

## CRNW WRITING GUIDELINES

### INTRODUCTION

Writing guidelines aren't as much about being right or wrong as they are about maintaining a consistency that polishes our written communication and streamlines our production processes. Sometimes written communication is the first—or only—impression of us that people see.

While proper use of the English language can be debated, the overall goal is to be consistent and maximize readability. These writing guidelines are based on two standard reference guides:

- *The Elements of Style*, William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White,
- *The Gregg Reference Manual*, William A. Sabin

There are many rules in the English language that are commonly broken, or that leave room for interpretation. The following guidelines have been developed to maintain consistency and readability across all written material.

There is no such thing as a traditional 'draft' in our business. Writers should write as if the draft is the only document they will have a chance to write and submit the document in as final a form as possible with associated reviews, checks, and organization.

### WRITING STYLE & LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

- Aim for a friendly, informal, direct voice (use first-person voice: 'we' and 'you').
- Use concise language and short paragraphs.
- Maintain consistent tense (past, present, future) throughout.
- Eliminate excess words or phrases.
- Minimize the use of unnecessary jargon and technical language.
- Minimize abbreviations.
- Minimize capitalization.
- Minimize punctuation.
- Minimize hyphenation.
- Avoid redundancy in word usage within the same sentence or paragraph.
- Avoid the use of passive voice as in, "We avoid the use of passive voice" versus "The use of passive voice is avoided."
- Avoid using the past perfect progressive as in, "We had been designing per the specifications until we saw your directive."
- Avoid starting and ending sentences with prepositions.

## WORD PROCESSING STANDARDS

### PLATFORM

Draft documents should be created in MSWord to enable easy editing before a document goes into InDesign or another design program.

### MARGINS

Unless specified by the client, margins should be set at least 1" on the left or gutter for binding/punching.

### SENTENCE SPACING

Use only one space between sentences instead of two. It should be standard practice to search and replace single spacing with two on all documents, particularly those that import copy from other authors.

### PARAGRAPH JUSTIFICATION

Always use left-justified (ragged right), rather than full justification to maximize readability. Our eyes use the ragged right edge to help navigate where we are vertically on the page.

### BULLETS

Bulleted text should use sentence caps (only first word is capped). Additionally:

- **All items in the list should use consistent punctuation: either all full sentences with periods, or all partial sentences with no period.**
- **Bullets should align left with margins (no indent).**

### SPELLCHECK

All writers, even those working on draft documents, have the responsibility to use spellcheck on their documents prior to sending out for team or marketing review. This will reduce unnecessary work by others and make documents easier to read.

### WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

A widow is a word or line of text that is forced to go on alone and start its own column or page. An orphan is a single word at the bottom of a paragraph that gets left behind. We adjust spacing to avoid widows and orphans as the final step in the design process.

## GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION USAGE

The following list includes our preferences for grammar and punctuation usage as well as commonly missed grammar rules for reference.

**Acronyms:** Acronyms may be used so long as they are spelled out in the first reference in any document with the acronym in parentheses immediately following the name or term as in “Erosion and Sediment (E&S) Control.”

**Affect and Effect:** “Affect” means “to have an effect on,” “distress,” or “assume.” “Affecting” means “emotional,” “moving,” or “touching.”

“Effect” as a noun means “result” or “consequence.” “Effect” as a verb means “to achieve” or “to appear.” “Effective” means “effectual,” “real,” or “operative.”

**Ampersand (&):** This symbol should be used when referring to an official name as in “Ben & Jerry’s” or in a standard industry term as in “E&SControl.” It should never be used in place of “and.”

**Assure, Ensure, and Insure:** “Assure” means to give confidence to someone. “Ensure” means to make certain. “Insure” means to protect against loss.

**Bullets:** Bullets containing a fragment of a sentence (no subject and/or verb) do not have a period at the end. Bullets containing full sentences require a period at the end.

**Capitalization:** Capital letters are used in major headers as in “Design-Build Approach,” but are not used in the middle of a sentence. For example, “The following section details the elements of our design-build approach.” The only exception to this guideline is when referring to a formal, recognized title as in “Our approach is predicated on guidance from the Design Build Institute of America (DBIA).”

**Colons:** Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause explains or illustrates the first clause and there is no coordinating conjunction or transitional expression linking the two clauses. If you aren’t sure whether to use a semicolon or a colon between two independent clauses, you can always treat each clause as a separate sentence and use a period at the end of each. For example, “I have a special fondness for the Maine coast: it reminds me of the many happy summers we spent there before our children went off to college.” Or, “I have two major hurdles to clear before I get my PhD: pass the oral exam and write a dissertation.”

Place a colon before such expressions as “for example,” “namely,” and “that is” when they introduce words, phrases, or a series of clauses anticipated earlier in the sentence as in, “The company provides a number of benefits not commonly offered in this area: for example, free dental insurance, low-cost term insurance, and personal financial counseling services.”

When a clause contains an anticipatory expression (“such as the following,” “as follows,” “thus,” and “these”) and directs attention to a series of explanatory words, phrases, or clauses, use a colon between the clause and the series as in, “These are some of the new features in this year’s models: a fuel economy indicator, a new rear suspension, and a three-year limited warranty.”

Use a colon even if the anticipatory expression is only implied as in, “The house has attractive features: cross ventilation in every room, a two-story living room, and two terraces.”

Do not capitalize after a colon if the material that follows cannot stand alone as a complete sentence as in, “I must

countersign all cash advances, with one exception: when the amount is less than \$50.”

**Comprise and Compose:** “Comprise” means “to contain” or “to consist of.” “Compose” means “to make up.” The parts compose (make up) the whole; the whole comprises (contains) the parts; the whole is composed of (not: is comprised of) the parts. For example, “The parent corporation comprises (consists of) three major divisions” and “Three major divisions compose (make up) the parent corporation.”

Do not use “comprise” and “include” as synonyms. “Include” implies that what follows represents some but not all of the parts. “Comprise” implies that what follows embraces all the parts.

**Conjunctions:** Avoid them.

**Constructability and constructibility:** Both are correct and frequently used. We prefer constructability, but are flexible depending on client usage and consistency within documents. The most likely deviation from this would be if something was constructible.

**e.g. and i.e.:** Use these common abbreviations correctly. Each of these abbreviations is typically offset by commas as in “We are dissatisfied with the test results, e.g., the soils tests, the atmospheric test, and the water test, etc.”

“i.e.” stands simply for “that is” and is used in place of “in other words” or “it/that is.” It specifies or makes more clear. For example, “We recommend the first alternative, i.e., replacing the well with a sloped pit.”

“e.g.” means “for example” or “for the sake of an example” and is used in expressions similar to “including,” when you are not intending to list everything that is being discussed. For example, “We recommend a range of alternatives, e.g., replacing the well with a sloped pit, deleting this scope entirely, using recycled aluminum piping, etc.”

**Evasive and invasive:** “Evasive” means “tending or seeking to evade.” “Invasive” refers to aggression, a tendency to spread, a medical procedure requiring puncture or incision, and intrusion or encroachment.

**Hyphens, En Dashes, and Em Dashes:** (The names en and em refer to the width of the dash: the en dash is roughly the width of the letter n, and the em dash is roughly the width of the letter m.) Hyphens (-) are used to create compound words.

En dashes (–) are used in place of the word ‘to’ in order to link two figures that represent a continuous sequence. Do not leave a space before or after the en dash as in, “during the week of May 15–21” or “for the years 1987–1997.” Do not use the en dash if the sequence is introduced by the word from or between as in, “from 1995 to 1998” (not “from 1995–1998”).

Em dashes (—) are used in place of a comma, semicolon, colon, or parentheses to create emphasis. There is no space before or after the dash as in, “At this year’s annual banquet, the speakers—and the food—were superb” or, “The job needs to be done—moreover, it needs to be done well.”

**Including and Such As:** When creating a list, the word “including” is typically offset by a comma before the word: “Our approach yields numerous benefits to the project, including reduced risk, increased satisfaction, and lower first cost.” When using “such as,” no comma is required: “Our approach yields numerous benefits to the project such as reduced risk, increased satisfaction, and lower first cost.”

**It’s and Its:** “It’s” is a contraction for “it is” or “it has” as in, “It’s time to take stock of our achievements.”

“Its” is possessive as in, “The company must protect its assets.”

**Jobsite:** Though technically correct in either one word or two, we prefer it as one word.

**Job Title Capitalization:** In general, titles that come before names (with no commas) are capitalized, and titles that come after names, or refer to an individual without their name, are lowercase.

**Numbers:** Numbers ten and under are spelled out; numbers over ten are not, as in “We will review the work completed in zones one through ten, but not 11 through 20.” However, if a number is at the start of a sentence, it should be spelled out as in “Forty-four of the 50 items were incorrect.”

**Preventive and Preventative:** Use “preventive” instead of “preventative.” Although these words have the same meaning, preventive is preferred because it is the shorter form and the one more commonly used.

**Preconstruction:** We prefer to use it in one word, no hyphens.

**Pre-installation:** Use the hyphenated “pre-installation” instead of “preinstallation,” as it is the more commonly used term.

**Pronoun References:** Need to be clear and correct in each body, there should be frequent and clear references to the subject of your pronoun.

**Proper Names:** We prefer to use first names after the first reference using the full name for a friendlier voice (proposals, resumes, websites, etc.)

In more formal writing, such as press releases, news articles, and client surveys, it is preferable to use the last name after the first full-name reference.

Titles and positions are only capped when used as part of a proper name. For example: “Senior Project Manager John Smith will lead the project team during preconstruction.” Or, “John Smith, our proposed senior project manager, will lead the project team during preconstruction.”

**Quotations:** Punctuation always goes on the inside of the end quotation as in, “The engineer will provide the final estimate.”

**Semicolons:** When a coordinating conjunction (“and,” “but,” “or,” or “nor”) is omitted between two independent clauses, use a semicolon—not a comma—to separate the clauses. If you prefer, you can treat the second clause as a separate sentence. For example, “Most of the stockholders favored the sale; the management did not.” (Not, “Most of the stockholders favored the sale, the management did not.”)

Use a semicolon in place of a comma between independent clauses where more emphasis is desired, or to increase readability as in, “Many people are convinced that they could personally solve the problem if given the authority to do so; however, no one will come forward with a clear-cut plan that we can evaluate” (for emphasis) or, “I sent you an order for copier paper, computer paper, and envelopes; shipping tags, cardboard cartons, stapler wire, and binding tape were sent to me instead” (for clarity).

Use semicolons to separate complex lists (phrases); use commas to separate simple lists (one-word items).

**Serial Comma:** We use serial (or Oxford) commas (the comma before the “and”) for lists of more than two items as in, “This ATC reduces risk, minimizes impact to the base, and shortens the overall schedule.”



**Square Footage:** When referring to square footage, use ‘sf’ as in “20,000 sf of office space.” Hyphenate when modifying a noun as in “a 20,000-sf building.”

**Tenses:** Present tense is more powerful than future perfect tense.

**That, Which, Who, and Whom:** When used as a relative pronoun, “that” refers to things; it also refers to persons when a class or type is meant as in, “Here is a picture of the plan that I own.” When used as a subordinating conjunction, “that” links the dependent clause it introduces with the main clause as in, “We know that we will have to make cuts in the budget.”

Use “which” (rather than who) when referring to animals, things, and ideas. Always use “which” (instead of “that”) to introduce nonessential clauses: “The revised report, which was done by Mark, is very impressive.” “Which” may also be used to introduce essential clauses.

When referring to people, use “who” or “whom” instead of “that” or “which.”

**Their, There, and They’re:** “Their” is possessive. “There” refers to location. “They’re” is a contraction of “they are.”

**Toward:** Use “toward” rather than “towards.” Both forms are correct, but toward is the more common American usage.

**Verb Tenses:** Make sure that you are using the correct tense for your document.

Past	Present	Future
Simple Past	Simple Present	Simple Future
Last night, I read an entire novel.	I read nearly every day.	I will read as much as I can this year.
Past Continuous	Present Continuous	Future Continuous
I was reading Edgar Allan Poe last night.	I am reading Shakespeare at the moment.	I will be reading Nathaniel Hawthorne soon.
Past Perfect	Present Perfect	Future Perfect
I had read at least 100 books by the time I was twelve.	I have read so many books I can’t keep count.	I will have read at least 500 books by the end of the year.
Past Perfect Continuous	Present Perfect Continuous	Future Perfect Continuous
I had been reading for at least a year before my sister learned to read.	I have been reading since I was four years old.	I will have been reading for at least two hours before dinner tonight.

**Your and You’re:** “Your” is possessive. “You’re” is a contraction for “you are.”

## DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION TERMINOLOGY

- design-build (lower case with a hyphen)
- Lean (the Lean Institute now caps this term; it is not an acronym and should never be all caps)

## QA/QC CHECKLIST

When editing any document for Communication Resources, we strive to make sure that each one receives the same in-depth review and consideration. To that end, below is a list of points that all final editors are responsible for checking. This should ensure that all documents are up to our high standards.

### HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS

- Do not format with page breaks. This will create problems for you if the document is edited, potentially leaving blank pages or hanging sentences.
- If text needs to stay together, use the command in the paragraph spacing command under 'line and page breaks;' select 'keep with next.'
- Run one last spell check before printing.
- Print a hardcopy to do final edits manually—any edits can be either handed off directly or scanned back to your teammate.

### CONSISTENCY

- Repeated information (ex: names, dates, phone numbers, ect.): If one repeating section doesn't have a certain info point, then it needs to be taken off all the appropriate repeating sections.
- Order of repeated info needs to be uniform as well.

### NAMES

- Consistent use of first/last or just first or just last

### VERB TENSES

- Make sure the document is both using the correct tense for your document and there is a consistent use of tense throughout the document.

### FORMATTING

- Widows and Orphans: Eliminate through clever formatting.
- Headers and Footers: Double check they are formatted and spaced correctly.
- Punctuation in bullets: If a bullet is a complete sentence (subject and a verb), it gets a period. If it is not, it doesn't. Bullets within the same list should always be consistent (complete sentences or incomplete sentences).
- Check for words that were not caught by spell check—to/too/two, four/for.