



# **STATE BOARD FOR COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES STYLE GUIDE**

*STATE BOARD COMMUNICATIONS*

# Introduction

Thank you for visiting the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Style Guide! We appreciate you taking time to learn and keep our agency's language consistent. This is important as we tell our agency's story:

*Leading with racial equity, our colleges maximize student potential and transform lives within a culture of belonging that advances racial, social, and economic justice in service to our diverse communities.*

Language changes, and this style guide will change with it. Check back for updates.

If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to any member of the communications team. We're happy to help!

## Using Plain Talk

All written products produced by State Board for Community and Technical Colleges staff follow the principles of Plain Talk. The governor's office establishes and explains these principles as:

- Understanding customer needs.
  - Find out who will be reading your material, what information they are looking for and what the circumstances are.
- Include only relevant information.
  - Your customers are looking for specific information. If you try to cover too many topics, you will frustrate them and dilute your message. Stick to the basics and don't describe every policy change or service you provide.
- Use words your customers use.
  - Choose words your customers normally use, not what attorneys or your coworkers use. If you must use a specialized term, define it for your readers.
- Use the "active voice."
  - The active voice shows who is responsible for doing what, which tends to eliminate confusion.
- Use personal pronouns.
  - The personal pronouns "you" and "we" can take the place of nouns, such as "all citizens" and "the department." When the writer is an "I" or a "we" and the reader is a "you," the reader understands quickly who the message is for, and who is delivering it.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short.
  - Your document will be easier to read if you keep your sentences short. Try limiting them to fewer than 20 words and your paragraphs to fewer than six sentences.
- Design clear pages.

The design of your page is as important to its readability as the words you have chosen. The right design will highlight your messages so your customers can scan the document quickly.

# Editorial Style Guide

This SBCTC style guide provides standards for writing clear and consistent documents, publications and web pages. Words and phrases are based on a blend of the Associated Press Stylebook, Plain Talk principles and established agency usage.

The Gregg Reference Manual is acceptable for correspondence documents. For words and phrases not included in this style guide, please refer to the AP Stylebook, or ask a member of the communications team. News releases will follow strict AP Style.

This guide does not apply to legal documents.

## Acronyms

Avoid using acronyms when possible unless the acronyms are already well known to the average reader (for example, FBI, CIA). Often, a generic word such as agency, program, committee or center will work on second reference. Also, do not use an acronym if the entity is only mentioned once.

If there's no way to avoid using an acronym, spell out the name of the entity in the first reference, followed by the acronym in parenthesis. The acronym can then be used in all subsequent references.

**Correct:** *The Department of Enterprise Services (DES) sets purchasing rules for state agencies. To find the correct contact, refer to the DES staff roster.*

**Better:** *The Department of Enterprise Services sets purchasing rules for state agencies. To find the correct contact, refer to the department's staff roster.*

## Bullets

Introduce lists with a short phrase or sentence, followed by a colon. Capitalize the first word in each bullet and use periods at the end of each line.

**Correct:** *The goal is to create opportunities for Tribal students to:*

- *Earn in-demand associate/bachelor's degrees related to natural resources that incorporate Indigenous and Tribal knowledge systems.*
- *Engage work-based learning, field classrooms, and field experience within traditional Tribal territory.*
- *Receive mentorship from Tribal employers and Tribal scholars.*
- *Experience educational equity and student support.*

# Citations

Citations should be used in documents citing specific facts to lend credibility to the document. The citation allows readers to refer to source material for further information.

Documents that should use citations include one-pagers and issue briefs. Press releases and other documents following AP Style should, whenever possible, link to the citation.

For more information, refer to [Purdue OWL](#).

Hint: [Grammarly's free citation generator](#) will automatically create properly formatted citations.

# Days, Months, Years and Times

## Dates

When the full date is used in a sentence, use a comma after the day and after the year: *The emergency order will end on Oct. 31, 2022.*

To refer to a particular date, do not use ordinal numbers (such as 1st, 2nd or 3rd).

**Correct:** *The fiscal year begins July 1.*

**Incorrect:** *The fiscal year begins July 1st.*

Certain months are abbreviated before the date. See *months*.

## Days of the week

Always capitalize days of the week. Do not abbreviate, except when needed in tabular form. To save space in a table, use Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat (three letters, without periods).

## Decades

Use Arabic figures to indicate decades of history. Use an apostrophe to indicate numerals that are left out; show plural by adding the letter s: the 1890s, the '90s, the Gay '90s, the 1920s, the mid-1930s.

**Correct:** *Peace symbols were popular in the '70s.*

**Incorrect:** *Peace symbols were popular in the 70's.*

## Months

Always capitalize the name of the month. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.* and *Dec.* (spell out all other months): *Legislative session will begin Jan. 8, 2024. It is supposed to end March 7, 2024.*

When referring to a month without a date or year, spell it out: *I love driving to Eastern Washington in August.*

When referring to a month with a year only (no date), do not use a comma: *The governor will announce his proposal in mid-December 2024.*

In tabular material, use these three-letter forms without a period: *Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec.*

## Time of day

Use figures except for *noon* and *midnight*. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes. If it's an exact hour no “:00” is required.

**Correct:** *11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 9-11 a.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

Avoid such redundancies as *10 a.m. this morning, 10 p.m. tonight* or *10 p.m. Monday night*. Use *10 a.m.* or *10 p.m. Monday*.

## Years

When a phrase refers to a month and day within the current year, do not include the year. *The hearing is scheduled for June 26.*

If the reference is to a past or future year, include the year and set it off with commas: *Feb. 14, 2025, is the target date.*

Use an s without an apostrophe to indicate spans of decades or centuries: *the 1890s, the 1800s.*

Unlike most numerals, it is acceptable to start a sentence with a year: *2024 was a very good year.*

# Higher Education Punctuation and Use

## Advisor

An advisor is a college professional who gives advice, such as academic advisor or career advisor. Do not use “adviser.”

## Academic degree holders

If mention of degrees is necessary to establish someone's credentials, the preferred form is to avoid an abbreviation and use instead a phrase such as: *John Jones, who has a doctorate in psychology.*

If using an abbreviation is necessary, use BA, MS, PhD, with a comma after the last name. *John Snow, PhD, spoke.* Note that SBCTC does not use periods in these abbreviations, which is a departure from AP Style.

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.

**Correct:**

*Linda Green, PhD*

*Dr. Linda Green*

**Incorrect:** *Dr. Linda Green, PhD*

If you have a long list of people with academic degrees after their names, use semicolons to separate them. *Joining the State Board this evening will be John Doe, PhD; Jane Smith, PhD; and Mary Johnson, PhD.*

## Academic degrees

Capitalize a degree if it is the formal name of the degree. *South Puget Sound Community College today announced its first Bachelor in Applied Science (BAS) degree in Craft Beverage Management and Quality Assurance.*

Do not capitalize a degree if it is not part of the formal name of the degree. *The degree will be a bachelor's in applied science in craft beverage management and quality assurance.*

Use an apostrophe in *bachelor's degree*, *a master's*, etc., but there is no possessive in *Bachelor of Arts* or *Master of Science*.

Also: an *associate degree* (not an *associate's degree*).

## Academic departments

Lowercase when not using the official, proper name: *biology department*, *English department*,  
*math department*.

Uppercase when part of an official name:

*Columbia Basin College Department of Math and Sciences*  
*Department of English*  
*Department of Biology*

## Academic honors

When referring to academic honors, use the phrase “with honors” (lowercase).

**Example:** *Beth holds a bachelor's degree with honors in business management from the University of Washington.*

**Not:**

*Beth holds an honors bachelor degree in business management.*  
*Beth holds an honors Bachelor of Business Administration degree.*

## Alma mater

The college someone attended (lowercase unless it's part of a formal title).

## Alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae

Use the gender-neutral terms *alum* or *alums*, which are both approved in the Associated Press Stylebook. *Bellevue College alums gathered for a celebration. A Bellevue College alum donated \$10,000 to the college foundation.*

The Associated Press Stylebook also recognizes the following traditional terms, however, SBCTC prefers gender-neutral language to be inclusive of people whose gender identity is not strictly male or female.

- Alumnus — singular male.
- Alumni — plural male or a plural male and female.
- Alumna — singular female.
- Alumnae — plural female.

## Associate degree

Use associate degree, not associate's degree.

## Awards

Capitalize *award* or *prize* only when those names part of an official name: *The Aspen Institute on Tuesday announced the 150 community colleges that are eligible to compete for the \$1 million 2023 Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence. A jury will select the prize winner in late spring 2023.*

## Bachelor's degree

Use an apostrophe — bachelor's degree.

## Campus-wide

Hyphenate campus-wide: *A campus-wide event.*

## Center of Excellence

Uppercase center when used as part of a formal name. Otherwise, use lowercase. Upon first reference, spell out the name of the center. After that, the word “center” may be used. *The Pacific Northwest Center of Excellence for Clean Energy at Centralia College published a report. The center is one of the few in the nation.* Plural: Centers of Excellence not Center of Excellences.

## Course names

Capitalize official course names. After the first reference, a lowercase reference may be used. For example: *There is a long waitlist for the Survey of Biology class. The biology class is popular for students who plan to transfer to a university.*

## Coursework

Coursework is one word.

## CTC

Spell out “community college” and “technical college.” “CTC” is acceptable in internal, agency-use only documents.

## ctcLink

Note that “ctc” is lowercase followed by a capital L.

## College(s)

Capitalize the word college only if it is part of a formal name. Otherwise, lowercase. *Spokane Falls Community College has a lovely campus. The college also offers a wide variety of programs.*

## Curriculum

Curriculum is singular. Curricula is plural.

## English as a second language

Spell out English as a second language on first reference. ESL is acceptable for second reference. Capitalize when referring to the formal name of a program.

### Examples:

*Marta Garcia, who teaches English as a second language, was honored at a ceremony. Kathy Alfaro, a new English language instructor, visited the student club. Dozens of students are enrolled in the college’s English as a Second Language program.*

For internal SBCTC documents, it is also appropriate to use the term “English Language Acquisition.” However, the general public typically does not understand this term.

## English for Speakers of Other Languages

Spell out “English for Speakers of Other Languages” when used for the first time in copy. It’s acceptable to use “ESOL” in following references.

## FAFSA

Spell out *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* when used for the first time in copy. There is no need to put the acronym in parentheses after spelling it out because FAFSA is a widely recognized. In following references, use FAFSA.

## FTES and FTEF

Spell out full-time equivalent students (FTES) or full-time-equivalent faculty (FTEF), followed by the acronym in parenthesis. The acronym can then be used in later references.

**Correct:** *The number of full-time equivalent students (FTES) has gone up. The growth in FTES may be due to the economy.*

**Better:** *The number of full-time equivalent students (FTES) has gone up. The enrollment growth may be due to the economy.*

**Do not just use FTE.** It’s either FTES (full-time equivalent students) or FTEF (full-time equivalent faculty).



## GED®

Although news articles written in Associated Press style do not typically include a registered trademark after GED®, SBCTC staff should use a trademark symbol in all references to avoid any possibility of a trademark violation.

## GPA

Spell out *grade point average* when used for the first time in copy. It is acceptable to use *GPA* in following references. There is no need to put an acronym in parenthesis after the first mention because most people recognize the acronym *GPA*.

## High School Equivalency

Use *high school equivalency degree (HSE)* when used for the first time in copy. It is then acceptable to use *HSE* in subsequent references.

## International students

Do not use “foreign students.”

## Pell Grant

Pell Grant program (the p is lower-case).

## President

Capitalize and spell out when preceding a name. Lowercase elsewhere. *President Jane Doe, John Doe, president.*

## President’s List

Capitalize both words.

## Professional-technical

Use a hyphen: *professional-technical programs.*

## Professor

Capitalize and spell out when preceding a name. Lowercase in following references. *Professor Jane Doe. John Doe, professor.*

## Programs

Capitalize p in the word “program” only when it is part of the formal name.

**Correct:** *South Puget Sound Community College’s biology program is very popular.*

**Correct:** *Grays Harbor College’s Survey of Biology program is full.*

**Incorrect:** *Our Financial Aid Programs (it should be financial aid programs)*

## Registered nurse

Spell out “registered nurse” at the first reference. Acceptable to use abbreviation “RN” in following references.

## Quarters

Lowercase fall quarter, winter quarter, spring quarter, summer quarter.

**Correct:** Enrollments increased fall quarter.

**Incorrect:** Enrollments increased Fall quarter.

**Incorrect:** Enrollments increased Fall Quarter.

## SBCTC and State Board

Use “SBCTC” when referring to our agency. There is no need to include “the” before SBCTC.

**Correct:** *The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) is located in Olympia and has three mission areas: adult basic education, workforce education and transfer. SBCTC has more than 200 employees.*

Use State Board (both words capitalized) when referring to the 9-member, governor-appointed board. Use lowercase “board” when introducing with a definite article.

**Correct:** *The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges is meeting in Spokane. The board is looking for input on a policy.*

## Scholastic Aptitude Test

Spell out Scholastic Aptitude Test but use SAT on second reference.

## Systemwide

Systemwide, not system-wide.

## WASFA

Spell out Washington Application for State Financial Aid and put the acronym in parentheses. Use WASFA upon second reference. *To be considered for financial aid, students should fill out the Washington State Application for Financial Aid (WASFA). The WASFA is specifically for undocumented students who cannot access federal financial aid but may be eligible for state financial aid.*

If you refer to FAFSA in the same article, follow the same protocol — i.e., spell out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and use FAFSA on second reference.

If you are writing about the FAFSA only, with no mention to WASFA, there is no need to put FAFSA in parentheses. See “FAFSA.”

## Workforce

Workforce is one word.

## Work-study

Work-study is hyphenated. *The FAFSA is used to determine eligibility for work-study programs.* Capitalize when referring specifically to the federal program. *Federal Work-Study is a financial aid program that provides part-time jobs for financially eligible students.*

## Legislative Punctuation and Use

### Biennium

In Washington, a two-year state budget is adopted in odd-numbered years. The words *biennial* and *biennium* are not capitalized unless they start a sentence. Use all four figures of the first year of the biennium, followed by the last two numbers of the final year.

**Correct:**

*The Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges asked the Legislature to fund workforce programs in the 2023-25 biennial budget.*

*Revenue projections were down for the 2023-25 biennium.*

**Incorrect:** Revenue projections were down for the 2023-25 Biennium.

**Incorrect:** Revenue projections were down for the 2023-2025 Biennium.

### Bill numbers

Legislative citations should be spelled out on first reference and abbreviated on following references. First reference: House Bill/Senate Bill xxxx (YEAR). Every reference thereafter: HB/SB xxxx.

### Capitol, capital

Capitol (capitalized) is used to refer to a building or the campus on which the building is located: *Protestors gathered at the state Capitol on Thursday. Hundreds of people rallied at the Temple of Justice on the Capitol Campus on Tuesday.*

Capital refers to a city/town and it is lowercase: *Olympia is the capital of Washington state.*

### Fiscal year

The following guidance comes from the Office of Financial Management style guide:

When referring to a specific fiscal year, use all the figures of the year.

**Correct:** *The new funding will begin in fiscal year 2025.*

**Incorrect:** *The new funding will begin in fiscal year 25. The new funding will begin in FY25. (The FY abbreviation can be used in charts, but not in text.)*

Note: Do not identify a biennium in terms of fiscal years. It is incorrect to identify a biennium as FY25-27. Also, a fiscal year is only one year.

## Governor, Governor's Office

Governor is not capitalized unless it precedes the name of a governor. In that case, it is abbreviated. However, use the full word *governor* when emailing or writing to a governor, or including the governor's name in an invitation, flyer or other promotional material. The following guidance reflects Associated Press style and the Governor's Office style guide.

**Correct:**

*Gov. Inslee joined the discussion.*

*The governor had a successful trip to Asia.*

*The governors in the room appreciated his remarks.*

*In correspondence — Dear Governor Inslee, thank you for your support of community and technical colleges.*

*In an invitation — Please join us to hear Governor Inslee present his priorities. Governor Jay Inslee will be our keynote speaker.*

**Incorrect:**

*The Governor had a successful trip to Asia.*

*The Governors in the room appreciated his remarks.*

Governor's Office is capitalized because it is the formal name of the office.

## Legislature, legislators

Legislature is capitalized when referring to the state Legislature. Lowercase is used for the words legislative, congressional, legislator, and legislation (but capitalize the word "Congress" when referring to the institution).

**Correct:**

*The governor made his proposal to the Legislature.*

*We recommend establishing relationships with legislators.*

*Several senators back the House leaders' plan.*

*After lunch, Gov. Inslee spoke to congressional leadership about state finances.*

*Members of Congress were impressed with the presentation.*

*The meeting with legislative staff went smoothly.*

## Legislative titles and districts

In news releases, use Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens. as formal titles before one or more names, but spell out after a name:

*Sen. Drew Hansen spoke in favor of the bill.*

*Sens. Drew Hansen and Andy Billig spoke at the event.*

*Drew Hansen, a senator from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Legislative District.*

*Rep. Vandana Slatter is an advocate for our colleges.*

In all other publications except news releases, spell out the title: *"Dear Senator Hansen, thank you for supporting our college students."*

### **Correct:**

*State Sen. Andy Billig met college presidents in Spokane.*

*The event started with a speech by state Sen. Andy Billig.*

*State Rep. Drew Hansen introduced the legislation.*

*The legislation was introduced by state Rep. Drew Hansen.*

*When using more than one name: State Sens. Andy Billig and Sam Hunt and State Reps. Drew Hansen and Laurie Dolan.*

*U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal said she supported the idea.*

*U.S. Senator Patty Murray said she supported the idea.*

*Dear Senator Billig, thank you for attending our event in Spokane.*

*Dear Congresswoman Jayapal, thank you for supporting the bill.*

*Dear Senator Murray, thank you for advocating for community and technical colleges.*

SECOND REFERENCE: In news releases, do not use legislative titles before a name on second reference unless they are part of a direct quotation. *U.S. Senator Patty Murray said she would champion community and technical colleges. Murray also said she would encourage other congressional representatives to do the same.*

## **Political parties and philosophies**

Capitalize when using the name of a political party. Lowercase when using the name of a political philosophy. *The governor is a Democrat. The senator supports democracy.*

## **Locations, regions and directions**

### **Addresses**

Use the address abbreviations Ave., Blvd., and St. with numbered addresses only. *The White House address is 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.*

Without a number, spell out Avenue, Boulevard and Street. *The White House is located on Pennsylvania Avenue.*

Without a number and with more than one street name, lowercase avenue, boulevard and street. *Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues or Legion and Eastside streets.*

All similar words (*alley, drive, road, terrace, etc.*) are always spelled out. Capitalize them when part of a formal name without a number; lowercase when used alone or with two or more names. *I moved to Walnut Road. The college has locations on Walnut and Cooper Point roads.*

Always use figures for an address number: *9 Morningside Circle.*

Spell out and capitalize *First* through *Ninth* when used as street names; use figures for *10th* and above: *7 Fifth Ave., 100 21st St.*

Abbreviate compass points used to indicate directional ends of a street or quadrants of a city in a numbered address: *222 E. 42nd St., 562 W. 43rd St., 600 K St. NW.* Do not abbreviate if the number is omitted: *East 42nd Street, West 43rd Street, K Street Northwest.* No periods in quadrant abbreviations NW, SE unless customary locally.

## City/county names

“City” and “County” are only capitalized if those words are part of the municipality’s proper name. (Examples: He visited Kansas City. The meeting with King county leaders went well. We’re going to the city of Seattle.”)

When listing multiple localities, do not repeat the word “city” or “county” when you can just use one plural word. (Examples: King, Pierce and Snohomish counties are the most populous in Washington. The cities of Yakima, Wenatchee and Othello are reliant on agriculture.”)

## City/state

A comma should follow the city and the state: *Legislators meet in Olympia, Washington each January.*

## Directions

In general, lowercase north, south, northeast, northern, etc., when they indicate compass direction; capitalize these words when they designate regions.

**Correct:** *Traffic is terrible driving east on Friday afternoons.*

**Correct:** *Storms and showers are expected in much of Eastern Washington. Hazardous smoke remains a threat for Western Washington. Heartache and anger are occurring in Central Washington over drinking-water wells tainted by chemicals.*

## Numbers and numerals

### Numbers/numerals – general

Spell out numbers one through nine; use numerals for numbers 10 and up. Always spell out the number if it starts a sentence. For tables, charts and other graphics, use numerals for all number values. Note: Numerals are used for all percentages, even those less than 10.

**Examples:**

*The department hired eight faculty members last October.*

*The department director said the agency needed 12 more employees.*

*Sales grew by 5% in October and another 15% in December.*

## Ages

When referring to ages, always use figures. For example: *a 6-year-old girl; an 8-year-old law; the 7-year-old house.* Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun. *A 5-year-old boy, but the boy is 5 years old. The boy, 5, has a sister, 10. The woman, 26, has a daughter, 2 months old. The race is for 3-year-olds. The woman is in her 30s (no apostrophe). 30-something, (but Thirty-something to start a sentence).*

## Dimensions

Use all figures and spell out inches, feet, etc., to indicate depth, height, length and width. *5 inches of snow, a 5-foot man, 5 feet 6 inches tall, 6 feet wide and 5 feet high, the rug is 9 feet by 12 feet.*

## Money

If the denomination is a dollar value only (no cents), drop the zeros.

**Examples:**

*A \$7 hamburger (not a \$7.00 burger)*

*A \$100,000 truck.*

*A \$1.4 million investment.*

*A 25-cent tip.*

*He gave me 25 cents for a tip*

## Percentages

Express percentages in numerals, including numerals one through nine. Use the % sign in all instances.

**Examples:** *Mortgage rates increased from 6% to 7%. The department expects to receive a 25% increase in reimbursements.*

Fractional percentages should be presented in numeric form. **Examples:** *1.1% 10.3%* For fractions less than 1%, add a zero before the decimal. Example: *0.8%*

## Phone numbers

Use hyphens as separation.

*360-704-1234*

*360-704-1234, ext. 567*

## Capitalization

Also see *Higher Education Punctuation and Use* and *Legislative Punctuation and Use* in this guide.

## Board, board of trustees

Uppercase “board” only when the word is part of a formal name. *The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges met in October. The board welcomed public comments at the end of the meeting.*

The same rule applies to boards of trustees. *The Big Bend Community College Board of Trustees met with legislators. The board also met with staff from the Governor’s Office. At the meeting, trustees said they appreciate having the opportunity to meet as a group.*

## Building

Lowercase the word building unless it is part of a formal name. *Spokane Community College scheduled a meeting in the Student Union Building. The building has several meeting rooms.*

## Committees and councils

Uppercase *committee* or *council* only when the word is part of a formal name: *The Safety Council discussed state and federal reporting requirements. The council also discussed anti-hazing legislation.*

## Chair, chairperson

Use the gender-neutral terms *chair* or *chairperson* rather than *chairman* or *chairwoman*.

If the title precedes a person's name, use uppercase. *State Board Chair Chelsea Mason-Placek thanked everyone in the room for a successful meeting.*

If the title follows a person's name, use lowercase. *Angela Davis, chair of the Public Information Commission, said she looked forward to the upcoming meeting. She said commission members should receive an agenda soon.*

## College(s)

Capitalize the word *college* only if it is part of a formal name. Otherwise, lowercase. *Spokane Falls Community College has a lovely campus. The college also offers a wide variety of programs.*

## Congress

Capitalize *Congress* when referring to the U.S. Senate and House together; *congressional* is lowercase unless it is part of a formal name: *Members of Congress adjourned for the evening.*

## Department/division

Capitalize the word *department* or *division* if it is part of a formal name. Otherwise, the word should be lowercase: *The Education Division helps set policy for Washington's 34 community and technical colleges. The division also tracks the impact of proposed legislation on our colleges.*

## Director

Capitalize and spell out when preceding a name. Lowercase elsewhere.

### Correct:

*SBCTC Executive Director Paul Francis*

*Paul Francis, SBCTC executive director*

*Paul Francis, executive director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges*

**Incorrect:** *Paul Francis, Executive Director, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges*



Note: In correspondence or on resolutions, it is acceptable to capitalize a title after the name.

## President

Capitalize and spell out when preceding a name. Lowercase elsewhere. *President Jane Doe, John Doe, president.*

## Seasons

Lowercase unless part of a formal name.

**Correct:** *I love welcoming students back in the fall.*

**Incorrect:** I love welcoming students back in the Fall.

**Correct:** *The Fall Freshman Frenzy is underway.*

## State

State is only capitalized when part of a formal title. It is not capitalized when referring to Washington state. Examples: We live in the state of Washington. A new law took effect in Washington state. I went to school at Washington State University.

## Titles

Capitalize and spell out formal titles such as *chancellor, chair, dean, president, executive director* etc., when they precede a name. Lowercase elsewhere.

Lowercase modifiers such as *department* in *department Chair Jerome Wiesner.*

**Correct:**

*Executive Director Paul Francis thanked staff for persevering during the pandemic.*

*Paul Francis, SBCTC executive director, started working at the agency in August 2022*

*Councilmember Autumn Smith supported the idea.*

*I have a meeting with Dean of Student Services Sarah Miles next week.*

**Incorrect:**

*Paul Francis, Executive Director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, thanked staff for persevering during the pandemic.*

*Autumn Smith, Councilmember, supported the idea.*

Lowercase in instances where a title is not used with an individual's name. *The president issued a statement. The pope gave his blessing.*

Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas: *The vice president, Kamala Harris, was elected in 2020. Pope Francis, the current pope, was born in Argentina.*

Note: In correspondence or on resolutions, it is acceptable to capitalize a title after a person's name.

## Washington state

When referring to our state, the word “state” is lowercase unless it’s part of a proper noun. *There are 34 community and technical colleges in Washington state. The Washington State Wine Commission will meet on Thursday.*

## Prefixes

Generally, with common prefixes, a hyphen is not necessary unless it would avoid possible confusion. *I re-covered the sofa but I recovered the document.*

Double-e combinations with the prefixes pre- and re- are no longer hyphenated (such as preelection, preexisting, reemphasize, reemploy). Cooperate and coordinate are never hyphenated.

Hyphenate when the prefix is followed by a proper noun (capitalized word).

Prefix	Example	Exception
anti-	antianxiety	anti-vaccination
bi-	biweekly, biannual, biennial	
co-	coworker, codependent, cooperate, coordinate	co-owner
mid-	midlevel, midpoint, midstream, midsemester, midterm	mid-1970s
non-	nonprofit, nontraditional, noncredit	non-native, non-Catholic
post-	postdoctoral, postscript	post-graduate-level studies, post-baccalaureate
pre-	prerecord, preorder, prehistoric	pre-1960
pro-	proactive	pro-environment, pro-gun laws
re-	recover, resign, rewrite, reemploy	re-covered the sofa, re-signed the document
un-	uninviting, uninterested	un-American

## Punctuation Summary

Punctuation	Guidance
ampersand &	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ampersands may only be used in titles, headlines or when it is part of a legal name.</li> <li>• Do not use an ampersand in place of “and” with the exception of accepted abbreviations: <i>B&amp;B</i>, <i>R&amp;B</i>.</li> </ul>
apostrophe ‘	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use an apostrophe “s” to create a possessive singular noun. <i>The student’s room.</i></li> <li>• Use an “s” apostrophe to create a possessive plural noun. <i>The students’ rooms.</i></li> <li>• For singular common (noncapitalized) nouns ending in s, add ‘s: He borrowed the boss’s car.</li> <li>• For common (noncapitalized) nouns that are already plural, add apostrophe s at the end: <i>The children’s park. The women’s dorm. The men’s dressing room.</i></li> <li>• For singular proper nouns ending in s, use only an apostrophe: <i>He borrowed Julies’ car.</i></li> <li>• Do not use an apostrophe after expressing decades or centuries. Do, however, use an apostrophe before figures expressing a decade if using only two numerals: <i>The 1990s or the ‘90s.</i></li> </ul>
brackets [ ]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to denote clarifying copy added by a secondary author. <i>The agency’s [SBCTC] executive director spoke. “Our [community and technical] colleges provide financial assistance.”</i></li> </ul>
bullets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize the first word following the bullet in all cases.</li> <li>• Use a period at the end of each item of a bulleted list, whether a list of phrases or complete sentences. See earlier section on bullets.</li> </ul>
colon :	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.</li> <li>• A colon may also indicate emphasis and the start of dialogue. <i>Paul Francis said: “This agency’s employees are incredible.”</i></li> </ul>

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comma ,	<p>The Oxford comma, or serial comma, comes before the conjunction in a list of three or more things. The following sentence uses an Oxford comma: “<i>The flag is red, white, and blue.</i>” This sentence does not use an Oxford comma: “<i>The flag is red, white and blue.</i>”</p> <p>In documents <u>except news releases</u>, use the Oxford comma to avoid ambiguity and to make lists easier to comprehend: <i>Legislators say they like to visit with faculty, staff, trustees, and students.</i> For news releases, SBCTC strictly follows Associated Press Style, which calls for using an Oxford comma only when needed for clarity. (The communications division used AP Style in this style guide.)</p> <p>Documents written in APA Style should include an Oxford comma. Legal, technical and scientific style manuals also require an Oxford comma to prevent ambiguity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When following APA Style, documents should include a serial comma (a comma before a conjunction). Legal, technical and scientific style manuals require a serial comma to prevent ambiguity.</li> <li>• When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with a comma. <i>June 30, 2025.</i></li> <li>• A comma follows the state name when listing a city and state combination. <i>They travel to Olympia, Washington, to the State Board.</i></li> </ul>
Dash – (en) — (em)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An “en” dash is used to indicate a number range. There are no spaces on either side of an “en” dash. <i>Example: She read pages 10-25.</i></li> <li>• An “em” dash is used to indicate an abrupt change in a sentence; to set apart copy from other copy; as one option to set off a series within a phrase; before attribution to an author or composer in some formats; after datelines; and to start lists. There is one space on either side of an “em” dash. <i>Example: My sister – who doesn’t know a word of Spanish – is moving to Mexico.</i></li> </ul>
Ellipsis ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to indicate omitted copy. <i>Without ellipses: After much deliberation, I decided yesterday that it was time for me to retire from this sport.” With ellipses: “I decided ... it was time for me to retire from this sport.”</i></li> <li>• Use one space before the ellipsis and one after the ellipsis.</li> <li>• No spaces go between the periods of the ellipsis.</li> <li>• In quotes, do not use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of a direct quote.</li> </ul>
hyphen -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to provide clarity to compound modifiers “full-time student.”</li> <li>• May also be used for ranges.</li> </ul>

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parentheses ( )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use parentheses sparingly.</li> <li>• Use when indicating an acronym for the first time. <i>State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)</i>. Omit the abbreviation if it is not used later on.</li> <li>• Use a period inside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is a complete sentence: <i>The college had a waitlist for its audiovisual class. (Several other programs were offered but they were not as popular.)</i></li> <li>• Do not use a period inside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a complete sentence: <i>The college had a waitlist for its audiovisual class (so frustrating).</i></li> </ul>
Percent %	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the % sign when paired with a number, with no space.</li> <li>• For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero: <i>0.8%</i></li> <li>• If it's necessary to start a sentence with a percentage, spell out both: <i>Two percent of the survey respondents agreed with the statement.</i></li> <li>• Use percentage, rather than percent, when not paired with a number: <i>A high percentage of respondents disagreed with the statement.</i></li> </ul>
quotation marks “ ”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use double quotation marks when using a direct quote in copy: <i>Executive Director Paul Francis said, “SBCTC staff are outstanding.”</i></li> <li>• Use single quotation marks to indicate a quote within a direct quote. <i>Jim Smith said, “She keeps telling me to just ‘take it easy’ but she doesn’t know the stress I’m under.”</i></li> <li>• In news release headlines, use single quotation marks to indicate a quote: <i>Gov. Jay Inslee says ‘good chance’ he will seek another term.</i></li> <li>• Use when introducing an unfamiliar word or phrase for the first time: <i>We called it a “spork” because it was both a spoon and a fork.</i></li> <li>• The comma and period always go inside quotation marks: <i>The building will be called the “Helen Sommers Building.” The new building, which will be called the “Helen Sommers Building,” will have plenty of meeting space.</i></li> <li>• The semicolon, colon, question mark, exclamation point and dash go inside quotation marks if they are part of the quotation mark and outside if they are not. <i>He asked, “Who called the operator?” Why did you say I was “a pain”?</i></li> </ul>

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semicolon ;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use semicolons sparingly.</li> <li>• Do not capitalize the first word after a semicolon unless the word is a proper noun. <i>The sun is bright; it's such a beautiful day. The sun is bright; Washington is so beautiful in the summer.</i></li> <li>• Use a semicolon to indicate a pause in thought more than a comma but less than a period. <i>I ordered cheesecake; life's too short to worry about calories.</i></li> <li>• Use to separate items in a list that already have commas. <i>I need the weather statistics for the following cities: London, England; Rome, Italy; and Barcelona, Spain.</i></li> </ul>
spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use only one space between sentences.</li> </ul>
underline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not underline text unless the underline indicates that the text is linked to the web.</li> </ul>



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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges