed to say a novel or a play, all audiences prefer simpler writing. No matter whether it is a reader with a Ph.D. or a high school education, people prefer easier reading materials.

What affects readability?

Readability is affected by many factors, including white space, graphics, headers and structure. For the purposes of this style guide, our focus is on readability in terms of the complexity of the writing. In this area, the focus is on using short paragraphs, short sentences and short words. Sentences should be direct, with limited clauses and punctuation. They should not be passive. Subject, verb, object is the rule.

The reason we prefer short paragraphs is that research also shows that readers tend to skip past large blocks of text, especially on smartphone and computer screens. Blocks of text are intimidating. So when in doubt, split up the paragraph. Generally, do not include more than three or four sentences in a paragraph.

(Readability continued)

Readability tools

There are many tools to measure the complexity of writing. Among the most common are the Flesch readability and Flesch-Kincaid grade level measures. Both of these are conveniently available on your MSWord spell checker. To gain access, simply go to the "File" tab of a Microsoft Word document, select options and then proofing. Check the box marked "show readability statistics" and the "OK," and you are all set.

Now, whenever you run spellcheck, you will also be given a convenient readout of "Reading Ease" and "Grade Level." The readout will also provide the percentage of passive sentences, sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, word count and a host of other interesting items.

Readability goals at WSSDA

At WSSDA, our goal is to keep written materials at about grade 12 or below, preferably in the grade 8-to-10 range. In terms of reading ease, we shoot for 45 to 60. This guide, for example, falls within that range. For a reference, typical reading levels are: Reader's Digest, 65; Time Magazine, 52 and the Harvard Business Journal, about 32.

These goals apply to all publications, Web writing, email blasts and other written materials.

While short paragraphs, short sentences and short words are good general rules, they are not all powerful. There are many times when a more nuanced, sometimes longer, word will take the place of three or four. Rhythm and pacing in sentences are important. And authors should be allowed to express style.

However, if Herman Melville, author of Moby Dick, could write at an average 58 reading ease, so can our fantastic writers at WSSDA.

By the way, this readability section was written at grade level 8.2 with a reading ease of 59.8.

Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	185
Characters	1131
Paragraphs	14
Sentences	17
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	3.4
Words per Sentence	9.2
Characters per Word	5.7
Readability	
Passive Sentences	0%
Flesch Reading Ease	41.5
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	9.7

(Readability continued)

Gender

Avoid racial or sexual stereotyping and language. Use he or she, or make the usage plural: they. Many words now have neutral alternatives: firefighter, police officer, chair or chairperson. Use these rather than assuming a particular gender. Use skillful writing to avoid putting two words together with slashes: he/she. If necessary, say he or she.

Citations and Sources

It is often necessary to cite or credit resources. WSSDA uses a modified APA style. We modify APA style by using full names, as a courtesy to our resources, many of whom are people we know. When in doubt, use formal APA citation style:

Sourcing a book
Jamie Vollmer (2010). *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*. First Paperback Edition. Fairfield, IA.

### Sourcing a periodical
Elissa Dyson (October 2015). "2015 Small Schools Tour travels to Clark, Cowlitz and Lewis Counties." *WSSDA Direct,* p. 1.

Sourcing a website
Washington State School Directors' Association. (December 2015). Gov. Inslee Proclaims January as School Board Recognition Month. Retrieved from WSSDA websi*te http://wssda.org/Newsroom/NewsReleasesandStatements.aspx.*

All reports and publications should include a publication date. This can include just the month and year, such as February 2016, or month, day and year, such as February 1, 2016.
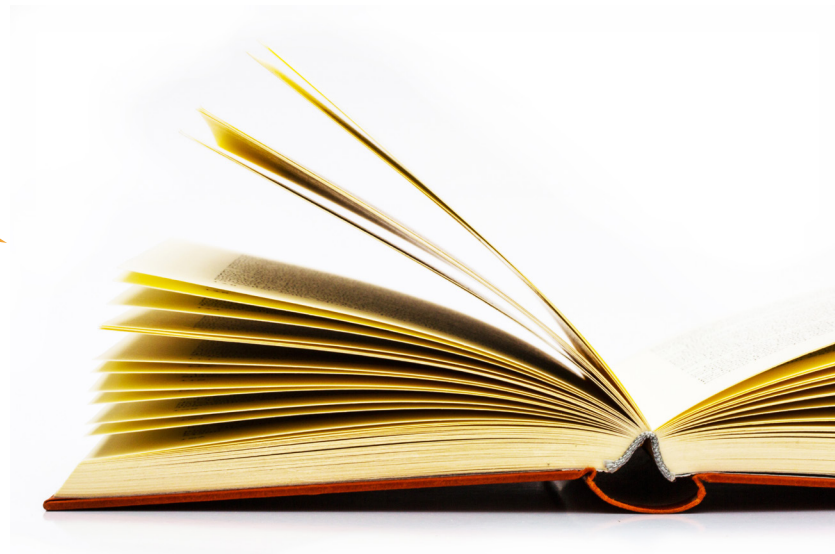
FREQUENTLY-USED
Information

> You can find the © symbol in Word by holding down the Alt key while typing 0169 on the numeric keypad.

Academic year	2015-2016
Centuries	1900s 21st century
Copyright	Everything we hand out or create at WSSDA is already "copyrighted." But marking it with the © symbol creates notice to others that says "WSSDA owns this content, please ask to use it." When generating content, ask "Will we be handing out material with ideas or other content that our department or WSSDA does not want stolen and/or used by another person or entity without our permission?" If the answer is yes, copyright materials this way: Copyright © 2016 Washington State School Directors' Association. Questions about whether or not to use a ©? Contact Heidi Maynard at h.maynard@WSSDA.org.
Dates	Dates are indicated by cardinal, not ordinal numbers: April 1, not April 1st
Dollars and cents	$29.75 $45 $4 billion 45 cents
Numbers	Spell out one through nine. Use figures for 10 and above. Use figures for ages: 5-year-old boy. For large numbers, use a figure followed by the word: 3 million, $4 billion Use commas in larger numbers: 1,104 attendees, but not in addresses or years. Spell out percent instead of using the % symbol: 18 percent not 18% Plurals of numbers are made by adding the letter "s": 100s (no apostrophe). Contractions of years take an apostrophe: Class of '92.
Phone numbers	**217.528.9688** or **(217) 528-9688**
States	Follow AP Style and spell out Washington in prose. Do not use WA.
Time of day	9:30-11 a.m. (do not use 00; do not use a.m. or p.m. twice, no spaces around the hyphen) 9 a.m.-noon (lowercase noon) 10 a.m.-3:45 p.m.
Time of year	Lowercase spring, summer, fall, winter unless referring to a specific time frame, as in Spring 2015 (note no comma). In most prose usage, spell out the month: The first meeting was held in October 2005. (note no comma). When writing a full date, punctuate: December 25, 2015.

FREQUENTLY-USED
Words and Phrases

association no cap **The Washington State School Directors' Association** cap specific	
assure/insure/insure To **"assure"** a person of something is to make him or her confident of it. According to AP style, to **"ensure"** that something happens is to make certain that it does, and to **"insure"** is to issue an insurance policy.	
bachelor's degree/master's degree lowercase possessive, not plural	
board of directors no cap	
capital seat of government, usually being a city, such as Olympia. Capital can also be used in a financial sense to describe money, equipment, or property in a business of corporation among other uses. A **capitol**, on the other hand, is a building where legislators meet to have legislative sessions. Capitalize it if you are referring to the building in Olympia or Washington, D.C.	
chairperson or chair not chairwoman or chairman	
database one word	
decision-maker/decision-making	
email no hyphen	
extracurricular no hyphen	
flier vs. flyer AP says flier; WSSDA uses flyer more. Either is okay.	
fundraiser, fundraising no hyphen	
grade school or **elementary school, middle school, high school** two words, capitalize only if part of full title of school	
Internet with cap	
always use **judgment** no first"e", rather than judgement.	
Legislature always cap **legislators** no cap **legislative** no cap	
nonprofit no hyphen **not-for-profit** hyphenated	
online no hyphen	
self-evaluation no cap in general, but the title of a workshop could be capitalized, such as **School Board Self-Evaluation**	
social media capitalize **Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google** and even **Googling**	

(Frequently-used words and phrases continued)

staff is a collective noun and takes a singular verb. So say **staff is**, rather than staff are, just as spell check advises.
superintendent   no cap
vice president   no hyphen   **president-elect**   hyphen
Use **Washington state** or **state of Washington.**   Do not capitalize "state."
website   no cap, one word, no hyphen   **Web page** do capitalize   **Web** do capitalize

Want to add to the list? Email us: communications@WSSDA.org.

BEST PRACTICES
Format and Styling

Emphasis

Best practice is to choose words that do the emphasizing for you. But where you need more emphasis, bold is fine if used consistently. Consistently use your standard font for content, and if necessary use bold for headings and subheadings, and indents, rules and spacing to make different sections stand out. Do not underline for emphasis. Underlining has come to indicate links. Do not use all caps for emphasis.

Italics

We italicize publication titles, and long quotations if they are set apart

Being a school director can be demanding, frustrating, and requires those who serve to struggle with complex issues and difficult choices. However, local school board service is also rewarding, as you watch students achieve and graduate from your schools with promising futures.

- Serving on Your Local School Board

If quotations are embedded into text, they retain the quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quote but the quotes themselves are not italicized.

Do not use italics for emphasis. We do not italicize links unless they are references.

Spacing

Use only one space after a period in narrative text.

Sourcing a website

Do not italicize websites unless they are used as a reference.

Washington State School Directors' Association. (December 2015). Gov. Inslee Proclaims January as School Board Recognition Month. Retrieved from WSSDA website *http://wssda.org/Newsroom/NewsReleasesandStatements.aspx.*

NO NEED TO YELL!!
Choose words that do the emphasizing for you.

(Formatting and Font styling continued)

Typography

The official WSSDA logo and text underneath are in the typeface Avenir, which comes in light, roman (medium) and bold faces. The WSSDA website and all printed materials use san serif fonts: a standard body text and a condensed font for headlines and sub headings that combine to give a "branded" clean, modern look.

When creating email blasts, best practice is to use universal or system fonts which means selecting fonts that mimic the printed fonts in hopes of maintaining a unique, brand presence. Here are some we recommend.

What WSSDA uses for print	Good substitutions
Standard	**Standard**
Avenir Light	Calibri Light
Avenir Light Oblique	*Calibri Light Italic*
Avenir Roman,	Calibri Regular
Avenir Roman Oblique,	*Calibri Regular Italic*
Avenir Heavy	**Calibri Bold**
Avenir Heavy Oblique	***Calibri Bold Italic***
Franklin Gothic Book	**Arial Bold**
Franklin Gothic Oblique	***Arial Bold Italic***
Franklin Gothic Demi	**Arial Black**
Franklin Gothic Demi Oblique	Tahoma Regular
Franklin Gothic Medium	**Tahoma Bold**
Franklin Gothic Medium Italic	
Franklin Gothic Heavy	**Condensed**
Franklin Gothic Heavy Italic	Arial Narrow
Helvetica Neue Thin	*Arial Narrow Italic*
Helvetica Neue Light	**Impact**
Helvetica Neue Bold	
	Plus these fonts common to both Mac & PC:
Condensed	Trebuchet
Helvetica Neue Thin Condensed	Verdana
Helvetica Neue Thin Condensed Italic	MS Serif4
Helvetica Neue Bold Condensed	Geneva
Helvetica Neue Black Condensed	
Helvetica Neue Extra Black Condensed	http://www.theenergygrid.com/articles-a-resources/web-safe-fonts.html
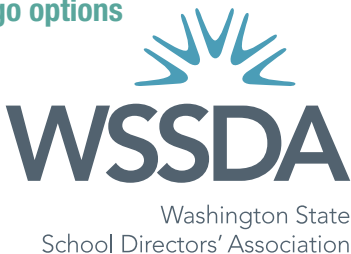
GRAPHIC STANDARDS
Use of Logos

The WSSDA logo has four approved versions for use: 2-color logo with text underneath, 2-color logo with no text underneath, all-black logo and all-white logo reversed out of a background.*

Be careful not to change the proportions of the logo when placing into an application. When sizing a logo inside a picture box, holding down the shift key as you drag the box will keep the horizontal and vertical dimensions linked. Do not modify the logo without talking to the WSSDA communications department first.

Prepared logos can be found in the communications image library. Consult with your designer to determine which version is best for the application you are using.

Logo options

WSSDA
Washington State
School Directors' Association
2-color with text

WSSDA
2-color without text

WSSDA
All-black

WSSDA
White reversed out of background

Approved colors

CMYK: 52-6-0-25
RGB: 86-155-190
PANTONE 549

CMYK: 23-2-0-77
RGB: 69-85-96
PANTONE 432

*All versions of the logo come with and without the text underneath.

WSSDA

Links and Resources

AP Style Guide starting point for basics and common usages:
- AP Style Guide https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/02/

For resources and citations:
- APA STYLE https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/05/

Further reading for grammar geeks:
- http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl
- http://www.dailywritingtips.com/7-grammatical-errors-that-aren't
- http://www.grammarly.com/blog/2015/what-is-the-oxford-comma-and-why-do-people-care-so-much-about-it/
- http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/language-blog/
- http://www.amazon.com/Between-You-Me-Confessions-Comma/dp/
- http://www.amazon.com/Elements-Style-Illustrated-William-Strunk/dp/

Further reading for font fanatics:
- http://writingspaces.org/wwsg/serif-and-sans-serif-fonts
- http://www.urbanfonts.com/blog/2013/02/serif-vs-sans-the-final-battle/
- http://www.comicsanscriminal.com/
- https://designschool.canva.com/blog/

Finding free stock images:
- https://designschool.canva.com/blog/free-stock-photos/

Color tips:
- http://www.creativepro.com/article/10-color-tips-graphic-designers

Best practices for working with Windows
- https://support.office.com/en-za/article/Best-practices-for-working-with-Windows

How to add a custom dictionary in Word:
- http://support.microsoft.com/

Facebook logos and other assets and how to use them:
- https://www.facebookbrand.com/

Twitter brand assets and guidelines:
- https://about.twitter.com/press/brand-assets

Using the YouTube logo:
- http://www.youtube.com/yt/brand/using-logo.html