



AWSP'S GOT **STYLE**

OFFICIAL WRITING & DESIGN STANDARDS OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A Brief Introduction

This style guide is for use in all written materials from the Association of Washington School Principals. This includes materials for both print and the Web.

The majority of our guide was borrowed and adapted from the Washington State School Directors Association Guide. A special thanks to WSSDA for helping us put this together.

A list of references is included at the end for additional assistance.

We will update this guide and welcome suggested changes or additions.

Please contact the communications director if you have suggestions or questions about applying these guidelines.

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Style Guide FAQs

What is a style guide?

A style guide is a set of standards for the writing and design of publications, either for general use or for a specific document, organization, or field.

What is a style guide not?

It's not meant to dismiss a communicator's voice or diminish creativity. It's not meant to complicate things, although it might seem to at first.

When should I use the style guide?

Use the style guide any time you are not sure about the correct capitalization, punctuation, grammar, format, word, phrase, etc. If you don't find the answer, email the communications department. We can find an answer and update the style guide.

Why do we need a style guide?

A style guide helps the organization maintain consistency in its writing, grammar, design and branding. It also helps ensure the publications follow accepted grammatical rules and best practices for writing. By providing direction, a guide can also eliminate the waste of time in trying to decide what rule to follow, since different authorities can disagree on how grammar should be applied.



Be Punctual with Periods

In a sentence that ends with an abbreviation, do not include two periods.



Comm' Again?

AWSP generally does not use the Oxford comma rule. However, if you feel it makes the text easier to read or understand, use it.



Dashingly Good Grammar

- Dash
- En Dash
- Em Dash

Punctuation

Periods

If a sentence ends in a URL, or an email address, the closing punctuation—usually a period—should be included. There is less danger of web users trying to make the sentence-ending period part of the URL than in the past.

In a sentence that ends with an abbreviation, do not include two periods. For example, “the conference was held in Washington, D.C.” is correct. If it ends with a question mark or exclamation mark, do include the period.

Use of periods in degree abbreviations is preferred: B.A., M.S., Ed.D
Use only one space after a period at the end of a sentence.

Comma Use

AWSP does not use the serial or Oxford comma rule. We follow the AP guideline. We omit the serial comma before the conjunction—usually “and” or “or”—except where it prevents misreading. An example of where the comma is necessary is: “To my parents, Ayn Rand and God.” Without the comma, the suggestion is that the writer’s parents are Ayn Rand and God. A comma after Rand eliminates the confusion.

Generally use a comma when linking two independent clauses (complete sentences) with a conjunction, such as “and.” For example, “The governor will announce the budget cuts Thursday, and all of the press will be listening.” Don’t use a comma if the sentence has only a compound verb and the subject isn’t repeated: She dropped the gun and surrendered. AP does allow you to omit the comma for two short clauses with expressly stated subjects. For example, “He gave me an apple and I ate it.

Hyphens and Dashes

A hyphen connects related words for clarity: president-elect

Compound modifiers get a hyphen while nouns do not: consensus building (noun), consensus-building (adjective). For example, “The consensus-building exercise resulted in true consensus building.”

Dashes can be used to set off clauses in prose as an alternative to a comma. Add a space before and after the dash: Most people—school board members included—like cookies. Em or en-dashes, which are longer than a hyphen, are preferable in this use. An em-dash can be created by holding down the Alt key and typing 0151 on the numeric keypad.

Capitalization

Capitalizing Titles and Headers

Both sentence case and title case capitalizing is allowed for titles and headers, although the choice must be consistent in any single document or product.

AWSP generally uses sentence case in headers and titles in narrative pieces such as newsletter articles, press releases and email blasts. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized. For example, the headline for a newsletter article would be written as “Improving your board through self-assessment.”

In flyers and other marketing materials, we often employ what is called “title case.” Here we follow the AP rule. We capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions with four or more letters. For example, a headline on a flyer might read, “Time to Read Your Issue of Washington Principal.” Sentence case is also appropriate for marketing materials. Generally, this decision is made by the designer.

Following AP, we use what’s known as downstyle. Words are lowercased unless a rule says to capitalize them. For example:

Capitalize common nouns that are part of a proper name, such as Libertarian Party and Spokane River. Do not capitalize in plural use, such as the Libertarian and Green parties or Columbia and Snake rivers.

Capitalize the full, formal name of an organization or event, such as the Association of Washington School Principals or the AWSP Fall Summit. Do not capitalize if it is a partial reference, such as the association or the annual conference. The same applies to school board and school district.

Personal Titles

Capitalize formal titles that come directly before a name: “The students were delighted when they heard they would meet President Obama.” Do not capitalize titles when they come after the name: “John Smith, superintendent, advised the school board to approve the policy.”

Never capitalize job descriptions: shortstop, police officer, attorney and so on. Do not capitalize the governor, the principal, the teacher or the superintendent, even if it is referring to a specific person.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

As a general rule, use only abbreviations that would be recognized by your audience. A few, such as NASA, FBI and CIA, can be used on all references. They do not need to be spelled out.

All familiar acronyms and abbreviations are acceptable in headlines. In text, however, the name should usually be spelled out in full near the beginning of the narrative.



Just in Case...

Both sentence case and title case capitalizing is allowed for titles and headers, although the choice must be consistent in any single document or product.

AWSP

Abbreviating Our Name

When abbreviating our association's name, we refer to it as "AWSP," not "The AWSP."

Acronyms and Abbreviations (Continued)

If the abbreviation is generally sounded out as a word, for example WASA or WSSDA, you do not use an article before it. For example, it should be "WSSDA is set to testify on Thursday," not "The WSSDA is set to testify..." We also generally do not include "the" in front of association names, including our own:

On the other hand, where the abbreviation is sounded out by letter, you do generally place the article before it. For example, "The FBI is investigating" or "The CIA would not comment on the matter." One exception to this rule is our own name, "AWSP." We do not include "the" in front of it.

Readability

Research shows that when it comes to business communications, as opposed to say a novel or a play, all audiences prefer simpler writing. No matter whether it is a reader with a Ph.D. or a high school education, people prefer easier reading materials.

What Affects Readability?

Readability is affected by many factors, including white space, graphics, headers and structure. For the purposes of this style guide, our focus is on readability in terms of the complexity of the writing. In this area, the focus is on using short paragraphs, short sentences and short words. Sentences should be direct, with limited clauses and punctuation. They should not be passive. Subject, verb, object is the rule.

The reason we prefer short paragraphs is that research also shows that readers tend to skip past large blocks of text, especially on smartphone and computer screens. Blocks of text are intimidating. So when in doubt, split up the paragraph. Generally, do not include more than three or four sentences in a paragraph.

Readability Tools

There are many tools to measure the complexity of writing. Among the most common are the Flesch readability and Flesch-Kincaid grade level measures. Both of these are conveniently available on your MSWord spell checker. To gain access, simply go to the "File" tab of a Microsoft Word document, select options and then proofing. Check the box marked "show readability statistics" and the "OK," and you are all set.

Now, whenever you run spellcheck, you will also be given a convenient readout of "Reading Ease" and "Grade Level." The readout will also provide the percentage of passive sentences, sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, word count and a host of other interesting items.

Readability Goals at AWSP

At AWSP, our goal is to keep written materials at about grade 12 or below, preferably in the grade 8-to-10 range. In terms of reading ease, we shoot for 45 to 60. This guide, for example, falls within that range. For a reference, typical reading levels are: Reader's Digest, 65; Time Magazine, 52 and the Harvard Business Journal, about 32.

These goals apply to all publications, Web writing, email blasts and other written materials. While short paragraphs, short sentences and short words are good general rules, they are not all powerful. There are many times when a more nuanced, sometimes longer, word will take the place of three or four. Rhythm and pacing in sentences are important. And authors should be allowed to express style.

However, if Herman Melville, author of *Moby Dick*, could write at an average 58 reading ease, so can our fantastic writers at AWSP.

By the way, this readability section was written at grade level 8.2 with a reading ease of 59.8.

Gender

Avoid racial or sexual stereotyping and language. Use he or she, or make the usage plural: they. Many words now have neutral alternatives: firefighter, police officer, chair or chairperson. Use these rather than assuming a particular gender.

Citations and Sources

It is often necessary to cite or credit resources. AWSP uses a modified APA style. We modify APA style by using full names, as a courtesy to our resources, many of whom are people we know. When in doubt, use formal APA citation style:

Sourcing a book: Jamie Vollmer (2010). *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*. First Paperback Edition. Fairfield, IA.

Sourcing a periodical: Elissa Dyson (October 2015). "2015 Small Schools Tour travels to Clark, Cowlitz and Lewis Counties." WSSDA Direct, p. 1.

Sourcing a website: Washington State School Directors' Association. (December 2015). Gov. Inslee Proclaims January as School Board Recognition Month. Retrieved from WSSDA website <http://wssda.org/Newsroom/NewsReleasesandStatements.aspx>.



He or She

Use skillful writing to avoid putting two words together with slashes: he/she. If necessary, say he or she.



Giving Credit

When in doubt, use formal APA citation style for citations and sources.

Frequently Used Information

Academic year	2015-2016
Centuries	1900s 21st century
Copyright	Everything we hand out or create at WSSDA is already “copyrighted.” But marking it with the © symbol creates notice to others that says “WSSDA owns this content, please ask to use it.” When generating content, ask “Will we be handing out material with ideas or other content that our department or WSSDA does not want stolen and/or used by another person or entity without our permission?” If the answer is yes, copyright materials this way: Copyright © 2016 Washington State School Directors’ Association. Questions about whether or not to use a ©? Contact Heidi Maynard at h.maynard@WSSDA.org.
Dates	Dates are indicated by cardinal, not ordinal numbers: April 1, not April 1st
Dollars and cents	\$29.75 \$45 \$4 billion 45 cents
Numbers	Spell out one through nine. Use figures for 10 and above. Use figures for ages: 5-year-old boy. For large numbers, use a figure followed by the word: 3 million, \$4 billion Use commas in larger numbers: 1,104 attendees, but not in addresses or years. Spell out percent instead of using % : 18 percent not 18% For plurals of numbers, add the letter “s”: 100s (no apostrophe). Contractions of years take an apostrophe: Class of ‘92.
Phone numbers	217.528.9688 or (217)528-9688
States	Follow AP Style and spell out Washington in prose. Do not use WA.
Time of day	9:30-11 a.m. (do not use 00; do not use a.m. or p.m. twice, no spaces around the hyphen) 9 a.m.-noon (lowercase noon) 10 a.m.-3:45 p.m.
Time of year	Lowercase spring, summer, fall, winter unless referring to a specific time frame, as in Spring 2015 (note no comma). In most prose usage, spell out the month: The first meeting was held in October 2005. (note no comma). When writing a full date, punctuate: December 25, 2015.

Frequently Used Words and Phrases

association: no cap **The Association of Washington School Principals:** cap specific

assure/ensure/insure: To “assure” a person of something is to make him or her confident of it. According to AP style, to “ensure” that something happens is to make certain that it does, and to “insure” is to issue an insurance policy.

bachelor’s degree/master’s degree: lowercase possessive, not plural

board of directors: no cap

capital: seat of government, usually being a city, such as Olympia. Capital can also be used in a financial sense to describe money, equipment, or property in a business or corporation among other uses. A **capitol**, on the other hand, is a building where legislators meet to have legislative sessions. Capitalize it if you are referring to the building in Olympia or Washington, D.C.

chairperson or chair: not chairwoman or chairman

database: one word

decision-maker/decision-making

email: no hyphen

extracurricular: no hyphen

flyer vs. flier: AWSP generally uses “flyer” for a handbill, “flier” for something that flies.

fundraiser, fundraising: no hyphen

grade school or elementary school, middle school, high school: two words, capitalize only if part of full title of school

Internet: with cap

judgment: no first “e”

Legislature: always cap **legislators:** no cap **legislative:** no cap

nonprofit: no hyphen not-for-profit hyphenated

online: no hyphen

Frequently Used Words and Phrases (Continued)

self-evaluation: no cap in general, but the title of a workshop could be capitalized

social media: capitalize **Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google** and even **Googling**

staff is a collective noun and takes a singular verb. So say **staff is**, rather than **staff are**, just as spell check advises.

superintendent: no cap

vice president: no hyphen **president-elect:** hyphen

Use **Washington state** or **state of Washington**. Do not capitalize “state.”

website: no cap, one word, no hyphen web do not capitalize



Fonts and Formatting

Emphasis

Best practice is to choose words that do the emphasizing for you. But where you need more emphasis, bold is fine if used consistently. Consistently use your standard font for content, and if necessary use bold for headings and subheadings, and indents, rules and spacing to make different sections stand out. Do not underline for emphasis. Underlining has come to indicate links. Do not use all caps for emphasis.

Italics

We italicize publication titles, and long quotations if they are set apart.

If quotations are embedded into text, they retain the quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quote but the quotes themselves are not italicized.

Do not use italics for emphasis. We do not italicize links unless they are references.

Citing a Source

Do not italicize websites unless they are used as a reference. Washington State School Directors' Association. (December 2015). Gov. Inslee Proclaims January as School Board Recognition Month. Retrieved from WSSDA website <http://wssda.org/Newsroom/NewsReleasesand-Statements.aspx>.

Spacing

Use only one space after a period in narrative text.

Typography

The official AWSP logo and text underneath are in the typeface Avenir Next, which comes in light, roman (medium) and bold faces. The AWSP website and all printed materials use san serif fonts: a standard body text and a condensed font for headlines and sub headings that combine to give a “branded” clean, modern look. One exception to this rule is the magazine body copy, which is a serif font (Chaparral).

When creating email blasts, best practice is to use universal or system fonts which means selecting fonts that mimic the printed fonts in hopes of maintaining a unique, brand presence. On the next page are some we recommend.



Please Mind the Gap

Use only one space after a period in narrative text.

Print

The logo uses a font called Avenir Next, which is the preferred font for print communications. However, if Avenir Next is not available on your computer, Lato may be used as a substitute. Lato is a Google font available for free download.

Web

Arial is our preferred font for email text and web default text where font choices are limited.

Font Weight

Regular, Medium, Demi Bold, and Bold are preferred Avenir Next font weights. Please use your best judgement when choosing a font weight.

Font Size

Size 10 pt is the preferred standard font size for body copy. Please use your best judgement when choosing a font size.

Fonts

AWSP Standard Fonts	Good Substitutions
<p>Print</p> <p>Avenir Next Ultra Light <i>Avenir Next Ultra Light Italic</i> Avenir Next Regular <i>Avenir Next Italic</i> Avenir Next Medium <i>Avenir Next Medium Italic</i> Avenir Next Demi Bold <i>Avenir Next Demi Bold Italic</i> Avenir Next Bold <i>Avenir Next Bold Italic</i> Avenir Next Heavy <i>Avenir Next Heavy Italic</i></p> <p><i>(Condensed versions of each Avenir Next font are also acceptable)</i></p> <p><i>Magazine body copy:</i></p> <p>Chaparral Pro Regular <i>Chaparral Pro Italic</i> Chaparral Pro Bold <i>Chaparral Pro Bold Italic</i></p> <p>Web/Email</p> <p>Arial (all styles)</p>	<p>Print</p> <p>Lato Hairline <i>Lato Hairline Italic</i> Lato Light <i>Lato Light Italic</i> Lato Regular <i>Lato Italic</i> Lato Bold <i>Lato Bold Italic</i> Lato Black <i>Lato Black Italic</i></p> <p><i>(Lato is a free Google font available for both PC and Mac computers.)</i></p> <p>Web/Email</p> <p>Helvetica (all styles)</p>

Logos and Color Palette

Official AWSP Logos



AWSP's traditional logo (left) is our primary logo and should be used in the majority of our publications. AWSP's seal-style logo (right) is our secondary logo and can be used in instances where the allocated space is perfectly square (i.e. social media profile images) or when presented alongside seal-style logos of other associations. The seal-style logo can also be used on giveaways and tchotchkes that require a square or round graphic.

An all-black logo or an all-white logo against a colored background are also acceptable variations of each logo.

A few tips:

Be careful not to change the proportions of the logo when placing into an application. When sizing a logo inside a picture box, holding down the shift key as you drag the box will keep the horizontal and vertical dimensions linked.

Do not modify the logo unless there is a special circumstance (see sidebar).

If unsure, consult with your designer to determine which version is best for the application you are using.

Official Color Palette

Gray (80%)	PMS 294	PMS 7473	PMS 152	White
Hex. 464749	Hex. 004086	Hex 1AA495	Hex. EC6428	Hex. FFFFFF

Logo Explanation

The AWSP torch is comprised of three flames, each representing our three component levels (elementary, middle, and high school), which are at the core of our identity: blue for high school, teal for middle level, and orange for elementary.

Component Logos

There are no longer separate logos for each of the component boards (ESPAW, AWMLP and WASSP).

For each component, please use the AWSP logo with either the component acronym or full name spelled out underneath.

Special Circumstances

There are some instances where the style, specifications or dimensions of both standard AWSP logos will not work, and a special adaptation of the logo may be required. Some potential examples:

- Name badges
- Conference giveaways
- Apparel

Please talk to the communications director for instructions on how to proceed in your particular situation if you find that the logos are not working for you.



Computer and Design Resources:

Free stock images:

<https://designschool.canva.com/blog/free-stock-photos/>

Color tips:

<http://www.creativepro.com/article/10-color-tips-graphic-designers>

Best practices for working with Windows:

<https://support.office.com/en-za/article/Best-practices-for-working-with-Windows>

How to add a custom dictionary in Word:

<http://support.microsoft.com/>

Using Social Media Logos:

Facebook: <https://www.facebookbrand.com/>

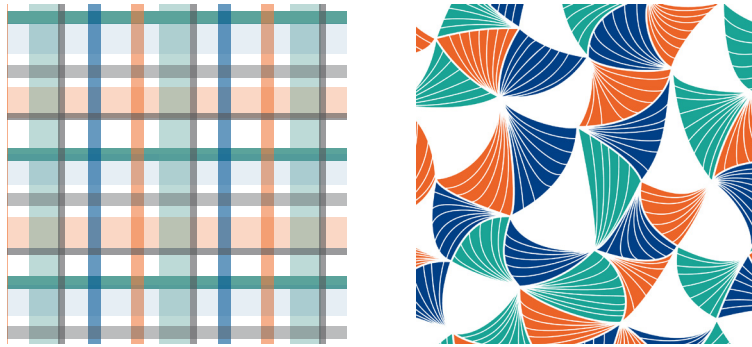
Twitter: <https://about.twitter.com/press/brand-assets>

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/brand/usinglogo.html>

Special Extras

AWSP Patterns

AWSP has two official design patterns utilizing the AWSP color palette. These patterns can be used in print collateral, as presentation backgrounds, on the website, and with promotional giveaways.



The AWSP Motto

The Association of Washington School Principals believes in the motto, **“Strong principals, strong schools, strong students.”**

Links and Resources

AP Style Guide starting point for basics and common usages:

AP Style Guide <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/02/>

For resources and citations:

- APA STYLE <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/05/>

Further reading for grammar geeks:

- <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl>
- <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/7-grammatical-errors-that-aren't>
- <http://www.grammarly.com/blog/2015/what-is-the-oxford-comma-and-why-dopeople-care-so-much-about-it/>
- <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/language-blog/>
- <http://www.amazon.com/Between-You-Me-Confessions-Comma/dp/>
- <http://www.amazon.com/Elements-Style-Illustrated-William-Strunk/dp/>

Further reading for font fanatics:

- <http://writingspaces.org/wwsg/serif-and-sans-serif-fonts>
- <http://www.urbanfonts.com/blog/2013/02/serif-vs-sans-the-final-battle/>
- <http://www.comicsanscriminal.com/>
- <https://designschool.canva.com/blog/>