

OFM Style Guide



WASHINGTON STATE
Office of Financial Management
Office of the Director – Communications

WASHINGTON STATE
O**F****M**
Office of Financial Management

A note about this style guide

This copy of the OFM Style Guide was created in October 2024. For an updated version of this guide, see the OFM Brand Center or contact the [Communications team](#).

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To accommodate people with disabilities, this document is available in alternate formats by calling the Office of Financial Management (OFM) at 360-902-0599.

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Introduction

A consistent writing style promotes clear and effective communication. This style guide addresses questions that often arise in OFM communications work, but it is not exhaustive. For matters not covered here, ask the editor, [Myke Okuhara](#), or contact the [Communications team](#).

First and foremost, keep it simple:

- The most effective writing is the simplest.
- The easier something is to understand, the less likely it is to be misconstrued.
- Straightforward sentences with one subject, one verb, and one object are easily understood.
- Commas should be kept to a minimum, and semicolons should be used sparingly.
- Fewer words are better than more.
- Common words are better than obscure words.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations (such as OFM for the Office of Financial Management) may be used to mention agencies, programs, plans, departments, or the like. Do not use an abbreviation if the entity is mentioned only once in the section. In cases where the entity is mentioned twice, use your discretion in abbreviating.

Avoid using abbreviations in a title, heading, or subject line in correspondence.

Abbreviations may be used once the full name or title has been cited. Put the abbreviation in parentheses immediately after the first reference. For longer works, you may want to cite the full name and abbreviation again at the beginning of new major sections, as readers may skip directly to that section.

Example: The staff of Child Protective Services (CPS) ate lunch together every Friday. CPS employees started the practice in 2016.

Avoid overusing abbreviations because they can confuse, distract, or frustrate the reader.

Example: According to DSHS officials, DOH can make use of the HSA funds.

Better: According to DSHS officials, the Department of Health can make better use of the Health Savings Account funds.

Accessibility

We prioritize accessibility and equity in all OFM communications. To do so, we must strive to deliver products that all people can access and use, regardless of factors such as disability or reading level. All OFM employees share this responsibility.

By leading with accessibility, we deliver messaging that is more effective and inclusive, reaching more people with information, products, and services they can use.

Accessible communications are also required by law and policy. OFM must meet relevant standards of the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) and [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.1 – Level AA](#), as outlined in the [OFM Accessibility Policy](#) and [Washington State IT Accessibility Policy](#).

For additional information, please see our [Brand Center’s Accessibility page](#).

Accessible Writing

The most important tip for accessible writing is to keep it simple, as noted in this [style guide’s introduction](#).

To be sure, much of the work we do within OFM deals with highly technical terms and subjects. We aren’t asking you to communicate in ways that would be less true or precise. That said, aiming for simplicity will go a long way toward creating text that is easily accessible to all.

Writing for the web

When possible, publish content as a webpage. Web code tends to be easier to make accessible and mobile-device-friendly than, for example, PDF files.

When your communication is primarily accessed online, we must keep in mind that people are using a variety of devices and ways of navigating content. In general, for web-based writing:

- Use shorter sentences and paragraphs to prevent eye strain and increase readability.
- Keep your overall content shorter to prevent endless scrolling and to help readers stay focused on the most important points within your work.
- Provide meaningful alternative text (alt text) for all non-decorative visuals. See the [Formatting section](#) below for more information.

For additional tips on accessible writing for the web, see our [Web Content Guidelines](#) on our Brand Center.

Creating accessible documents

The Microsoft and Adobe suites offer a range of options to increase the accessibility of your documents and communications. Both offer “accessibility checks” for your document that will help you identify and remediate issues prior to finalizing your work. Every program is different, so consult the help menu or search online to find out how to initiate these checks.

Note that these automatic checks are imperfect and will not catch every accessibility error in your documents. They should only be a starting point in your efforts to make your documents as accessible as possible.

Formatting

Starting your work in accessible, readable formats is much easier than making corrections later. Formatting guidelines to keep in mind include:

- **Starting with an accessible template** – We offer several OFM-branded report and presentation templates. Reach out to Communications if you can’t find what you need.
- **Using left alignment for body text** – This helps keep the spaces between words consistent. Center alignment should be used only for short passages when there are aesthetic or formatting considerations to take into account. Right alignment should be used in table cells when the unit places need to match up.
- **Using Source Sans Pro size 11–12 font for body text** – A simple, commonly used, sans serif font will typically be most accessible for most readers. Source Sans Pro is OFM’s recommended brand font. Font size is important because it affects the length, appearance, and layout of each line of text should a user need to alter the size technologically.
- **Minimizing the use of footnotes and endnotes whenever possible** – If a footnote or endnote consists of just a web URL, consider adding it as a hyperlink to the body of the text instead.
- **Minimizing the use of forward slashes (“/”) between words when possible** – Instead, use “and” or “or,” which help readers comprehend meanings quickly and easily.
- **Providing meaningful alternative text (alt text) for all non-decorative visuals** – Tables, charts, and non-decorative images in your communications should be described through alt text. Tips for writing high quality alt text include:
 - Avoid using “image of” or “picture of.”
 - Be descriptive and concise about what the image is trying to convey. For instance, if the image is of a logo, identify the entity the logo is for (e.g., “Husky Stadium with two lone runners bounding up the steps,” or “Washington State Office of Financial Management logo”).

- Include any text that is embedded in the image (e.g., an image that says “Join this event on October 31” should be accompanied by alt text that includes that phrase).
- Learn more about alt text and find additional examples at [Authoring Meaningful Alternative Text | Section508.gov](#).
- **Using built-in tools for heading and table of contents**
 - Organize information in documents through headings. Heading 1 (also known as H1 or Title) should be used once per document or webpage. Apply headers in their numeric order (H1 followed by H2, followed by H3, etc.). Headings inform how screen reader users navigate your content. Applying headings out of order or reusing level H1 can disrupt the way screen reader users access your content.
 - Create a table of contents or a list of links to major sections for lengthy reports and documents.

Tables and charts

Word has a chart function that allows you to build simple, accessible charts in your document:

- **Build charts in the Word file, when possible** – Simply import your number values (not formulas) from your Excel file into Word and format your chart.
- **Always include column and row headers when creating a table or chart** – This allows screen reader users to navigate this content effectively.
- **Use high contrast colors and do not rely on color alone to convey meaning** – If you are creating pie charts or bar graphs that use color, make sure there is enough contrast between elements that are overlapping or side-by-side (use a tool like the [WebAIM: Contrast Checker](#)). Include distinct patterns (dots, lines, or shading) that are associated with each respective color to help low-vision or color-blind users distinguish between the content you are comparing.

There may be instances when you must include more complex tables or charts. You have the option of importing Excel-created charts into your Word document. This can be tricky for chart-heavy publications and complicated charts. In these instances, be sure to include alt text that summarizes the key meanings and takeaways from the visualization.

Bullets and numbered lists

Bullets

Always use the MS Word bullet function alone to create bullets. Adding spaces or tabs to bullets can cause major editing problems.

Capitalize the first word in a bullet if the bullet forms a complete sentence. Avoid situations where a bulleted list contains long phrases that require periods alongside short phrases that don't.

The sentence preceding a bulleted list should be complete and end with a colon. Place periods after independent clauses (complete sentences), dependent clauses, or long phrases that follow bullets.

Do not create a bullet list if there is only one item in that list.

Example: To meet the new requirements of the law, the department will:

- Distribute written procedures to guide staff in the activities listed above.
- Make certain that staff members use appropriate records to calculate distributions.
- Allocate all funds collected from the assessment.

If a list consists of short phrases composed of two or three words only, do not place any punctuation after the entries. Do not capitalize the first word in these short phrases.

Example: We examined the following documents:

- statistical reports
- financial statements
- historical records
- correspondence
- interviews

Numbered lists

In a sentence, use parentheses to enclose numbers or letters that accompany numbered items.

Example: We need the following to complete your travel authorization: (1) the cost of the hotel, (2) the cost of the airfare, and (3) the actual time of travel.

In a displayed list where the enumerated items appear on separate lines, the letters or numbers are not followed by periods unless each line forms a complete sentence. In such cases, a list may not be necessary. Do not create numbered list if there is only one item in that list.

Incorrect: 1. yellow highlighters

Correct: 1. yellow highlighters
2. pencils and pens
3. notebook and paper

Better: We were asked to bring yellow highlighters, pencils and pens, and notebook and paper.

Capitalization

Biennium is not capitalized when referring to a two-year budget period.

Examples: The governor proposed a budget for the 2003–05 biennium.
Funding will be higher than in the current biennium.

See Numerals section for more rules about “biennium.”

Black is capitalized when referring to race, culture, or community.

Examples: Black history in Washington
leaders in the Black community

Budget is not capitalized.

Examples: the 2023 proposed budget
capital budget
supplemental budgets

City and county are capitalized only when they are part of a proper name or formal title.

Examples: Kansas City

the city of Olympia
the county board of commissioners

Committee, commission, board, department, and director are not capitalized when used alone. Capitalize when used in a formal title that precedes the name of the individual.

Examples: OFM Director Pat Sullivan issued the memorandum.
As director of the agency, Sullivan was required to do so.
The Transportation Commission meets Thursday.
Members of the commission are looking forward to the session.

Compass directions and adjectives derived from them are usually capitalized when they refer to a specific geographical area. Otherwise, do not capitalize.

Examples: They live *in* the East. (Referring to a known location, e.g., the East Coast)
They live *to* the east. (Referring to a general direction)
Western Washington has most of the state’s population.
Pullman is south of Spokane.
The storm front moved to the north.

Federal is not capitalized when used as an adjective to distinguish something from state, county, or other entities. “Federal” is capitalized only when part of a formal title, for instance, the full name of a federal agency.

Examples: State welfare programs are funded by state and federal dollars.
The programs are funded by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Fiscal years are not capitalized. Note that the abbreviations FY and SFY (for state fiscal year) are acceptable for use, provided that the words are fully spelled out on their first reference, as with any abbreviation.

Examples: The new funding will not be available until fiscal year 2022.
Revenue will rise over the next two fiscal years.
Spending will decline during fiscal years 2019 and 2020.

See Numerals section for more rules about “fiscal years.”

Funds and accounts are capitalized when the formal name of the fund is used.

Examples: The General Fund-State finances day-to-day state operations.

Tobacco prevention is funded through the Health Services Account.
The highway project will be financed by various transportation accounts.

Governor is not capitalized unless it precedes the name of a governor. And in that case, it is abbreviated.

Examples: The governor wasn't feeling well after his return from a vacation.
Gov. Inslee joined the group after a quick break.
The governors in the room were appreciative of his thoughtful remarks.

Legislature is capitalized when referring to the Washington State Legislature. The words "legislative," "congressional," "legislator," and "legislation" should all be lowercase. "Congress," "House," and "Senate" are capitalized, but lowercase is used for "senator" and "representative" when used without a legislator's name.

Examples: The governor made his proposal to the Legislature.
Several senators back the House leaders' plan.
After lunch, Gov. Inslee spoke to congressional leadership about state finances.
Members of Congress were impressed with the presentation.
The meeting with legislative staff went smoothly.

Program is not capitalized unless part of a formal title.

Examples: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
Regional Support Network program

Seasons are not capitalized.

Examples: The Legislature meets during winter and early spring.
The report is due in the fall.

Tribe, Tribal should be capitalized in almost all contexts. Rare exceptions include usages not specific to Indigenous peoples (e.g., "tribalism"), though in these cases, finding a different word or phrase is often preferred.

Examples: The program was developed by members of the Suquamish Tribe.
The agency met with members of the Tribe to learn more about their stewardship of resources on Tribal lands.

Washington State is capitalized only when referring to the university on second reference (the

first reference would be “Washington State University”). The word “state” is lowercase when used alone or in the phrases “state of Washington” or “Washington state.” The word “state” can be capitalized when used in a formal title or name of an organization.

Examples: Some say Washington state is great the way it is.
Others contend the state of Washington could be improved.

Grammar

Apostrophes – No apostrophe is needed in numerical figures.

Examples: 1990s, size 7s, temperature in the low 20s

Gendered language – Whenever possible, consider using nongendered terms, titles, and salutations to avoid language biases towards a particular sex or social gender. Since you cannot assume a person's gender identity based on external appearance, name, or sex assigned at birth, if you are unsure about a person's pronouns and titles, consider using their first and last name or address them with a nongendered salutation such as "M." or "Mx."

Incorrect: “Mr. Smith goes to Washington.”

Correct: “Jennifer Smith goes to Washington.” or “Mx. Smith goes to Washington.”

Parallel sentence construction – Parallel construction is the consistent use of phrases or words that are consecutively listed.

Incorrect: Under the governor’s proposal, two demonstration projects will:

- Give schools funding and regulatory flexibility for selected school districts.
- Selected school districts receive waivers for state school regulations.

Correct: Under the governor’s proposal, two demonstration projects will give schools:

- Additional waivers from regulations
- State funding

Note that in the Incorrect example, the first bullet is structured properly, but the second does not match. In the Correct example, the construction and verbs in each listing flow easily from the introductory phrase. Note that, as these are short bullets, it would be even better to simply express them in a sentence.

Additionally, sentences and phrases in the same list should consistently use the same tense (past, present, or future) and construction (passive or active voice).

Percentages – Express percentages in numerals, including numerals one through nine. Use the % sign in all instances unless describing an increase or decrease of “percentage points.”

Examples: Mortgage rates increased from 6% to 7%.
The department expects to receive a 25% increase in reimbursements. The mortgage rate increased by one percentage point, from 6% to 7%.
Fractional percentages should be presented in numeric form.

Examples: 1.1% or 10.3%

For fractions less than 1%, add a zero before the decimal.

Example: 0.8%

Quotations – Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks.

Examples: The freeway will be called “The Veterans of Foreign Wars Memorial Freeway.”
The freeway, to be called the “The Veterans of Foreign Wars Memorial Freeway,” will be completed in 10 years.

Spaces between sentences – Use a single space between sentences.

Statute authority and legislative authority – Laws which have been codified should be cited by title and chapter number.

Example: Budget and Accounting Act (chapter 43.88 RCW) *or* chapter 43.88 RCW

When citing a specific part of a statute, add the section number after the title and chapter with no spaces.

Example: RCW 39.26.010

Laws which have not been codified should be cited by chapter number and year.

Example: Model Toxics Control Act – Cleanup Standards (chapter 359, Laws of 1995) *or* chapter 359, Laws of 1995

Do not refer to a bill by number if it has passed the Legislature. Use the correct chapter and session reference. The bill can be referenced in parentheses following the chapter citation.

New legislation or legislative changes made during a special session of the Legislature should be identified using the ordinal number of the special session.

Example: chapter xx, Laws of 2001 2nd Sp. Sess, provides for a general salary increase.

Titles of books and periodicals – Put quotation marks around titles of books, television programs, movies, and speeches. No quotation marks are needed for works of reference. Do not use italics for titles.

Examples: Editors just released “The Best Pony Book Ever.”
Her favorite show is “Lost.”
“The Gettysburg Address” was reprinted in its entirety.
He reads the Bible every night.

Numerals

Whole numerals nine and lower should be spelled out. Numerals 10 and greater should be in figures. Figures should be used when referring to dates, money, proportions, ratios, or FTE staff years.

Numerals are used for all percentages, even those less than 10.

Follow the rules above for text. For tables, charts, and other graphics, use numerals for all number values.

Examples: The department hired eight inspectors last October.
The department director said the agency needed 12.8 FTEs.
The new staff will cost \$90.8 million, or 8% of the total budget.
The department will complete the new hiring by March 1.
Our 75 staff members consumed a total of 120 hamburgers, five large bottles of Coke, 115 ice cream bars, and about 200 cookies — all at one sitting.

Millions and billions are spelled out when writing whole numbers in text. For numbers in thousands or hundreds, use numerals alone.

Examples: The \$31.57 billion budget funds state services for a population of 6.5 million.
More than 60,000 children are expected to benefit.

Begin sentences with numerals spelled out.

Example: Twenty-three people will be appointed to the boards and commissions.

Month and year, when written together, are not separated by commas.

Example: The governor will make their 2010 supplemental budget proposal by mid-December 2018.

Nouns with numbers or letters should capitalize the noun followed by a number or a letter that indicates a sequence.

Examples: Appendix I
Chapter V
Room 234

Cent notations for amounts less than a dollar should use numerals and the word “cent(s).”

Example: The governor wants to increase the gas tax by 9 cents a gallon, but the Senate prefers a 12-cent increase.

Dollar notations in text should be handled as follows:

Thousands – \$487,000 (round up or down as appropriate, with no decimal)

Millions – \$3.4 million (round to one decimal point)

Billions – \$6.84 billion (round to two decimal points unless the first numeral is 0)

To prevent misunderstanding, place the word “million,” “billion,” or “trillion” after each figure in a pair or group.

Incorrect: Assessments increased from \$3.2 to \$6.1 million.

Correct: Assessments increased from \$3.2 million to \$6.1 million.

Do not use the word “dollars” when expressing monetary values. Instead, use the “\$” symbol.

Incorrect: 4.8 million dollars

Correct: \$4.8 million

Biennium and fiscal years are separate concepts. In Washington, a two-year state budget is adopted in odd-numbered years. This budget is known as the biennial budget. Biennium is not capitalized unless it starts a sentence.

Use all the figures of the first year, plus an [en dash](#), then the last two numerals of the final year unless the time frame spans a century, such as 1999–2001.

Example: The governor’s proposal for the 2003–05 biennium totals \$25.47 billion.

In Washington, the state government fiscal year is composed of the last six months of one calendar year and the first six months of the next, or July 1 to June 30. A biennium consists of two fiscal years.

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

Incorrect: The new funding will begin in fiscal year ’02.

Correct: The new funding will begin in fiscal year 2002.

Do *not* identify a biennium in terms of fiscal years. See Capitalization section for more rules about

“biennium” and “fiscal years.”

Preferred word choices, usages, and spellings

affect vs. effect – As a verb, “affect” means to influence or change. As a noun, “effect” indicates a result or impression.

Examples: The recommendations will not affect the agency’s organizational structure.
We could not assess the full effect of the automated system.

although vs. while – Both words introduce dependent clauses. Use “although” to mean “even if.” Use “while” to mean “during the time that.”

Examples: Although rain was in the forecast, the game was not canceled.
They played while it rained.

among vs. between – Use the preposition “among” when referring to more than two persons or things. Use “between” when referring to two persons or things.

Examples: The grant funds will be divided among the four agencies.
We tried to distinguish between the two legal opinions.

around – The word “around” is imprecise. Instead, use “about,” “on,” or another adverb.

because vs. since – Use “because” to point to an obvious cause-effect relationship, and use “since” to denote temporal relationships or a logical sequence of events in which time plays a part.

Examples: The report was rejected because it contained so many fiscal errors.
No one has looked at the report since it was rejected Tuesday.

capital vs. capitol – The capital of Washington is Olympia. State construction projects are funded by the capital budget. In Washington state, the Capitol refers to the Legislative Building. Capitalize “capitol” when referring to the building in Washington, D.C., or when referring to the capitol building located in a state capital.

Example: I met the legislator at the Capitol, a building which is in Olympia, the capital of Washington state.

child care – Should be written as two words unless part of a proper noun which styles it as a single word.

citizen – This term should be avoided unless specifically referring to a country’s citizens. When referring to all Washingtonians, for instance, using “residents of” or “people of” is preferred.

Example: The implementation of this law has far-reaching consequences for all residents of Washington.

cost-saving vs. cost savings – As a hyphenated word, “cost-saving” is an adjective. When split into two words, “cost savings” is a noun.

Examples: The department will take cost-saving measures.
Efficiencies recommended by employees produced a cost savings of \$500,000.

data – Data can be used either as a plural or singular noun. The most important thing is to keep its usage consistent throughout a sentence or paragraph (preferably throughout the entire piece of communication).

Example: The data was clear, but the analysis misinterpreted its meaning.

e.g. vs. i.e. – Latin words and phrases: “e.g.” means “for example,” and “i.e.” means “that is.” When used, each abbreviation should be followed by a comma. Avoid overusing these notations; write out their full meanings or find another way to state it whenever possible.

Example: The policy paper examined a number of important issues (e.g., monetary practices, regulatory environments, and legislative provisions).
These negotiations were particularly “difficult” (i.e., politically sensitive).

Better: The policy paper examined a number of important issues, for example, monetary practices, regulatory environments, and legislative provisions.
These negotiations were particularly “difficult,” which is to say, politically sensitive.

full-time – The term should be hyphenated when used as a compound modifier. Use the same rule for part-time.

Example: Leonard has a full-time job. However, he does not like to work full time.

health care – Should be written as two words unless part of a proper noun which styles it as a single word.

impact – As a noun, this word means “to force tightly together” or a “significant or major effect.” Use sparingly. In most cases, the word “effect” or “result” is a better choice.

Example: The cut in the prime rate will have a major impact on the economy.

Better: The cut in the prime rate will have a major effect on the economy.

in order to – Avoid this phrase when possible. It adds unnecessary verbiage to a sentence.

include – The word means “some, but not all of.” When listing all the elements of a set, use “are” or “composed of” instead.

Examples: The committee of four included a representative from the Department of Agriculture.

The committee members are from the departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation, and Health.

its vs. it’s – “Its” is a possessive form of the pronoun “it.” When an apostrophe is added, “it’s” is a contraction for “it is.”

Examples: We checked the door and discovered someone had tampered with its lock.
It’s a sure bet that Doug will be late for the interview.

its vs. their – Use “its” for singular subjects and “their” for plural subjects.

Examples: The committee issued its recommendations.

The House of Representatives released its budget.

The department’s priorities were expressed clearly in its budget.

The members of the committee expressed their displeasure over the lateness of the report.

There are exceptions for the above rule, which include using “their” as a singular possessive when it is the subject’s personal pronoun. “Their” should also be used as a singular possessive instead of using the more awkward and less inclusive “his or her” or “his/her.”

Incorrect: M. Johnson walked his dog past the new neighbor’s apartment. He hadn’t met the neighbor yet but was curious to learn more about him or her.

Correct: M. Johnson walked their dog past the new neighbor’s apartment. They hadn’t met the neighbor yet but was curious to learn more about them.

LGBTQ+ – An abbreviation for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus” when referring to the community, culture, and people. Note that this is the baseline abbreviation; we accept and encourage the use of abbreviations that include additional identities, such as “LGBTQIA+” and “2SLGBTQIA+,” whenever appropriate.

Example: The agency surveyed members of the LGBTQ+ community for additional feedback.

long-term vs. long term – As a hyphenated word, “long-term” is an adjective. When split into two words, “long term” is used as the object of a preposition.

Examples: We have a long-term plan for accomplishing our mission.
Your solution will not work for the long term.

non – This prefix usually requires no hyphen unless a capitalized word follows.

Examples: nonessential
noncompliance
non-American

only – Be careful where you place this word. Note how meanings change with different placements.

Examples: He was happy to see only me. (*No one else could make him happy.*)
He was happy to only see me. (*If I talked to him on the phone instead, he wasn't happy.*)

policymaker, policymaking – Should be one word in most instances (used as a noun or modifier). Compare to “decision-maker” and “decision-making” which should be hyphenated in most instances.

Examples: The policymaker wished to limit the bill's provision giving the committee additional policymaking authority. (*A person in a position to make policy had an opinion on a committee's authority.*)
The policy making attendees prove their identity was widely derided. (*A policy exists that makes attendees prove their identity.*)

re – As a rule, the prefix “re” (meaning again) should not be followed by a hyphen. A few words require the hyphen so they can be distinguished from other words with the same spelling but different meaning.

Examples: reelection
reevaluate
recover (from an illness)
re-cover (a sofa)

Note that the abbreviation “re:” (when used to stand for “regarding”) should be avoided in formal writing.

rulemaking – Should be one word in most instances (used as a noun or modifier).

Examples: The committee was busy with rulemaking. (*The committee was creating rules.*)
The rule making last-minute policy changes illegal was cited in the decision. (*A rule exists that makes last-minute policy changes illegal.*)

revenue – The singular form is correct even when money is derived from several sources.

Example: Department revenue from licenses and fees is \$11.6 million.

short-term vs. short term – As a hyphenated word, “short-term” is an adjective. When split into two words, “short term” is used as the object of a preposition.

Examples: He made some short-term investments.
That strategy will work only for the short term.

utilize – Avoid using this term. “Use” is preferable.

Examples: The committee used experts to conduct research.
We used several resources to prepare the report.
The committee utilized a new technique to conduct research.

within – In most instances, “in” expresses the same relationship as “within.” Reserve “within” when referring to the interior of an object or when something is not beyond in distance, time, degree, range, etc.

Examples: He worked in the budget office.
The appropriation was changed in the third version of the budget.
The goal was within our reach.

whose vs. who’s – “Whose” is the possessive form of “who,” “which,” and “that” and refers to either animate or inanimate objects. “Who’s” is a contraction of “who is” or “who has.”

Examples: The detective still did not know whose car was at the scene.
She is the detective who’s been assigned to the case.

Punctuation

Commas. Use serial commas (also known as the Oxford or Harvard comma) to separate items in simple lists and compound subjects. Note that this is a deviation from the standard guidance from the AP Stylebook (OFM’s default style guide).

Example: We will use pink, purple, and yellow for this year’s cover of the annual report.

Em dashes. Em dashes are punctuation that *offset text* in the middle or end of a sentence, for instance, in place of parentheses. Note that a space precedes and follows a dash. On Windows computers, the Em Dash can be typed with Alt+0151. On Mac computers, it can be typed with Shift+Option+Hyphen.

Examples: My favorite cars — Mercedes, Porsche, and Jaguar — are expensive.
That’s what is fun about writing the budget — bad food, long days, and little sleep.

En dashes. En dashes should be used to *indicate a range of numbers or dates*. Note that for ranges, there are no spaces surrounding the dash. On Windows computers, the En Dash can be typed with Alt+0150. On Mac computers, it can be typed with Option+Hyphen.

Examples: Between 30–40 patients each year seek professional care for this condition.
The event was held from July 30–August 4.

Date. When the full date is used in a sentence, use a comma after the day and after the year. When the day of the week appears, separate it from the date with a comma, as well.

Example: As of Monday, Aug. 6, 2001, the program was without funds.

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

Incorrect: We began the audit on March 3rd.

Correct: We began the audit March 3.

Times. When indicating a time (even at the top of an hour), write out the full hours and minutes followed by a space and lowercase “a.m.” or “p.m.”

Example: The survey was conducted between 9:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Survey takers were invited to attend a debriefing that evening from 4:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Hyphens. A compound adjective consists of two or more words that function as a unit and express a single thought. Hyphenate the elements of a compound adjective that occur before a noun. No space precedes or follows a hyphen.

Example: a high-ranking official
same-day service
community-based organizations

Hyphenate all fractions when written out.

Example: two-thirds

Whenever necessary, use a hyphen to prevent one word from being mistaken for another.

Example: lock the coop vs. buy a co-op

Hyphenate between numbers and units of time when used as adjectives before a noun.

Examples: one-year period
three-hour course

In general, do not use a hyphen to set off a prefix at the beginning of a word.

Example: nonfederal
nonthreatening

Do not use a hyphen after an adverb that ends in “ly.”

Examples: federally mandated program
highly flammable material

Parentheses. When a parenthetical element falls within another parenthetical element, enclose the smaller element in brackets and enclose the larger element in parentheses.

Example: The chairman said on television yesterday that no action on the bill is planned.
(However, in an article published in The Seattle Times [Aug. 9, 2001], she said a committee decision is expected Tuesday.)

Writing tone and style for legislative audiences

As with any work you produce, communications intended for legislators and their staff should be professional and uphold OFM's reputation as an agency. Additionally, the tone and style of your messaging should be tailored to the kind of work you are producing. At a very basic level, your writing should fall into one of two distinct styles:

- **Neutral**

- Use straightforward language and cite objective data and facts from trusted sources.
- Whenever possible, avoid using subjective language unless it's attributable or a source is cited.
 - Example of subjective language: "Option B is best for the community."
 - Example of non-subjective language: "Community members stated Option B best meets local needs."
- Include as much relevant background information as is needed to give the reader an understanding of the topic; don't make assumptions about the reader's previous knowledge.
- If making recommendations, only do so within the parameters called for in the bill or directive.
- **Examples of times to use a neutral style:** Forecasting & Research reports requested by the Legislature, legislatively directed proviso studies or workgroup reports, presentations to legislative committees

- **Persuasive**

- Use active language aimed at supporting the overall message you are trying to convey.
- Include impactful, high-level data that will grab the reader's attention; think about the kind of statistics they would want to use in their own communication on the topic.
- Whenever possible, include your overall ask or recommendation early on in your communication. Highlight major supporting arguments or data by placing them at the beginning of paragraphs or as headings of new sections.
- Be as concise as possible and limit the overall length of your document; use bullets to summarize or emphasize key takeaways for the reader.
- **Examples of times to use a persuasive style:** governor's budget highlights, one-pagers for an OFM agency request bill