

# Writing Style Guide

Tone and style of writing are critical in the communication of ideas and emotions. The consistent use of proper grammar builds credibility whereas poor grammar creates a barrier between your audience and message. As such, Tourism Calgary uses the Canadian Press (CP) style as its guideline for writing and grammar. Canadian Press style is regarded as the industry standard for Canadian journalism, and is the preferred style for many organizations. This guide provides a selection of regular rules and guidelines for consideration during the production of print and online materials prepared by Tourism Calgary, including (but not limited to):

- e-mail
- letters
- reports
- presentations and speeches
- marketing collateral
- websites and social media content

Exceptions to CP style can be made for certain materials — if you require clarification on a guideline, speak to a member of the communications team.

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# Writing Style

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## ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE VOICE

Active voice allows the reader to be engaged, makes content flow smoothly and avoids subject confusion. To ensure active voice is maintained, always check that the subject is before any other verbs or modifiers.

✓ **Tourism Calgary developed a regional marketing campaign.**

✗ **A regional marketing campaign was developed by Tourism Calgary.**

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## PLAIN LANGUAGE

“Plain English is clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary. It is language that avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary and convoluted sentence construction. It is not baby talk, nor is it a simplified version of the English language. Writers of plain English let their audience concentrate on the message instead of being distracted by complicated language. They make sure that their audience understands the message easily.”

– *Professor Robert Eagleson, Australia*

The following are three key tools to writing plain language:

- a. Limit the number of words that end with an ‘-ing’: These can become cumbersome and difficult to read if included too frequently in a sentence or paragraph.
- b. When building lists in any copy, aim to follow the rule of three, which suggests that content in groups of three is easier to read and understand.
- c. There is a tendency to overuse certain words, making text overcrowded. Always challenge every word — is it necessary for the thought to make sense? To make content less redundant, limit the use of the following overused words:
  - actually
  - also
  - therefore
  - literally
  - honestly
  - that

# Writing Style

## DATE AND TIME

### Punctuation

For time, use periods to separate the a.m. and p.m.

Do not write :00 when the time is on the hour.

When writing an agenda, only include the a.m. or p.m. symbol once, unless the block of time shifts from morning to evening or vice versa.

When speaking about noon or midnight do not include 12.

Do not use th or st following a date.

Only use a comma to separate the year from the month and day.

Do not use commas when there is no day or date.

### Abbreviation

When abbreviating months, always use a period following the abbreviation. Only omit the period when the month is in tabular form.

Do not abbreviate March, April, May, June, July.

### Decades

When referring to a decade, apostrophes are not required.

When referring to a period in the decade, use a hyphen to separate the preface from the decade, but do not use apostrophes.

Only use apostrophes to precede the decade when it is shortened, but do not use apostrophes when referring to age.

## DATE AND TIME EXAMPLES

✓ 8:30 a.m.

✗ 8:30 am

✓ 8 a.m.

✗ 8:00 a.m.

✓ 8 - 9:30 a.m.

✗ 8 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

✓ 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

✓ Noon

✗ 12 noon

✓ December 6, 2010

✗ December 6th, 2010

✓ Friday, December 3, 2010

✓ December 2010 data showed increased website traffic.

✓ Dec.

✗ Dec

✓ March

✗ Mar.

✓ The 1990s

✗ The 1990's

✓ The mid-1980s

✗ The mid-1980's

✓ The '50s

✗ The 50s

✓ He's in his 50s

✗ He's in his '50s

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## SYMBOLS

### % versus per cent versus percent:

Only use the % symbol in tables, charts and financial reports.

Spell out the symbol as two words — per cent — in all other copy.

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## NUMBERS AND NUMERALS

Write out numbers one through nine, and use figures for 10 and above.

Spell out a number if it starts a sentence (unless it's a year, such as 2012).

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## TITLES

Capitalize formal titles only when they precede an individual's name. If the title falls after the name, then it's lowercase.

✓ **Tourism Calgary President Cindy Ady is presenting with Jeff Hessel, Tourism Calgary vice president of marketing.**

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## WHO VERSUS WHOM

Both words are pronouns. 'Who' refers to the subject of a clause; 'whom' refers to the object of the clause.

**Here's a trick:** Answer the sentence using the word 'him' or 'he.'

If 'him' works, the correct usage is 'whom.' For example: "**Whom** did you visit? I visited him."

If 'he' works, the correct word is 'who.' For example: "**Who** sent this e-mail? He sent the e-mail."

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## THAT VERSUS WHICH

This can be tricky. One way to tell the difference is to determine whether the clause that either word introduces can be deleted without changing the sentence's meaning.

If the clause can be cut, use 'which.'

If not, go with 'that.'

# Writing Style

## TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Use periods between each grouping of numbers in a phone number.

✓ **403.236.8510**

## ABBREVIATIONS

Do not use periods in all-caps abbreviations or acronyms.

Unless the abbreviation is geographical or a single letter.

Use periods in lower-case or mixed-case abbreviations.

Metric symbols are not abbreviations and are only followed by a period when they are at the end of a sentence.

Note that km is both singular and plural.

## ABBREVIATIONS EXAMPLES

✓ **GST**

✓ **U.S.**

✓ **B.C.**

✓ **i.e.**

✓ **etc.**

✓ **mm**

✓ **UNESCO**

✓ **P.E.I.**

✓ **E.**

✓ **B. Comm.**

✓ **Dr.**

✓ **cm**

✓ **The distance from Calgary to Banff is about 128 km.**

## CURRENCY

Always use figures for sums of money. Omit unneeded zeros after the decimal point.

For large sums of money, use figures with a dollar sign and spell out million, billion, etc.

In general, specify Canadian dollars to avoid confusion, especially when a mix of non-Canadian figures are also shown.

Please note that there are no spaces between the number and dollar sign. When referring to amounts of money, use a singular verb.

## CURRENCY EXAMPLES

✓ **Tickets are \$6 for adults, \$7.50 for students.**

✓ **Nearly \$2 billion have been spent annually.**

✓ **This the equivalent of €20.**

✓ **C\$1,500 and US\$1,500**

✓ **The mayor stated that \$10 million was donated to the project.**

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# Writing Style

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## CANADIAN SPELLING

Using Canadian spellings consistently in advertising in English speaking countries will help reinforce our authenticity and position Calgary as a foreign destination. Here are some examples of words that have Canadian spellings that are different from U.S. spellings. Note that this is not a complete list, but a list of words that have relevance to travel writing. Use the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as a reference for all Canadian spellings.

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## CANADIAN SPELLING EXAMPLES

**behaviour**

**calibre**

**catalogue**

**cancelled**

**centre**

**cheque**

**colour**

**counsellor**

**dialogue**

**favour**

**favourite**

**flavour**

**fuelled**

**gauge**

**grey**

**gruelling**

**harbour**

**honour**

**humour**

**kilometre**

**marvelous**

**Métis**

**neighbour**

**theatre**

**tipi**

**travellers**

**travelling**