[COMPANY NAME] WRITING STYLE GUIDE (DRAFT)

Guidelines for writing and editing [Company name] documents

(for Canadian companies using the Canadian Press Stylebook)

Contents

1. About

This style guide provides a set of editorial guidelines for writers at [Company], to help ensure that all content published or sent by the company goes out with a consistent voice and writing style. It also lists the company's preferred spelling of words and phrases common to our business and industry.

Use this guide as your first reference source for resolving questions about how to spell a specific word or phrase, or how to format or punctuate your content. It presents the basic rules and preferences of the [Company] writing style, and (where there are differences) overrides those found in any of the references recommended below or on subsequent pages.

2. Main Reference

For words and topics not addressed in this document, our main reference is the **CP Stylebook** published by The Canadian Press. Look there next to check the Canadian spelling of a word, or if you're not sure whether to hyphenate a compound word, or whether to use the Oxford comma (aka serial comma) *[CP's advice: not unless it helps avoid confusion]*.

The CP Stylebook is available in both a print edition and an online digital edition (where it can be bundled with a companion Online Caps and Spelling resource). The advantages of the digital version are that it can be accessed from any device with an internet connection, and that it's searchable.

3. Secondary References

Some spelling, grammar and style questions are not addressed in the CP Stylebook. For guidance on those issues, here are some additional resources, listed in order of authority (i.e., in cases where they don't agree, follow the one listed higher on the list):

- For questions about the correct **Canadian** spelling of a word or phrase:

    o **The Canadian Oxford Dictionary**
    Available in print, and online with a subscription.

    o **The Canadian Style**
    One of the writing tools published by TERMIUM Plus, from Public Works and Government Services Canada's Translation Bureau; available free online.

    o **Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles**
    Published by Gage Educational Publishing Company and licensed to The University of British Columbia. Available free online.

- For questions about **technical writing** style and the spelling of terms related to **technology** or **the internet**:

    o **The Microsoft Writing Style Guide**
    Available free in both an online and a PDF version.

    o **The Apple Style Guide**
    Available free online.

    o **The IBM Style Guide: Conventions for Writers and Editors**
    Available in print. A substantial subset of its contents is also available free online.

- And finally, two additional online dictionaries, for quick look-ups of words not found in any of the resources already listed:

    o Cambridge Dictionary
    Gives both English (British) and American spellings.

    o Oxford Dictionary
    Defaults to British English, but also offers American English spellings.

4. General Principles

Above All, Clarity

Good writing has many attributes, but one that readers will always appreciate is *clarity*. Try to make your writing for the company as clear as possible. If the reader needs to work at all to understand what you're trying to say, it's an indication that parts of your document still need to be clarified.

Understandable

Some tips for making your writing more understandable:
- Avoid unnecessary jargon, and define each required technical term as soon as it's introduced.
- Explain all acronyms when they first appear in a document.
- Avoid legalese unless it's actually required and put there by a lawyer.
- Review the document with the following questions in mind:
  - Is there a simpler way to say it?
  - Does it assume any knowledge of the topic? Is that a safe assumption for all intended readers?

Easy to Read

Since most readers are busy people who are inundated with information, the easier you make a document to read, the more likely that it will actually be read. Partly, this might mean using a conversational tone, or breaking up your content with headings and sub-headings. But more generally, it should be the other filter (along with clarity) through which you judge anything that you've written. Is it easy to read?

The goal is writing that smoothes the reader's path through the document, with nothing to slow them down along the way. *(For example, see Optional Pronouns)*

Plain English

Wherever possible, try to use plain language in your document's vocabulary and phrasing. Choosing the simpler way to say something contributes to all of the goals mentioned above: it makes the document clearer, more understandable and easier to read. It also usually sets a better overall tone than wording that's too formal, legal, stuffy or verbose.

For specific suggestions, see section 9. Plain Language Examples.

For inspiration and more advice on this topic, see the US government's Federal Plain Language Guidelines, available both online and in downloadable PDF or Word format. For Canadian plain language resources and examples, see The Canadian Style's Plain Language chapter, and the Putting Plain Language into Practice website.

Voice and Tone

While the tone will vary as appropriate for the type of document being written (more matter-of-fact for a standard operating procedure, more friendly or casual for an HR announcement), the overall voice of all [Company] documents should be consistent: **professional**, **clear**, **helpful**, **informative**. Think of it as the writing equivalent of our office dress code: business casual.

5. Language and Grammar

Abbreviations

e.g.   (Latin, *exempli gratia*, "for the sake of example"): not followed by a comma. When possible, use "for example" instead.

i.e.   (Latin, *id est*, "that is"): not followed by a comma. When possible, use "that is" instead.

n/a   ("not applicable"): lower case

NB   (Latin, nota bene, "note well"): usually followed by a colon. When possible, use "Note:" instead.

Acronyms

Limit the use of acronyms wherever possible – only introduce them if used more than once in the document.

Spell out the entire name the first time an acronym is used, followed by the acronym in brackets immediately after. Use acronym throughout (e.g. Light Rail Transit (LRT), then LRT).

No apostrophe for the plural form of an acronym ("SBUs" not "SBU's").

Active Voice

Use an active rather than a passive voice (e.g. "The Project Manager directs the team" not "The team is directed by the Project Manager").

Contractions

When your document allows for a more casual or conversational tone, the use of commonly-used contractions is acceptable (e.g. "This doesn't require" and "Here's an example").

Gender-Neutral Pronouns

Using the singular "they" is an acceptable alternative to using "he" or "she" in sentences that aren't intended to be gender-specific (e.g. "Contact the manager and ask them to review the requirements.")

Optional Pronouns

Use optional pronouns ("read the contract *that* we prepared") or articles ("*the* owner") whenever it helps to clarify the intended meaning of the sentence.

Possessives

When intended as a possessive adjective, the word "its" has no apostrophe (e.g. "the tree shed its leaves").

Shall

Instead of saying "shall", use "must" to indicate a requirement, use "should" to indicate a recommendation, and use "will" to indicate something that will happen in the future.

6. Capitalization

Of nouns in general

Don't capitalize common nouns just to indicate importance or to draw attention (e.g. "the project").

Of company names and terms

Use lowercase when referring to a job title not attached to a specific individual (e.g. "president", "manager").

Use uppercase only when the title precedes someone's name (e.g. Project Manager Jane Smith).

Only capitalize the names of departments, forms, documents and procedures if they're officially named entities.

7. Punctuation and Formatting

Ampersands

Use ampersands ("&") in titles only. In paragraphs, use "and" unless it's part of a name or acronym (e.g. FF&E or M&E).

Apostrophes

Don't use apostrophes on plurals (e.g. P3s not P3's; 1990s not 1990's).

Dashes

Use an em-dash (in MS Word, type a dash followed by "enter") as a stand-in for a comma or parenthesis to separate out phrases or a word in a sentence (e.g. "Against all odds, Pete – the unluckiest man alive – won the lottery"). Put a space before and after the dash.

Use an en-dash to connect values in a range or that are related (e.g. "Pages 31-34" or "May 2005-December 2006") There are no spaces between the en-dash and the word/number.

Lists and Bullet Points

Introduce a list of bullet points with a colon.

Use a semicolon at the end of each bullet, and for the second to last bullet, use a semicolon followed by "and" (e.g. "Mechanical/electrical work; and …").

If a bullet has multiple sentences, end each bullet in that sequence with a period.

Use capital letters at the beginning of bulleted phrases.

Maintain sentence structure and tense; no switching between sentences and non-sentences in the same list.

Start the bullet with a verb or subject. Should the verb end in "ing", all subsequent bullets must start with a verb ending in "ing" (e.g. Maintaining, Scheduling, Providing). Should the bullet begin with a verb which does not end in "ing", all subsequent verbs must also end without "ing" (e.g. Maintain, Schedule, Provide).

Spaces

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

Don't add a space between the slash and the words that it connects (e.g. mechanical/electrical).

Text Alignment

Set the text in paragraphs as left-aligned, which is easier to read than justified text.

8. Units

Date and Time

Spell out the month followed by the day and year (e.g. January 11, 2018).

Use periods after each letter in "a.m." and "p.m." (e.g. 7:35 a.m. and 9:50 p.m., not 7:35 am and 9:50 pm).

Directions

Use lowercase for all directions (e.g. north, south, east, west, northern, southern, etc.)

Elevations

Use "level" to describe grade changes.

Use "floor" to describe storeys in a building (e.g. "Scope of work for the office building included construction of 5 floors, totalling 26,942 m^2.").

Metric

Use metric only and don't spell out the metric unit. Leave space between number and metric (e.g. for kilometres use km, not miles; for metres use m, not feet; 3.5 m, not 3.5 metres).

Numbers

For numbers 10 and higher, use numerals (e.g. 15 not fifteen).

For numbers 9 and lower, use words (e.g. nine not 9).

If a paragraph uses numbers more than once in the same sentence, use numerals for all (e.g. "The project consisted of 5 phases within a total time frame of 16 months, with 350 workers at project peak.").

Use a comma for numerals with 4 or 5 digits (e.g. 3,450, not 3450; 100,000, not 100000 or 100k).

Use "million" and "billion" for units that exceed 5 digits. In this case only, spell out the metric (e.g. 6 million metres of concrete).

Percentages

Don't add spaces between the number and the percentage sign (e.g. 62% not 62 %).

Don't spell out the word; use the symbol (e.g. % not percent).

Size/Area

When referring to size or area, use the metric short form and superscript the number, which can be found in the "Font > Effects" window in Word (e.g. m^2, not m. sq. or SM)

9. Plain Language Examples

Instead of:	Use:	Instead of:	Use:
a large majority	most	governmental entities	agencies
abbreviate	condense	in close proximity to	near
aforementioned	these	in order to	to
allow us to	let us	in the course of	during
as a result of	because	in the event that	if
at this point in time	currently, now	in the future	soon
cease	stop	is an indication of, indicates	shows
colleague	peer	locate	find
commence, initiate	start, begin	optimal	best
commencement	beginning	on the condition that	provided
compensate	pay	prior to	before
demonstrate	show	provide a summary of	summarize
desire	want	purchase	buy
disengage	free	subsequent to	after
during the time that	while	subsequently	later
elect	choose	sufficient	enough
for the purpose of	to	terminate	end
future plans	plans	utilize	use
give consideration to	consider	verification	check, proof

10. Spelling: General

Canadian > British > American

If there's a unique or preferred Canadian way to spell a word, use that. To find out, check this guide's Canadian Spellings section. If the word isn't listed here, check the CP Stylebook next, and if necessary, try the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as a third option.

If none of those resources list a preferred Canadian spelling, use a standard dictionary spelling, favouring the British variant rather than the American one if there's a choice (e.g. labour not labor; cheque not check).

Don't change U.S. titles or names to Canadian spellings (e.g. American Construction Center not American Construction Centre).

11. Spelling: List

Canadian Spellings

Use this Canadian spelling for the following words:

aging	fulfill	odour
aluminum	level crossing	organization
analogue	gram	paralyze
analyze	grey	practice (n)
behaviour	harbour	practise (v)
BSc (degree)	honour	program
calibre	installment	railway
cancelled	judgment	rigour
catalogue	kilometre	signalling
centre	label, labelled, labelling	skeptic
cheque (n)	labour	skillful
colour	licence (n)	standardize
convenor	manoeuvre	sulphur
counselling, counsellor	metre (unit of distance)	theatre
defence	minimize	tonnes
dialogue	modelled, modelling	travelling
favour, favourite	mould	vapour
fibre, fibre optics	neighbour	

Correct Spellings

References sometimes disagree about how to spell a word, or whether it's a single, compound, or multiple word. Consult the list below for the correct spelling (or usage) of the following words:

above-grade	backfill	build out (v)
ad hoc	bank line	build-out (n)
any more	below-ground	build-up (n)
arm's length	bilingual	buy-in (n)
as-built	bi-monthly	buy-out (n)
as-needed	bioswales	bypass
at-grade	blueprint	cash flow
back charge	bore hole	cast-in-place

clean up (v)	log on, log in (v)	preconstruction
cleanup (n)	log on, log in (v)	prestressed
close out (v)	logon, login (n)	pre-tension(ed)
closeout (n)	long-range	project-specific
coarse-grained	long-standing	pull-out (n)
coordinate	long-term	real time
cost-benefit analysis	loophole	reconstruction
cost-effective (adj)	low-speed	record of decision
countrywide	man-hour	re-create (create again)
cross section (n)	manmade	re-sort (sort again)
cross-section (v)	metadata	right-of-way
crosstie	metalworker	riprap
cut-off wall	mid-90s	river channel
decommission	mid-August	river reach
design-build	midsized	riverbed
designer-of-record	midweek	riverfront
drop-down	mudflats	roadbed
eastbound	multilingual	roadblock
email	multimedia	roadside
falsework	nationwide	roadway
fast track (n)	nevertheless	roadwork
fast-track (adj)	no one	rockfill (n)
firefighter	off site (other than adj)	rollout
floor plan	offline	runoff
flow-down	off-ramp	sandbank
flyover	offshore	sandbar
follow-up (n)	off-site, on-site (adj)	set up (v)
front-line	on site (other than adj)	setup (n)
give-and-take	on to	short list (n)
groundwater	ongoing	shortage (not underage)
hand out (v)	online	shortcut
handoff (n)	on-ramp	shortlist (v)
handout (n)	onshore	shutdown (n)
handover (n)	on-site (adj)	sign-off (n)
handpicked	outcrop	snowmelt
home page (two words)	overage	sole source
in-house (adj)	overrate	spillover
intergovernmental	override	start-up (n)
internet	overrule	storm water
joint venture	overrun	storey (upper floor), not
jump start	pay off (v)	story (tale)
jump-start (v)	pay out (v)	subcommittee
kickoff (n)	pickup	subconsultant
know-how	point of contact	subcontractor
land use	policy makers (-ing)	surface water
landowner	pop-up	takeoff
life cycle, life cycle cost	post-tension(ed)	takeover
lifelong	pre-cast	task force

third-party	vice versa	waterway
threshold	vise (tool), not vice (bad	well-being
timeline	habit)	westbound
timetable	walkway	Wi-Fi
transatlantic	wastewater	windfall
turnoff (n)	water level	work hours
turnout (n)	water supply	work place
turnover	watercourse	workforce
undercut	waterless	wrap-up
underrate	waterpower	
underway (adj)	watershed	
up-to-date	watertight	

12. Additional Guidelines for Specific Types of Writing

For Official Documents

Official company documents can include **policies**, **standard operating procedures** (SOPs), **work instructions** (WIs) and **forms**. Each of these doc types has a template (for formatting), a numbering convention, and a file-naming convention, all of which should be used for all new docs to maintain consistency:

[official doc formatting, naming & numbering guidelines go here]

For Software Documentation

Don't use "hit" to refer to pressing a key. Instead, use "press" if referring to a keyboard action, "click" if referring to a mouse action, or "select" if the action also applies to mobile devices.

In general, use the second person voice ("you"), writing as though you're speaking directly to the reader.

To alert the reader to a specific point of interest, use "Note", "Important" or "Warning" (rather than "NB").

For a complete set of style recommendations related to writing software documentation, refer to the Microsoft Writing Style Guide, which can be accessed and searched online, or downloaded as a PDF.