



Providence Health Care

Editorial Standards Guide



How you want to be treated.

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Standards Guide Introduction

Reference materials

Our editorial style generally follows Canadian Press Style (CP Style).

If you need additional resources refer to the following:

- For style: [CP Style Guide](#).
- For spelling: [Canadian Oxford Dictionary](#).
- For metric usage: [The Canadian metric Practice Guide or the Metric Editorial Handbook](#).
(Canadian Standards Association)
- [Plain Language Medical dictionary](#).

The Providence Health Care Editorial Standards Guide (standards guide) provides guidelines on the terminology, language, grammar, capitalization, and other editorial decisions that distract readers and reduce the clarity and professionalism of communications across Providence Health Care (PHC).

When does this standards guide apply?

This standards guide applies to written internal and external communications produced for print and online, issued by PHC or individuals acting on behalf of our organization including:

- Promotional items
- Marketing materials
- General written communications materials
- Official correspondence
- Submissions to governing bodies

When doesn't this standards guide apply?

This guide is not intended to apply to technical, scholarly or research texts. It allows some flexibility for specialized types of communication and for various levels of formality.

Need help?

We recognize that sometimes it will not be practical to adhere to the standards guide. For example, when it is necessary to refer or conform to a style used by a third party, such as the Ministry of Health.

If you need writing advice or you need to make an exception to following this standards guide, contact the [PHC Communications & Public Affairs](#) department at 604-806-8022.

The future of this standards guide

This standards guide is a work in progress. As new editorial questions arise and language and usage change, it will evolve. Communications & Public Affairs welcomes input in order to make the standards guide more useful. If you have comments or suggestions, please email them to communications at communications@providencehealth.bc.ca.

A close-up photograph of a fountain pen nib resting on a document with cursive handwriting. The pen is silver and black, and the inkwell is partially visible. The background is a light-colored paper with some text written in a cursive script.

Writing and Style

Useful writing tips:

- Keep sentences short.
- Break up paragraphs and use clear headings.
- Use patient-friendly text that is honest and practical.

Writing and Style

Writing with impact, clarity and accuracy is a critical part of crafting any business document or communication material. When writing for a public audience, use language and sentence structures that reflect the essence and personality of Providence Health Care. Some of our communications serve to inform, others to inspire; many aim to strike a proper balance of the two.

Our best communications should include factual information, presented in language that reflects our corporate character and personality.

Tone and Voice

Tone

Writing should be inclusive in tone. Use “we” and “our” when writing about Providence Health Care, instead of “it” and “the organization”. This will bring a more inclusive, warmer feel to the writing. People seeking health care advice want reassurance from a reliable and welcoming source.

Do: *This month, we are offering five flu clinics across Providence Health Care sites.*

Don't: *This month, the organization is offering five flu clinics across its sites.*

Voice

Write in the active voice. This will keep your content short and more interesting for the reader. In the active voice, the subject of the sentence performs the action.

Do: *Staff are currently engaged in emergency preparedness exercises at St. Paul's Hospital.*

Don't: *Emergency preparedness exercises are currently being engaged in by staff at St. Paul's Hospital.*

Our Culture and Audience

Who are “we”?

- Leaders in health care
- Quality caregivers and service providers
- Innovative
- Committed
- Open
- Honest
- Efficient
- Effective
- Responsive
- Sustainable
- Inclusive
- Diverse
- Understanding
- “People first”

We are one of the largest faith-based health care organizations in Canada, operating 16 facilities in Greater Vancouver, BC. Guided by the principle *How you want to be treated.*, our 1,200 physicians, 6,000 staff and 1,600 volunteers deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia while training medical professionals and making innovative advances in research.

Every day, those of us at Providence Health Care do our best to treat people well. This includes providing stellar medical treatment to our patients and treating our patients, residents and families with compassion. It also includes treating each other with respect in the course of our working life. This is our commitment to those we serve.

We are leaders in promoting wellness and ensuring care by focusing on quality and innovation. We are committed to supporting healthy lives in healthy communities through care, education, and research.

Note: *When using the PHC slogan How you want to be treated. you must always include the period at the end of the slogan. While this may seem contrary to usual grammar rules, the period is part of the officially copyrighted slogan and thus must be included in all references.*

Our audience

The potential readership for health care is a wide one, from those unfamiliar with a subject to those with expert knowledge. PHC produces written materials for a wide array of readers including:

- patients
- residents and clients
- members of the public looking for information about our services
- academics and medical practitioners
- media
- government officials

Written materials should be tailored to suit the appropriate audience.

Often, our audiences need facts and advice urgently and during times of emotional stress. For this reason, it is vital to make complex information easy to read and understand.

Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission, Vision and Values are an important part of who we are here at Providence Health Care. If using them, please use word-for-word as outlined below.

Mission

Inspired by the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, Providence Health Care is a Catholic health care community dedicated to meeting the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of those served through compassionate care, teaching and research.

Vision

Driven by compassion and social justice, we are at the forefront of exceptional care and innovation.

Values

- Spirituality** We nurture the God-given creativity, love and compassion that dwells within us all.
- Integrity** We build our relationships on honesty, justice and fairness.
- Stewardship** We share accountability for the well-being of our community.
- Trust** We behave in ways that promote safety, inclusion and support.
- Excellence** We achieve excellence through learning and continuous improvement.
- Respect** We respect the diversity, dignity and interdependence of all persons.

Use of Mission, Vision and Values

If you are referring to our Mission, our Vision, or our Values, please use capitals.

Do: *Providence Health Care has recently revised its organizational Vision to focus on compassion, social justice and innovation.*

Do: *Here at Providence Health Care, we uphold six core Values that include spirituality, integrity, stewardship, trust, excellence, and respect.*

If you are using those words in general terms, do not capitalize.

Do: *The mission of the conference was to educate staff about social media.*

Don't: *The nurse respected the beliefs and Values of the patient and his family.*

Plain Language contacts

Providence Health
Care

Carol Wilson, plain
language specialist,
PHC

604-806-9090

ext. 66276

cawilson@

providencehealth.

bc.ca

[PHC Connect](#)

Plain Language

Writing should strike the right balance between correct terminology and common usage. Medical terms can be confusing and frightening for the average reader. Writing should be as specific as possible and explain anything that may confuse the reader.

Plain language is useful in getting your message across in the shortest time possible. This increases the number of people able to understand your message and decreases misunderstandings. Bigger words do not make your document more interesting to read.

Do: *If you start having an upset stomach, loose bowel movements or other problems, call your doctor right away.*

Don't: *With the onset of nausea, diarrhea or other gastrointestinal disturbances consult your physician immediately.*

Reading level

Research on the reading level of patient education materials found that they are, on average, six levels higher than the literacy level of the average patient (Nursing Research, 1994).

It is important to match your writing to the appropriate reading level for your audience. The best way to know whether a document is easy to read and understand is to get feedback from people in the intended audience.

You can check the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of your written materials using Microsoft Word. To set up the reading level in a Word document, click Tools in the menu option along the top. Scroll down to the bottom of the Tools menu and select Options, then click the Spelling & Grammar tab.

Select the Show Readability Statistics check box, and then click OK. To display the reading level, perform a spelling and grammar check. When Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it will display information about the reading level of the document.

** A caution about readability formulas: Some of the most common readability formulas were designed many years ago and were fast and easy to use, but with limitations. It is important to not depend solely on tools like Microsoft Word to determine your document's reading level.*

Contact

For more information on plain language resources and workshops, visit the [Plain Language site](#) on PHC Connect.



Health Care Terminology

Health Care - one word or two?

Do: *Our standard practice is to write health care as two words, regardless of whether you are using the term as a noun or an adjective.*

Don't: *Do not write it as one word (healthcare) or as a hyphenated compound (health-care).*

Terminology

The legal name for our organization is:

Providence Health Care

The legal name must be used in all legal documents.

In non-legal communications, use the full name at first mention [Providence Health Care], followed by a secondary reference as displayed below:

1st reference: Providence Health Care

2nd reference: PHC, Providence

Never use: Providence Health Care Authority

Do: *Providence Health Care (PHC) operates 16 facilities in Greater Vancouver, BC. PHC has more than 6,000 employees.*

****Tip:** If you must refer to the organization several times in one paragraph or document, vary your references to increase readability and reduce repetition.

Do: *Providence Health Care is one of the largest faith-based health care organizations in Canada, operating 16 facilities in Greater Vancouver, BC. Guided by the principle “How You Want to Be Treated.”, PHC’s 1,200 physicians, 6,000 staff and 1,600 volunteers deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia while training medical professionals and making innovative advances in research. Every day, those of us at Providence Health Care do our best to treat people well.*

Don't: *Providence Health Care is one of the largest faith-based health care organizations in Canada, operating 16 facilities in Greater Vancouver, BC. Guided by the principle “How You Want to Be Treated.”, Providence Health Care’s 1,200 physicians, 6,000 staff and 1,600 volunteers deliver compassionate care to patients and residents in British Columbia. Providence Health Care also trains medical professionals and making innovative advances in research. Every day, those of us at the health authority do our best to treat people well.*

Denominational References

As one of the largest faith-based health care organizations in Canada, Providence Health Care works alongside those in a variety of religious offices. As a matter of respect, it is important to know how to address those with religious titles.

Use a religious title before a persons full name on first reference. In subsequential references, use their surname with the title, or the title only preceded by “the”.

Do: *Archbishop Adam Green will arrive at St. Paul’s Hospital on Friday, February 8, 2011. The archbishop will be meeting with Providence Health Care’s Mission Services Team. Archbishop Green is a specialist on the papacy and modern papal teaching, he has published seven books and more than 150 articles, both scholarly, and popular.*

Common religious titles

Some of the more common identifying titles that apply to various levels of Christian religious office are listed below. As they are not always familiar to everyone, the forms of address on the right should be avoided unless in direct quotation, or followed by a descriptor.

Do: *Most Rev. John Raymond, the archbishop, will be in attendance.*

Don’t: *Most Rev. John Raymond, will be in attendance.*

Familiar title

Formal title

Roman Catholic:

The Pope

His Holiness

Cardinal

His Eminence

Archbishop

Most Rev.

Bishop

Most Rev.

Monsignor

Right Rev. or Msgr.

Anglican:

Primate

Most Rev.

Archbishop

Most Rev.

Bishop

Right Rev.

Dean

Very Rev.

Canon

Rev.

United Church:

Moderator

Right Rev.

Ex-Moderator

Very Rev.

Presbyterian

Moderator – Rev.

**Some religions lack a formal hierarchy. In such cases use descriptive terms such as holy man or priest, as in Hindu priest Sharad Rao or Sikh priest Satinder Singh.*

Organizational References

Providence Health Care sites

1st Reference	2nd Reference	Never Use
St. Paul's Hospital	St. Paul's, SPH	Saint
Mount Saint Joseph Hospital	Mount Saint Joseph, MSJ	Mt., St., Joseph's, Jo's
St. Vincent's: Brock Fahrni	Brock Fahrni Residence, Brock Fahrni, BF	BFP
St. Vincent's: Langara	Langara Residence, Langara, SVL	
St. Vincent's: Honoria Conway - Heather	Honoria Conway, Honoria Residence	St. Vincent's: Heather, HC, HCSVH
Youville Residence	Youville	YR
Holy Family Hospital	Holy Family, Holy Family Residence, HFH	
Marion Hospice	Marion Hospice	
Providence Crosstown Clinic	Crosstown Clinic	Crosstown

Research Institutes, programs and centres

1st Reference	2nd Reference	Never Use
Providence Health Care Research Institute	PHCRI, PHC Research Institute	Research Institute
BC Mental Health & Addictions Research Institute	BCMHAS	Research Institute
Vancouver Coastal Health Research Institute	VCHRI, VCH Research Institute	Research Institute
BC Centre for Excellence in HIV AIDS at St. Paul's Hospital	BC-CfE, BC Centre for Excellence	
Centre for Healthy Aging at Providence	CHAP, Centre for Healthy Aging	
UBC James Hogg Research Centre	JHRC	James Hogg Centre
Centre for Health Evaluation and Outcome Sciences	CHEOS	the Centre
Centre for Practitioner Renewal	CPR	the Centre
CIHR Canadian HIV Trials Network	CTN	the HIV Trials Network
Prevention of Organ Failure Centre of Excellence	PROOF	Prevention of Organ Failure Centre
The Institute for Heart + Lung Health	IHLI	HLI, HLH, Heart and Lung Institute

Foundations

1st Reference	2nd Reference	Never Use
St. Paul's Hospital Foundation	The Foundation	SPH Foundation, SPHF
Tapestry Foundation for Health Care	Tapestry Foundation, the Foundation	No abbreviations

Other Health Authorities

1st Reference	2nd Reference	Never Use
Fraser Health	Fraser Health	
Provincial Health Services Authority	PHSA	PH, PHS, Provincial Health, the Province, Health Services
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority	VCH, Vancouver Coastal Health,	VC, Coastal, the health authority, Vancouver Coastal

***Note:** Providence Health Care also operates seven community dialysis clinics. When referring to these sites, please capitalize the full name, e.g.: East Vancouver Community Dialysis Unit, North Shore Community Dialysis Unit, Powell River Community Dialysis Unit, Richmond Community Dialysis Unit, Sechelt Community Dialysis Centre, Squamish Community Dialysis Unit, and Vancouver Community Dialysis Unit.

Government and Health Agencies

Due to the nature of health care in Canada, it is important to understand how to reference government and government officials. There are three levels of government in Canada: federal, provincial and municipal (includes First Nations bands).

Federal

The federal government is officially referred to as the Government of Canada, with proper nouns capitalized. When referred to in general terms as “the federal government”, this is lowercased.

Do: *The federal government in Canada is officially called the Government of Canada.*

Don't: *The Federal Government in our country is called the Government of Canada.*

Provincial

- The provincial government is officially referred to as the Province of British Columbia, or alternatively, the Province.

Municipal

- Our sites and programs cover a number of municipalities including:
 - City of Powell River
 - City of Vancouver
 - Island Municipality of Bowen Island
 - Resort Municipality of Whistler

First Nations

- Sechelt Indian Government District

Federal health agencies

- Health Canada
- Public Health Agency of Canada
- Assisted Human Reproduction Canada
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- Patented Medicine Prices Review Board

Provincial health agencies

- Ministry of Health Services
- BC Ambulance
- BC Health Authorities
- BC Centre for Disease Control
- Health Match BC
- ImmunizeBC

Aa A B B C
c c D E F G H
H I J J K k L M
M N n o o P P
Q Q R R S S S t T
U U v V W W X y Z

Names and Caps

Names and Caps

Our organization follows [Canadian Press](#) rules for names and titles:

“Capitalize all proper names, trade names, government departments and agencies of government, names of associations, companies, clubs, religions, languages, nations, races, places, addresses. Otherwise lowercase is favoured where a reasonable options exists.”

Refer to the rest of this section on [Terminology, Names and Caps](#) for rules pertaining to specific subject areas.

Corporate Partners and Trademarks

For company and organization names, follow the spelling and capitalization preferred by the company:

Canadian Blood Services
Lifeline Medical Alert

Abbreviate Corp. and Co. at the end of a name:

Centric Health Corp.
The Green Health Co.

Unless you are referring to a product made by a particular company, avoid using trademarked names such as Jell-O and Kleenex. Instead, use generic terms such as gelatin dessert or facial tissue. When you use a trademarked name in an editorial context, follow the trade name’s capitalization, spacing and punctuation: PowerPoint, Q-tips.

Locations

A major location should be capitalized, including its meeting room, unit or department if they are named in honour of a funding donor.

Example:

St. Paul's Hospital
Teck Emergency Department

Province and Territories

Spell out the names of provinces, territories, countries and states in running text. BC, NWT and PEI are acceptable in running text for second and subsequent references to British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and Prince Edward Island. Abbreviations may be used in lists and tables.

Do not use periods:

AB, BC, MB, NB, NL, NS, NT, NU, ON, PE, QC, SK, YT

Programs, Departments and Units

Capitalize common nouns when they represent a complete formal name. Lowercase the names of subjects or areas of study, unless the name contains a proper noun or adjective.

Do: *If you are concerned about your child's hearing, contact the BC Early Hearing Program.*

Do: *General Psychiatry is the largest service within the Mental Health Program, providing care through community, outpatient, inpatient and consultation services.*

Below is a partial list of proper program and department names with correct capitalization:

- BC Early Hearing Program
- Elder Care
- Emergency Department
- Gastro-intestinal Clinic
- The Heart Centre at St. Paul's Hospital
- HIV/AIDS Program
- Intensive Care Unit
- Mental Health Program
- Telehealth
- Urgent Care Centre

Names of PHC departments and programs are lowercased, except for when official names. (see above).

Do: *Justin Karasick is the director of the communications department at PHC.*

Do: *Justin Karasick is the director of Communications & Public Affairs at PHC.*

***Note:** *In titles, we lowercase the title and uppercase the official program name or department.*

Capitalize the names of specific academic course titles.

She teaches Comparative Anatomy at the University of British Columbia.

Lowercase the names of general subjects or areas of study, unless the name contains a proper noun or adjective.

He teaches medicine and English literature.

Occupational Titles and Job Descriptions

President & CEO

Use the rules for formal titles when capitalizing President and CEO.

Do: *According to Providence Health Care President and CEO Dianne Doyle, the changes to services will begin next week.*

Do: *According to Dianne Doyle, president and CEO, Providence Health Care, the changes to services will begin next week.*

Tricky titles

- Use dietitian NOT dietician. This follows spelling used by the [Dietitians of Canada](#) and [Healthlink](#).
- Refer to persons who works in Pastoral Care as pastoral care workers.

Formal titles

Capitalize formal titles directly preceding a name. Lowercase them when standing alone or set off from the name with commas. As a rule of thumb, formal titles are those that could be used with the surname alone. These include government titles, professional titles, military and religious titles. Included in this category are President and CEO.

Do: *Health Services Minister Colin Hansen will be attending the event.*

Do: *Colin Hansen, the minister of health services, will be attending the event.*

Occupational titles and job descriptions

Occupational titles and descriptions are in lowercase, as are titles of officials of companies, unions and political organizations, with the exception of President and CEO (see formal titles above).

Do: *Participating in the surgery were Dr. Carl Lansfield, registered nurse Andy Cameron, and anaesthesiologist James Baker.*

For titles and positions commonly referred to by their acronyms, use the full title at first reference, followed by the acronym in brackets. Standard practice is to capitalize the acronym so that it doesn't appear to be a misspelled word.

Do: *Sally Marshall, a registered nurse (RN) at St. Paul's Hospital, has been with the organization for over twenty years.*

Do: *Leading today's seminar is licensed practical nurse (LPN) Bob Davis.*

Doctor versus doctorate

Use the full name on first reference.

Do: *Dr. Joe Smith will be attending the conference.*

Use Dr. plus last name in second reference. Do not use first names in second references.

Do: *Dr. Mary Stephenson (1st reference) works at the health centre. Dr. Stephenson (2nd reference) has been here for five years.*

Spell out the word doctor if its not used as a title.

Do: *The doctor told the patient his cholesterol was high.*

When referencing Ph.D doctorates do not use Dr. before the person's name.



People We Serve

People We Serve

At Providence Health Care we serve a diverse patient population that reflects our Mission and Values; respecting the diversity, dignity and interdependence of all persons.

Patients and consumers

At Providence Health Care we provide person centred care, remembering that everyone we treat and care for is an individual, requiring care specific to their individual needs.

When referring to the individual, please use the term “patient” for those who are being treated in acute care.

At Providence Health Care, we do NOT use the term “consumer” when referring to those requiring or looking for health care services.

Residents, seniors, elders, and older adults

There are a number of terms for referring to our older population.

In general, we use the term “residents” when referring to those who live at our residential sites at Mount Saint Joseph, Brock Fahni, Youville, Holy Family and Langara.

For our older, aging population we use the terms “seniors” or “elders”. At PHC, we prefer to avoid using the term “elderly” due to negative or derogatory connotations.

Often, there are people in long-term care who are not “seniors” (65 plus). When referring to this population, we use the term “older adults”.

For those at Honoria Conway assisted living site, the correct term of use is “tenant” not “patient”, nor “resident”.

Tenants

For those at Honoria Conway assisted living site, the correct term of use is “tenant” not “patient”, nor “resident”.

Aboriginal People and First Nations

Aboriginal People vs. Persons

Which one to use?

Aboriginal persons

Definition: More than one person.

Aboriginal people

Definition: Entire body of Aboriginal persons in Canada.

Aboriginal peoples

Definition: Different groups of Aboriginal people with distinct cultures (often used when referring to different groups among different communities).

For specific questions on language referring to Aboriginal people, visit the sites below.

[INAC - Terminology](#)

[INAC - Language Usage](#)

When using the terms Aboriginal people, Aboriginal peoples and First Nation(s), there are specific instances when you should choose one term over the other.

The language in this section comes from [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada](#) (INAC), one of the federal government departments responsible for meeting the Government of Canada's obligations and commitments to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and for fulfilling the federal government's constitutional responsibilities in the North.

For more specific information, you might visit the [INAC website](#) (www.inac.gc.ca) or browse the links at right, which include a very useful reference document called *Words First: An Evolving Terminology Relating to Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*.

Aboriginal People(s)

"Aboriginal people" is a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution (the Constitution Act, 1982) recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples — Indians, Métis and Inuit. These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

When you are referring to "Aboriginal people," you are referring to all the Aboriginal people in Canada collectively, without regard to their separate origins and identities. Or, you are simply referring to more than one Aboriginal person.

By adding the 's' to people, you are emphasizing that there is a diversity of people within the group known as Aboriginal people.

Because the term "Aboriginal people" generally applies to First Nations, Inuit and Métis, writers should take care in using this term. If they are describing a particular departmental program that is only for First Nations, like band funding, you should avoid using "Aboriginal people" which could cause misunderstanding.

Avoid describing Aboriginal people as "belonging" to Canada. Use neutral terms instead.

Don't: *Canada's Aboriginal people have traditions and cultures that go back thousands of years.*

Do: *Aboriginal people in Canada have traditions and cultures that go back thousands of years.*

First Nation

'First Nation' has been adopted by some Indian communities to replace the term 'Indian band'. A band is defined as a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or declared to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act. Many Indian bands started to replace the word 'band' in their name with 'First Nation' in the 1980s. It is a matter of preference, and writers should follow the choice expressed by individual First Nations/bands.

General Use:

Capitalize the term First Nation.

Use the term First Nation when referencing a specific group:

- The Musqueam First Nation.
- The Squamish First Nation.

People With Disabilities

The terms used to refer to people with disabilities are evolving. Employment equity legislation speaks of persons with disabilities. “Person/people with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used for the most part interchangeably in disability scholarship/disability studies. Some people with disabilities prefer one over the other. It is best to use the language preferred by your audience—if such terminology is necessary in the situation.

Avoid defining people by their disorders or depersonalizing people by turning descriptors into nouns. Put the person first, not the disability. *’Is’ or ‘has’ phrases can be useful.

Do: *The patient is living with epilepsy.*

Don’t: *The patient is an epileptic.*

‘Visual impairment’ or ‘sight impairment’ is often used to indicate some loss of vision or complete blindness. Be aware that some individuals or groups may dislike the use of ‘impaired’. For hearing, preferred terms are ‘deaf’ or ‘hard of hearing’ rather than ‘hearing impaired’.

Use factual rather than negative references. A person may have a condition but may not necessarily “suffer” from it.

Do: *Joe Craig, who experienced a stroke last year, has blindness in his right eye.*

Don’t: *Joe Craig, a stroke victim, suffers from blindness in his right eye.*

There is often a societal stigma attached to mental illness or disability which makes some people wary of disclosing their condition or referring to it as a mental or psychiatric disability. Some prefer the terms ‘non-apparent’ or ‘non-physical disabilities’. Other terms that might be considered neutral and less medical include ‘people with mental health problems, difficulties or conditions’.

Race and Ethnicity

The Employment Equity Act refers to members of visible minorities as those who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. It is recognized that people who are visibly in a minority because of their skin colour or identifiable “racial” background may face various types of barriers which may have social implications that need to be addressed.

Avoid stereotypes, generalizations or assumptions about ethnic or “racial” groups. Try to be inclusive in the use of examples, where appropriate, to take account of diversity in the population.

Be wary of the use of some expressions or proverbs that may be culture-bound and may contain stereotyping, racial or otherwise inappropriate connotations.

Some people prefer reference to ethnicity rather than colour for groups, where such references seem necessary, e.g. African Canadian over black. Caucasian over white.

Sex and Gender

According to the [World Health Organization](#), “sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. “Gender” refers to socially constructed roles, behaviours, mannerisms, activities and attributes. “Male” and “female” are sex categories, while “masculine” and “feminine” are gender categories. Aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly.

In all references, follow the preference of your audience. Use inclusive terms rather than those that make sex distinctions.

Do: *There will be five people staffing the communication office over the holidays.*

Don't: *There will be five people manning the communication office over the holidays.*

Do: *Often, before an event on Vancouver soil we take a moment to bless our aboriginal ancestors.*

Don't: *Often, before an event on Vancouver soil we take a moment to bless our aboriginal forefathers.*

Do: *During the holidays, working hours will remain nine to five.*

Don't: *During the holidays, man hours will be nine to five.*

When the sex or gender is unknown or a group is composed of both men and women, avoid using the masculine pronoun as a generic pronoun. Use the plural pronouns “they” and “their” with antecedents such as “anyone,” “everyone,” “someone” to provide a gender neutral statement.

Do: *Everyone should decide whether they want to come.*

Don't: *Anyone can request his grade.*

When titles are used they should be used consistently for all people listed. Use the neutral “Ms.” as a general rule, but if a woman has indicated a preference to be addressed as “Miss” or “Mrs.,” respect this preference.

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered

When communicating with or about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, two-spirit or queer community, in all references, follow the preference of your audience. “Gay” is often used to refer just to gay men but can be used to include lesbians. The preferred usage is as an adjective:

Stigma and prejudice still persists in many societies about gay men, with research indicating that only between 18% to 49% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual people disclose their sexual orientation to their physician.

For sexual health information pertaining to gay women, visit the following site...

Avoid use of “gay” as a noun.

Don’t: *The health study includes gays and lesbians.*

Do: *The health study includes gay men and lesbians.*

Some other preferred terms include: lesbian, bi or bisexual, transgendered, transsexual, trans, transman, transwoman, intersexed, two-spirited, queer, genderqueer, gender questioning and bigendered.

When referring to partners, consider “same-sex” as an alternative to “homosexual” or “gay.”

Do: *The same-sex couple applied for benefits coverage.*

Don’t: *The gay couple applied for benefits coverage.*

“Transgendered” is used to embrace both transgendered and transsexual people and is often abbreviated to “trans” or combined with other gender terms such as transman, or transwoman.

The word “transgender” is an umbrella term used to refer to people who do not fit well within traditional concepts of gender and who may feel as though their biological sex (male, female, intersexed, etc.) and their socially expected gender (man, woman, etc.) don’t match up.

The word “intersex” refers to people who, on a physical level, have a mix of typically male or female characteristics.

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and trans Aboriginal people in North America use the term “two-spirited” to describe themselves. The word “two-spirited” is more used by Aboriginal people who live in large multiethnic urban environments. Those who live in rural areas or Aboriginal communities may have terms in their own languages to identify non-heterosexual or gender variant people in their communities. Two-spirited is a cultural and social Aboriginal term, although in some cases it may also be a religious one.

“Queer” still comes across as derogatory for some older people, though many younger people have reclaimed the word as a descriptor for all non-heterosexual orientations.

Avoid the term “sexual preference,” since “preference” suggests a choice and many gay people do not see their sexuality as an option. Many prefer to speak of sexual orientation, gender identity or sexuality.

Do: *Headline: Sexual orientation in women linked to the inner ear.*

Don’t: *Headline: Sexual preference in women linked to the inner ear.*



Numbers and Units

Phone Numbers and Addresses

Numbered Street Names

In lists or directories of addresses, use numerals:

Do: *The seminar on blood pressure will be held at 1081 West 10th Avenue.*

Don't: *The hospital is located at 1081 west Tenth Avenue.*

Phone Numbers

While it has become fashionable to use the period in phone numbers, our style format is the dash. Also avoid placing parentheses around area codes.

Do: *For more information call the Communication main line at 604-806-8022.*

Don't: *To register for the course, call (604) 888.8888.*

For toll free numbers, the long-distance access code 1 is usually included (because all callers must dial 1).

Do: *For more information call 1-800-123-5678.*

Currency

Currency is written in the following order: monetary symbol, amount and currency. The decimal point is not necessary if there are no cents involved. If your audience is primarily a Canadian one, there is no need to state that figures are expressed in Canadian dollars unless you introduce a figure with a different currency in the same document.

Do: *The course fee is \$500 CAD.*

Dates and Times

When written in long form, dates should be expressed as month, day, year.

Do: *March 1, 2010*

When the day of the week is followed by the date, separate the two with a comma. When citing a month and a year only, use the month, followed directly by the year.

Do: *The conference will be held in February 2012. Tentative dates are from Thursday, February 8 to Saturday, February 10, 2011.*

When writing dates in an all-numeric format, the correct format is the Canadian metric standard year, month, day.

Do: 2010/02/12

Don't: 12/02/2012

Note: *When writing dates we do not use “th” or “st” on the end. E.g. Apr 18, not Apr 18th.*

When writing time, please use the hour and minutes with a colon in between. Also use a.m. or p.m. – lower case with the periods present.

Do: *The conference begins at 7:00 p.m. tomorrow.*

Measurements

The metric system is the standard system of measurement for all Lower Mainland Health Authority organizations. The most common metric measurements are as follows:

metre (m)	millilitre (ml)
centimetre (cm)	tonne (t)
millimetre (mm)	kilometres per hour (km/h)
kilometre (km)	Celsius (°C)
gram (g)	Watt (w)
kilogram (kg)	kilojoule (kj)
litre (l)	hectare (ha)

When expressing units of measure, insert a single space between the number and the metric symbol (e.g.: 5 km). Exceptions: when the symbols for temperature and per cent are used (35°C, 25%).

Note: *Metric symbols are never pluralized (km, not kms) and metric symbols are never followed by a period (km, not km.), except at the end of a sentence. Always write the metric word in full in text (kilometres, not km), unless in a table format.*



Grammar

Grammar

For the purpose of this style guide, grammar covers common grammatical errors, punctuation, spelling, capitalization and abbreviations and acronyms.

Four Common Grammatical Errors

Subject/verb agreement

The verb should agree with its subject and not a word that comes in between. Modifying words often come in between the subject and the verb and may contain a noun that at first appears to be the subject. By mentally stripping away such modifiers, you can isolate the noun and ensure proper subject-verb agreement.

The patients in the waiting room need to see a doctor.

High levels of carbon monoxide in the home are dangerous.

Indefinite pronouns

Treat most indefinite pronouns as singular. Indefinite pronouns refer to non-specific people or things. Even though the following indefinite pronouns may seem to have plural meanings, treat them as singular: anybody, anyone, each, either, everybody, everyone, everything, neither, none, no one, someone, something.

Do: *Everyone in the health unit supports the anti-smoking campaign.*

Don't: *None of these restaurant inspections require a second visit.*

It's versus its

“It's” is a contraction for it is. “Its” is a possessive pronoun meaning of it or belonging to it. There is no such word as its’.

Do: *It's a good day to tour the Emergency Department.*

Do: *Holy Family Hospital is known for its rehabilitation programs.*

Don't: *Its' recommended that we drink a minimum of eight cups of water a day.*

That versus which

If you are unsure whether to use that or which in a sentence, consider this rule. Whatever follows which in a sentence adds a useful, but not grammatically necessary piece of information. Whatever follows that in a sentence is essential information. If it wasn't there, the sentence would have a different meaning.

Do: *The editorial arguing against anti-smoking legislation, which appeared in the Sunday newspaper, upset me.*

The editorial is already identified. Therefore, which appeared in the Sunday newspaper, is a non-essential clause.

Do: *I do not like editorials that argue against anti-smoking legislation.*

We would not know which editorials were being discussed without the ‘that clause’.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Generally, use only abbreviations and acronyms (abbreviations pronounced as words) that are familiar to your audience, and that your audience needs to know because it is something that they will hear often. Spell these out on first reference.

BCNU, BCIT, ICBC, WCB, SFU, BCMA

Do: *The program was offered at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT).*

Note: *Keep in mind that people whose first language is not English may have a difficult time learning abbreviations, so use only when extremely common or necessary.*

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words that consist of the first letter or the first letter and other letters, but not the last letter.

The physician only works Mon. and Thurs. this week.

If a term with more than one word is abbreviated, the first letter of each word is used without periods in between the letters.

CEO (Chief Executive Officer)

CESEI (Centre of Excellence for Surgical Education and Innovation)

Some abbreviations that have become household terms are acceptable in all references.

RCMP, MP, NDP, CBC, CD, AIDS

An abbreviation is also acceptable on first reference if the full term is not in general use or hard to pronounce.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), CT scanner (computerized tomography)

Abbreviations such as BA, MA, RN, PhD and MD do not use periods and are preceded by a comma after a name. However, mixed abbreviations such as B.Comm. or P.Eng. do require periods.

Do: *Jane Smith works on the 4th floor.*

Acronyms

Acronyms are shortened forms of words that are pronounced as a word.

UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System)

Always write the acronym in full the first time it is used.

Bulleted Lists

Regardless of the style used for vertical lists, the key is to apply them consistently. Use a colon after all introductory expressions to list items that are placed on several lines, regardless of whether those expressions are complete sentences.

Use periods after bulleted or numbered items and capitalize the first word of each item if the items are complete sentences.

Complete Sentence

The survey results were gratifying:

- *More than 90 per cent of respondents agreed that the strategy was clearly presented.*
- *Confidence in the leadership team received a mean score of 9.63.*

Phrase Completes Introductory Sentence

Use periods after bulleted or numbered items and capitalize the first word of each item if the phrases complete the introductory sentence.

To help managers and supervisors in this important role, highly effective companies:

- *Provide training that improves managers' communication skills.*
- *Package information for easy delivery.*
- *Involve managers early in the communication process to give them time to absorb the material before disseminating.*

Fragmented Bullets

Do not use periods with bulleted/numbered items when the introductory statement is grammatically complete, but the bullets are fragments.

The research shows that the companies with top engagement scores have six common traits:

- *Focusing on the customer*
- *Engaging employees in the business*
- *Improving managerial communication*
- *Managing effective change*
- *Establishing a strong employer brand*

For stylistic purposes if working with a document with a lot of bulleted lists, including complete phrases and fragments, you can choose to end all bullets in periods (including fragments). This provides one consistent look throughout.

Punctuation

Apostrophe

Apostrophes are used to indicate possession or to replace omitted letters in words. Avoid contractions in news releases, reports and published materials. Contractions can be used sparingly in web copy, which should be brief and to-the-point.

Brackets

Square brackets can be used to enclose editorial remarks. The treatment was a success [it was not officially announced until the following day, however].

Colon

Use a colon to introduce more information such as a list, words, phrases, clauses or quotations. In a list, the sentence should contain the words “as follows” or “the following” before the colon. The most popular jobs are as follows: nurse, social worker, and physiotherapist.

Use a colon to introduce a word, phrase, clause or quotation that explains or summarizes.

There is only one word for the surgeon’s performance: amazing.

Comma

Commas are used in a sentence to create a short pause or separation of clauses. They should make text clearer. If readability is improved by commas, then use them. Omit commas if they are not absolutely essential for clarity and legibility.

Use commas to separate a list of items. A serial comma (used before the word and) may be appropriate to clarify any ambiguity.

Do: *On behalf of the organization, I would like to thank the Communications Department, Dianne Doyle, and Tim Stevenson.* (The serial comma clarifies that you are thanking three separate subjects.)

Don’t: *I would like to thank the Communications Department, Dianne Doyle and Tim Stevenson, for all their hard work.* (This could be confusing as to whether the Communication Department is made up of Dianne and Tim.)

Commas are also used to separate clauses or phrases, separate parenthetical remarks, and to introduce direct quotes.

Dash

There are two dashes an en-dash and an em-dash. An en-dash is twice as long as a hyphen (–) while an em-dash is three times as long (—).

En-dash

The en-dash is used as a substitute for “to”. Do not use the en-dash if it is preceded by the words “from” or “between”. There are no spaces on either side of the en-dash.

Do: *Family members can take the Richmond-Vancouver Canada Line to get to VGH from the airport.*

Don't: *The student were asked to read from page 1 to 43.*

Em-dash

The em-dash is an effective tool, but can easily be overused. It can often be avoided by breaking a long sentence into two shorter ones. Use the em-dash to set off mid-sentence lists punctuated by commas.

Do: *The board members discussed many issues – quality improvement, surgical wait lists, nursing shortages, and food services – before the meeting adjourned.*

Use dashes when commas would create confusion.

Do: *The doctors – a cardiologist and an obstetrician – met for lunch once a month.*

Use a dash to mark a sharp break in a word or sentence or to introduce a phrase or clause that summarizes, emphasizes or contrasts what has gone before.

Do: *Our health authority has many highly skilled employees who are difficult to replace – almost impossible to replace.*

Ellipses

Ellipses are commonly used to indicate an omission in text, especially quotations. It is unnecessary at the beginning or end of the quotation, but is necessary when parts of the middle are missing. “Few things are impossible....Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance.” –Samuel Johnson

Hyphen

Hyphens are used to separate compound words, prefixes ending in the same letter that begins the main word, prefixes added to a word that is capitalized, nouns preceded by a number, or to describe the pronunciation of words.

Do: *The result was cross-referenced with the lab.*

The facilities installed an anti-intrusion device. Non-Canadian visitors should ensure they have proper insurance coverage while staying here.

The conference is a three-day event. The word is pronounced de-fib-u-la-tor.

Period

Referred to as a full stop in international communities, the period marks the end of a sentence or abbreviation.

Do: *The patient's results were normal. She was very happy.*

Quotation marks

Use quotation marks to enclose direct quotations. Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. Question marks go inside if the question is part of the quotation, outside if the question is part of the sentence.

For a quote within a quote, use single quotation marks.

Do: *"I was walking to work when a man stopped me and asked, 'Do you have the time?'"*

Sometimes single words or short phrases are enclosed in single quotation marks to indicate that they are so-called, slang or unfamiliar words. This technique can be over-used, especially with terms that are in common usage. Avoid using this technique repeatedly in one document. A good rule of thumb is to ask if the meaning is still clear without the quotation marks.

Don't: *There were two cases of flesh eating disease that year.*

Do: *There were two cases of 'fleshing eating' disease that year.*

Semi-colon

Semi-colons separate two independent clauses where one or both clauses are short and the ideas expressed are usually similar. Alternatively, it is even better to break the clauses into two sentences.

Do: *Faculty will be unhappy with a wage freeze; staff will be unhappy, too.*
[Complete sentence on both sides.]

Do: *Faculty will be unhappy with a wage freeze. Staff will be unhappy, too.*
[separate into two sentences.]

Don't: *Faculty will be unhappy with a wage freeze; and angry.* [The item following the semi-colon is not a complete sentence.]

The semi-colon can also be used to separate groups of words that are themselves separated by commas.

The polyclinic required diagnostic equipment, technicians, and security personnel; spots for the patients, guests and employees; and access for wheelchairs.



Spelling

Tricky Words

Affect, effect

Affect is a verb meaning to influence.

Effect is a noun meaning result.

E.g., The drug did not affect the disease, and it had several adverse side effects.

All ready, already

All ready means completely prepared.

Already means previously.

E.g., Deidre was all ready for work, but her carpool had already left.

Among, between

Use *among* with three or more entities.

Use *between* with two.

E.g., The prize was divided among several employees. They had a choice between cash or a trip to Paris.

A lot, alot

A lot is two words.

Alot is not a word.

E.g., We have a lot of patients at the Diabetes Clinic.

Spelling

Word choice - Some words are commonly confused because they sound alike, are spelled similarly or seem to have the same meaning. The following is a list of commonly confused words, their meanings and examples of when each might be used.

A

aging (not ageing)

antiviral (no hyphen)

aetiology (incorrect) – use etiology

Aids or AIDS (not AIDs)

Alzheimer's disease, (not Alzheimers or alzheimers or Alzheimer's Disease)

amoeba (not ameba)

anemia (not anaemia)

anemic (not anaemic)

anesthesia (not anaesthesia)

anorexia nervosa (not anorexia-nervosa)

B

BC (not B.C.)

BC CareCard

benefited (not benefitted)

C

caregiver (one word)

child-bearing

Children's

clinic (uppercase C if it's a specific clinic)

comorbid (one word)

cooperative (no hyphen or umlaut)

counselor

centre (not center)

centred (as in person centred)

counselling (not counseling)

Tricky Words

And, &

Use “and” instead of the ampersand sign (&) in writing, unless the & is part of a trade name.

Complement, compliment

Complement (verb) means to go with or to complete; or (noun) something that completes. Compliment (verb) means to flatter; or (noun) a flattering remark.

E.g., Her thorough knowledge of breastfeeding issues complements her skills as a public health nurse. Many people complimented Nancy on her workshop about choosing a residential care facility.

D

data is plural, datum is singular

daycare in reference to child minding; Day Care in reference to diarrhea (not diarrhoea)

dietitian (not dietician)

Down syndrome (uppercase “D”)

E

email

Executive Director

etiology (not aetiology)

extracorporeal (not two words)

emcee or MC (not M.C.)

enrol (not enroll)

enrolled (not enroled)

enrolling (not enroling)

enrolment (not enrollment)

F

fellow (uppercase F if referring to a specific Fellow)

follow up (two words) as a verb

follow-up (hyphenated) as a noun or adjective

G

German measles (capital “G”)

H

home page

health care (not healthcare or health-care)

home care (not homecare or home-care)

I

immuno-compromised

inpatient

Internet

Intranet

J

Tricky Words

E.g., i.e.

The Latin abbreviation e.g. means for example, or for instance.

The Latin abbreviation i.e. means that is.

These terms are not interchangeable, and whenever possible, should be replaced with their English equivalent. Use a comma after both abbreviations.

K

Kilometre

L

leukemia

long-term (not long term or longterm)

M

multidisciplinary (no hyphen)

N

nationwide (no hyphen)

O

orthopedic

online

on site (but on-site when modifying something, as in on-site program)

osteoporosis

organization (not organisation)

outpatient (not out-patient)

P

pap smear

pediatric

person centred (no hyphen)

Parkinson's disease (not parkinsons, or Parkinsons or Parkinson's Disease)

per cent (not percent)

post-graduate

postpartum depression

preoperative

postoperative

perioperative

psychosocial (no hyphen)

Q

quadriplegic

questionnaire