**Style Guide for Grants, reports and other communications messages**

*note - there are times when the style guide cannot or should not be followed because of donor or client requirements (ie, an online form or a client style guide).*

**Abbreviations**

The first time a term is used, its abbreviation should be in parentheses afterward. From then on, the abbreviation itself can be used, unless it seems to flow better to use the whole name. For instance, “Oklahoma State University (OSU) is in Stillwater. A lot of people who live in Tulsa went to OSU.”

There may be times when it “feels” right to spell out an abbreviation again - such as the beginning of a new section in a long application. That’s fine.

![A person posing for the camera

Description automatically generated]()

This is the first thing you looked at, right? That is why we use photos and cutlines whenever possible.

**Comma**

Even the AP style has adopted the Oxford comma! It is usually best to follow whatever comma style used by the funder (that’s what they expect to see). The default should be to use the Oxford.

**Emphasis**

Various sentences on each page should have emphasis, such as bold, underscore, italicized or a combination. If a reader only read the titles, cutlines, emphasized sentences and postscript, they should still grasp what the proposal is for.

**Font**

No more than two fonts should be used in a single document. A serif font (like Times New Roman) should be used for the text. A San serif font (like Arial) can be used for titles, headings, footnotes and cutlines. Font size should be 11 point when possible, but choose the size based on the needs and requirements of the proposal.

**Headers and footers**

All documents should have a footer on every page following this formula:

Client Name / Proposal to Funder name / Document (if more than one submitted / month and year / page #. The footer should be in San serif font, smaller than the body text and in a dark gray color. For example:

Neighborhood Services Charity | Proposal to ABC Foundation | Budget | December 2016 | page 1 of 2

A **letter** should NOT have the footer on the first page but should have it on the 2nd page. However, if the client has a policy or preference that a footer be different than this, the client’s policy should be used.

**Numbers**

Numbers 0-10 (unless in a range such as this) should be spelled out. numbers 11+ can be written with numerals. Numbers that start a sentence should always be spelled out (or avoided).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Wrong** | **Correct** |
| $7 million. | $7,000,000 or seven million dollars |
| $12,000,000 | $12 million |
| 8-year-old | eight-year-old |
| Fifteen-year-old | 15-year-old |
| 27 women attended the meeting in June. | Twenty-seven women attended the meeting in June. *or*  At the June meeting, 27 women attended. |
| The project will take eight-12 years. | The project will take 8-12 years. |

**Photos and infographics**

All proposals three or more pages long should have a photo or graphic on at least two-thirds of the pages, unless not allowed by funder. **All photos must have a cutline.**

Graphics (like maps or charts) should have cutlines unless it would be awkward or unnecessary to have one.

**Post-scripts on letters**

All letters must have a P.S. that really pops. Research shows that the postscript is the most-read element of a letter (unless there is a photo with a cutline).

**Spacing**

When possible, grants should have a 1.15 Spacing between lines, with each paragraph indented. When possible, increase the space between lines to make the document more readable. Often, space limits do not allow this.

**Style**

Unless the client uses a different style, written documents should follow the [Associated Press (AP) style](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/02/). If the client prefers a different style, we will use theirs.

**Common Errors/Red Flag Usage**

If you are referring to a number, use “More than” or “less than,” NOT “over” or “under.”

*Example: We’ve been serving Oklahoma for more than 20 years.*

If you are referring to an amount that is not a number, it is okay to use “over” or “under.”

*Example: We’ve been serving Oklahoma for over a century.*

**Red Flags: Avoid using the following words or phrases:**

And also

Due to

Plethora (Dana hates this word and will always change it)

Youngsters (same)

**Doing anything “one XX at a time.” This is a ridiculous statement that organizations seem to love. It is our job to make their writing better.**