

FEW GRAMMAR GUIDE 2008

** This guide is to be used as reference material in preparing reports, for the website and for news releases/articles. It is not all- inclusive, but should meet some basic “need to know(s)”.*

Here’s a simple rule of thumb: if you have to read it more than once to understand it, it’s not clear enough. Moreover, you can’t be the judge, because you know what you mean. Ask someone else to read it—once. If the reader has questions, rewrite your information.

Some tips on writing in plain English:

Write in active voice, where the subject of a verb performs the action expressed by the verb.

Keep it short—about 20 words per sentence and 10 or 12 lines per paragraph.

Don’t use unnecessary qualifiers such as “**totally** unrealistic” or “**completely** convinced.”

Personal pronouns, used in place of a noun such as

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
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	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
<u>Nominative</u> —used as the subject of the sentence		
1 st Person	I	we
2 nd Person	you	you
3 rd Person Masculine	he	they
Feminine	she	they
Neuter	it	they
<u>Possessive</u>		
1 st Person	my, mine	our, ours
2 nd Person	your, your	your, yours
3 rd Person Masculine	his	their, theirs
Feminine	her, hers	their, theirs
Neuter	its	their, theirs
<u>Objective</u> —used as the object of a verb or of a preposition		
1 st Person	me	us
2 nd Person	you	you
3 rd Person Masculine	him	them
Feminine	her	them
Neuter	it	them

Terms:

(-)**—**Hyphens are joiners. Used correctly, they help us to avoid ambiguity in our writing. Employ hyphens to form a single idea from two or more words. Hyphens also help us create compound modifiers. Use hyphens to link two or more words used to express a single modifier. However, hyphens should **not** be used to join the adverb *very* or any adverb ending in “*ly*.”

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abbreviations and acronyms—Spell out words (i.e., information not info).

When the word to be abbreviated is first introduced, spell out the word followed by the abbreviated form of the word. Once the abbreviation has been introduced, it can be used for the remainder of the document. Example: Federally Employed Women (FEW).

accept, except—Accept means to receive; except means to exclude.

adverse, averse—Adverse means unfavorable. He predicted adverse weather. Averse means reluctant, opposed: She is averse to change.

affect, effect—Affect, as a verb, means to influence: The game will affect the standings. Affect, as a noun, is best avoided. Effect, as a verb, means to cause: He will effect many changes in the company. As a noun, means result: The effect was overwhelming. He has miscalculated the effect of his actions. It was a law of little effect.

a.m., p.m.—Lowercase, with periods. Avoid the redundant 10 a.m. this morning.

and (not &) in sentences

anticipate, expect—Anticipate means to expect and prepare for something; expect does not include the notion of preparation: They expect a record crowd. They have anticipated it by adding more seats to the auditorium.

anybody, any body, anyone, any one—One word for an indefinite reference: Anyone can do that. Two words where the emphasis is on singling out one element of a group: Any one of them may speak up.

capitol—Capitalize U.S. Capitol and the Capitol when referring to the building in Washington: The meeting was held on Capitol Hill in the west wing of the Capitol. Follow the same practice when referring to state capitols: The Virginia Capitol is in Richmond. Thomas Jefferson designed the Capitol of Virginia.

CBS—Acceptable in all references for CBS, Inc., the former Columbia Broadcasting System.

chapter Capitalize when used with a numeral inference to a section of a book or legal code. Normally is lowercase when standing alone, however when referring to a FEW Chapter, the word 'Chapter' will be capitalized as a form of respect.

check up (v.) checkup (n.)

chief justice—capitalize only as a formal title before a name: Chief Justice Warren Burger.

committee—Do not abbreviate. Capitalize when part of a formal name: the House Appropriations Committee. Do not capitalize committee in shortened versions of long committee names...The Special Senate Select Committee to Investigate Improper Labor-Management Practices, for example, became the rackets committee. (i.e., **Membership Committee, a formal name**)

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compared to, compared with—Use compared to when the intent is to assert, without the need for elaboration, that two or more items are similar: She compared her work for women’s rights to Susan B. Anthony’s campaign for women’s suffrage. Use compare with when juxtaposing two or more items to illustrate similarities and/or differences: His time was 2:10:10 compared with 2:14 for his closest competitor.

corps—Capitalize when used with a word or a figure to form a proper name: the Marine Corps, the Signal Corps, and the 9th Corps. Capitalize when standing alone only if it is a shortened reference to U.S. Marine Corps. The possessive form is corps’ for both singular and plural: one corps’ location, two corps’ assignments.

county—Capitalize when an integral part of a proper name: Dade County, Nassau County, and Suffolk County. Capitalize the full names of county government units: the Dade County Commission, the Orange County Department of Social Services. Retain capitalization for the name of a county body if the proper noun is not needed in the context; lowercase the word county if it is used to distinguish an agency from state or federal counterparts, the Board of Supervisors, the county Board of Supervisors. Lowercase the board, the department, etc., whenever they stand alone.

Capitalize county if it is an integral part of a specific body’s name even without the proper noun, the County Commission, the County Legislature. Lowercase the commission, the legislature, etc., when not preceded by the word county.

Capitalize as part of a formal title before a name, County Manager John Smith. Lowercase when it is not part of the formal title, county Health Commissioner Frank Jones.

cover up (v.) cover-up (n. and adj.)—He tried to cover up the scandal. He was prosecuted for the cover-up.

crack up (v.) crackup (n.)

D.C., not DC—when abbreviating Washington, D.C.

days of the week—Capitalize them. Do not abbreviate, except when needed in a tabular format: Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat (three letters, without periods, to facilitate tabular composition).

day to day, day-to-day—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: They have extended the contract on a day to day basis.

Department of Agriculture; Department of Commerce; Department of Defense; Department of Education; Department of Energy (abbreviation acceptable on second reference)—Check with the department to ensure correct usage of their acronym, as there is no standard departmental three letter acronym. For FEW purposes, the majority of departments will use all uppercase acronyms. In many installations and commands, the preferred Department of Defense abbreviation is DoD (upper and lower case). Avoid acronyms when possible. A phrase such as the department is preferable on second reference because it is more readable and avoids alphabet soup. The “of” may be dropped and the title flopped while capitalization is retained—the State Department.

Lowercase department in plural uses, but capitalize the proper name element: the departments of Labor and Justice. A shorthand reference to the proper name

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element also is capitalized: Kissinger said, "State and Justice must resolve their differences." But: Henry Kissinger, the secretary of state.

Lowercase the department whenever it stands alone.

Do not abbreviate department in any usage.

directions and regions—In general, lowercase north, south, northeast, northern, etc., when they indicate compass direction: capitalize these words when they designate regions.

Regions: A storm system that developed in the Midwest is spreading eastward. It will bring showers to the East Coast by morning and to the entire Northeast by late in the day.

drop out (v.) dropout (n.)

email—Several variations exist, however FEW has elected to use email (no capitalization, no hyphens)

every day (adv.) everyday (adj.)—Two words when it means each individual item: Every one of the clues was worthless.

One word when used as a pronoun meaning all persons; everyone wants his life to be happy. (Note that everyone takes singular verbs and pronoun.)

eye to eye, eye-to-eye—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: an eye-to-eye confrontation.

federal—Use a capital letter for the architectural style and for corporate or governmental bodies that use the word as part of their formal names: Federal Express, the Federal Trade Commission.

Lowercase when used as an adjective to distinguish something from state, county, federal assistance, federal court, the federal government, a federal judge.

Also: federal District Court (but U. S. District Court is preferred) and federal Judge Ann Aldrich (but U.S. District Judge Ann Aldrich is preferred).

federal employees and federal government

Federally Employed Women (FEW after first use)

fund raising, fund-raising, fund-raiser—Fund raising is difficult. They planned a fund-raising campaign. A fund-raiser was hired. The organization is planning a fund-raiser.

his, her—Do not presume maleness in constructing a sentence, but use the pronoun his when an indefinite antecedent may be male or female: A reporter attempts to protect his sources. (Not his or her sources, but note the use of the word reporter rather than newsman.) Frequently, however, the best choice is a slight revision of the sentence: Reporters attempt to protect their sources.

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interjection—Translated from the Latin, the word "interjection" literally means "thrown in between." We use interjections when we encounter events that cause emotional responses like surprise, pain, delight, dismay. We may respond with:

Oh!

Wow!

Ouch!

Aw!

We also use interjections to express hesitance or some other reason to pause, as when we say **uh**, **um**, **er** or **well** or when we greet someone with **hello**, **hi** or **hey**. You may express interjections as whole sentences, often with an exclamation point ("**Hey!**" or "**Oh, no!**") or use them within a sentence, by setting them off with various punctuation. The appropriate use of interjections will add an authentic touch to your writing as long as you don't overuse them.

internet access

offline—(No hyphen is an exception to Webster's.)

online—(One word in all cases for the computer connection term.)

legislative districts—The standard for showing party affiliation, state and congressional district is:

Senate: Party followed by State abbreviation (R-CO, D-OH)

House of Representatives: Party followed by State followed by District (D-AL-3, R-CA-8)

legislative titles—First Reference Form. Use Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens. as formal titles before one or more names in regular text. Spell out and capitalize these titles before one or more names in a direct quotation. Spell out and lowercase representative and senator in other uses. Add U.S. or state before a title only if necessary to avoid confusion: U.S. Sen. Nancy Kassebaum spoke with state Sen. Hugh Carter.

local government

military titles— Capitalize a military rank when used as a formal title before an individual's name. Spell out any title used before a name in a direct quotation. On first reference, use the appropriate title before the full name of a member of the military. In subsequent references, do not continue using the title before a name. Use only the last name. Spell out and lowercase a title when it is substituted for a name: Gen. John J. Pershing arrived today. An aide said the general would review the troops.

In some cases, it may be necessary to explain the significance of a title: Army Sgt. Maj. John Jones described the attack. Jones, who holds the Army's highest rank for enlistees, said it was unprovoked.

In addition to the ranks, each service has ratings such as machinist, radar man, etc., that are job descriptions. Do not use any of these designations as a title on first reference. If one is used before the name in a subsequent reference, do not capitalize or abbreviate it.

Do not refer to warrant offices or petty officers simply as officers.

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millions, billions—Use figures with million or billion in all except casual uses: I'd like to make a billion dollars. But: The nation has 1 million citizens. I need \$7 billion.

Do not go beyond two decimal places. 7.51 million people, \$256 billion, 7,542,500 people, \$2,565,750,000. Decimals are preferred where practical: 1.5 million, not 1 ½ million.

Do not mix millions and billions in the same figure: 2.6 billion. Not 2 billion 600 million.

Do not drop the word million or billion in the first figure of a range: He is worth from \$2 million to \$4 million. Not \$2 to \$4 million, unless you really mean \$2.

months—Capitalize the names of months in all uses. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone.

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. EXAMPLES: January 1972 was a cold month. Jan. 2 was the coldest day of the month. His birthday is May 8. Feb. 14, 1987, was the target date.

In tabular material, use three-letter forms without a period.

national Normally is lowercase when standing alone, however when referring to a National FEW, the word 'National' will be capitalized as a form of respect.

National Board of Directors (NBOD is the abbreviation)

national guard—Capitalize when referring to U.S. or state-level forces: the National Guard, the Guard, the Iowa National Guard, Iowa's National Guard, National Guard troops. Use lowercase for the forces of other nations.

News & Views— (not NEWS & VIEWS or News and Views)

numbers— (spell out those less than 10)

OK, OK'd, OK'ing, Oks—Do not use okay.

on—do not use "on" before a date or day of the week when its absence would not lead to confusion: The meeting will be held Monday. He will be inaugurated Jan. 20.

Use "on" also to avoid any suggestion that a date is the object of a transitive verb: The House killed on Tuesday a bid to raise taxes. The Senate postponed on Wednesday its consideration of a bill to reduce import duties.

one-—Hyphenate when used in writing fractions: one-half; one-third. Use phrases such as a half or a third if precision is not intended.

part time, part-time—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier. She works part time. She has a part-time job on Monday.

president—Capitalize president only as a formal title before one or more names: President Reagan, Presidents Ford and Carter. Lowercase in all other uses: The president said today. He is running for president. Lincoln was president during the Civil War.

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quotations in the news—Never alter quotations even to correct minor grammatical errors or word usage. Causal minor tongue slips may be removed by using ellipses but even that should be done with extreme caution. If there is a question about a quote, either don't use it or ask the speaker to clarify. If a person is unavailable for comment, detail attempts to reach that period. (Smith was out of the country on business; Jones did not return phone messages left at the office.)

raised, reared—Only humans may be reared. All living things, including humans, may be raised.

region, regional Normally is lowercase when standing alone, however when referring to a FEW Region, the word 'Region' will be capitalized as a form of respect.

room numbers—Use figures and capitalize room when used with a figure: Room 2, Room 211.

rooms—Capitalize the names of specially-designated rooms: Blue Room, Lincoln Room, Oval Office, and Persian Room.

Senior Executive Service (SES after first use)

shall, will—Use shall to express determination: We shall overcome. You and he shall stay.

Either shall or will may be used in first-person constructions that do not emphasize determination: We shall hold a meeting. We will hold a meeting.

For second- and third-person constructions, use will unless determination is stressed: You will like it. She will not be pleased.

should, would—Use should to express an obligation: We should help the needy. Use would to express a customary action: In the summer we would spend hours by the seashore.

Use would also in constructing a conditional past tense, but be careful: WRONG: If Soderholm would not have had an injured foot, Thompson would not have been in the lineup. RIGHT: If Soderholm had not had an injured foot, Thompson would have been in the lineup.

state government

States—spell out— names of the 50 U.S. states when they stand alone in textual material. Any state name may be condensed, however, to fit typographical requirements for tabular material. The names of eight states are never abbreviated in datelines or text: 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.

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telephone numbers—Use figures. Use hyphens not periods. FEW has adopted the “no parentheses” format for phone numbers and uses only hyphens to separate the area code from the main number. The parentheses around the area code are based on a format that telephone companies have agreed upon for international communications. In the United States, the country code is “1”, but we don’t regularly write it out in a phone number and simply use the area code and phone number: 202-898-0994. For international numbers, use the parentheses around the country code and the city code (where required): (44-20) 7353-1515.

The form for toll-free numbers: 800-111-1000

If extension numbers are given: ext. 364 Use a comma to separate the main number from the extension. 202-898-0994, ext. 333

That, which, who, whom (pronouns)—Use who and whom in referring to people and to animals with a name: John Jones is the man who helped me. See the **who, whom** entry.

Use that and which in referring to inanimate objects and to animals without a name.

Titles/Chair—Capitalize first letter

toward, towards—toward is preferred

under way—Always two words as an adverb: The project is under way. The naval maneuvers are under way. Only one word when used as an adjective before a noun in a nautical sense: an underway flotilla.

United States—Spell out when used as a noun. Use U.S. (no space) only as an adjective.

Vice President not VP—Capitalize only as a formal title before one or more names

Washington—Abbreviate the state as Wash. Never abbreviate when referring to the U.S. capital.

who, whom—Use who and whom for references to human beings and to animals with a name. Use that and which for inanimate objects and animals without a name.

Who is the word when someone is the subject of a sentence, clause or phrase: The woman who rented the room left the window open. Who is there?

Whom is the word when someone is the object of a verb or preposition: The woman to whom the room was rented left the window open. Whom do you wish to see?

ZIP code—Use all-caps ZIP for Zoning Improvement Plan, but always lowercase the word code. Run the five digits together without a comma, and do not put a comma between the state name and the ZIP code; New York, NY 10020

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Writing Standards for the Web

Writing for the intranet is very different from writing for a hardcopy print medium. A study by Sun Microsystems found that reading from computer screens is 25 percent slower than reading from hardcopy.

Target audience is clear and unambiguous

Who is the intended audience? What do they want to know? What do you need to tell them?

Don't try to make one size fit all. Different audiences have different perspectives—address them separately. You wouldn't explain a home financing plan to your mother the same way you'd explain it to a mortgage banker. Therefore, don't try to make one piece of Web writing serve different audiences.

Know your readers. It is important to understand who your target audience is and what you can offer them. People are very busy and need to access specific information on our Web pages quickly and efficiently. Many readers are accessing our Web pages. This fact should always be a big part of your decision of what to put on your web pages.

Purpose of the page is clear and unambiguous

What is the purpose of this page?

State it in the first paragraph. Be direct. Introduce your topic at the start of your page and progress logically to the conclusion.

What does the audience want to know about the subject? What do you need to tell them? Often those are two different things; the audience wants to know things that fall outside your normal purview; you want to tell them things they wouldn't think to ask. Make sure the page anticipates both.

What should the audience do after they read the page? Make sure it's obvious; what are the next steps?

If you anticipate that they want to know something that's beyond your scope, take them where they can find what they're looking for through links.

Words and terminology are appropriate to the target audience

What words would your audience use?

If you need to use a word or term they might not understand, how can you explain it simply?

Is the content conversational and friendly? Write as though you're talking to someone in his or her living room or den.

Avoid using professional jargon; and if you must use acronyms, use them only after you've spelled them out once. You can't tell who is going to need your information, and many people may not recognize your jargon or acronyms.

Explain everything! Never assume your audience has knowledge that they may not have

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Content is written and organized efficiently

Keep it short and sweet. People don't like to read on the screen; 79 percent of Web readers scan. Use about half of the words you'd use in print publishing.

The key difference between writing for hardcopy and writing for the intranet is that intranet writing should be shorter. Take out all unnecessary words. Documents intended for online reading should rarely be over 1,000 words.

Use the inverted pyramid style of writing; put the most important information at the top.

Break up long pieces into short segments. Let your audience choose how much they want to read.

Use headers and sub-headers, so people can go right to the sections they want. Use standard HTML header tags to facilitate "scanning" via screen readers.

Layer information: short introductory paragraphs that link to more in-depth information.

Organize information in ways that make sense to the audience.

Normally limit yourself to one main idea per paragraph.

Content is consistent

Make sure content doesn't contradict other information on the site.

Avoid duplication and redundancy, except where it's needed to address different audiences. If the content is located elsewhere on the site, provide the URL to the existing published content or document.

Make sure that words and phrases mean the same thing throughout the page and the Website.

Create links. If information already exists on the Website about the same subject or about subjects referenced in your document, link to them.

Spelling and punctuation are accurate

Bulleted Lists

The Modern Language Association Guide explains formatting bulleted lists like this. When there is an introductory sentence to a list of items, which has only one subject and one verb, it should read as follows:

WHAT IS FEW's CONCERN?

Compliance policies and practices of primary concern to FEW are (no colon)

- Equal (capitalized because this is part of a list of topics) Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action, (no semi colon)
- Promotion and upward mobility,
- Recruitment, selection, and placement,
- Position Classification and pay administration and
- Sexual harassment.

When there is an introductory sentence that is continued with bullets, which has only one subject, one verb, and one preposition, it should read as follows:

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FEW's Compliance process includes, but is not limited to (no colon)

- holding (not capitalized because its a continuation of the sentence and gerund used as object of the preposition) meetings with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to identify common goals and strengthen the partnership between our organizations, (no semi colon)
- conducting visits with federal agencies to identify compliance issues and develop solutions specific to the agency,
- providing guidance and resources to Regional Managers and Chapter Officers as they work with their agency's EEO Offices on compliance issues and
- advising FEW members and/or interceding on the members' behalf, except in formal discrimination or complaint cases.

Content anticipates obvious questions

Be an advocate for your audience. What do they want to know? What do you need to tell them? Is it all there? Did you anticipate their questions? Did you lead them to related materials?

Meaning is clear and unambiguous

Explain everything. Never assume your audience has knowledge that they may not have.

***(Combined from Associated Press STYLEBOOK, The StyleFiles and preferences from the News & Views Editor and the Publications Policy and Review Committee)**