



FSSA Writing Style Guide

These guidelines are based on rules from *The Associated Press Stylebook*. This resource provides guidelines on grammar, punctuation, usage and journalistic style. Using Associated Press guidelines is very important in communicating effectively with FSSA clients and stakeholders and helps maintain professional and consistent communications throughout the agency.

This style guide is designed to be a convenient reference for the most common style issues you're likely to face while writing for publication in print or online.

Months, dates, times and seasons

Rule

Example

When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.* and *Dec.* Spell out the month when it is used without a specific date.

July 4 is Independence Day.
Nov. 11 is Veterans Day.
The training will be held in September.

When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas.

The class begins in February 2017.
Dec. 7, 1941, is a date which will live in infamy.

For dates, use numerals without *st*, *nd*, *rd* or *th*.

Right: He will retire on June 2.
Wrong: The conference is on December 5th.

To indicate times, use numerals except for noon and midnight. Do not use unnecessary zeroes. Always use "a.m." and "p.m." with lowercase letters and periods.

The webinar will start at noon.
Right: 7 a.m., 1:45 p.m.
Wrong: 10:00 a.m., 2:30 PM

Do not abbreviate days of the week.

Right: The reports are due on Wednesday.
Wrong: She was hired on Fri., June 4, 2010.

Do not capitalize the seasons *spring*, *summer*, *fall* and *winter* unless part of a formal name.

The board will release its decision in the fall.

Titles and degrees

<i>Rule</i>	<i>Example</i>
Capitalize formal titles used directly before a name.	Our team was surprised to see Pope Francis. The keynote speaker is Gov. Eric Holcomb.
Lowercase titles that are not used before an individual's name. Never capitalize job descriptions regardless of whether they are before or after a name.	Eric Holcomb, governor, addressed the crowd. The booklets were provided by case manager Jane Doe and project coordinator John Doe.
Spell out academic degrees. Use an apostrophe in <i>bachelor's degree</i>, a <i>master's</i>, etc.	She has a bachelor's degree.
Use abbreviations for degrees only when you need to include a list of credentials after a name. An academic abbreviation is set off with commas.	John Doe, LL.D, Ph.d., will present his paper at the symposium.

Numbers and money

<i>Rule</i>	<i>Example</i>
In general, spell out <i>one</i> through <i>nine</i>. Use figures for <i>10</i> or above and when preceding a unit of measure or referring to ages.	He found seven of the 12 forms he needs. She traveled 6 miles. The 7-year-old building needs repairs.
Spell out a number that appears at the beginning of a sentence, unless that number is a year.	Eleven executives attended the meeting. 2010 was a banner year for our program.
Use numerals before <i>million</i> or <i>billion</i>.	The program has a \$1.7 million budget.
Always use figures for an address number.	700 Fifth Ave.
Use numerals for percent and percentages. Use the % symbol.	<i>Right:</i> We saved 36% by buying in bulk. <i>Wrong:</i> She knew 50 percent of the people.

Rule

Example

Use numerals and the \$ sign for all dollar figures. Do not use unnecessary zeroes.

Right: The bill came to \$2,400.

Wrong: He has eight hundred dollars left.

Wrong: I gave the driver my last \$5.00.

Use hyphens for telephone numbers.

Right: 800-403-0864

Wrong: (800) 403-0864, 800.403.0864

Acronyms

Rule

Example

Acronyms should be avoided whenever possible. Always spell the words out on the first mention. On subsequent mentions, it is preferable to use generic terms such as *the board*, *the division*, etc.

The Medicaid Advisory Committee meets next week. The committee's agenda is available online.

If an acronym must be used, include the acronym in parentheses after the first use of the full name.

The Healthy Indiana Plan (HIP) is an affordable health insurance program. HIP covers Hoosiers ages 19 to 64 who meet specific income levels.

Punctuation and quotations

Rule

Example

Do not use a comma before a conjunction in a simple series.

The American flag is red, white and blue.

Use a comma for a series that includes elements containing the word *and* or the word *or*.

The menu offered a choice of pancakes, bacon and eggs, or waffles.

Do not use apostrophes for plurals of acronyms or numbers. Use an apostrophe for plurals of a single letter.

ATMs, 1970s. The Oakland A's.

Rule

Example

Use quotation marks with most composition titles. Exceptions include reference works and periodicals.

“American Idol,” Reader’s Digest, “Born This Way”

Use a comma to introduce a complete sentence quotation. Capitalize the first word of the quoted sentence.

John said, “They did not arrive in time.”

When using a sentence fragment as a quotation, do not set it off with a comma unless the sentence requires one for proper grammar. Do not capitalize the first letter of a sentence fragment quote.

Jane told the crowd to “get pumped up.”

Use a comma instead of a period at the end of a quote that is followed by attribution. Do not use a comma if the quoted sentence ends with a question mark or exclamation point.

“Open your textbooks to page one,” John instructed.

“That’s amazing!” Jane exclaimed.

Periods and commas always go within the quotation marks. Question marks and exclamation points go within the quotation marks when they apply only to the text in quotes.

Right: His favorite movie is “That Darn Cat!”

Right: Was it Ben Franklin who said, “A penny saved is a penny earned”?

Wrong: Did you ever read “The Lord of the Rings?”

Other

Rule

Example

Do not capitalize *state, federal, department, division, board, program, section, unit, etc.*, unless the word is part of a formal name.

File your paperwork with the state.

She is employed by the state of Indiana.

The Division of Family Resources office is open today.

Do not hyphenate *email*.

She updated her email password.

Rule

Example

***Sign up* is used as a verb. *Sign-up* is used as a noun or adjective.**

Don't forget to sign up for the seminar.
Sign-ups are open until February.
The sign-up sheet is nearly full.

Do not capitalize directional indicators except when they refer to specific regions.

Go south on University Boulevard.
Most of the delegates were from the Midwest.

***Health care* and *child care* are two words.**

The Healthy Indiana Plan provides health care for low-income Hoosiers.
To find child care in your area, visit childcarefinder.in.gov.