



Stylebook
Municipal Association of South Carolina

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Stylebook

This stylebook will help ensure consistency in grammar, punctuation and spelling throughout the Association. This guide is intended for use with publications, press releases, newsletters, all printed materials, promotional pieces, websites and correspondence. All guidelines refer to print and web usages unless otherwise noted.

Because writers and editors within the Association use a variety of sources for standards of grammar and usage, this guide is intended to ensure consistency. The stylebook primarily aligns with the *Associated Press Stylebook (2010)*; however, there are instances where more common usage rules are employed, especially for formal correspondence and “city government-specific” references.

This guide is by no means comprehensive. The entries were selected to illustrate common usages and questions that arise during editing. Use it in conjunction with two publications that together should be considered the authorities on questions of usage — *Webster’s New World College Dictionary, third edition (1997)* and *The Associated Press Stylebook (2010)*. Use *The Chicago Manual of Style* as a backup source.

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Notes:

➤ Indicates an example.

Italics indicate an example of incorrect usage.

Examples are indicated in **bold Arial** font to differentiate them from the rest of the document.

Abbreviations

General abbreviations and acronyms.

- When using an abbreviation or acronym for an internal publication, spell out the entity on first reference and use the abbreviation or acronym on subsequent references. Do not insert the abbreviation in parentheses following the first reference. If an abbreviation or acronym would not be clear on second reference, do not use it.
 - *The Municipal Association of SC (MASC) belongs to the National League of Cities (NLC). (incorrect)*

Financial statement reporting exception.

- Use of parenthetical references with quotations is permitted (e.g. “GAAP or “GSA”).
- If a term is to be used only once in the document or article, don’t abbreviate the single instance.
- Avoid the use of abbreviations for external publications (press releases, articles for non-Municipal Association of SC publications, etc.). If an abbreviation or acronym would not be clear on second reference, do not use it. Names not commonly before the public should not be reduced to acronyms simply to save a few spaces.
- When referencing the Municipal Association of SC, use the following guidelines:
 - Write out **Municipal Association of South Carolina** on first reference.
 - **Municipal Association of SC** or **Municipal Association** is acceptable on subsequent references. Avoid using the “of SC” with possessive or descriptive constructions.
 - The Municipal Association’s address is 1411 Gervais Street.
 - *The Municipal Association of SC’s address is 1411 Gervais Street. (incorrect)*
 - “The vote is doubtful,” said the Municipal Association’s executive director.
 - *“The vote is doubtful,” said the Municipal Association of SC’s executive director. (incorrect)*
 - Do not use the acronym, **MASC**, in any context.
- Do not use periods for abbreviations, except when there are only two letters in the abbreviation (U.S.). See exception below for abbreviations of state names.

Frequently used abbreviations.

- BLOA — Business License Officials Association
- MAA — Municipal Attorneys Association
- MCAA — Municipal Court Administration Association
- MCTI — Municipal Clerks and Treasurers Institute
- MEO — Municipal Elected Officials Institute of Government
- MFOCTA — Municipal Finance Officers, Clerks and Treasurers Association
- MHRA — Municipal Human Resources Association
- MTASC — Municipal Technology Association of South Carolina

- SCAMPS — SC Association of Municipal Power Systems
 - SCASM — SC Association of Stormwater Managers
 - SCCDA — SC Community Development Association
 - SCUBA – SC Utility Billing Association
-
- BTCP — Brokers Tax Collection Program
 - ITCP — Insurance Tax Collection Program
 - SODCP — Setoff Debt Collection Program
 - TTCP — Telecommunications Tax Collection Program
-
- MIS — Municipal Insurance Services
 - RMS — Risk Management Services
 - SCLGAG — SC Local Government Assurance Group
 - SCMIT — SC Municipal Insurance Trust
 - SCMIRF — SC Municipal Insurance and Risk Financing Trust Fund
 - SC ORBET – South Carolina Other Retirement Benefits Employer Trust
-
- HSCLAD — *Hometown, SC* Legislative Action Day
 - COG — Council of Governments
 - a.m.
 - p.m.
 - e.g. (for example)
 - i.e. (that is)
 - PDF — Portable Document Format

State names.

- Spell out the names of the 50 U.S. states when they stand alone in textual material or are used as a descriptor.
 - He lives in South Carolina and was born in Nevada.
 - The South Carolina Department of Environmental Control is a state agency.
- State names are abbreviated in conjunction with the name of a city, county, town, village, or military base in text. Use the *AP Stylebook* listing for postal code (ZIP code) abbreviations.
 - He traveled from Columbia, SC, to Nashville, TN.
- The names of eight states are never abbreviated — Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah.

United States.

- Spell out when used as a noun. Use **U.S.** when used as an adjective.
 - The United States went to war.
 - The U.S. Census is out this week.

Academic degrees.

- B.A.
- B.S.
- M.A.
- M.D.
- M.S.
- Ed.D.
- Ph.D.
- bachelor's degree
- master's degree
- doctorate

Do not capitalize fields of study unless the word itself is a proper noun.

- She has a B.A. in English.
- He has a B.A. in history.
- Her master's degree is in biology.

Use academic degree abbreviations only after a full name — never after just a last name. When used after a name, an academic abbreviation is set off by commas.

- John Smith, Ph.D., spoke.

Do not precede a name with a courtesy title for an academic degree and follow it with the abbreviation for the degree in the same reference.

- *Dr. Pam Jones, Ph.D.* (incorrect)
- Dr. Pam Jones, a chemist

Capitalization

Municipal Association of South Carolina terms (see other references in Abbreviations section).

- Always capitalize **Municipal Association of South Carolina**.
- Capitalize **Association** on subsequent references. This is to be used only in reference to the Municipal Association of SC. Reference to other associations follows the *AP Stylebook* rule.
 - The Municipal Association of South Carolina is located in Columbia. The Association's office is located on Gervais Street.
- Department names
 - Education and Training Department
- Home Rule
- Annual Meeting
- Internet

Seasons.

- Use lowercase unless part of a formal name.
 - Summer Olympics
 - The summer months are the time for vacation.
 - The Annual Meeting is in July.

- The spring meeting of MFOCTA is held in May.
- The MFOCTA Spring Meeting is held in May.

City references.

- Capitalize as part of a proper name or “City of” or “Town of” constructions.
 - Kansas City
 - The City of Columbia
 - The Town of Lexington is having an anniversary.
- Lowercase city references elsewhere.
 - A South Carolina city
 - We believe city government works.
 - The city is having an anniversary.
- **City Council.** Capitalize when part of a proper name or when reference without the city name is to a specific council.
 - Columbia City Council voted this week. The Council met behind closed doors earlier.
- **City Hall.** Capitalize with the name of a city or without the name of a city if the reference is specific.
 - Columbia City Hall is located on Main Street.
 - City Hall is where you can find Mayor Smith’s office.
 - You can’t fight city hall.

Party affiliation.

- Capitalize a political party when it refers to a specific party or its members.
- Lowercase the reference to the party affiliation when it refers to a political philosophy.
 - The liberal Republican senator and his Democratic Party colleague said they believe that democracy and communism are incompatible.

State references.

- Do not capitalize **state** when used simply as an adjective to specify a level of jurisdiction.
 - state Senator Joe Smith
 - state Department of Transportation
 - state funds
 - state of South Carolina
 - state Constitution

Headlines.

- Capitalize the first word and any proper names in a headline.

Titles of conference sessions or speeches.

- Capitalize the principal words of a title, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters. Use quotations to set off the title in body copy.

Legal references.

- Names of legal cases (plaintiff and defendant) are italicized.

NOTE: *The Chicago Manual of Style* covers several code section references in “Public Documents” sections 15.322 through 15.411. More extensive advice is found in the *Chicago Manual of Legal Citation*.

Other capitalization issues.

- Legislature — Capitalize when preceded by the name of a state. Retain the capitalization when the state name is dropped but the reference is specifically to that state’s legislature. Lowercase when used generically.
 - The South Carolina Legislature is in session until June. The Legislature can’t always get the work done by then.
 - No legislature in the nation has passed a similar bill.
- board of directors
- minutes

Formatting

Default font.

- Use 12-point Times Roman as the default font for correspondence, email, press releases and other written materials.

Correspondence format.

- Font should be Times Roman, preferably 12 point (10 or 11 point is acceptable to make a letter fit on one page).
- **Financial statement reporting exception.**
 - Times Roman 11-point and 10-point font is acceptable for information within notes.
- Document margins should be set at:
 - Left margin 1 inch, right margin 1 inch
 - Top margin 2 inches
 - At least 1.5 inches from the bottom
- Salutation should be followed by a colon.
 - **Dear Mayor Smith:**
- Inside address should fall two returns below the date. The salutation falls two returns below the inside address. The first paragraph falls two returns below the salutation.
- Letters should not crowd the page. It is preferable to use a second sheet rather than crowd a first sheet.

Contact information.

- Use the PO box address for return addresses:
PO Box 12109
Columbia, SC 29211
- All external correspondence should include name, title, department, address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address and web address.

Other formatting issues.

- Insert one space between sentences.
 - Ms. Mandoza is the media contact at the foundation. She can be reached at 800.485.9900.

Website.

- Omit **http://** when referring to a website address.
- Include the keyword for reference to the Municipal Association website.
 - www.masc.sc (keyword: achievement awards)
- Embed the website address as a link in e-mails, Web pages and all other electronic communications.

Numerals/Numbers

Time.

- Omit the two zeros when indicating a time in body copy.
 - **3 p.m.** for body copy
- Include the hourly increments on an agenda.
 - 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
 - 11:15 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
- Separate hourly increments using a dash.
 - *3 p.m. – 4 p.m.* Use **3 – 4 p.m.**
- Avoid the redundant — *10 a.m. this morning, 12 noon or 12 midnight*

Money.

- Omit the two zeros when indicating an even dollar amount.
 - \$50 (not \$50.00)
- For amounts more than \$1 million, use the \$ and numerals up to two decimal places. Do not link the numerals and the word by a hyphen.
 - The building is worth \$4.35 million.
 - The building is worth \$4,351,242.

- He proposed a \$300 billion budget.
- For amounts less than \$1 million, use the following.
 - \$4, \$25, \$500, \$1,000, \$650,000
- For cents, spell out the word **cents** in lowercase, using numerals for amounts less than a dollar.
 - 5 cents
 - 1 cent

Numbers in text.

- When the number is nine or less, spell it out.
 - There are five intern positions available.
- When the number is 10 or more, use numerals.
 - There are 50 volunteers available.
- The exceptions are ages, dates, times, percentages, and references to amounts of money, which are also expressed in numerals. Spell out the age of an inanimate object.
 - The meeting is at 2 p.m.
 - The pledge drive raised more than \$90,000. (See “Money” above)
 - The 6-year-old boy weighed more than the 7-pound, 6-ounce baby.
 - The law is five years old.
- Sentences never start with numerals.
 - Fifty-nine cities responded.
- Do not use a numeral after spelled-out numbers.
 - *They need six (6) soft drinks.*
- See punctuation entry for use of percentages in body copy.

Telephone numbers.

- Telephone numbers should be written with periods.
 - 888.555.5555

Dates and days of the week.

- Commas are used to separate days and years, but not months and years.
 - We celebrated the new year, January 1, 2006, with fireworks and loud noise. (Make sure to add a comma after the year if the phrase falls within a sentence.)
 - January 2003
- **Financial statement reporting exception.**
 - Exclude comma after first year as in December 31, 2010 and 2009.(Comma excluded after 2010.)
- Months containing only one syllable are never abbreviated.

- Always use Arabic figures, without **st, nd, rd, or th**
 - His birthday is January 10.
 - *His birthday is January 10th. (incorrect)*
- Capitalize days of the week and do not abbreviate except when used in tabular format.

Age.

- Always use figures.
 - The boy is 5 and his mother is 36.
- Ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun use hyphens.
 - A 5-year-old boy. He is a 5-year-old.

Punctuation

Apostrophe.

- Apostrophes are used for (among other things) omitted letters or numerals.
 - the '06 season
 - the 1900s (*not 1900's*)
 - the '80s (*not the '80's*)
- Apostrophes are also used for possessives, but not for plurals.
 - The hills are alive. (correct) / *The hill's are alive. (incorrect)*
 - The Smiths' house
 - The Smiths are going with us.
- For plural possessive, use only an apostrophe, and not an additional **s**, when a proper name ends in **s**.
 - Cass' first day at work was September 10.

Quotation marks.

- The period and the comma **always** go **inside** the quotation marks.
- The dash, semicolon, question mark and exclamation point go inside the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to a whole sentence containing a quote.

Comma.

- Use commas to separate elements in a series. In a simple series, it is not necessary to use a comma before the conjunction.
 - The flag is red, white and blue.
 - The group ate chips, dip, peanuts and crackers.

- Use a comma before the conjunction in a complex series.
 - The group ate fruit, cookies and cream ice cream, peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and pretzels.

Ampersand (&).

- Use the ampersand only when it is part of an organization's formal name.
 - Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Newport News Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Co.
- The ampersand should not be used in place of **and** except to accommodate space issues in web headlines, but not in body copy or print publication headlines.

Semicolon.

- When the elements in a series are long and complex or involve internal punctuation, semicolons should separate them — note the semicolon is used before the final **and** in such circumstances.
 - He leaves a son, John Smith, of Chicago; two daughters, Jane Smith of Denver and Ann Jones of New York; and a sister, Martha Smith of Houston.

Percentage.

- Do not use the percent sign (%) in body copy.
- Use numerals with **percent** in body copy.
 - 1 percent
 - .06 percent
 - 2.5 percent
- **Financial statement reporting exception.**
 - Percent sign can be used within financial statements and the management discussion and analysis.

Ellipsis.

- In general, treat an ellipsis as a three-letter word, constructed with three periods and two spaces. (...)
- Use an ellipsis to indicate the deletion of one or more words to condense quotes, text and documents. An ellipsis also may be used to indicate a thought that the speaker or writer does not complete.
- When an ellipsis occurs in the middle of a sentence, maintain the capitalization of the surrounding words.
 - ... As long as there was a base, I felt strongly that it was necessary to see the constitutional process through to its conclusion, that to do otherwise would be ... a dangerously destabilizing precedent for the future.
- If the words that precede an ellipsis constitute a grammatically complete sentence, place a period at the end of the last word before the ellipsis.
 - I no longer have a strong enough political base. ...

- When material is deleted at the end of one paragraph and at the beginning of the one that follows, place an ellipsis in both location.
 - I have always tried to do what was best for the nation. ...
 - ... However, It have become evident to me that I no longer have a strong enough political base in Congress.

Spelling

Certain words with optional spelling appear often in Municipal Association publications. To maintain consistency, use the following spellings:

- website
- Web page
- webmaster
- webcasting
- email
- State House — Capitalize when referring to a specific capitol building, with or without the state name. (Note: this goes against *AP* style but is the commonly accepted spelling for state government and some of the SC newspapers.)
- Lowcountry (one word, always capitalized)
- online (one word, not capitalized)
- indepth (one word, not capitalized)
- councilmember
- stormwater
- listserv
- wastewater (it is the preferred word to use. If the term “wastewater” does not work, use “sewage” but not sewerage)
- login, logon, logoff (Use as two words in verb form: I **log in** to my computer.)

Titles and Names

Leadership positions and job titles.

- Capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before one or more names.
 - They know President Bob Jones has served on the board.
- Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas. (Capitalizing titles in formal correspondence and meeting agendas is acceptable.)
 - The president, Bob Jones, addressed the meeting.
 - Bob Jones, vice president for engineering, attended the meeting.
- In referring to the entire title, place the position name first followed by the committee or group.
 - Chairman, board of directors

- The following formal titles are abbreviated as shown when used before a name outside of quotations: **Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen.** Spell out all except **Dr.** when they are used in quotations. (Full spelling of these titles in formal correspondence is acceptable.)
 - Gov. Jones came to the meeting.
 - He said, “Governor Jones and Dr. Smith will join us.”
- For legislative titles, capitalize when used with formal names. Otherwise, use lowercase.
 - Sen. John Smith
 - The senator walked down the hall.
- Lowercase and spell out titles when they are used in lieu of a name or to refer specifically to the position.
 - All vice presidents are invited to attend.
- In referring to an **at large** position, the position title does not contain hyphens.
 - The Municipal Human Resources Association board has one **member at large** seat.

Individual names.

- After initial use of a person’s full name, use the last name only. (Use of a courtesy title such as Ms. is appropriate in formal correspondence.)
 - John Smith, director of the orchestra, welcomes a variety of musical guests this summer season. Smith delights in introducing new talent to the music world.
- Use the middle initial for an individual name according to the person’s preference and to identify a specific individual.
- In referring to a person of the legal profession, do not use the suffix of **Esq.** or term **Esquire**.

Company/business names

- Follow the capitalization, spelling and punctuation preferences of the company/business.
 - Davis & Floyd, Inc.
 - Greene Finney & Horton, LLP
 - jB+a, Inc.

Titles of publications, movies, television programs, etc.

Italicize:

- Books
- Movies
- Operas
- Plays
- Magazines
- Newsletters (*Uptown*)
- Newspapers

- Titles of paintings, statues and other works of art
- *Hometown, SC*

Quotation marks.

- Computer game titles
- Poem titles
- Song titles
- Titles of articles and features in newspapers and magazines
- Chapter titles
- Titles of short stories and essays
- Titles of lectures, conference sessions and speeches

Capitalize:

- Software titles

Use of trademarked words.

- A trademark is a brand, symbol, word, etc. used by a manufacturer or dealer to prevent a competitor from using it. In general, use a generic equivalent unless the trademark name is essential to the story. When a trademark name is used, capitalize it.
 - Mary Smith is a real estate agent. (Use the trademark **Realtor** only if referring to her status as a member of the National Association of Realtors.)

Appendix 1: A Few Common Grammatical and Contextual Errors

Accept/except — **Except** is to exclude; **accept** is to receive.

Adopt/approve/enact/pass — Amendments, ordinances, resolutions and rules are **adopted** or **approved**. Bills are **passed**. Laws are **enacted**.

Affect/effect — **Affect** as a verb means to influence, and as a noun is best avoided. **Effect** as a verb means to cause, and as a noun means result.

Annual — An event cannot be described as **annual** until it has been held in at least two successive years.

Because/since — Use **because** to denote a specific cause-effect relationship. Use **since** to indicate lapse of time.

Beside/besides — **Beside** means at the side of. **Besides** means in addition to.

Between/among — Use **between** for two items, **among** is for three or more.

Citizen/resident — A person is a **citizen** of the United States of America. He is a **resident** of a city, town or state.

Collective nouns — Nouns that denote a unit take singular verbs and pronouns: class, committee, crowd, family, group, team.

- The committee is meeting in the training room from 1-3 p.m.

Complement/compliment — Use **complement** as a noun and verb denoting completeness or the process of supplementing something; **compliment** is a noun or verb denoting praise or expression of courtesy.

- The tie complements his suit.
- The captain complimented the sailors.

Either, or/neither, nor — Always go together in pairs.

Ensure/insure — Use **ensure** when the meaning is to guarantee; **insure** is used for references to insurance.

- He will ensure they get there on time.
- The policy insures his life.

Fewer/less — In general, use **fewer** for individual items, **less** for bulk of quantity.

Farther/further — **Farther** is a physical distance; **further** is an extension of time.

Imply/infer — A listener or reader **infers** something from the words; writers or speakers **imply** in the words they use;

It's/its — Use **it's** as a contraction of **it is**; **its** is possessive.

- It's time to go.
- The bag fell on its side.

Its/their — **Its** is used with inanimate objects, **their** with people.

Lay/lie — **Lay** is an action verb and requires an object. **Lie** indicates a state of reclining.

Me/I — **Me** is an object; **I** is a subject.

- Joan is going with Herman and me.
- Joan and I are going with Herman.

More than/over — **More than** is preferred with numbers; **over** generally refers to spatial relationships.

- **More than** 40 members attended the meeting.
- The office is **over** the bridge and to the right.

Not only, but also — Always paired.

Person/people — Use **people** when referring to multiple individuals; use **person** when referring to one individual.

- One person waited for the bus.
- Five people were ready to go.

That/which — **That** is used with essential clauses and does not require a comma; **which** is used with non-essential clauses and often requires a comma.

That/who — **That** is impersonal referring to an object. **Who** is personal referring to a person.

Toward/towards — Use **toward**.

Your/you're — Use **your** as a pronoun; **you're** is a contraction of **you are**.

- Hang up your clothes.
- You're going to the bank.

Avoid passive voice (sometimes passive construction makes more sense but be cognizant of avoiding it in most cases).

- He ate the chicken.
- *The chicken was eaten.*

Maintain a common verb tense throughout a written document.

Avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.