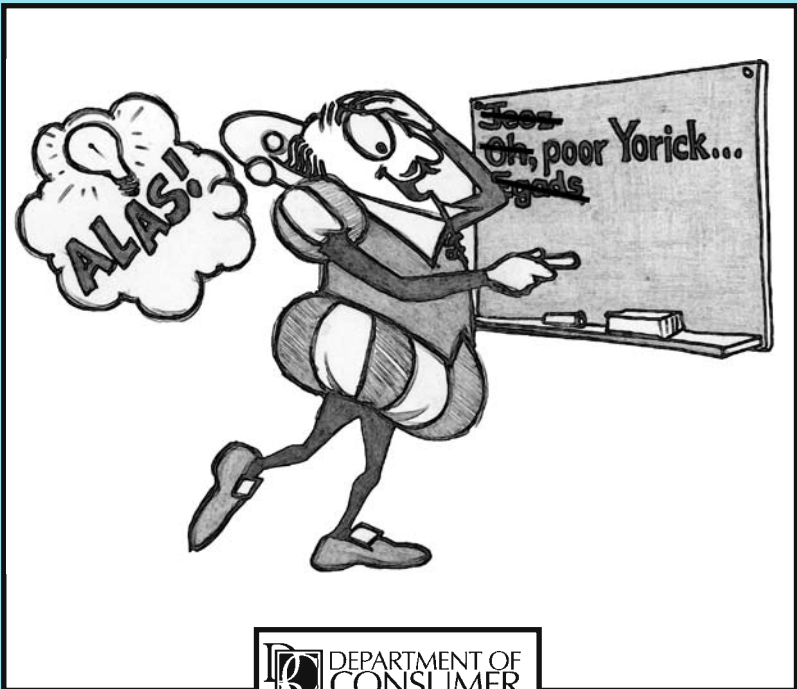


# DODS

## *Stylebook*



June 2006

# DCBS Communications Section Services



## Print design & production

Graphic designers in Communications work with you to create printed materials that suit your purpose and budget.

- Newsletters, booklets, brochures, and flyers
- Forms & interactive forms for Web use
- Posters, displays & signage
- Advertisements
- Bulletins, reports
- Letters
- CDs
- Award certificates
- Covers, folders, placards, badges
- Other specialty items

Print design and production services:

- Design consultation
- Illustrations and other graphic elements
- Photography and photo scanning
- Selection of color, paper, and type fonts
- Layout that attracts readership
- Revisions of existing publications
- Files in formats needed by printers
- Coordination of publications in series
- File archiving for future use
- Send-to-print services

## Web page design & maintenance

The Communications Section designs and maintains Web sites and Web pages that are clean, clear, and cool, too.

- Planning
- Design
- Organization
- Updating/uploading

## Writing & editing

Expert writing and editing help present your message with clarity and conciseness.

- News articles
- Editorials, guest columns
- Reports
- News releases
- Ad copy
- Fact sheets
- Letters
- Interviews
- Editing, proofing, rewrites, and revisions
- Powerpoint presentations

## Media & public relations

Professional services can make the most of a message, strategy, or an event.

- Communications consultations
- Crisis communications
- Public service campaigns
- News media response
- Press conferences
- NewsNet radio program
- News-story development
- Presentations to groups
- Outreach

## Training

The Communications Section helps employees in DCBS' divisions help themselves improve skills.

- Media training
- Writing & editing training
- Web design assistance
- Individual coaching

**Call Communications for help, (503) 947-7006.**

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## Foreword

As the new editor in the DCBS Communications Section, I hope this stylebook continues to be a handy tool to help you with everyday writing and editing. The *DCBS Stylebook* was produced by my predecessor and has been updated several times over the years. I have updated it once again, addressing issues and questions that have come up during my first several months at DCBS. I will be working on a more extensive update later this year.

This stylebook is designed to be a quick guide that is easy to use and understand. If you encounter something that this book does not address, or if you want more detailed information about a topic, I encourage you to call me at (503) 947-7897 or consult one of the reference books listed on page 6.

You can request free copies of the *DCBS Stylebook* from Communications, (503) 947-7897, for anyone who needs or wants them. You can also find the *DCBS Stylebook* on our internal Web site, [cbs.state.or.us/internal/](http://cbs.state.or.us/internal/).

If you have any questions about this stylebook or editing in general, feel free to call me anytime. My goal is to be a true partner with the divisions in making DCBS publications even more clear, concise, and consistent.

*Lisa Morawski*

**Communications Section**  
Oregon Department of  
Consumer & Business Services

## Why good writing is important

No matter what agency, division, or section you work for, writing skills are important. You need to be able to present information understandably. Clear writing improves access to benefits, information, and services. Clear documents help people understand what government is doing and what it asks of them.

Unclear documents take readers a long time to digest — more time than they're willing to spend, in many cases. Unclear documents create a bad image for your program and agency — not to mention the writer. Ill-conceived and poorly executed rules, laws, letters, manuals, brochures, press releases, Web sites, and other forms of so-called communication destroy relationships and waste huge amounts of money and time.

It's a common misperception that writing is simple, that anyone — or even a software program — can deliver a clear, concise press release, article, ad, report, or business letter. But software cannot replace skilled writers. Hiring people with writing skills is less expensive in the long run than trying to make writers of staff members who are not writers.

That said, anyone can improve his or her writing skills with the desire to improve, training, and practice.

## Five steps to help with your writing process

**If you have difficulty starting (or finishing) a writing project, here are some steps that may help:**

### One

Take the time you need to gather information and consider what you want to write and even *why* you want to write it. Ask plenty of questions. Read documents or publications similar to what you want to create. It helps to sketch (yes, with pictures, arrows, and circles) or outline your project, if you don't have a clear picture of it in mind.

Unless you have total freedom on the project, make sure you and your boss and other parties with an interest in the project have similar ideas about the purpose, content, and audience. Brainstorm with them. Go over what you've got. Make notes about what you need.

Good writing takes time. At the beginning of a writing project, you may not appear to be accomplishing anything, and you may not *feel* like you are, either, but this is part of the creative process, so don't panic. Your brain is doing some internal organization.

If, after a reasonable amount of time, you *do* feel panicky, you may be experiencing "writer's block." It may be because you're delaying the next important step.

### Two

Get a first draft on paper (or into your computer). Don't put off this active part of the creative process too long, waiting for everything to become crystal clear in your mind before you commit to paper. It won't. You need to *see* it on paper or on screen to see how it flows — or doesn't. It won't get better and better up there in your head. Putting something on paper helps you refine or redefine the project. It gives you something solid to bend, shape, and apply finishing touches to.

### Three

Get away from your first draft for a while. If you can leave it for 24 hours or more and then go back to it, great. If all you can do is walk away from your desk and get a cup of coffee or a breath of fresh air, do it. When you come back to your project, you'll discover better ways to organize the information, points you need to add, material that is extraneous, sentences that can be improved, and grammar and spelling corrections to make.

All writers who care about the quality of what they write must proof, edit, and rewrite *everything*, including ad copy, news items, text for forms, scripts, press releases, and business letters. It may be tedious, but it's necessary. And, on the bright side, you may see new possibilities as you proof, edit, and rewrite.

#### Four

Time to rewrite! Perhaps you'll just need to move a few chunks of text and change a word here and there. Often, though, your document will need *substantial* changes. That's OK. The process up to this point has made you more familiar with your text and your project, and you will edit your text with ease. If you're obligated to have it reviewed by several parties, they also may require changes.

#### Five

After rewriting, leave your work for a while, review it, and then give it to an editor or proofreader qualified to make final revisions or at least highlight possible problems and give it back to you. ***Don't skip this step***, even when you're feeling pressured to get your project to the printer, and you believe that it's perfect. This is when the biggest "bloopers" can slip expensively and embarrassingly into print — like spelling the name of your agency wrong. (See *Quick-check list for proofing*, page 12.)

At some point, you've got to put your work out there in the public eye. What's important is finding the best moment to let it fly — sometime after the first draft and before the 99th. You owe it to your reader to have done the best you can to present your information clearly and accurately. And you owe it to your employer to get it done as efficiently as possible.

## Using reference materials

DCBS uses the *AP 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. Don't miss its helpful AP Internet Guide.

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. And everyone has days when the simplest word just looks wrong. (Don't they?)

Language changes continually. Because our mission here doesn't include speeding the evolution of written language, consult your dictionary. In it, you'll usually want to select the first choice among spellings found there.

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

Consider getting one or more of these reference books:

- *The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage*
- *The Elements of Grammar* by Margaret Shertzer
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White
- *The Careful Writer* by Theodore Bernstein
- *Modern American Usage* by Wilson Follett
- *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser
- *Lapsing Into a Comma: A Curmudgeon's Guide to the Many Things That Can Go Wrong in Print — and How to Avoid Them* by Bill Walsh
- *Words, Words, Words* by John Bremner
- *The Well-Tempered Sentence* by Karen Elizabeth Gordon
- *The Chicago Manual of Style*

These books are available at bookstores, office supply stores, or on the Internet. You may find them in used bookstores or your local public or university library. There are many other style guides available, some specific to professions or industries.

Depending on where you work, you may find these reference works indispensable:

- *Barron's Dictionary of Finance and Investment Terms*
- *Legal Thesaurus* by William C. Burton
- A current *Oregon Blue Book*

## Creating publications at DCBS

### 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 publications contact for each division must fill out a Communications work order before work can proceed and sign an 1142 form before the job can be sent to the state printing plant when you are satisfied with the way it looks.

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## 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 readers' 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 Web sites.

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.

Please don't hold your division's communications representative responsible for edits made at the agency level; call the editor directly to discuss them, (503) 947-7897. Get the editor involved early in the planning and writing process, if that will help.

Here is a list of editing considerations:

- Does the publication include all the information that a reader might need to know?
- 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 and writing 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?

## Tips for self-editing

### Conciseness and clarity

Know your message and assess the reading skills of your audience; we don't want to "talk down" to readers, but we do want to be clear. Use simple language and strive to answer questions a reader might ask. Find and eliminate jargon and legalese. Convert passive sentences to active where it makes sense to do so. Don't include every possible scenario and every related statute and fact that you can lay your hands on. *Include the information your readers need to accomplish whatever it is you want them to accomplish and provide references for further information.* Try reading your written work aloud. Have someone whose opinion you trust — but who isn't necessarily a subject-matter expert — read through your document.

### Brevity

Generally, write short. People don't want to dig for information. Say what you need to say as directly as possible, using short sentences and paragraphs.

### Proofreading

Always rely on at least one other person to proofread your work. When you proofread your own work, you'll see what you intended to write, no matter what is on the page. When proofreading for others, don't be hesitant about commenting on what is not clear to you. And don't rely (entirely) on electronic spell- or grammar-checkers. It's easy to make a typing error that spells a real word; your spell-checker won't know it's the incorrect word.

### Assist your staff

Most employees have computers and are somewhat illogically expected to be able to write because of that, even though they may never have cultivated writing skills. If you're a staff manager, become aware of who writes well and who needs help; see that writers get training and that everyone has proofreading partners. For further information about training, check the Human Resources Services Web site ([cbs.state.or.us/internal/crossdiv/train](http://cbs.state.or.us/internal/crossdiv/train)), call the editor in the Communications Section, or call Organization Development and Training, (503) 947-7295.

## Formatting and style tips

### Type styles

Many type styles are difficult to read, including reverse (white on a black or colored background), all caps, drop-caps, outlined and shadowed type, all bold or all-italic type; type that is too large or too small, script-style type, and nonserif typefaces such as Helvetica and Arial. Use them sparingly.

Readability may be improved by using ragged-right justification instead of right-justified text. Serif type may be easier on the eyes in printed material. The same is not true on the Web, where screen resolution is kinder to nonserif (sans serif) type such as Arial.

### Tabs

If you're aligning type in columns in the body of a document, set tabs, don't use the space bar. If you're tab-impaired, indicate on your copy or on another piece of paper how you want your columns to look and let Communications' graphic designers create tabbed columns for you.

### Periods and returns

Don't double-space after periods or colons or hit *return* at the ends of lines. It's a difficult habit to break, but if you insert

double spaces or returns, a designer will have to remove them, which costs your division money. Modern type fonts build in adequate post-punctuation spacing. If you add more, you leave unsightly white "tracks" throughout a page of type.

### Bullets

Convenient for highlighting important information, bullets lose their effectiveness with overuse. Just splitting an otherwise readable sentence into bullets will not help it to be 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 (e.g., "In order to comply, you must satisfy all of the following requirements:"). When bulleting a list, (which typically means more than three 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 (verb forms that end with -ing and function as nouns) phrases with imperative sentences, for instance. 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.

## Vertical type

Don't use vertical type for important information. Most readers' eyes and minds simply ignore vertical type, although it can be attractive as an art element.

## Screens

Let the graphic designers in Communications place your screens and patterns, as they can interfere with readability.

## Color

As of this printing, color use by state agencies remains limited. If you get approval to use color, discuss it with a graphic designer

in Communications, who will use a Pantone color guide. Your paper choice can affect color. Don't use low-contrast color combinations of type, graphics, and background. Don't use reverse on yellow or more than two or three colors of type.

## Photos and graphics

Photos and graphic elements can enhance your design and help make the point. Provide photos printed on nontextured paper for scanning. Do not use paper clips on photos or artwork. Do not write on the backs of photos; write on removable tape, then put the tape on the back of the photo. If people appear in photos, you may need signed releases. Remember that four-color presswork may be prohibitively expensive.

## Wrapped copy

Don't spend time meticulously wrapping type around a photo or performing other formatting tricks. If your piece has yet to be edited, everything could change.

## Last-but-best style tip

Formatting and design are best left to graphic artists. Take your raw materials and your ideas to Communications staff members. They'll help.

## 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 ba ndleader raised his..... remove space
- New information has shown .....insert space (also # )
- the <sup>stet</sup> Medicare recipients will..... retain, keep as it  
 was originally
- The ruling <sup>is</sup> a fine example ..... insert word
- according to the ~~the~~ the source ..... delete
- [Important] ..... bold face, center  
 or **BF** in margin
- John Jones ..... italics, flush left
- [John Jones ..... flush left
- ^ ..... insert comma
- ∨ .....insert apostrophe
- ∨ ∨ ..... insert quotation marks
- ⊗ or ⊙ or ^ ..... insert period
- = ∨ ..... hyphen
- m or |—| ..... dash

## 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.

### 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.

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.*

### 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. For 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, as in this example: The team leader said, *"I'm not going to be here after tomorrow."*

If you're quoting the governor's latest speech, use a colon, as in this example: *Following is the text of the governor's speech: ...*

### Commas

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

DCBS employs the serial comma, which means we use a comma before the *and* in a simple series, as in this 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:

*... counseling related to family, marriage, sex and career, in the absence of an illness.*

Here, *sex and career* are treated as a single entity with the absence of a serial comma, which causes confusion. This sentence could be rewritten: *In addition to services for illness, we provide counseling related to family, marriage, sex, and career.*

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.*

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.*

Do use a comma to set off nonessential (nonrestrictive) phrases or clauses. Nonessential means that the sentence makes sense without the phrases or clauses. For example: *The candy, which had been picked up from the floor by the janitor, was eaten during the birthday 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 birthday celebration.* The clause is essential here.

Use commas to separate day-month-year sequences: *He arrived Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2004.* Don't use commas if you're writing just the month and year: *We finished that project in June 2003.*

Use commas in city-state sequences: *We're presenting the project in Atlanta, Georgia, and Helena, Montana.*

*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.**

## 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 of which follow: *The office will be open 8 a.m.-6 p.m. every weekday. Their record was 23-2 for that period.*

## Ellipsis (...)

An ellipsis alerts readers that something has been omitted, that the speaker has hesitated, or that 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.

## Exclamation points

Used to express a strong emotion or surprise. You'll 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.

For 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. The only exceptions are the adverb *very* and all adverbs that end in *-ly*. A *first-quarter touchdown*, a *full-time job*, an *easily remembered rule*.

Hyphens are also used to separate times and numbers in a series, such as *5-7 p.m.* and *Chapters 15-26*.

Hyphens are used 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*). Usually, prefixes that call for a hyphen include *all-*, *anti-*, *ex-*, *pro-*, and *un-*.

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 dollar project*).

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

There are many exceptions to hyphen rules. The best thing is to reread your sentence and determine whether there is a possibility for confusion or ambiguity; if so, use a hyphen. If you're not sure, contact an editor or check a dictionary.

## Parentheses

Parentheses are used to give *additional 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.

You may use brackets or another set of parentheses for parenthetical material within parentheses.

## Periods

Periods end sentences. Don't double-space after periods at the ends of sentences.

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 contains 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.

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."*

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.

## 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, 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 separate a series of elements, introduced by a colon, 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 at the beginning of this booklet.

## Serial commas

A serial comma is the last comma in a series. DCBS joins editors and authors Strunk and White in opting to use them. For example: *The maid, the chauffeur, and the nanny left when my lottery winnings were depleted.* Please read the commas entry for more about serial commas.

## Quick-check list for proofing

- ✓ If you've changed *any* text, run another spell check.
- ✓ Check a printed copy for incorrectly used words that your spell-checker missed and miscellaneous words left from edits.
- ✓ Double-check *all* names, telephone numbers, addresses, ages, dates, statute references, fee amounts, etc.
- ✓ Ensure that you have the right photos, charts, and diagrams, that they have captions, and that the captions are complete and correct.
- ✓ Make sure headings are consistent in style and size and that headlines have subjects and verbs.

## Alphabetical entries

### a lot

It's not *alot*. It's two words.

### a majority of

Use *most*.

### a meeting was held

Use *we met*, *the committee met*, etc.

### a number of

Use *many*.

### abbreviations and initials

They're handy when your division's title is long: Department of Consumer & Business Services' Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Division; however, don't abbreviate the name on first use in documents intended for those who may not be familiar with our division and program names.

Extensive use of initials annoys readers, who don't want to backtrack to find out what the letters represent. *It's best to spell out names of organizations, programs, and agencies if it's likely that readers won't understand the abbreviations.* Some abbreviations are so well known that they don't have to be spelled out: FBI, U.S.A., U.N., etc.

The *AP Stylebook* advises against including initials in parentheses after a name. The reasoning: Readers should be able to readily identify who or what is later referred to by initial or acronym; if not, the writer shouldn't be using them.

If you're introducing an entity that will not be used again in the document, spell it and don't include the initials in parentheses.

To help readers, you can include a few words of description when you refer to a section, division, etc., that you may not have used for a while. Example: *HRS, which is part of the Director's Office and provides a variety of personnel services for the department, ...*

### absent

Use *lacking* or *without*, not "Absent a budget ..."

### accede

Use *agree*, *grant*, or *allow*.

### accept/except

*Accept* is to receive, *except* is to exclude.

### access

Except when referring to computer data, perhaps, 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.

### accounted for by the fact

Use *because*.

### accustomed to

*Used to*.

**acronyms**

Acronyms are different than abbreviations; acronyms are created to be pronounced as words and often to *mean* something as a word. Abbreviations are shortened forms, often initials pronounced individually. DCBS is an abbreviation of the department's name, consisting of its initials. We don't pronounce it "duckbus." PESO, however, *is* an acronym for a program within OR-OSHA. It is intended to be pronounced "peso." Another acronym is MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

**active/passive voice**

Impart life into your writing by having subjects *perform* the actions (active voice), rather than having actions *performed on them*. For 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.

**acts**

Names of acts should have initial caps but not be italicized (the Americans with Disabilities Act). When you refer to "the act" without naming it in your writing, "act" is nonspecific and isn't capitalized.

**ad nauseam**

It's not ad naseum.

**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.

**additional**

Use *more* or *extra*.

**additionally**

Avoid using *by using and* or *also*.

**addresses**

Use the abbreviations *Ave.*, *Blvd.*, and *St.* only with a numbered address: *350 Winter St. NE*. Spell them out and capitalize when part of a formal street name without the number: *Winter Street NE*. Lowercase and spell out when used alone or with more than one street name: *on the corner of Winter and Center streets*.

All similar words (*alley*, *drive*, *road*, *terrace*, etc.) always are spelled out. Capitalize them when part of a formal name without a number; lowercase when used alone or with two or more names.

Use periods in the abbreviation *P.O.* for *P.O. Box* numbers.

**advance planning**

Just *planning*, which is in advance.

**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 penicillin.* *Averse* is the word you're looking for when you mean reluctant to accept or endorse it: *I'm averse to that proposal.*

**advise**

Try *tell* or *inform*.

**advocate**

As a **transitive 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 of correct use: *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 the American Sign Language Association.*

**affect/effect**

*Affect*, as a **verb**, generally means *to influence*: *That virus affected me.* *Effect*, as a **noun** that means result: The effect of reading all these formulas is more confusion. *Effect* as a **verb** means *bring about* or *cause*: *The wide-scale lack of compliance effected the change in the law.*

**aforementioned, aforesaid**

Try *preceding*.

**agenda**

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

**ages**

Figures should be used for ages. Write *the 5-year-old girls* or *the girls are both 5*. When referring to age, use *older than* or *younger than*, rather than more than or less than, over or under. You don't need of age in He was 65 years of age. Simply say, *He was 65*.

**agreement in number**

The subject of your sentence should agree in number with the verb and with pronouns used to represent the subject. If you write, *Jensen & Jensen found that their wax sticks were being eaten instead of applied to creaky doors*, you have missed in number agreement. Because *Jensen & Jensen* is a company, it is a single entity, and because the pronoun must agree in number (with the subject, in this case), you should use *its* instead of *their*: *Jensen & Jensen found that its wax sticks were being eaten ....*

**ahead of time**

Try a more precise phrase such as *before the deadline* or *before the meeting*.

**alleviate**

Use *ease*, *reduce*, or *lessen*.

**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.*

**along the lines of**

Use *like*.

**alright**

Two words: *all right*.

**alternate**

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

**ambiguous pronouns**

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

**among/between**

*Among* is used when there are more than two things or people involved, *between* when there are two.

**amongst**

Use *among*.

**amp, AMP**

*Amp* meaning *ampere* is not capitalized except at the beginning of a sentence. *AMP*, the chemical adenosine monophosphate, is.

**and also**

Redundant. Use *and*.

**ands and commas**

Don't create a "false series" because you're concerned about using too many *ands* or adding another word. Consider this sentence: *There was damage indicating a history of water leaks, high humidity, and condensation levels.* Note that *condensation levels* is left without a modifier. Yes, there probably is a history of condensation levels, but what is crucial is that levels were high, not that there *were* levels. Repeat *high* or rewrite: *The damage indicated a history of water leaks and high humidity and condensation levels.*

**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.*

**annual**

An event must have been held at least two successive years in order to be called *annual*, according to AP style. Do not use *first annual* or *second annual*.

**another**

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

**any**

Often unnecessary: If you have *any* questions, If you wish to submit *any* proposals, etc.

**anybody, anyone**

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

**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, *The circumstances were explained to me* — or, perhaps best, *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.

**are of the same opinion**

Use *agree*.

**arguably**

If you’re presenting an argument, you’ve already established that your topic’s arguable, so don’t introduce

the sentence with *arguably* or *unarguably*.

**as a consequence of**

Use *because*.

**as a matter of fact**

Use *in fact*.

**ascertain**

Use *discover* or *find out*.

**assist**

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

**assure, ensure, insure**

*Assure* means to convince or to inform confidently, and uses the preposition *of*. *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 all of her demands are met. We will *insure* your business only if you move it out of the flood plain.

**ATM**

It’s not *ATM machine*, as the “M” in the abbreviation stands for “machine.”

**at some point in time**

Use *when*.

**at this (or that) point in time**

Use *now* or *then*.

**attain**

Use *reach*, *achieve*, or *accomplish*.

**attorney**

An *attorney* is not necessarily a *lawyer*. An attorney is someone acting on behalf of another. You cannot, by definition, be just “an attorney.” 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. *Ms. Jones is the attorney for John Cleever, and she is a lawyer.*

**based on the fact that**

Use *because*.

**basically**

Skip it. Just state your facts.

**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, bi-weekly**

*Biannual* means twice a year, *biennial* every two years. *Bi-weekly* can mean either *twice* in a week or *every other* week, whereas *bimonthly* always means every two months. Make certain your readers know what you mean, preferably by avoiding these terms.

**bottom line**

Overused. Substitute more precise words, such as *what this means*, *the outcome*, etc.

**brief summary**

By definition, a summary is brief — at least it is shorter than the work from which it is derived.

**bullets**

Bullets are for highlighting important information. They can make lists easier to read, and they provide variety in a layout; however, they lose their effectiveness through overuse. Don't use too-large or too-tiny bullets, and don't use bullets that detract from the information. Read more about bullets on Page 10.

**“bureaucratese”**

Gobbledygook. Example: *Significant additional time frames will be necessitated if we are unable to utilize substantially increased circumspection in our methodology.* Roughly translated, this means: *To be more careful, we need to take more time.* Concentrate on paring to conciseness instead of “fluffing up” what you write.

**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*.

**by means of**

Use *by* or *with*.

**can not**

Use *cannot*, or use the contracted form, *can't*.

**canceled**

In American English, it has only one “l,” as does *traveled*.

**capital, capital**

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

**capitalization**

Use capital letters sparingly, as capitalizing adds clutter. Do not capitalize job titles unless they precede and are part of a name. Some overcapitalization results from spelling out abbreviations. If you’ve seen administrative law judge abbreviated ALJ, you may think it should be capitalized when spelled out. If abbreviations or acronyms represent proper names, capitalize spelled-out versions. Example: *BART is Bay Area Rapid Transit*. Capitalize *standing legislative committees*. Capitalize *Oregon State Supreme Court* but not *supreme courts*; capitalize *U.S. Army*, but not *army*, *marines*, or *air force*.

When the common-noun version of an organization’s name is used in place of the full name (e.g., *the department*, *the division*, *the bureau*, *the board*, *the corporation*), don’t capitalize it.

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

Capitalize, *a*, *an*, or *the* at the beginnings of the headlines, subheads, etc.

Use all-capped names and titles in addresses on the *outside* of envelopes, as the U.S. Postal Service prefers, but not within letters.

**cease**

Use *stop* or *end*.

**ensor, censure**

To *ensor* is to delete or suppress. To *censure* is to criticize harshly.

**census**

*U.S. Census Bureau* is capitalized. The *1990 census* isn’t.

**chair**

Using this genderless word for chairman and chairwoman is acceptable. If you know Mrs. 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*.

**clauses**

A group of words containing both a subject and a verb that isn’t always a complete sentence.

**clearly**

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

**cognizant of**

Use *know about* or *aware of*.

**commence**

Use *start* or *begin*.

**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: *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 and/or differences: *There were 31 workplace deaths in 2005, compared with 46 in 2004.*

**compendium**

A summary or an outline.

**completely full**

Just *full*; omit *completely*.

**component**

Use *part*.

**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.

**concerning**

Use *about*.

**connote, denote**

*Connote* means signify or suggest, *denote* means to *mean* or *be a mark or sign of*.

**consensus**

This means general agreement or collective opinion, so *general consensus* is redundant.

**consequently**

Use *so*.

**constitute**

Use *form* or *make up*.

**construe**

Use *interpret*.

**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 "one uninterrupted sequence."

**contractions**

Shortened forms make writing more informal; however, some contractions, e.g., *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.

**costs**

Be careful not to write between \$2 and \$3 million if you mean \$2-3 million or between \$2 million and \$3 million.

**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 is more commonly used to mean *soon* than *now*.

**customs**

U.S. *Customs Service* is capitalized but *customs*, as in “He went through *customs*,” is not.

**cutting edge**

Avoid and explain what you mean instead.

**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.

**database**

*Database* may be one word.

**dates**

In business and news writing, dates should be written without an *-st*, *-d*, or *-th*: *Set that appointment for June 26.*

Capitalize the names of months in all uses. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. Spell out when using alone or with a year alone: *The meeting was in January. The bill was signed in August 2005* (no comma between month and year).

For a specific date, use a comma before the year: *The bill was signed Aug. 15, 2005.*

**decades**

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

**deduct**

Try *subtract*, *take away*, or *take off*.

**deem**

Use *consider* or *treat as*.

**defer**

Use *postpone* or *put off*.

**definitely proved**

Just *proved*.

**denied making a statement to the effect that**

Use *denied*.

**departments**

When writing about a government department, capitalize the formal name: *The Department of Consumer & Business Services*. But lowercase department when it stands alone, often on second reference: *the department*.

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

**desire, wish for**

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

**desist**

Use *stop*.

**despite the fact that**

Use *although* or *despite*.

**determine**

Use *decide*.

**development**

There is no *e* after the *p*.

**dialogued, entered into dialogue**

Use *talked*, *discussed*, or *began discussions about*.

**dimensions**

Use figures and spell out *inches*, *feet*, *yards*, etc., to indicate depth, height, length, and width. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns. Examples: *It's a 9-by-12 rug. He put the 2-by-4 down. She is 5 feet 10 inches tall, and he's a 7-footer. The rug is 9 feet by 12 feet.*

**discreet, discrete**

*Discreet* means cautious, tactful, or judicious. *Discrete* means separate.

**do a study of the effects of**

Use *study the effects* or *study*.

**document**

Avoid *document the names of the participants*. *Record* or *list* may be more accurate.

**do's and don'ts**

This is how it is written.

**driver license**

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

**due to the fact that**

Use *because*.

**during the course of**

Use *during* or *while*.

**dwelling**

Use *home* or *property* if possible.

**e.g.**

For example, such as (Latin, *exempli gratia*), usually followed by a comma. See entry for "i.e."

**each and every**

Use *one or the other*, not both.

**elucidate**

Use *explain*.

**e-mail**

If not *electronic mail*, use the hyphenated version. Unless you're using it to begin a sentence, don't capitalize it.

**emanate from**

Use *come from* or *stem from*.

**emergency situations**

Use *emergencies*.

**employees and management**

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

**end result**

Use *result*.

**endeavor**

Use *try* or *attempt*.

**envelop, envelope**

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

**establish**

Try *form, create, or set up*.

**et cetera or etc.**

*Et cetera* means “and the rest.” “Etc.” is usually harmless; however, if you are detailing steps a citizen must take to comply with a government process, and you stick “etc.” at the end, you could cause sleepless nights. If the “etc.” you are referring to is important, it’s important enough to explain.

**even as we speak**

Use *now*.

**eventuate**

Use *result, occur, or happen*.

**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.*

Sometimes with the notion that everyone is plural and sometimes to avoid his or her, writers use plural pronouns: “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 applications, which they may mail, fax, or deliver ...”

**fabricate**

Use *make*.

**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*.

**factoid**

First meaning: something fictitious or unsubstantiated, presented as fact. Another meaning: an insignificant fact.

**failure to**

Use *if you do not*.

**fewer, less**

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

**fewer in number**

Use *fewer*.

**final outcome, settlement**

Use *outcome, result, settlement*.

**finalize**

Use *end, finish, or complete*.

**first aid, first-aid**

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

**first of all**

Use *first*.

**first priority**

Use *priority*.

**flammable, inflammable, combustible**

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

**flyer, flier**

When you mean a handbill, AP style calls for *flier*, although both *flier* and *flyer* are in use. You'll notice that *flyer* is in common use at DCBS, and that's fine. When you mean an aviator, use *flier*. When you're referring to the names of trains or buses, it's *flyer*.

**for the duration of**

Use *during* or *while*.

**for the purpose of**

Use *for* or *to*.

**for the reason that**

Use *because*.

**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.

**foreseeable future**

Reserved for use by prophets. Use *until further notice* or just *in the future*.

**forthcoming**

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

**forward (verb)**

Use *send* or *give*.

**fractions**

Spell out amounts less than one unless you are discussing the stock market or working with a large number of fractions. *The snow was three-fourths melted by this afternoon.*

Whole numbers with fractions may be written with a space (instead of a hyphen) after the whole number and a forward slash for the fraction: 2¼, 3¾, 12½. For publications, fractions will be converted to super- and subscript. You can also convert fractions to decimals.

**free**

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

**freelance**

AP has moved on from hyphenating this one: *She freelanced this article. She's a freelancer.*

**furnish**

Use *give* or *provide*.

**future plans**

Use *plans* (they are always for the future).

**give encouragement to**

Use *encourage*.

**give rise to**

Use *cause*.

**governor**

Capitalize and abbreviate as *Gov.* or *Govs.* when used as a formal title before one or more names: *Gov. Kulongoski*. Capitalize and spell out when used as a formal title before one or more names in direct quotations. Lowercase and spell out in all other uses: *The governor made a proclamation.*

**great majority of**

Use *most*.

**hackneyed words and fad phrases**

Well-intentioned writers use them to create a conversational tone, to appear modern, or to fill scary white space, but hackneyed words and fad phrases can make sentences unintelligible: *Basically, the shop mavens opted for a state-of-the-art solution to boost the bottom line and level the playing field; if the strategy pans out, the stakeholders' cutting edge line of defense will gain a foothold in the near future and make itself indispensable.* Remedy: edit.

**has the capability to**

Use *can*.

**has the capacity to**

Use *can*.

**has a need for**

Use *needs*.

**have a tendency to**

Use *tend to*.

**having regard to**

Use *about*.

**haz-mat**

May be used as an abbreviated form for hazardous materials. Example: *The haz-mat team arrived within 27 minutes of the accident.*

**health care or healthcare**

May be two words or one. The first use in most reference materials shows it as two; however, one is acceptable — just be consistent within your publication.

**height**

It's not *height*. Write "The building was 36 feet tall," not "in height."

**help, assist**

Division 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, so it gets my vote. Examples: *Using this checklist will help applicants make a complete filing.*

*This checklist will assist applicants in making a complete filing.*

**henceforth**

Use *from now on*.

**heretofore**

Use *until now*.

**him or her, he or she, 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 ...* Avoid shortening to the slashed versions such as *him/her*. However, if you should use phrases such as *the employee may call this number for assistance*, 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 for “new employee,” calling someone a “hire” is impersonal personnel-services jargon, and could be compared to “unit” or “cog.”

**hit (or take) on**

Some may know that you mean *the way you understand it or how something affects you*, but others won’t. It’s an example of spoken language not transferring well to written form.

**HIV**

You should spell *human immunodeficiency virus* unless you are writing *HIV-positive*, which is acceptable whether or not you’ve spelled it out previously. Don’t use *HIV virus*, which is redundant.

**hopefully**

Here’s an example of preferred use: *Those who had lost their homes arrived hopefully at the Red Cross headquarters*. Incorrect: *Hopefully, he will be there when we get home*. The reader could understand this to mean that when “he” arrives home, “he” will be feeling hopeful. Instead, write, *We hope he will be there when we get home*.

**hot line**

Two words.

**hype**

Means *to exaggerate the worth of, inflate, or deceive*. If you use it to mean *promote* or *publicize*, you are implying something isn’t what it should be. It’s similar to using *claimed* in a news story instead of *said*.

**i.e.**

That is (Latin, *id est*), usually followed by a comma.

**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.

**if this is not the case**

Use *if not*.

**immediate future**

Use *soon*.

**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.* *The federally impacted areas will be discussed in detail.* (The areas affected by the federal actions will be discussed in detail.)

**impart**

Use *give*, *pass on*, *tell*, or *inform*.

**implement (verb)**

Use *do* or *carry out*.

**in a number of cases**

Use *some*.

**in a position to**

Use *can*.

**in a satisfactory manner**

Use *satisfactory*.

**in a very real sense**

Use *in a sense*.

**in accordance with**

Use *according to* or *in line with*.

**in case**

Use *if*.

**in conjunction with**

Use *with*.

**in connection with**

Use *about*.

**in lieu of**

Use *instead of*.

**in my opinion**

Use *I think*.

**in order to**

Use *to*.

**in receipt of**

Use *get*, *have*, or *receive*.

**in regards to**

Use *regarding* or *about*.

**in relation to**

Use *toward*.

**in respect to**

Use *about*.

**in some cases**

Use *sometimes*.

**in terms of**

Use *about*.

**in the event that**

Use *if*.

**in the nature of**

Use *like*.

**in the possession of**

Use *has* or *have*.

**in view of**

Use *for* or *as*.

**inasmuch as**

Use *because*.

**incessantly**

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

**in-depth**

Use *thorough*, or choose another modifier.

**indict, indite**

*Indict* means to charge with a crime. *Indite* means to write or compose.

**infeasible, unfeasible**

Both are adjectives meaning *not feasible* or *impracticable*. They are interchangeable.

**initiate**

Use *begin* or *start*.

**instantly/instantaneous**

Use *instantly* (an adverb) to mean *at once*, *immediately*. *Instantaneous* is an adjective meaning *occurring presently* or *without delay*.

**integral part**

It's *integral to* or it's *part of*.

**Internet**

One word, capitalized.

**irregardless**

Use *regardless*.

**it has been reported by Smith**

Write *Smith reported*.

**it is apparent that**

Use *apparently*.

**it is believed that**

Use *I think*.

**it is clear that**

Use *clearly*.

**it is doubtful that**

Use *possibly*.

**it is often the case**

Use *often*.

**it is suggested that**

Use *I think*, *they believe*, etc.

**it is worth pointing out that**

Use *note that*.

**it may be that**

Use *I think*.

**it may, however, be noted**

Use *but*.

**it was indicated that**

Use *he said*, *she said*.

**it was decided that**

Say *I decided*, *the committee decided*, etc.

**italics, bolding, quotation marks**

Often it's not apparent why writers have used italics or quotation marks. If you're using italics for emphasis, which is fine, don't overdo it. Use bold for more emphasis. Use either *sparingly* if you want readers to pay attention. Most bolding, italicizing, underlining, and use of quotation marks for emphasis can be avoided by careful wording. The result is easier on the brain and the eyes of the reader.

**its/it's**

It's is a contraction of it is. To show possession, use *its*, as in, *Its coat was matted and dirty*.

**-ize words**

Don't tack *-ize* willy-nilly onto nouns and adjectives to create new words. Best advice: Look them up.

**joint cooperation**

Just *cooperation*.

**journalistic style**

Ideally, journalistic style is unbiased and impartial information delivered clearly, completely, and succinctly. When writing newsletters and press releases, pare as much opinion as possible from your final product. Consider this sentence: *His outstanding contributions and great sense of humor will be sorely missed by all.* It seems innocuous, yet contains opinion. And this example: *Three staff members, Dickenson, Mary, and Dr. Arnett, attended* — it could be interpreted as sexist and elitist. (This is one reason that journalistic style uses last names after first reference or keeps courtesy titles for all humans, not just doctors.)

Put as much information as you can in the first paragraph of a news story. This “inverted pyramid” style, which should be used for press releases, allows editors to conveniently find and use the most important information. This requires careful judgment about what readers want or need to know.

**judgment**

It has no *e* after the *g*.

**jurisdiction**

Jurisdiction means the *right, power, or authority to administer law*. Please don’t write “local authority having jurisdiction,” although *local jurisdiction* is fine.

**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*.

**lacked the ability to**

Use *could not* or *couldn’t*.

**large in size**

Use *large*.

**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 U.S. Forest Service.*

**lay/lie**

*Lay (lay, laid, laid)* 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 when I am tired. *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.

**learning experience**

Just *experience*, which includes learning, one would hope. If you mean education, say that.

**lectern**

This is what you stand behind to speak to a group, usually a stand with a slanted top for papers. A *podium* is usually a platform a speaker stands on, but also has the definition *lectern*.

**legalese**

Remember that your goal is to make the laws, rulings, and guidelines about which you're writing *understandable* to those who need the information. Legalese *can* be translated into everyday language. Include references to statute and rule, when necessary.

**legislature**

Capitalize when you are referring to the Oregon Legislature. Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped but the reference is still to that specific legislature: *the state Legislature, the 2005 Legislature*.

Lowercase legislature only if you are using it generically: *No legislature has approved the amendment*.

**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. It must be installed under the eaves. Fewer than a dozen people showed up. However, you would not say He made fewer than \$50,000 a year (which would place the emphasis on individual dollars rather than the sum) or There was one fewer seat. Try one seat fewer or There were almost the same number of seats available as last season.*

**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.

**libel**

Injury to reputation. Libelous words, pictures, or cartoons that expose a person to public hatred, shame, disgrace or ridicule, or induce an ill opinion of a person.

**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 kid ripped open Christmas presents *like* he had never received a gift in his life." Better: "The kid ripped open Christmas presents *as though* he had never received a gift in his life." Do not use *like* in place of such as. Instead of: *DCBS has many divisions, like*

*Building Codes*, say: *DCBS has many divisions, such as Building Codes.*

### 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.*

### 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.

### loaded attributions

When attributing quotes, don’t use *claimed, charged, alleged, laughed, simpered, whimpered*. Just use *said*, which doesn’t imply judgment. And remember that if you use *says*, you’re implying that the speaker frequently repeats the quote — unlikely for most quoted material, although possible.

### 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 logon procedure is as follows ...*

### make an adjustment to

Use *adjust*.

### make decisions about

Use *decide on*.

### make inquiry of

Use *ask*.

### media is

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. In the singular, they are not each a “medium.”

### 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.

### 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 impact 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*. *There were more than a million stars in the sky over the Rockies. He contributed more than \$40,000.*

**myself, yourself, himself**

Many people use these reflexive pronouns instead of the simple personal pronouns, *I, me, you, he, him*, 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*, etc. Try removing the other parties from the sentence, and see if, for example, *Send a copy to myself*, sounds correct.

**necessitate**

Use *require, need, have to*.

**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*).

**no. for "number"**

If you're using *no.* for *number* because you don't have space for *number* in the form or table you're creating, you can pluralize it *no.'s*.

**non-**

Generally, you don't need a hyphen with this prefix, unless it's a proper noun or in an awkward combination, such as *non-nuclear*. If you're not sure, check the dictionary.

**nonattendance**

It's *absence*. Harsh, perhaps, but there it is.

**noon, midnight**

To avoid confusion, use *noon* and *midnight* without attaching "a.m." or "p.m." Contrary to popular belief, noon is 12 hours after midnight, and can be considered 12 a.m. Midnight is part of the preceding day, or 12 p.m. However, one minute after midnight is, of course, 12:01 a.m.

**not less than, not more than**

Use *at least* and *or less*.

**notorious**

Don't use for *noted* or *famous*. It's pejorative. Someone may have notoriety as a criminal, yet be noted for his or her skill with contracts.

**notwithstanding**

Use *even if, despite, still, yet, or but*.

**noun-pronoun agreement**

If a noun is plural, its pronoun later in the sentence must also be plural. Example: *Civil law allows **victims** to file suit within three years of when **they** realize they were injured.* 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.*

**numbers, dimensions**

Too many of them in one sentence or paragraph can be mind-numbing. Use only the statistics you need to make your point — and double-check to ensure that they really do make your point. Avoid more than three numbers or dimensions in one sentence. Put additional figures in other paragraphs. Explain your numbers clearly. A table or graph may be the best way to present data.

Only substitute *no.* for number when you are short on space. If you need to pluralize it, use *no.'s*.

Use figures and spell out *inches*, *feet*, *yards*, etc. Examples: *Add a 6-inch border. He is 6 feet 6 inches tall. The 5-foot-8-inch woman is Sarah Browne.*

If working with many dimensions, weights, heights, or measurements in technical documents, use an apostrophe to indicate feet, quote marks to indicate inches, and an x to indicate by. Examples: *6'5" tall, a 9' x 12' board.*

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

Spell out numbers smaller than 10. Some exceptions: *percents* (*5 percent, 2 percent*), *monetary amounts* (*5 cents, \$2*), *millions*, *billions* (*1 million, 8 billion*).

**of a confidential nature**

If it's *confidential*, just say *confidential*. If it's not, don't imply that it is.

**of great practical importance**

Say *useful*.

**OK**

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

**online**

Related to the Internet, *online* is acceptable and is preferred by the *AP Stylebook*, a recent change.

**on-site, on site**

*On-site* is the adjective: *on-site* inspections. *On site* is an adverb: “She’s working on site in Hillsboro.”

**orient, orientate**

For introducing someone to something: *orient*.

**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.

**owing to the fact that**

Use *because*.

**oxymoron**

A pairing of contradictory or out-of-place words, such as *unsung hero*, *open secret*, and *war games*. Avoid oxymorons in business writing.

**parameters**

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: “Beyond the perimeters of the brick fence was everything the dog had ever wanted to see and sniff.”

**passive constructions**

*It was decided that, a meeting was held, the report was compiled by* — these passive constructions are not only lifeless but also indicate reluctance to take responsibility. Use the active voice: *we*

*decided, the committee met, John Hughes wrote the report.*

**past experience**

Experience is always past. Use *experience*.

**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 the requirements of ORS 656.241*,” not “Applicants must respond in writing, *per ORS 656.241*.”

**percent**

Spell *percent* (50 percent, etc.), unless it’s in a table. Always use figures and decimals, not fractions (2 percent, 7.5 percent). For amounts less than 1 percent, precede the decimal with a zero (0.5 percent). Repeat percent with each individual figure: *He said 10 percent to 30 percent of the electorate may not vote.*

**perform the work of**

Such constructions can often be shortened: “He installed the manufactured home. She was a chief operating officer.”

**period of time**

Just *period*, which includes the concept of time.

**peruse**

Use *read* or *study*.

**phenomena, phenomenon**

*Phenomena* is plural: “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.

**political correctness**

Although there is value in correcting terms that have been slap-dashedly applied and that now seem insensitive, if not downright inaccurate, the urge to be politically correct can be carried too far.

For instance, one cannot legitimately change famous quotations or sayings. If you anticipate that they may cause trouble, as “It’s a man’s world” would, simply omit them.

Be extremely careful when substituting for long-established words such as “journeyman.” Substituting “journey” would create a problem for translators: “If you want to become a journeyman (sojourn? trip? excursion?) electrician ...,” Translators might struggle with “journey,” yet recognize “journeyman.”

Journey has long had its own meanings; assigning it another one would be as irresponsible as selecting “journeyman” today if the word did not exist.

“Journeywoman” has been on the fringe of the lexicon for some time, but how clumsy to say: “There will be a class for journeyman and journeywoman electricians next month. If you want to enroll, present your journeyman or -woman electrician license at sign up.”

“Journeyman” is the word for a person who has served an apprenticeship in a trade and who is certified to work in that trade. It is understood to mean male or female. Sometimes our desperate search for a politically correct term is unnecessary.

Words such as “fireman” can be troublesome, as they refer to a person in a particular line rather than a level of achievement within a line of work. But it should be adequate to refer to “fire department employees,” consisting of men and women.

**pore over**

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

**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*; *science's needs*, but *for science' sake*.
- 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 un-contracted form *it's*, and see if it makes sense. *The cat licked it is fur* obviously is not correct.

### practicable, practical

*Practicable* means capable of being put into practice with the available means, or feasible. *Practical* means pertaining to or concerned with practice or action, adapted or suited for practical use, or useful or utilitarian. You could reasonably

say a *practical method*, but you'd raise eyebrows writing a *practicable vinyl floor*.

### pre-

Generally you don't need a hyphen with this prefix, unless the word that follows begins with the same vowel: *pre-existing*, *pre-empt*, *preregistration*, *prejudge*.

### premier, premiere

*Premier* (adj.) for first in rank, chief, leading. *Premiere* for first public showing: *It will premiere in Portland*.

### preposition pile-up

Prepositions used carelessly, as in this sentence: *When he came to after the freeway pile up 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.

### 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*. The *-ple principle* is always a noun, and means a truth, doctrine, or rule

of conduct. *The principle "treat others as you would wish to be treated" was apparent*.

### prior to

Use *before*. It's less stuffy.

### prioritize

*Rank* is better, although *prioritize* has been used so frequently that it's appearing in newer dictionaries.

### proactive

A word created as an opposite to *reactive*. It too is creeping into dictionaries. 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: “His theory was eventually *proved*.” “It was a *proven* theory.”

**provide a summary of**

Use *summarize*.

**quoting**

Quotations can be effective for adding facts, validity, variety, and tone; however, made-up quotations are easily identifiable, and they’re likely to result in suspicion and dismissal.

*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 person quoted 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*,” *Mr. 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.*”

**ranges, false**

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.

**ratios**

Use figures and hyphens. Example: *2-to-1*

**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 if *refute* doesn’t work.

**redundancy**

Some often-used examples are *close proximity*, *potential hazards*, *HIV virus*, and *the local jurisdiction having authority*. It should be obvious that something in *proximity* would have to be *close*, that all *hazards* are *potential* (or they wouldn’t be hazards), and that *jurisdiction* means “the local jurisdiction having authority.”

**re-employment**

Use a hyphen, in most cases, when the prefix ends in a vowel and the following word begins with the same vowel (exceptions are coordinate and

cooperate). The *hyphen* helps the reader interpret the word not as *reem ployment* but *re-employment*. However, Reemployment Section, within WCD, does not have a hyphen.

### referred to as

Use *called*.

### reimburse

Use *repay*.

### remuneration or remunerative employment

Use *pay*, *wages*, or *salary* for *remuneration* and *paid work* for *remunerative employment*.

### render

Use *send*, *make*, or *give*.

### reside

Use *live*.

### 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*. Too often used with “with” to mean *sounds good*, *makes sense*, *is preferable*, etc.

### root cause

Use *cause*, which means the reason, motive, or occurrence that produced the result.

### series

It’s 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*.

### serve to make reductions

Use *reduce*.

### shall

(Legal obligation). Use *must*.

### Sheetrock

A trademarked name (like Kleenex or Spam), in this case, for plasterboard made of gypsum.

### since, because

Avoid using these interchangeably. Use *since* to denote periods of time and *because* when you are offering a reason or cause.

### single most, single best, single biggest

*Single* cannot correctly modify superlative forms like *best*. Put *single* in front of what it does modify: *She made the biggest single donation*.

### Social Security number

Use caps on *Social* and *Security*.

### 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.L. Mencken*).

### 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 in-*

*tend 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 they have met several more times and appointed a subcommittee 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. The sentence cries out for rewriting.

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 2005 report, a compilation by various interested departments providing input about their own progress in the areas of work force and career development, will be published soon.* There are 20 words between the subject and the verb, which is a stretch for the reader.

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 Salmon-*

*towne 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?"

### staff

*Staff* is singular, *staffs* plural. So: *Staff was enlisted to help with the mailing. Staffs from Employment and Revenue were asked to join DCBS staff to consider restructuring central services.*

### 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 the word or combination of words that best explains to whom you are referring. Examples: *Our readers, taxpayers, licensees, attendees, etc.*

### state

Lowercase in all "state of" references: *state of Oregon*.

Do not capitalize state when used simply as an adjective to specify a level of jurisdiction: *the state Department of Revenue, state funds*.

Apply the same principle to "city of" and similar phrases: *the city of Portland*.

**state of the art**

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

**state names, abbreviations**

When referring to a state in a sentence, spell it. Example: *Dorothy liked Kansas.*

When a city name accompanies the state, spell out the state name or 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, Kans./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

**U.S territories, possessions, occupancies**

American Samoa/AS; Federated States of Micronesia/FM; Guam/GU; Marshall Islands/MH; Northern Mariana Islands/

MP; Palau/PW; Puerto Rico/PR; Virgin Islands/VI

**subheads**

Subheads are used for breaks and guidance when text runs long or material is complicated. Subheads should be succinct. They should be similar in style, meaning that if you use one gerund-phrase subhead, e.g., *Saving money*, other subheads should not be full sentences, questions, or one-word subheads.

**such as**

Used without a comma when the phrase is restrictive, which is to say crucial to the fundamental meaning of the sentence: *The incident-management system was created 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: *You may wish to bring personal items for your own comfort, such as water bottles, blankets, sunscreen, and sunglasses.*

**supplementary**

Use *extra* or *more*.

**take into consideration**

Use *consider*.

**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: *All language seminars, which were offered to PSU's international business students last June, will be offered to local corporations this year.* If the nonessential clause is removed, the sentence says: *All language seminars will be offered to local corporations this year.*

### the law provides that

Use *the law says*.

### the question as to whether

Use *whether* or *if*.

### theirs

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

### there are some people who are

*Some people are*.

### there is reason to believe

Use *I think*.

### there's

This is the contracted form of *there is*. Example: *There's going to be a storm tonight*.

### they're

This is the contracted form of *they are*. Example: *They're driving to Newport tomorrow*.

### this, that, and they

Replace *this*, *that*, and *they* if, upon rereading your sentence, you see that they may be ambiguous.

### time

Use figures, except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours and minutes. Omit the double zero after even hours: *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.*

### 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.

### 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*.

### timely

Avoid using *timely* as an adverb (*payments will be made timely*), which is archaic. 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.

### titles

Lowercase and spell out titles when they are not used with an individual's name: *The director of the Department of Consumer & Business Services issued a statement.*

Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas: *Cory Streisinger, the director of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, issued a statement.*

Spell out a title only if it comes directly before the individual's name: *DCBS Director Cory Streisinger issued a statement.*

(See separate entry for *governor*)

### toll-free numbers

Omit the "1" and put the first three digits, which don't always use 800, in parentheses. Example: *Call our toll-free phone number, (800) 222-3333.* Note that *toll-free* has a hyphen.

### type

Don't use it when you mean *kind of*, as in this sentence: *He was that type employee. Say He was that kind of employee.*

### ultimate

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

### uncommon expressions

Be careful about using what you may consider well-known expressions in business writing. They will not be well-known to everyone, and they may be inappropriate. And don't mutilate expressions that might otherwise have been well-known: "iron out the bugs" instead of "iron out the wrinkles" or "remove the bugs."

### under way

Two words.

### 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. Remember that careful wording and a clean layout are more effective at emphasizing information than any of these tools — all of them reduce readability and increase clutter.

### unique

Unique means one of a kind. Something cannot be rather unique, most unique, somewhat unique, etc.

### usage

Usually, "use" is the word you want: *PUC reports showed that the public's use of power purchased from other states was higher this year than last year.* You could substitute "consumption" for "use" in this sentence.

**user friendly**

Don't use. It is may not be "friendly" to the user at all — we don't know. See "hackneyed words and fad phrases."

**utilize**

Say *use*.

**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.

**verbally reported**

Use *said*. If someone reports, we can assume they used words, or reported *verbally*. If they were, say, grunting, we couldn't be sure they were reporting.

**verify**

Use *check* or *prove*.

**versus**

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

**was of the opinion that**

Use *believed* or *thought*.

**was witness to**

Use *saw*.

**we wish to thank**

Say *we thank* or just *thank you*.

**World Wide Web site, Web site**

Web site is two words, capitalized because World Wide Web is capitalized.

**whether or not**

Use *whether* for most purposes.

**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 goose? (You did give that goose to whom? (him/her/them)

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

**who, that**

Both pronouns are used when referring to people. If writing of an individual, use *who*. If writing about a group, use *that*. Examples: *The health care workers **that** picketed on the steps of the Capitol marched and sang throughout the night. The employer, **who** denied being non-compliant, did not appeal the citations and filed for bankruptcy within a month. The employers **that** sponsored the conference expressed satisfaction and committed to next year's sponsorship.*

Note the “that” examples are in restrictive phrases — that is, they are essential to the meaning of the sentences they are in. A nonrestrictive phrase would contain “which”: *The steelhead, which are now spawning, are native to these rivers.* 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?*

**with a view to**

Use *to*.

**with reference to**

Use *about* or *concerning*.

**with the possible exception of**

In most situations, use *except*.

**with the result that**

Use *so that*.

**workplace, worksite**

OK as one word, although your spell-checker may not agree. *Workroom, workshop, worktable, workweek, workbench*, and *workbook* morphed into single words, so we’ll pretend these two have, also.

**X-ray**

Use this form for noun, verb, or adjective.

**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: *You’re going golfing this afternoon? Your clubs are in the closet.*

**ZIP code**

The “zip” in *ZIP code* should be capitalized. It stands for Zoning Improvement Plan. When writing addresses, you don’t need a comma after the state and before the ZIP code: Downton, Salem OR 97302.

## About press releases and publicity

Every press release faces stiff competition for newspaper space or airtime. You need a solid news angle and a press release that is well-written, -timed, and -targeted. Ask yourself what you have that others want or need to know. Be realistic. Consider the value of your news to editors and readers. Will it have a significant effect on a significant group within the distribution area of the outlet you're targeting?

Ask yourself if the cost is worth the coverage you're likely to get. (You may have the mistaken idea that it only takes about half an hour, so why not?)

Knowing the audience for your particular news item will help.

Good mailing (or e-mail or fax) lists are crucial.

Always think like a reporter when writing a news release; ask:

- What happened?
- Who was affected?
- When, where, and why did it happen?
- If I were the reader, what else would I want to know about this?

Then:

- Pack the who, what, when, where and why into the lead (lede); don't "bury" your lead down in the body of your release — your artful construction will not be appreciated at the news desk.
- Keep news releases short (one page) and make them legible. It's wise to double-space if you're mailing or faxing them. If a reporter or editor can easily mark it up for his or her own use, it is more likely to be used.
- Don't use acronyms, abbreviations, jargon, or legalese.
- Write concise headlines with subjects and verbs.
- Include several contact numbers or methods, so editors can reach someone before 8 a.m. or after 5 p.m.
- Always have someone proofread your draft.
- Get your news release out before or promptly after the event. If it can't be prompt, try another approach, such as an opinion piece or feature article.

Some always-popular topics likely to make the grade as regional news:

- Big savings
- Government expenses
- New or revived industry
- Beginnings or endings of programs that benefit a significant portion of the population
- Inventions
- Stories about people that bring to life trends, crimes, changes
- Trends
- Fraud
- Scandal

What state-agency news, for example, would probably get regional coverage?

- You have the first all-Spanish-language division in state government.
- Your agency has turned to profit-making activities to fund worthwhile projects.
- Your division is switching to 100 percent telecommuting and leasing its building.
- Your agency or division is merging with another.

- The governor has replaced your agency administrator.
- Your agency is the model upon which another country is building a similar department.

Of course, there are many other kinds of stories that might get regional coverage; the point is that they need to be “big” in the minds of editors and readers.

If you can’t honestly say your story is “big,” remember that bold type and underlining and lots of paper and phone calls won’t make it so.

For smaller news stories, aim more carefully. Target trade associations and professional groups, smaller weekly newspapers, and radio talk shows, for example.

Well-developed stories about people are always popular. When you can put real people into stories about policies and programs, you bring them to life, giving readers information in a way that is easier to understand, more memorable, and more interesting than a bulletin or straight news article.

