Town of Webster
Style Guide

Purpose

The purpose of this style guide is to expand consistency throughout internal and external communications distributed by the Town of Webster and those acting on behalf of the Town of Webster. By promoting consistency, we avoid making our audiences reinterpret our words over and over. This guide reflects best practices for local government communications. In giving these guidelines, a style guide will help residents and other consumers of our content best understand what we are trying to say.

While these recommendations will guide communications for the Town of Webster, issues not covered in this guide should refer to AP Style and Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

<u>Audience</u>

- Consider your audience. Craft your message and use an appropriate tone with your target audience in mind.

- If providing information on Town services or a Town project, make this information easily identifiable and provide any follow-up directives in plain language.

- Address the audience as "you" whenever possible.

- Favor "residents" or "community" over "citizens."

Overall Editorial Style

1. To preserve clarity throughout communications originating from the Town of Webster, format, style, and usage should be similar throughout the communication.

2. Choose clarity over cleverness.

3. Contractions are welcome, however please avoid if preparing formal communication on behalf of the Town.

4. If you use an acronym not universally recognized or well known to residents, write out the full name the first time and indicate the acronym. Acronyms may be used in all subsequent usages. Examples: Webster Economic Development Alliance (WEDA) and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG).

5. Avoid passive language. Examples: Use "you can" over "you may be able to," and "save the number in your records," over "the number should be saved in your records."

6. Be brief when possible. Be concise and aim for short sentences, but do not sacrifice clarity for brevity.

7. Avoid clichés, colloquialisms, and jargon, unless you are sure your audience is aware of the terminology you are using.

8. Avoid the overuse of formatting for emphasis (Examples: bold, italics, underline, capitalization, etc.). Use sparingly and appropriately; when using, it is recommended to not use more than one of these styles at one time.

Capitalization

Follow a consistent capitalization scheme. Consistency ensures that internal and external content is perceived as trustworthy and reliable. Use of an inconsistent capitalization scheme undermines trustworthiness; therefore, the following are the recommended capitalization guidelines:

Capitalize proper nouns, including names of individuals, places, and agencies.

In English, three types of words are capitalized: the first word of a sentence, the pronoun 'I', and proper nouns, as identified above. Capitalization is also a mark of formality, therefore using capitalization judiciously can help clarify if it is being used to identify a specific person, office, or municipality, or a more general noun. Overuse of capitalization can cause users confusion by implying formality or officialness where it does not exist.

Treatment of Names

Personal names
Use full names on first reference. When writing internal communications, about Webster staff members, or about our work, use first names on subsequent mentions. When writing about others, the recommendation is to primarily use last names in subsequent mentions.

Personal titles
Personal titles should not be capitalized unless they precede a name. Examples:

> *The **doctor** performed surgery.*

> ***Doctor Pepper** performed surgery.*

If addressing or discussing an elected official or notable person in the capacity of their position, their title should be noted. In this case, honorifics should precede the official's full name on first reference. All subsequent references should include honorifics followed by last name. Example:

> ***President George Washington** is the father of our country. **President Washington** was unanimously elected to office.*

State, county, city, and town names
State names should be spelled out when writing. Example:

> *The Town of Webster is located in **New York**.*

In formal correspondence, state names are recommended to be spelled out within the address block. For more casual and widespread written correspondence, official postal abbreviations are acceptable.

County, city, and town names should be spelled out, as well. Example:

*Webster is located in the northeast corner of **Monroe County**.*

When using the words state, county, city, or town generically, these words should be lowercase. Example:

*There are 62 **counties** in New York State.*

The exception to the above convention is when referring to the Town of Webster as the "Town." In this case it is appropriate to capitalize the word "Town" to allow readers to infer you are referring to the Town of Webster. Please ensure the "Town of Webster" is used before referring to Webster as the "Town." Example:

*The **Town of Webster** provides quality of life services for our entire community. Residents have come to rely on programs like leaf collection, snow removal, and material pickup and delivery provided by the **Town**.*

Punctuation

Bulleted lists
Capitalize the first word of each bullet. Do not use semicolons after points in a bulleted list. Include a period at the end of the bullet only if that point is a complete sentence. Example:

When you go to the market, please buy:

- *Asparagus*
- *Cherries*
- *Strawberries*

Colons
Capitalize the first word after a colon, only if what follows is a complete sentence. Examples:

I have several favorite animals: cats, dogs, and rabbits.

I have several favorite animals: Dogs were my favorite animal growing up, but now cats are at the top.

Commas
Use of the Oxford comma is recommended. In a list of three or more, include a comma before the conjunction. Example:

Manny, Moe, and Jack will be at the meeting.

Dashes
When offsetting a phrase with dashes you should use the longer em dash (—), which is **Alt + 0151** on PCs, with a space on either side of the dash. Example:

The extensive recreation programming through Webster Parks & Recreation —youth, adult, and 55+—supports all members of our community.

Although the preference is to use words rather than symbols, in some contexts you may use an en dash to convey a range of numbers. For example, both *10–20 students* and *10 to 20 students* are acceptable options. En dash is **Alt + 0150** on PCs.

Spaces
Sentences should always be separated by a single space, never two spaces. The change from two spaces to one is influenced by improved readability of proportional fonts and the standardization of typographic practices.

Ampersands or plus signs
Use 'and' instead of an ampersand or plus sign unless they are part of an official title or company name. Examples:

Webster Parks & Recreation (department name)

Barton & Loguidice (company name)

Ellipses
Use of the ellipsis, or three dots (…), shows an omission of words, represents a pause, or suggests there is something left unsaid. Ellipses should include three dots only.

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are tricky! They serve many purposes, and for that reason, are frequently misused.

Contractions
Contractions are shortened forms of words, omitting certain letters or sounds. While contractions should be avoided in formal writing, there is a place for them in conversational and casual communications.

Contraction	Uncontracted	Examples
—n't	not	isn't, hasn't
—'re	are	you're, they're, we're
—'d	had, would	they'd, I'd
—'ll	will	I'll, you'll, we'll
—'s	is	it's, she's
I'm	I am	—
let's	let us	—

Contractions can also have apostrophes at the beginning of a word. Please note that often times word processing software tends to default to a left-hand single quotation mark (incorrect), rather than an apostrophe (correct). Examples:

*She was born in the early **'90s**.*

***'Twas** the night before Christmas.*

Apostrophes and possessive nouns
Rules about forming possessive nouns cause the most apostrophe confusion.
Depending on what type of noun you are making possessive, there is some
variation.

For most singular nouns, adding –'s, is correct. Examples:

The **boy's** hat

The **author's** book

The **cat's** pajamas

For most plural nouns, adding only an apostrophe is correct. Examples:

The **boys'** hats

The **authors'** book

The **cats'** pajamas

For plural nouns that do not end in s, add –'s. Examples:

The **children's** toys

The **geese's** migration route

There are differing recommendations on making singular proper nouns that end in
's' plural. For our purposes, the recommendation is to add –'s. Examples:

Miles Davis's trumpet

Arkansas's state bird

For plural proper nouns, add only an apostrophe to make plural. Examples:

The **Joneses'** home

The **Phillips'** new car

Apostrophes and joint possession
When one thing belongs to two or more people jointly, make only the final name possessive. Examples:

Danny and Linda's grocery store (Danny and Linda co-own a grocery store.)

Manny, Moe, and Jack's parents (The three have the same parents.)

When discussing separate things belonging to different people at the same time, make all names possessive. Examples:

Danny's and Linda's grocery stores (Danny and Linda own separate grocery stores.)

Manny's, Moe's, and Jack's parents (They all have different sets of parents.)

Using possessive pronouns in joint clauses has the tendency to sound awkward (Example: You have their and my condolences). In these cases, it is best to rephrase (Example: You have our condolences).

Apostrophes and plurals
Unnecessary use of apostrophes in plural words is a common mistake. With few exceptions, apostrophes do not make nouns plural.

A good example of a rare exception to this rule is the plural form of lowercase letters, formed with an apostrophe to avoid confusion and misreading. Example:

Don't forget to dot all your is. → <u>Incorrect</u>

Don't forget to dot all your i's. → <u>Correct</u>

Numbers

Writing numbers
It is important to be consistent when writing out numbers. In nontechnical writing (the majority of writing that will come from the Town), it is best practice to write out numbers zero through one hundred, as numbers may disrupt the readability of a paragraph. Examples:

*I can name more than **ninety-nine** reasons why I love Webster!*

*The Town of Webster has approximately **45,000** residents.*

To express large numbers (millions, billions), use abbreviate as a decimal and add the word "million" or "billion" where possible. For whole millions, billions, and trillions, express using the whole number plus the word "million" or "billion." Examples:

*According to the 2020 US Census, New York City has an estimated population of **8.8 million**.*

*The minimum distance between the Earth and Saturn is around **814 million** miles.*

When using units of measurement, currency symbols, or similar units, always express numbers as numerals. Examples:

One foot is equal to 12 in.

Their home is assessed at $250,000.

Ordinal numbers

Ordinal numbers are used to indicate sequence or order (Example: First or 1st). Although in conversation it is common to speak using ordinal numbers (Example: Her birthday is on May tenth), in writing, the recommendation is to avoid using ordinal numbers. This shift is to enhance readability and is consistent with the AP Stylebook, the Chicago Manual of Style, and the MLA Handbook. Examples:

Her birthday is on May 10.

The Town of Webster was established on February 6, 1840.

Formatting

Formatting email signatures

For clarity, email signatures should have consistent formatting across the organization. The following guidelines are recommended to all staff members utilizing email through the Town of Webster, for a unified and professional appearance.

- Use only essential information in your email signature. Street address should be avoided unless you frequently receive mail or host guests onsite.

- Use common and easily read sans serif fonts, such as Aptos, Helvetica, Calibri, or Arial, sized 12–14 points.

- Use a single, dark color. Black, navy blue, or dark grey are preferred.

- Include a simple URL to the Town of Webster website (do not include http://www).

- Avoid using taglines or quotes, as they may appear to be statements on behalf of the Town of Webster.

- Town of Webster seal may be used in email signature, however, please be sure to use a high-resolution version.

Favored examples:

John Smith
Director of Email Signatures
Town of Webster, Communications Department
585-485-9365

John Smith
Director of Email Signatures
Town of Webster, Communications Department
585-910-4087 (office)
585-485-9365 (mobile)
585-872-1352 (fax)
websterny.gov

John Smith
Director of Email Signatures
Town of Webster, Communications Department
1000 Ridge Road
Webster, New York 14580
585-910-4087 (office)
585-485-9365 (mobile)
websterny.gov

Editing, revising, and feedback

To create clear and accurate external communications, feedback from at least one other staff member should be sought out prior to distribution. While the feedback process can be difficult, it is a critical part of the writing and design process.

How to give feedback
A first round of feedback should be focused on substantive edits. Future passes through can be dedicated to stylistic changes, however early edits should be limited to changes to clarity and messaging. Ask questions when further clarity is required and be open to conferencing with the writer if they need clarification about edits, revisions, and recommendations.

Track changes in Microsoft Word is suggested for edits and feedback, however other methods may be utilized, as well.

How to receive feedback
Make the most of peer editing! When asking another staff member to give feedback, be clear on the part(s) of a draft you are looking for feedback on. While it can be nerve wracking to ask someone to revise and edit your work, the editing process helps refine our message for distribution to our audiences.