



Arlington
Public
Schools

Style Guide

Updated 6/2016

The purpose of this style guide is to enable all Arlington Public Schools employees creating communications materials to help deliver the APS brand consistently and accurately, in order to reinforce with the community our professionalism and commitment to high-quality education.

APS STYLE GUIDELINES

Most of the following style guidelines are designed to save space and ensure that we are being consistent across all APS publications.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

General: On first usage, spell out the full name of the term, followed by the acronym/abbreviation in parentheses. All subsequent text references should just refer to the acronym/abbreviation.

Example: Arlington Public Schools (APS) has 38 schools and programs. APS has 23 elementary schools, five middle schools and three comprehensive high schools.

- **Academic degrees:**
Examples: B.A., M.A., Ph.D.
- **Days of the week:**
Examples: Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat, Sun. Note: There is no period after each abbreviation.
- **Months:**
Examples: Abbreviate only these months: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.
- **Temperatures:** When referring to Fahrenheit, use a space after the number, followed by an uppercase F with no period.
Example: 85 F
- **Times:** Use a.m. and p.m.
Examples: 8 a.m., 5 p.m.
Exception: With social media and in space-bound charts, OK to use 8am, 5pm, etc.
- **Weights & measurements:** For ounces and pounds, use oz. and lb. with a space between the numeral and abbreviation. For feet and inches, use ft. and in. (not ' or ") with a space between the numeral and abbreviation. When using both feet and inches in a measurement, use a space in between with no comma. Examples: 16 oz., 150 lb., 5 ft. 10 in.

AGES

Always use figures.

Example: The child is 5 years old.

For ages expressed as adjectives before a noun, use hyphens.

Example: The 18-year-old students voted for the first time this year.

DATES/YEARS

Dates should be abbreviated. You do not need to use the year unless you are referring to a previous or future year.

Example: "On Feb. 2, fifth graders at Claremont visited the Smithsonian," not "On February 2, 2013, fifth graders at Claremont visited the Smithsonian."

When referring to dates, it is not necessary to include ordinals (st, rd, nd, th).

Example: "On Sept. 11, students observed a moment of silence at 9:37 a.m." not "On Sept. 11th, students observed a moment of silence at 9:37 a.m."

Years: 2015-16 School Year, not 2015-2016 School Year.

EMAIL, ENEWSLETTER, ENEWS

Use without a hyphen (Not: e-mail.)

GRADES

Grades one through nine should be written out and grades 10-12 written as numbers.

Example: "Third graders in Sarah Smith's class..." not, "3rd graders in Sarah Smith's class..." and "Washington-Lee 10th grade students toured the Capitol today."

HOMEPAGE, ONLINE, WEBPAGE

One word, lowercase within a sentence, uppercase only when beginning a sentence.

INTERNET

Always capitalize "Internet."

ITS VS. IT'S

Its is the possessive form of the neutral pronoun it, e.g., "The snake shed its skin." It's is a contraction meaning "it is," e.g., "It's difficult to navigate the road with its twists and turns."

LESS VS. FEWER

Use less when talking about a volume or an amount of something. Use fewer when talking about discretely countable objects.

Example: "I have less money now because I have fewer dollar bills in my pocket."

MIDDLE INITIALS

Use middle initials only if the person uses it on a regular basis.

MONEY

- You do not need the cents in a round number, i.e. \$10
- Use exact figures up to \$1 million (e.g., \$999,999). On figures \$1 million or more, use: \$1 million, \$2.7 million, \$6.28 billion
- With ranges of amounts, don't drop designators such as million. \$8 million to \$10 million; not: \$8 to \$10 million

NUMBERS

Numbers one through nine should be spelled out, while numbers 10 and above should be written as numbers. Also, if the first word in a sentence is a number, it should be written out.

Example: "At the Feb. 14 School Board meeting, 101 employees were recognized for their service to APS," or "Twenty APS teachers earned National Board Certification this year ."

PERCENTAGES

Always use figures and spell out "percent" instead of using the % symbol in sentences.

Example: 5 percent, 25 percent

Exception: With social media and in charts/graphics, the % symbol is OK: 5%, 25%.

If used at the beginning of a sentence, spell out the number.

Example: Eighty-seven percent of Arlington residents do not have school-aged children.

PHONE NUMBERS

Because dialing area codes is no longer reserved for out of area calls, parentheses are no longer appropriate. Use hyphens, not periods.

Example: "For more information, call the School and Community Relations Office at 703-228-6005."

When referring to internal phone numbers, use x for extension, then the number. "Call Human Resources at x8139."

PLURALS

DO NOT use 's to indicate a plural. Apostrophes signify a contraction or a possessive, not a plural. The only exception is when referring to letters of the alphabet, e.g., "The students learned their ABC's," or "Mother taught us to mind our p's and q's."

- Most words: add s: flowers, slide rules
- Words ending in ch, s, sh, ss, x and z: add es: glasses (monarchs is the exception)
- Words ending in is: change to es, as in thesis to theses and basis to bases
- Words ending in y: if y is preceded by a consonant or qu, change y to i and add es: army to armies, soliloquy to soliloquies; otherwise, use s: donkey to donkeys
- Words ending in o: If o is preceded by a consonant, most plurals require es: hero to heroes (except pianos).
- Words ending in f: In general, change f to v and add es: leaf to leaves (except roofs)

PLURALS (cont'd.)

- Compound words: Words combined with no spaces in between just take an s: cupful to cupfuls. In cases where there is either a space or a hyphen between a compound word: attorney general to attorneys general, mother-in-law to mothers-in-law, deputy chief of staff to deputy chiefs of staff
- Proper names: Ending in es or z add es: Jones to Joneses. Ending in y add s, even if preceded by a consonant: Kennedy to Kennedys. Otherwise, just add s.

POSSESSIVES

- Singular nouns not ending in s: add 's: the student's grades
- Singular nouns ending in s: add 's unless the next word begins with an s: the witness's testimony, the Loris' smile, the campus's budget
- Singular proper names ending in s: use only an apostrophe: Achilles' heel
- Plural nouns not ending in s: add 's: women's rights
- Plural nouns ending in s: add only an apostrophe: states' rights, campuses' budgets
- Nouns plural in form, singular in meaning: add only an apostrophe: measles' effects, General Motors' profits
- Pronouns: "whose" is the possessive form of who, e.g., "She wondered whose coffee cup this was;" "who's" is a contraction meaning "who is," e.g., "Who's going to wash this coffee cup?"

PUNCTUATION

- Colon: The most frequent use of a colon is at the end of a complete sentence to introduce a list. Jeff has three favorite meals: breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Comma: Use commas to separate clauses. When listing a series of items, separate all but the last two with a comma. "The flag is red, white and blue." The only exception is when the last element of the series is a compound requiring its own conjunction: "I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast."
- Dash: Use a dash to set off a separate but related clause within a sentence: "The students took the test – albeit reluctantly – on Saturday morning." Use an en-dash to indicate continuing or inclusive numbers, such as dates, times or reference numbers: 2000–06, May–June 2005, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., pages 38–45.
- Ellipsis (...): Use three dots (no spaces between them but a space on each side) to signify that something has been left out of a direct quote or that the writer is jumping from one topic to another. If used after a whole sentence, put the period first, followed by a space, then the three dots, space and then the next sentence.
- Hyphen: Use a hyphen to link words with prefixes (pre-Renaissance literature), to link the elements of compound modifiers (entry-level job), or to link words or word fragments at line breaks. Use a hyphen to avoid ambiguity: He recovered from his illness. She re-covered the upholstered chair. If using a hyphen in a title, capitalize all words: e.g., "Multi-Lingual Testing Took Place Saturday."
- Parentheses: Avoid parentheticals where possible by rewriting the sentence, or using commas or dashes to isolate incidental material. If parenthetical information must be included, place a period outside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a complete sentence (such as this fragment). (An independent parenthetical sentence such as this one takes a period before the closing parenthesis.) When a phrase placed in parentheses (this one is an example) might normally qualify as a complete sentence but is dependent on the surrounding material, do not capitalize the first word or end with a period.
- Period: Always belongs inside quotation marks.
- Question mark: Goes inside the quotes when it is part of a question that is being quoted: He remarked, "Whose life is it anyway?" Goes outside the quotes if not part of the quoted material: Why did he say, "Your budget is sufficient"?
- Semicolon: Use a semicolon to separate two complete but related sentences. With quoted material, the semicolon always goes outside closed quote marks: Mr. T's favorite song is "My Way"; I prefer his version to Frank Sinatra's.
- Quotes: Use quotes at the beginning of each paragraph of a continuous quote of several paragraphs, but at the end of the last paragraph. Start a new paragraph for each full quotation in a story with quoted and unquoted sentences.

SCHOOL DISTRICT AND SCHOOL NAMES

Spell out the full name on first reference. For example, Arlington Public Schools (APS) received an award from AFAC. Use APS on second reference. When referring to the different schools across the district, there is a tendency to just use the first name of the school. To keep everything uniform, use the entire name. "Students from Barcroft Elementary School visited the Superintendent's office at the Education Center." Not "Students from Barcroft visited the Superintendent's office at the Ed. Ctr."

STATES AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Do not use the Postal abbreviation when abbreviating states. Always spell out state names when they stand alone. Eight states are never abbreviated; Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah. Memory Aid: Spell out the names of the two states that are not part of the contiguous United States and of the continental states that are five letters or fewer.

The correct abbreviations are: Ala., Ariz., Ark., Calif., Colo., Conn., Del., Fla., Ga., Ill., Ind., Kan., Ky., La., Md., Mass., Mich., Minn., Miss., Mo., Mont., Neb., Nev., N.H., N.J., N.M., N.Y., N.C., N.D., Okla., Ore., Pa., R.I., S.C., S.D., Tenn., Vt., Va., Wash., W. Va., Wis., Wyo.

Abbreviate as D.C. when the context requires that it be used in conjunction with Washington. Spell out when used alone. "The district," rather than D.C., should be used in subsequent references. A comma should always separate "Washington" and "D.C." as in "Washington, D.C." with a comma after "D.C." if the sentence continues.

Example: "In Washington, D.C., students visited the Smithsonian museum."

When referring to a major city, there is no need for the state abbreviation.

Example: The awards will be given at the annual NSPRA conference in San Diego.

THERE VS. THEIR VS. THEY'RE

"There" is indicative of a location, e.g., "The girls are standing over there." "Their" is the plural possessive pronoun, e.g., "The girls standing over there waved their hands." "They're" is a contraction meaning "they are," e.g., "The girls standing over there waved their hands because they're happy to see you."

TIME

Use one of these two options for time formats (depending on the situation):

- 2 a.m.-3 p.m. and 4-5 p.m. for more formal communications (this is AP Style)
- 2am-3pm and 4-5pm also is acceptable for more informal communications and for space reasons (in brochures, emails, social media, etc.)

Noon is 12 p.m. and midnight is 12 a.m. Use either the numeral form (preferred style) or word form — it is redundant to use both.

TITLES AND NAMES

Use titles when referring to people or staff.

Example: "During his visit to Wakefield, Superintendent Dr. Pat Murphy talked with students about the importance of studying," or "Williamsburg's principal Gordon Laurie talked with students."

Only capitalize a person's title if you are using it as part of their name. "Principal Gordon Laurie has been the head of Williamsburg for several years," but, "Gordon Laurie is the principal of Williamsburg."

The first time you refer to someone you should use their full name, and title if appropriate. From then on when you refer to that person, use their last name only.

Always provide a staff member's full name, on first mention, not Mr. or Mrs. Last Name.

Example: Librarian Jennifer Stacey organized the school's library night. Not: Ms. Stacey organized the school's library night.

YOUR VS. YOU'RE

"Your" is the possessive of you, e.g., "Please brush your teeth." "You're" is a contraction meaning "You are," e.g., "If you don't brush your teeth, you're going to have smelly breath."

MISCELLANEOUS STYLES

- Arlington Public Schools is a collective noun which is singular. “Arlington Public Schools is closed today.”
- Underway: Always use as one word (per the 2013 update to the AP Style Manual).
- Spaces: Always use a single space between sentences, i.e., after a period—in letters, on webpages, in social media or anywhere.
- A handout is not a “flyer” it is a “flier.”
- Pre-Kindergarten should be abbreviated PreK
- The following are the correct ways to refer to the Internet.
 - website
 - webpage
 - webmaster
 - homepage
- Go easy on capital letters. Only use caps in proper names, i.e. Jennifer Harris, director of School and Community Relations. Only Superintendent and Asst. Superintendent, and Principal titles should be capitalized.
- Aid/Aide: Aid is assistance. An aide is an assistant.
- On first reference, write out Arlington School Board. On following references refer to it as School Board or Board.
- Local University Abbreviations
 - American University – AU
 - George Washington University – GWU
 - George Mason University – GMU
 - James Madison University – JMU
 - University of the District of Columbia – UDC
 - University of Virginia – UVA.
 - University of Maryland – UMD
- APS Logo- When using the APS logo, make sure that you do not change the shape or alter the logo in any way. See the APS Logo Style Guide for more details.

SPELLCHECK AND AUTO CORRECT

Spellcheck and auto correct are great tools but they are not always accurate. Double check by having someone proof your work.

If you have something that you think should be in the Style Guide email it to Frank Bellavia at frank.bellavia@apsva.us.