City of Bellevue Communications Style Guide

To ensure communications about city programs and events are consistent and readily understandable for a broad range of audiences, the City of Bellevue maintains a style guide, which is used for news releases, the website and other communications channels and tools. While some departments may have their own style guides for specialized kinds of documents, city staff is encouraged to follow this guide when preparing communications for broad external or internal audiences.

If you have questions and want to ask for a revision of the style guide, please contact staff in the [Office of Communications](). Suggested revisions will be considered by the communications team, which includes department public information officers. If the team approves of a revision, the city's extended communications network, which includes employees with communications responsibilities, regardless of title, will be notified. The revised guide, of course, will be posted.

COB communications are generally presented according to the guidelines in the Associated Press Stylebook, the style guide for newspapers and other popular media across the country. Rules in the AP Stylebook that come up often in city communications are highlighted here. The website section at the end covers stylistic guidelines for city web pages.

Acronyms – Do not follow an organization's full name with an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses or set off by dashes. Simply use the acronym on second reference. If an abbreviation or acronym would not be clear on second reference without this arrangement, do not use it. (AP: Abbreviations and Acronyms – awkward constructions)

Capitalization – In general, capitalization should be used sparingly and primarily only for proper nouns. Resist the temptation to capitalize an important document or project related to your program. Likewise, job titles are only capitalized if they appear directly before the person's name, making it a proper noun. (AP: Capitalization – titles) For headlines, only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized. (AP: Headlines)

City v. city – The word "city" is capitalized *only* when used in the proper name "*City of Bellevue*." All other references to the city should be lower case unless the word begins a sentence or title or is used in the formal title of a document. This applies to all cities. The rule is similar for "state." (AP: Capitalization; City)

Commas – Do not use serial commas (the ones between the second-to-last item in a list and the "and"). For example: *We saw coyotes in Wilburton, Cougar Mountain and Factoria.* Not *We saw coyotes in Wilburton, Cougar Mountain, and Factoria.* (AP: Comma)

Time Element – Important rules related to presenting time of events (AP: Time Element):
- **Days of the week:** Use the days of the week if the event is taking place within seven days before or after the current date. "*No resident will come away feeling fleeced at the sheep-*

shearing Saturday" Use the month and figure otherwise. Do not include the year "*The project is expected to be complete on Nov. 14.*" We always include the date the news release is sent and posted, which provides readers with a reference point.

Months: When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out when using alone or with a year alone. (AP: Months)

No ordinal endings: *May 24*, not *May 24th*; *Nov. 2*, not *Nov. 2nd*; *Jan. 31*, not *Jan. 31st* (AP: Dates).

Money – With money, we do not include ".00" if no change is involved. For example: *The pet license fee is $60*, not *$60.00*. (AP: Cents)

Numbers – Use words to represent numbers and ordinals up to the number 10, then use numerals. When you start talking millions, billions or trillions, use a numeral with million, billion or trillion. Examples: *One, two, three, fourth, seventh, 10; 12; 15th; 27; 29,000; 5 million*. (AP: Numerals)

Streets and Addresses – When streets are referenced without an address, the name is written out, including the directional, i.e., *148th Avenue Northeast*, *Northeast Fourth Street*. Per numbers style above, streets with a number less than 10 are written out: *Fourth Street*, not *4th Street*. (AP: Addresses)

Percent – Always write out "percent" and use numerals with it: *1 percent, 50 percent, 17 percent*. (AP: Percent)

Phone Numbers – *425-452-7999*, not *(425) 452-7999* or *425.452.7999*.

Times – Times are rendered without the ":00." Go lowercase, with periods for the "*a.m.*" and the "*p.m.*" (AP, Times)
- Good: *9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.*
- Bad: *9:00 AM to 5:30 PM* or *9 am to 5:30 pm*.

Titles – In general, confine capitalization to formal titles used directly before an individual's name (AP: Capitalization – titles):
- **Lowercase:** Lowercase and spell out titles when they are not used with an individual's name: *The president issued a statement. The mayor hailed the new park. The city manager will appear at the ceremony.* Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas: *The deputy mayor, Jennifer Robertson, will present the award. Chris Salomone, director of Planning and Community Development, took the lead on the initiative.* Also could be *director of the Planning and Community Development Department* or *Chris Salomone, Planning and Community Development director.*
- **Uppercase:** Capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before one or more names: *Pope Benedict XVI, President Barack Obama, Mayor Andy Griffith,*

Transportation Director Dave Berg, City Manager Emilio Estevez, Councilmember Frida Kahlo.

- **City Council:** Capitalize when part of a proper name: *the Bellevue City Council.* Retain capitalization if the reference is to a specific council but the context does not require the city name: *the City Council approved the light rail agreement.* On second reference, lowercase council: *It was the third time the council accepted the award.*
- **Councilmember:** It's one word, not two. It's capitalized when it comes immediately before the member's name.
- **City Hall:** Capitalized when referring to Bellevue's City Hall, whether Bellevue appears in front of it or not. (AP: City Hall)

Website Style

Basics

- Think from an impartial, impatient user's perspective. Write at least 50 percent less than you would if you were writing for print. Pleasing your supervisor or the representative of a specific program with unnecessary text and graphics about a program does a disservice to users.
- If there is a demand for very specific information, insert hyperlinks to necessary documents in Word or PDF.
- Write in the active voice and use simple sentence structure. Break up long paragraphs with bulleted or numbered lists.
- Use an informal and personal style of writing vs. legalese or bureaucratese. On the other hand, don't be too informal or cutesy.
- Avoid exclamation points.

Linking

- When you insert a link to a file or web page:
    - Avoid saying, "click here" or "go to."
    - Instead, specify the file or web page's name and include descriptive text.
      Example: The [Internet Style Guide](#) provides complete information about writing for the city website. The [AP Stylebook](#) addresses commas.
- Only the most pertinent links should be part of the text.
- Less relevant (minor, illustrative, parenthetic, footnote) links should be included at the bottom of the page, maybe with bullet points or in the related links section, where they are available but not distracting.
- Unless you are linking to another Bellevue web page, make "_blank" the target, so the link opens a new window instead of sending the user to a new page. This goes for file and Internet links.
- If you are entering a file link to a file more than 10 megabytes in size, please note its size in parentheses.

Photos and graphics
- When inserting a photo or other kind of image, add descriptive text in the field for "alt text." This mouseover text provides accessibility for people with visual impairments who use electronic screen readers.
- Photos of people who are not staff should have signed releases