A guide that covers important writing topics, including grammar, plain language, and punctuation.
Bring clarity to your communications

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DCBS Communications will help get your message to more people in a clear and concise format.

**Come see us about your next project,**
**503-947-7868**
Table of Contents

Foreword ..............................................................................2
Plain language ......................................................................3
Using reference materials ......................................................4
Communications ..................................................................5
Choosing punctuation ..........................................................7
DCBS terms .......................................................................17
Grammar ............................................................................18
Capitalization ......................................................................24
Numbers ............................................................................27
Computers .........................................................................30
Plain language quick tips ....................................................32
Proofreading/editing marks .................................................33
Acronyms and abbreviations ...............................................34
Alphabetical list ...................................................................37
Writing clearly and concisely table ......................................58
Notes .................................................................................65
Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mark Peterson
Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services
Plain language

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

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

› Uses everyday words that convey meanings clearly and directly
› Uses the present tense and the active voice
› Uses short, simple sentences
› Defines only those words that cannot be properly explained or qualified in the text
› Uses type of a readable size
› Uses layout and spacing that separate the paragraphs and sections of the document from each other

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You may find these reference works indispensable:

- The Elements of Grammar by Margaret Shertzer
- The Elements of Style by William Strunk and E.B. White
- Barron’s Dictionary of Finance and Investment Terms
- Legal Thesaurus by William C. Burton
- A current Oregon Blue Book

As for online resources, try these:


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

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

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

The editing process

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

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

Here is a list of editing considerations:

- Does the publication include all the information that a reader might need to know?
- Is the content consistent with the goals, values, and mission of DCBS?
- Are things where the publication says they are? (Pages, tables, charts, pictures and captions, phone numbers, statute references, etc.)
Are explanations included when they’re needed — if so, are explanations clear and complete?

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

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

Are spelling, punctuation, and grammar correct?

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

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

Was the piece written wordily: “completely finished,” “add up these numbers,” “final outcome,” “usual customs”?

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

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

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

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

ampersand (&)

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

apostrophes

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

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

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

Examples: “How many A’s are in that? Did the Oakland A’s play? Add 12 24’s in that column.”

bullets

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

Just splitting an otherwise readable sentence into bullets will not make it more clear or more noticeable — it will probably just be more difficult to understand. Items best suited to bulleting are simple, important points or steps. Clearly explain what is to follow in the bulleted list. (Example: “You must satisfy all of the following requirements:”) When bulleting a list, which typically means three or more items, omit the semicolons and ands at the ends of lines. If you need punctuation, use periods.
Bulleted items should be similar. Don’t mix gerund phrases (gerunds are verb forms that end with -ing and function as nouns) with imperative sentences. An example of **how not** to set up bulleted lists follows.

You can improve your writing by:

- Balance is important.
- Perhaps rewriting will help
- If you have questions, call us at 503-000-0000.
- Check!
- Do you understand bulleting?

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

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

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

- Worker rights and responsibilities
- Insurer rights and responsibilities
- Time-loss benefits
- Medical benefits
- Claim closures
- Litigation processes
- Claim disposition agreements
- Disputed claim settlements

**colons**

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

For clarity’s sake, use a complete sentence to introduce lists. Example: “The credit will be granted when your business submits the following items: ….”
If you are introducing a single quoted sentence, use a comma. Example: The team leader said, “I’m not going to be here after tomorrow.”

**commas**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examples: “The factory is closing, and hundreds of workers will be unemployed.” (coordinating conjunction and a comma)
“The factory is closing; hundreds of workers will be unemployed.” (semicolon, no conjunction)

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We’re going to Washington, D.C., in June.”

“It’s a Washington, D.C.-based corporation.”

“We saw Washington, D.C.’s monuments while we were there.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the prefix co-, retain the hyphen when forming nouns, adjectives, and verbs that indicate occupation or status: co-author, co-chairman,
co-defendant, co-host, co-owner, co-partner, co-pilot, co-respondent, co-signer, co-sponsor, co-star, co-worker. Otherwise, don’t hyphenate: coed, coeducation, coequal, coexist, coexistence, cooperate, cooperative, coordinate, coordination. Note: Cooperate, coordinate, and related words are exceptions to the rule that a hyphen is used if a prefix ends in a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel. Two exceptions regarding co-: co-insurance, co-payment.

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

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

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

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

**italics, bolding**

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

**parentheses**

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

If the material within parentheses is a full sentence, capitalize the first word and use a period inside the parentheses. If the material is an incomplete sentence referring to material in your sentence, lowercase the first word in parentheses (unless it’s a proper noun); put your end punctuation after the parenthesis.
Example: “Today, more than 50 percent of Oregonians have employer-sponsored health coverage (insured and self-insured).”

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

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

**periods**

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

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

**quotation marks**

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

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

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

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

Don’t use quotation marks for names of magazines, newspapers, or reference books.
Quotation marks may be used around words or phrases that the reader may not know, nicknames, or tongue-in-cheek references. Avoid using quotation marks around words or phrases that would otherwise be clear, as the quotation marks cause doubt: Your investment is “secure” with us. This chicken is “fresh.” It causes people to think you mean the opposite.

The period and comma always go inside of quotation marks.

Semicolons always go outside of quotation marks.

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

**Quoting**

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

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

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

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

**Semicolons**

A semicolon should clarify and help organize information.

Use a semicolon when two independent clauses are not linked by a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *or*. Example: “Fall was shifting to winter; potholes on the city’s main streets were suddenly four inches deeper than they had been in September.”
If independent clauses contain internal punctuation, use a semicolon even if a coordinating conjunction is used. Example: “He packed his briefcase with paper, pens, a calculator, and books; and, most important to him, his daughter’s drawings of the baby.”

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

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

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

**spacing**

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

**time, punctuation**

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

**underlining**

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

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

Divisions

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

› Central Services Division:
  » Information Technology and Research Section: www4.cbs.state.or.us/ex/imd/external/

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

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

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

› Workers’ Compensation Division (WCD): wcd.oregon.gov

Offices

› Director’s Office: egov.oregon.gov/DCBS/DIR/index.shtml
  » Employee Services
  » Communications Services

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

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

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

Boards

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

› Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB): wcb.oregon.gov
Grammar

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

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

Wrong: “DCBS told their employees about the new law.”
Correct: “DCBS told its employees about the new law.”

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

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

“One of the bills passed this session regulates payday lenders.”
The subject of the sentence is one, not bills, so the verb (regulates) is singular.

Here are some other tricky ones:

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

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

Writers often use plural pronouns with everyone, even though everyone is singular: “Everyone must submit their applications.” For the sake of agreement, it should be “Everyone must submit his or her application.” Writers who dislike his or her (even though that is correct) should select plurals throughout: “Applicants must submit the forms, which they can mail, fax, or deliver.”
agenda
Although agenda (a list of things to be done) is plural, it uses a singular verb: “The agenda for this Friday’s meeting is daunting.” Agenda is commonly made plural by adding an s.

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

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

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

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

myself, yourself, himself, herself
Many people use these reflexive pronouns instead of the simple personal pronouns, (I, me, you, he, him, she, and her) in sentences such as this: “Send copies to my assistant and myself.” The pronoun to use in this example would be me. If the pronoun is the subject of a sentence (the doer of the action), the pronoun will be I, he, she, they. If the pronoun is in the objective case (the recipient of some action), the pronoun will be me, him, her, them. Try removing the other parties from the sentence. For example: “Send a copy to myself” is not correct. Instead, you should write “Send a copy to me.”
series
It is singular, even when it means a series of meetings, a series of publications, etc. So, it takes a singular verb: “A series of meetings has been held to discuss this topic.”

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

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

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

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

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

Pronoun case:

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

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

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

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

**active/passive voice**

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

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

**ambiguous pronouns**

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

**collective nouns**

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

**dangling modifiers**

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

**possessive nouns**

Here are eight rules for forming possessives:

- If a singular noun doesn’t end in *s*, add *’s*: *book’s, record’s, year’s.*
- If a singular common noun ends in *s*, add *’s* — unless the next word begins with *s*. If so, add an apostrophe only (includes words with *s* and *sh* sounds): *the boss’s machine,* but *the boss’ stronghold; the witness’s testimony,* but *the witness’ story.*
If a singular proper noun ends in s, add an apostrophe only: Tim Roberts’ copy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Examples: “It’s important to fill out each section of the form.” “The insurer touted its affordability.”

preposition pileup
Don’t be careless when using prepositions, as in this sentence: “When he came to after the freeway pileup he was out of a job, partially off his rocker from the pain, and with from about $20,000 to $50,000 in bills eating up savings that had been pared down to practically nothing.”
Try to replace verb forms that include prepositions, such as *face off, lift off, pry up, come to, lay out, fill up* and *circle around* (which is redundant, anyway), with one-word verbs.

**split constructions**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**baby boomer**
Lowercase, no hyphen.

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

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

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

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

**court**
Court is lowercase when not in proper name: appeals court; uppercase without Oregon in the name: The Court of Appeals ruled against the insurer.
governmental bodies
The proper noun rules are different for government bodies such as the Oregon Legislature. Capitalize when you are referring to the Oregon Legislature, Oregon House, and Oregon Senate. Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped, but the reference is still to that specific body: The state Legislature, the 2007 Legislature, the Senate, and the House.

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

government terms

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

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

holidays

jurisdictions
Capitalize State of, City of when referring to the governmental body. The State of Oregon issued the order. Otherwise, lowercase it: “I live in the state of Oregon.” Lowercase on second reference or when used as an adjective: the state, the city. Capitalize county when part of the proper name — Marion County, Washington County — and lowercase the county on second reference. If you are referring to more than one county, lowercase: “They drove through Marion and Linn counties.”
page
Capitalize when used with a page number: Page 2, Page 14.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Percents: 5 percent, 2 percent, 0.5 percent
- Millions, billions: 2 million, 8 billion
- Monetary amounts: $1, 5 cents
- Inches, feet, yards, other measurement units: The storm left 5 inches of rain. He is 6 feet 6 inches tall.
- Weights: The computer weighed 9 pounds.
- Ages: the 5-year-old girl; the girl is 5.
- Speed: The car slowed to 7 miles per hour; winds of 7 knots to 9 knots.

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

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

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

911
Use on all references for the emergency call number. Not 9-1-1. However, it is 9/11 when referencing the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.
**decades**
Don’t use apostrophes after the numerals: the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s.

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

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

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

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

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

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

\[
\frac{10,500 - 10,000}{10,000} = \frac{500}{10,000} = 0.05 = 5 \text{ percent.}
\]

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

**ratios**

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

**telephone numbers**

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

**temperatures**

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

**time**

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

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

anti-virus, anti-spyware
Hyphenate both.

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

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

cellphone, smartphone
One word, lowercase.

double-click
Hyphenated word, lowercase.

e-mail

Internet
One word, capitalized.

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

login, logon, logoff
Write “log on to your computers, and don’t forget to log off when you leave,” which are verb forms. As adjectives, use without hyphens or spaces: “Your new login procedure is as follows ….”
online
Related to the Internet, *online* is acceptable. One word with no hyphen.

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

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

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

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

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

Wi-Fi
For the wireless networking standards. Capitalized and hyphenated.
Use “Plain Language” to improve your writing

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

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

2. Focus the message around facts (who, what, where, when, why, how).
Clearly state your purpose. Are you asking, telling, or acknowledging? Is there a deadline or timeframe?

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

4. Fit the writing style to the message.
A policy statement (formal) is different from a thank-you letter (semi-formal), which is different from a newsletter story.

5. Use short, simple sentences.
Keep most sentences to one thought.

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

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

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

   Example:
   Do: “All businesses must complete form B.”
   Don’t: “Form B must be completed by all businesses.”

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

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

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

Go to plainlanguage.oregon.gov for more resources.

Clear ● Relevant ● Brief ● Active
Proofreading/editing marks

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

Salem — The Department of...............................................................new paragraph
as of Thursday..........................................................paragraph

The new president..........................................................paragraph
the future leader.

The speaker then .............................................................no paragraph

50 years later.................................................................spell out
group each had 6 members................................. transpose, spell out

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

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

The department of consumer and..................................capitalize (uppercase)
as a result, this will be ..........................................................lowercase

the bandleader raised his ...............................................remove space

New information has shown............................insert space (also 
the Medicare recipients will ........................retain, keep as it
was originally

The ruling a fine example.................................insert word
according to the the source.................................delete

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

John Jones .............................................................italics, flush right

John Jones .............................................................flush left

insert comma

insert apostrophe

insert quotation marks

insert period

hyphen

dash
Acronyms and abbreviations

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

Acronyms

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

Example: Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS)

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

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

Note: An abbreviation is not an acronym.

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

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

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

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

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

Use P.O. Box and ZIP code.

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

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

dates

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

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

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

Example: “The Workers’ Benefit Fund supports a variety of programs, e.g., Reopened Claims Program and Handicapped Workers’ Program.”

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

hazmat
This may be used as an abbreviated form for hazardous materials.
Example: “The hazmat team arrived within 27 minutes of the accident.”
et cetera or etc.
Et cetera means and the rest. Etc. is usually harmless; however, if you are detailing steps a company must take to comply with a government process, and stick etc. at the end, you could cause problems. If the etc. you are referring to is important, it’s important enough to explain. Don’t use with e.g. It is redundant.

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

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

state names
When referring to a state in a sentence, spell it out. Example: “She was born in Kansas.”
When a city name accompanies the state, use its abbreviation. “He came from Salem, Mass., to Salem, Ore.”
When offering addresses, use postal codes. State abbreviations and postal codes follow:
Ala./AL, Alaska/AK, Ariz./AZ, Ark./AR, Calif./CA, Colo./CO, Conn./CT, Del./DE, D.C./DC, Fla./FL, Ga./GA, Hawaii/HI, Idaho/ID, Ill./IL, Ind./IN, Iowa/IA, Kan./KS, Ky./KY, La./LA, Maine/ME, Md./MD, Mass./MA, Mich./MI, Minn./MN, Miss./MS, Mo./MO, Mont./MT, Neb./NE, Nev./NV, N.H./NH, N.J./NJ, N.M./NM, N.Y./NY, N.C./NC, ND./ND, Ohio/OH, Okla./OK, Ore./OR, Pa./PA, R.I./RI, S.C./SC, S.D./SD, Tenn./TN, Tex./TX, Utah/UT, Vt./VT, Va./VA, Wash./WA, W. Va./WV, Wis./WI, Wyo./WY

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

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

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

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

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

**able-bodied**
It’s hyphenated. “The worker is *able-bodied*.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**adopt, approve, enact, pass**
Amendments, ordinances, resolutions, and rules are adopted or approved. Bills are passed. Laws are enacted.
adverse, averse
Adverse means unfavorable or hostile, and should be used to modify the noun it is next to, as in the following: “He had an adverse reaction to the pain medication.” Averse is the word you want when you mean reluctant to accept or endorse it: “I am averse to that proposal.”

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

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

afterward
Not afterwards.

aka
Stands for also known as; no spaces.

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

allusion, illusion
Allusion means an indirect reference. Illusion means an unreal or false impression. Examples: “The allusion was to the company’s poor safety record.” “The broker created an illusion of investing the person’s money in solid investments.”
all right
Two words. Not alright.

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

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

amok
Not amuck.

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

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

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

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

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

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

any
Often unnecessary: If you have any questions…. Just say, “If you have questions….”
appraise, apprise
Appraise means to estimate the characteristics of something. Apprise means to inform, give notice to, or advise. Write “I’ve been apprised of the circumstances,” not appraised — or, better yet, “Simpkins explained the circumstances.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

cannot, can’t
Not can not.

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

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

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

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

child care, day care
Two words, no hyphen, in all cases.
citizen, resident
A citizen is a person who has acquired the full civil rights of a nation either by birth or naturalization. Cities and states in the United States do not confer citizenship. To avoid confusion, use resident, not citizen, in referring to inhabitants of states and cities.

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

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

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

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

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

continual, continuous
Continual means over and over again. Continuous means unbroken. To remember which is which: Continuous ends in o-u-s, which stands for “one uninterrupted sequence.”
criterion, criteria
Criterion is singular: “Our most important criterion for qualification is experience ….” Criteria is plural: “The qualifying criteria are on Page 216.”

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

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

cutting edge
Avoid this and explain what you mean instead.

database
Database is one word.

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

dependent
Not dependant.

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

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

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

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

each and every
Use one or the other, not both.
employees and management
Everyone who works for an agency is an employee. The distinction may be between union-represented employees and management employees or managers and line employees, but all are employees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

farmworker
one word.

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

firefighter
One word. The preferred term to describe a person who fights fires is firefighter.
firm
A business partnership is correctly referred to as a firm. “He joined a law firm.” Do not use firm in references to an incorporated business entity. Use the company or the corporation instead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

free
Free is fine in place of without cost or no-cost.
from, to  
If you use from when writing about a range, also use to: *He was the chief elevator inspector from 2001 to 2009 (not 2001-2009).*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

hire vs. employee  
Although it may be technically correct as an informal noun, calling someone a *hire* is impersonal personnel-services jargon, and could be compared to *unit* or *cog.*
helpline, hotline, infoline
Not help line, hot line, or info line.

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

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

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

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

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

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

its/it’s
It’s is a contraction of it is. To show possession, use its, as in, “Its coat was matted and dirty.” If you are ever confused, say the word as it is to see if it makes sense for an apostrophe.
I’d like to — say, take this opportunity, thank you
Writing such phrases at the beginnings of letters may help you organize your thoughts, but after you draft them, remove the I’d like to phrases. It’s obvious that you were writing, taking the opportunity, etc., and that you liked it, wanted to, or felt obligated to pretend you did.

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

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

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

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

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

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

left-handed (adjective), left-hander (noun)
Hyphens for both. However, left hand as a noun is two words. Same rules for right-handed, etc.
less than, under, fewer
These words are not interchangeable. Generally, use less than for quantity, use under when you are referring to a spatial relationship (something located relative to something else), and fewer for number. Examples: “He made less than $50,000 a year.” “You must install it under the eaves.” “Fewer than a dozen people showed up.”

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

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

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

livable
Not *liveable*.

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

minuscule
Not *miniscule*.

moot point
*Moot*’s first definition is *debatable*, although it is frequently used to mean *irrelevant*. In law, *moot* may mean *theoretical, hypothetical, or not actual.*
more importantly, most importantly
Write “More important, we need to assess the effect of the new regulations.” Importantly is an adverb that tells how something was done: “He strode importantly to the lectern.”

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

needless to say
If it’s needless to say, don’t.

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

null and void
Use one or the other.

OK
Choose this over okay or O.K.

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

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

Oregon Administrative Rules and Oregon Revised Statutes
Use OAR and ORS on first reference when using the rule or statute number. For example: OAR 918-030-0015, ORS 480.665. Examples: “The Amusement Ride Inspection Report must accompany the Amusement Ride Application (ORS 460.330).” “Refer to OAR 918-008-0120 and our website for more information.” In cases without the rule or statute, spell out. Example: “The Oregon Revised Statutes allow the Building Codes Division to collect fees.”
oversight
Oversight can mean a failure, lapse, omission, or blunder, as well as management. Because of this, authority, monitoring, administration, or some other word may be preferable.

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

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

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

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

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

phenomena, phenomenon
Phenomena is plural of phenomenon: “The phenomena were indisputable.”

pike, peak, peek
Pique is to excite, but also to affect with sharp irritation or resentment; peak means high point or to reach the highest point; and peek means to glance quickly or furtively. Example: “It piqued his interest when he peeked at the peak.”
plead, pleaded, pleading
Do not use the past tense form pled.

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

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

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

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

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

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

proved, proven
Proved is the verb, proven the adjective. Example: “His theory was eventually proved.” “It was a proven theory.”
Q-and-A format
Acceptable in all references for question-and-answer format. Do not use quotation marks in a Q-and-A.

Example how to do a Q-and-A:

Q: Do I need workers’ compensation insurance?
A: The State of Oregon requires almost all employers to carry workers’ compensation insurance for their employees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

right-handed (adjective), right-hander (noun)
Hyphens for both. However, right hand as a noun is two words. Same rules for left-handed, etc.
sign-up, sign up
Hyphenated when a noun (Example: “The sign-up starts Monday”) or an adjective (Example: “The sign-up day is tomorrow”). Two words (no hyphen) in verb form (Example: “Sign up to receive notification”).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

such as
Used without a comma when the phrase is restrictive, which means it is crucial to the fundamental meaning of the sentence. Example: “They created the incident-management system to deal with events such as fires, earthquakes, and terrorist acts.”
Use commas when the *such as* phrase is descriptive and not crucial to the sentence. Example: “You may want to bring personal items for your own comfort, *such as* water bottles, blankets, sunscreen, and sunglasses.”

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

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

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

(See also *who, that* entry.)

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

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

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

**timeline**
One word, lowercase.

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

**timely**
Avoid using timely as an adverb (*payments will be made timely*). When using timely as an adjective (*Payment must be made in a timely manner*), substitute “Payments must be made *promptly*, according to the schedule, within 30 days of the filing, etc.”
toward
Not towards.

traveled
In American English, it has only one “l,” as does canceled. Not travelled.
two-by-four
Spell out as a noun (same for other lengths, including two-by-six, one-by-two).
utimate
Don’t use for last, if last is what you mean. Don’t say ultimate outcome; outcome is sufficient.
unique
It means one of a kind. Do not describe something as rather unique or most unique.
uncommon expressions
Be careful about using what you may consider well-known expressions in business writing. They are not well-known to everyone and may be inappropriate. Don’t mutilate expressions: “iron out the bugs” instead of “iron out the wrinkles” or “remove the bugs.”
under way
Two words.
upward
Not upwards.
usage
Usually, use is the word you want. Example: “PUC reports showed the public’s use of power purchased from other states was higher this year than last year.”
user friendly
Don’t use. It may not be “friendly” to the user at all — we don’t know.
venue
Correctly used to refer to courtrooms or other sites of trials. Not the best choice for sites of meetings and concerts.
verbal agreement
Don’t use for oral agreement. Verbal means consisting of words, both written and spoken. Almost all agreements are verbal, and they may be written or oral.
very
Often unnecessary.

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

“To whom did you give that notice?” [You did give that notice to whom? (him/her/them)]

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

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

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

who’s, whose
Who’s is a contraction of who is. Example: “Who’s going?” Whose is the possessive form of the relative pronoun who. Example: “Whose coat is this?”

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

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

you’re
This is the contracted form of you are. If you’re using it correctly, you’re not confusing it with your, the possessive pronoun. Example: “If you’re going to the meeting, don’t forget your pen.”
Writing clearly and concisely

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t use this</th>
<th>Use this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a majority of</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a meeting was held</td>
<td>we met, the committee met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a number of</td>
<td>many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td>lacking, without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accede</td>
<td>agree, grant, allow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accounted for by the fact</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accustomed to</td>
<td>used to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>additional</td>
<td>more, extra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>additionally</td>
<td>and, also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advance planning</td>
<td>planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advise</td>
<td>tell, inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aforementioned, aforesaid</td>
<td>preceding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahead of time</td>
<td>before the deadline or meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alleviate</td>
<td>ease, reduce, lessen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>almost never</td>
<td>seldom, hardly ever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along the lines of</td>
<td>like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>amongst</td>
<td>among</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and also</td>
<td>and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are of the same opinion</td>
<td>agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a consequence of</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a matter of fact</td>
<td>in fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascertain</td>
<td>discover, find out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at some point in time</td>
<td>when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at this (or that) point in time</td>
<td>now or then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attain</td>
<td>reach, achieve, accomplish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on the fact that</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom line</td>
<td>what this means, the outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brief summary</td>
<td>summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by means of</td>
<td>by, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognizant of</td>
<td>know about, aware of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commence</td>
<td>start, begin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compendium</td>
<td>summary, outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>completely full</td>
<td>full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>component</td>
<td>part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerning</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consequently</td>
<td>so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constitute</td>
<td>form, make up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>construe</td>
<td>interpret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deduct</td>
<td>subtract, take away, take off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deem</td>
<td>consider, treat as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defer</td>
<td>postpone, put off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitely proved</td>
<td>proved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>denied making a statement to the effect that</td>
<td>denied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despite the fact that</td>
<td>although, despite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determine</td>
<td>decide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialogued, entered into dialogue</td>
<td>talked, discussed, began discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do a study of the effects of</td>
<td>study the effects, study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>document the names of participants</td>
<td>record, list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to the fact</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the course of</td>
<td>during, while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>elucidate</td>
<td>explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emanate from</td>
<td>come from, stem from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emergency situations</td>
<td>emergencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end result</td>
<td>result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>endeavor</td>
<td>try, attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>establish</td>
<td>form, create, set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even as we speak</td>
<td>now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eventuate</td>
<td>result, occur, happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fabricate</td>
<td>make</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facilitate</td>
<td>help, run, direct, manage, administer, teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>failure to</td>
<td>if you do not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fewer in number</td>
<td>fewer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final outcome, settlement</td>
<td>outcome, result settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finalize</td>
<td>end, finish, complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first of all</td>
<td>first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first priority</td>
<td>priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foreseeable future</td>
<td>until further notice, in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the duration of</td>
<td>during, while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the purpose of</td>
<td>for, to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the reason that</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forward (verb)</td>
<td>send, give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furnish</td>
<td>give, provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>future plans</td>
<td>plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give encouragement to</td>
<td>encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give rise to</td>
<td>cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great majority of</td>
<td>most</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has the capability to</td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has a need for</td>
<td>needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have a tendency to</td>
<td>tend to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>having regard to</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>henceforth</td>
<td>from now on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heretofore</td>
<td>until now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if this is not the case</td>
<td>if not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immediate future</td>
<td>soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impact</td>
<td>affect, effect (see pages 38, 47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>impart</td>
<td>give, pass on, tell, inform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>implement (verb)</td>
<td>do, carry out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a number of cases</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a position to</td>
<td>can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a satisfactory manner</td>
<td>satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a very real sense</td>
<td>in a sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in accordance with</td>
<td>according to, in line with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in case</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in conjunction with</td>
<td>with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in connection with</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in-depth</td>
<td>thorough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in lieu of</td>
<td>instead of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in my opinion</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in order to</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in receipt of</td>
<td>get, have, receive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in regards to</td>
<td>regarding, about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in relation to</td>
<td>toward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in respect to</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in spite of</td>
<td>despite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in some cases</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in terms of</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the event that</td>
<td>if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the nature of</td>
<td>like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the possession of</td>
<td>has, have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in view of</td>
<td>for, as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inasmuch as</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including, but not limited to</td>
<td>including</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initiate</td>
<td>begin, start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>integral part</td>
<td>integral to, part of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>irregardless</td>
<td>regardless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it has been reported by Smith</td>
<td>Smith reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is apparent that</td>
<td>apparently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is believed that</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is clear that</td>
<td>clearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is doubtful that</td>
<td>possibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is often the case</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is suggested that</td>
<td>I think, they believe, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it is worth pointing out</td>
<td>note that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it may be that</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it may, however, be noted</td>
<td>but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was indicated that</td>
<td>he said, she said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was decided that</td>
<td>I decided, the committee decided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joint cooperation</td>
<td>cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacked the ability to</td>
<td>could not, couldn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large in size</td>
<td>large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning experience</td>
<td>experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make an adjustment to</td>
<td>adjust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make decisions about</td>
<td>decide on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make inquiry of</td>
<td>ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>necessitate</td>
<td>require, need, have to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonattendance</td>
<td>absence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not less than, not more than</td>
<td>at least, or less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notwithstanding</td>
<td>even if, despite, still, yet, but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of a confidential nature</td>
<td>confidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of great practical importance</td>
<td>useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>off of</td>
<td>off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owing to the fact that</td>
<td>because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>past experience</td>
<td>experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>period of time</td>
<td>period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>peruse</td>
<td>read, study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preventative</td>
<td>preventive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prior to</td>
<td>before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prioritize</td>
<td>rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proactive</td>
<td>active, progressive, assertive, aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>procure</td>
<td>buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provide a summary of</td>
<td>summarize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pursuant to</td>
<td>under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referred to as</td>
<td>called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reimburse</td>
<td>repay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remit</td>
<td>send</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remuneration</td>
<td>pay, wages, salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remunerative employment</td>
<td>paid work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>render</td>
<td>send, make, give</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reside</td>
<td>live</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t use this</td>
<td>Use this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>root cause</td>
<td>cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>serve to make reductions</td>
<td>reduce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shall</td>
<td>must, will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supplementary</td>
<td>extra, more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take into consideration</td>
<td>consider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terminate</td>
<td>end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the law provides that</td>
<td>the law says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the question as to whether</td>
<td>whether, if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there are people who are</td>
<td>some people are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there is reason to believe</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theretofore</td>
<td>until then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utilize</td>
<td>use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbally reported</td>
<td>said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verify</td>
<td>check, prove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was of the opinion that</td>
<td>believed, thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was witness to</td>
<td>saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we wish to thank</td>
<td>we thank, thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whether or not</td>
<td>whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wish</td>
<td>want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a view to</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with reference to</td>
<td>about, concerning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the possible exception of</td>
<td>except</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the result that</td>
<td>so that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>