



## Communications and Style Tips

Each time you draft a letter or memo, write a proposal or prepare a presentation, you make a statement about your company – your brand. The objective in developing these standards is to serve as a guide in delivering consistent communications. This Style Guide is based on *The Associated Press Stylebook*, *The New York Times Manual of Style* and *Chicago Manual of Style* are also options for establishing company-wide preferences.

### Before Writing

- Consider your audience. Who will read what you write? Tailor your words and style to capture the interest of your audience.
- Consider your purpose. What do you want to accomplish with your writing? To inform? Or persuade? Identifying your goal will help you achieve it.
- Consider your medium. Would your purpose be better served with a letter, a memo, a proposal or an e-mail message or direct mail? Use the medium that best supports your purpose.

### While Writing

- Think about what you want to say, and say it as simply as possible. Clear thinking is the key to clear writing.
- Use simple words and simple sentences. Vary sentence length and structure to create rhythm and keep your reader's interest.
- Choose your words carefully. Use as few words as possible to get your message across. Use precise words that create imagery in the reader's mind. If you can leave out a word without changing the meaning, leave it out.
- Use short paragraphs. Make the written page look as appealing as possible by using short paragraphs that will engage your reader.
- Use subheads to break up long text.
- Use the active voice. The passive voice tends to use more words and often lacks the strength of the active voice. For example:  
*Active:* A VP signed the document.  
*Passive:* The document was signed by a VP.
- When the situation requires the use of an acronym, you should provide the full spelling in the first occurrence followed by the acronym in parentheses.  
*Sample:* Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM)



For further referencing, the acronym should be used.

### **Iterative Editing**

- Print a hard copy to edit, if possible. Seeing the words on paper will help you find unnecessary words, spelling mistakes and, most important, determine if the text conveys its intended meaning.
- It also helps to read aloud to make sure your message follows a logical pattern.
- Allow time to set the document aside after developing the first draft. When you come back to the text later, you'll have a clearer view and will probably find ways to improve it. Do this as many times as necessary.
- Proofread your work carefully for typographical errors. Develop a habit of proofing your work several times before declaring it finished. Have others proof it as well. Use the spell-checker one last time. (Refer to the proofreading checklist and proofreaders' marks.)

### **Formatting for Lists**

- Bullets are preferred when setting off items in a list—square bullets are the corporate standard, which reinforces the building blocks for growth. In a list containing more than six items, numbers with periods may be used. (Do not enclose the numbers in parentheses.)
- Punctuation used after each item varies according to format. Preferable style is that no punctuation be used when all the items in a list are single words or phrases.
- If one or more of the items in a list are full sentences, periods should be used after all the items within that list.
- Be consistent with list punctuation throughout the document.
- Items in lists must be parallel in construction; for example, if one item starts with a verb, all must start with a verb.

### **Punctuation**

#### **Comma (in a series)**

- Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series.  
*Sample:* We will be introducing some important changes to the way you access your HR, payroll and benefits services.
- Use comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases.  
*Sample:* We help build shareholder value, streamline and create greater efficiencies in HR and payroll, and reduce time and costs of administrative requirements.

### **Dashes**

- Hyphens. Hyphens are used at the end of lines to show word breaks, to join words to form compound adjectives, and to join some prefixes and suffixes with root words.  
*Sample:* post-settlement  
Note: hyphens used to form compound adjectives to modify nouns are not used when the adjective appears after the noun or when an adverb (word ending in "ly") is used.  
*Sample:* cost-containment solution



*Sample:* the solution focuses on cost containment

*Sample:* highly qualified consultants

*Sample:* high-quality consultants

- En dashes. En dashes are used as a substitute for the word “to” or as a separation between a subhead and content. They are slightly larger than hyphens but smaller than em dashes. A space is inserted on either side of an en dash.

*Sample:* pages 10 – 12

*Sample:* The Best Choice – MarCom Point.Solutions

In Microsoft Word, the en dash can be inserted easily through one of three methods.

When typing numbers do the following:

Method 1: Type the number, space, dash, number, space

When typing words, do the following:

Method 2: Type the word, one dash, the word, space

Method 3: Click on Insert, Symbol, Special Characters, En Dash

In Microsoft PowerPoint, use Method 1 or 2 as described above.

- Em dashes. Em dashes are used to set off parenthetical expressions when commas do not provide enough emphasis. There are no spaces on either side of the em dash.

*Sample:* When working with leading-edge companies – those that consistently outperform the market – a number of similarities were identified.

In Microsoft Word, the em dash can be inserted easily through one of two methods.

Method 1: type the word, two dashes, the word, space

Method 2: Click on Insert, Symbol, Special Characters, En Dash

In Microsoft PowerPoint, use Method 1 as described above.

## Character Spacing

When typing a paragraph, use only one space between sentences. Notice how the typesetting looks professional in this paragraph, as a result. The reason the change has been made from two spaces (when using a typewriter) to one space (when using a computer) is that typography on a computer uses fonts, which properly positions the spaces between the characters.

## That vs. Which

The word “which” is used when the sentence requires a phrase.

*Sample:* the data resides on internal host systems, which are controlled by IT

*Sample:* the information is part of a system that includes several databases

## Frequently Used Words

This table lists words frequently used in company communications, their preferred spellings and forms. It’s a living list and can always be added to. Let us know what you would like to see added to this list or if you have any questions by contacting [askmarketing@xxxcompany.com](mailto:askmarketing@xxxcompany.com).



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