



Style Guide

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Introduction to TEA Style

This *TEA Style Guide* establishes writing, editing, formatting, and design standards for all content produced on behalf of TEA. The guidance applies to content distributed in any format, including documents, web content, slide presentations, videos, social media, etc.

There are two main options for navigating this PDF to find specific information:

- Click the relevant section in the Table of Contents to jump directly to it.
- Use the “Find” keyboard shortcut (ctrl-F on a PC, command-F on a Mac) to search for a keyword or phrase anywhere within the PDF.

Use the *TEA Style Guide* in conjunction with the *TEA Brand Book*, which includes additional guidance on brand identity, voice and tone, key audiences, logo requirements, approved fonts and colors, and other visual guidance.

For writing guidance not addressed in this style guide, refer to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. (TEA staff have automatic access to [The Chicago Manual of Style Online](#) when logged in to the network in the office or remotely via VPN.)

Additional recommended companion resources:

- [The Plain Language Action and Information Network](#)
- [Section 508.gov](#) (accessibility information)
- [21st Century Integrated Digital Experience \(IDEA\) Act](#)
- [18F U.S. Government User-Centered Development Guides](#)

Specialized content areas may give preference to other approved style guides as appropriate to the work (e.g., the Student Assessment division follows the *Student Assessment Publications Guide*; TEA Media Relations follows Associated Press style).

Have a style question?

Is something missing from this guide? Did you find an error or inconsistency? Please submit a [Communications Help Desk](#) ticket. Vendors or external audiences should contact their TEA representative.

Need communications or graphic design support?

Email branding@tea.texas.gov or additional resources or to submit a request for service, or call 512-463-3900 for urgent assistance.

Making Content Accessible

All TEA employees and vendors have a responsibility to ensure the content they produce or review is accessible—meaning it should adhere to guidelines and best practices for readability, plain language, and Section 508 accessibility.

Write at a grade level appropriate for your audience.

Use a resource such as [Hemingwayapp](#) or [Readable](#) (both have a basic free readability check and also offer paid subscription features) to check the readability and grade level of your content.

Consider the format or channel.

Is it a PDF document, e-newsletter, website content, a social media post, a webinar, or something else? Best practices vary depending on the format and distribution method. Learn and follow best practices for [accessibility](#), readability, usability, writing style, length, and structure to correspond with each specific format.

Format text with readability and accessibility in mind.

Some general best practices include:

- Use only TEA-approved fonts, as identified in the TEA Brand Book. Nest headings appropriately. Consider type size, spacing, and line length or column width, all of which impact readability.
- Avoid use of all caps except for acronyms/initialisms. (Refer to “Capitalization” section.)
- Use colored text sparingly. Choose colors carefully and check the contrast if layering text on top of a colored background.
- Limit use of reverse type (white text on a dark background) to headings or very short passages.
- Do not use color as the sole means for conveying information.
- Reserve underlined text for hyperlinks. Reserve italics only for certain titles of works and uses specified in this guide or The Chicago Manual of Style.
- Use descriptive, meaningful text for hyperlinks. Do not use generic phrases such as “click here,” “read more,” or “more info.” A descriptive link explains/sets an expectation for where the user will go if they decide to click.
- Do not use tables except for data, and format them accessibly. Tables should not be used for text or image layout.
- Write captions/labels that help readers understand graphics and charts.
- Do not use the words “above” or “below” to reference parts of the content; these visual cues are not meaningful for someone using a screen reader. Instead, use words such as “previous,” “preceding,” or “following,” or state the specific location.

Plain Language

All TEA communication directed to external audiences should be clear, concise, and straightforward. Plain language makes it easier for the public to read, understand, and use government communication.

Avoid jargon and corporate buzzwords. Do not assume your audience is familiar with specialized terminology. Include a simple definition, explanation, or link to more information when using terms that might not be familiar to all readers. Avoid corporate speak and catch phrases like “new and improved” or “paradigm shift.”

Keep sentence structure as simple as possible. Avoid unnecessary linguistic complexity. Use active voice rather than passive voice. Avoid compound tenses (e.g., past perfect and future perfect). Do not chain together multiple prepositional phrases within a sentence.

Follow the guidelines on plainlanguage.gov:

- [Write for your audience.](#)
- [Organize the information.](#)
- [Choose your words carefully.](#)
- [Be concise.](#)
- [Keep it conversational.](#)
- [Design for reading.](#)
- [Follow web standards.](#)
- [Test your assumptions.](#)

508 Accessibility

[Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) requires government agencies to develop, procure, maintain, and use information and communications technology that is accessible to people with disabilities.

Every TEA employee and vendor has a responsibility to ensure their documents, web pages, videos, and other digital content is compliant.

Accessibility isn't just the law. It's the right thing to do.

Accessible digital content provides a better user experience for everyone, including individuals with different cognitive, learning, language, visual, hearing, and physical abilities.

Learn how to make your content and documents accessible before posting, sharing, or distributing. Watch TEA accessibility training videos and explore other TEA accessibility resources, including checklists and testing tools. Vendors or external audiences should contact their TEA representative if resources are needed.

Make accessibility part of your routine. Get in the habit of running the built-in accessibility checker on all types of documents. Include accessibility reviews in all project timelines. Address accessibility early in the process to avoid major last-minute changes.

Get accessibility help. For expert-level accessibility reviews or immediate help resolving an accessibility error, email branding@tea.texas.gov.

Writing Style and Usage

In addition to adhering to this style guide, all written content should align with the voice and tone established in the [TEA Brand Book](#).

For style and usage guidelines not addressed in this style guide, TEA follows [The Chicago Manual of Style](#).

All TEA employees automatically have access to an institutional subscription for [The Chicago Manual of Style Online](#) when logged in to the network (in the office or remotely via VPN). Employees experiencing difficulty accessing the complete online manual should submit a [TEA Help Desk](#) request for assistance.

Preferred online dictionaries:

- [Lexico](#) (free abbreviated version of Oxford English Dictionary)
- [Merriam-Webster](#)

In addition, refer to the Student Assessment Publications Guide when producing content related to assessments.

Awareness and Representation

Content should reflect all populations represented in Texas public schools. No one character or person, group of characters or people, or geographic location should be presented favorably or unfavorably in either graphics or text.

Be mindful of potentially sensitive topics, and always consider audiences and stakeholders with a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints.

Refer to [Chicago Manual of Style \(CMOS\) guidance on avoiding biased language](#).

Disabilities

Terms related to disabilities (blind, deaf, etc.) are lowercased in body text. Only refer to a person's disability if it is relevant to the story.

When writing about disabilities, refer to the American Psychological Association website for [general guidance on preferred terminology](#) or the National Center on Disability and Journalism [Disability Language Style Guide](#) for specific word choice recommendations.

In general, default to person-first language, which means referring to a “person with a disability” instead of a “disabled person” (e.g., student with autism, teacher with color blindness, child with dyslexia). When referring to an individual, ask for and use their preferred language because some people with disabilities prefer identity-first language (e.g., amputee, deaf person, etc.).

Only use “deaf” to describe a person with complete hearing loss and “blind” when a person has complete loss of sight. Do not use the terms “hearing impaired,” “visually impaired,” “learning impaired,” etc. Instead, use phrases such as “hard of hearing,” “limited vision,” or “learning disability” (refer to list of acceptable words in this section).

Avoid made-up words like “handicapable” or “diversability” unless used in reference to a specific movement.

Down syndrome has no “s” and no apostrophe; capitalize Down and lowercase syndrome.

Acceptable words and phrases:

- blind
- deaf
- deafblind
- deaf-mute
- disability
- hard of hearing
- learning disability
- limited hearing/vision
- low vision
- neurotypical/neurodiversity (reserve for audiences familiar with these terms)
- non-disabled
- partial hearing loss
- partially deaf/sighted

The following words and phrases are not recommended:

- able-bodied
- abnormal
- differently abled
- diversability
- handicap/handicapped
- handicapable
- impaired
- suffers from
- wheelchair bound

Gender-Specific Pronouns and Terms

Refer to the [CMOS list of techniques](#) for gender-neutral writing. Choosing between “he” or “she” as the singular pronoun is a common dilemma. These pronouns should be used sparingly. Use of “they” is an acceptable alternative, or even better, rewrite the sentence to avoid using a pronoun. Keep job titles gender neutral (e.g., “chair” or “chairperson” instead of “chairman;” “spokesperson” instead of “spokesman”). Avoid words with problematic feminine suffixes (*-ess* or *-ette*).

Parent vs. Family vs. Guardian

The word “family” or “guardian” is generally preferred instead of “parent” to make the information inclusive of all family types and situations. However, some state or federal statutes may refer specifically to “parents,” in which case this term should be used to be consistent with the language in the regulations.

Racial and Ethnic Terms

Names of ethnic and national groups are capitalized. Adjectives associated with these names are also capitalized. Capitalize Black or White when used as a racial descriptor. Do not hyphenate terms such as African American or Italian American. Refer to [CMOS 8.38](#) for more examples. It is acceptable to use identity-first language when describing someone’s race, ethnicity, or nationality (e.g., “an Asian American student” instead of “a student who is Asian American”).

Academic and Legislative Terms

Academic Degrees

Degrees should be lowercased when referred to generically (e.g., bachelor of arts, master of science, juris doctor). An academic degree may be capitalized when referring to a specific degree program in an institutional setting or when it appears on a business card, diploma, directory, or resume (e.g., Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, Juris Doctor).

Use an apostrophe when referring to a bachelor’s degree or master’s degree; do not use an apostrophe when referring to an associate degree.

Lowercase the area of study (e.g., bachelor of arts in history) unless part of an official degree title (e.g., Master of Public Health, Bachelor of Journalism).

Follow [CMOS rules for abbreviating academic degrees](#) and do not use periods.

Academic Subjects and Grades

Grade Levels

Grade levels are lowercased, and the preferred format is “grade” plus the numeral in most cases (e.g., grade 1, grade 12, grades K–5). When stating a grade band, use an en dash, not a hyphen (e.g., grades 6–8, not grades 6-8). When the ordinal form is needed in running text, spell it out as first, second, third, etc. (not 1st, 2nd, 8th, etc.).

Prekindergarten is not hyphenated. It may be abbreviated as pre-k on second reference or when the short form is needed due to space constraints or design considerations for a title, table, or graphic treatment.

Terms denoting student status (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) are lowercased.

Letter Grades

Letter grades are capitalized, and no apostrophe should be used when plural.

- ✓ The student made all As this semester.
- The campus received a B rating.

Subjects

Academic subjects are not capitalized (e.g., math, chemistry, physics) unless they form part of a department name or an official course name or are proper nouns (e.g., English, Latin).

- ✓ Yes, an English class is required.
- She will take an archaeology class next semester.
- My cousin works in the UT Department of Archaeology.

Education Terms

Curriculum vs. Instructional Materials

These terms are not used interchangeably at TEA. Curriculum is state standards organized in a specific scope and sequence over the course of a school year (often used interchangeably with the term “scope and sequence”). [Instructional materials](#) are used to teach the curriculum.

Education Service Center (ESC)

Spell out education service center on first reference. Do not capitalize unless using the proper name of a specific one (e.g., Region 13 Education Service Center). Texas has 20 [education service centers](#) across the state. They provide various support services to school districts to help them operate more efficiently, improve student performance, and implement legislative initiatives.

Educational Materials and Textbook (EMAT)

EMAT is the name of the online system Texas schools use to order instructional materials. It is known only by the acronym and does not need to be spelled out. (Occasionally it has been referred to as the Educational Materials and Textbook [EMAT] system in past communications.)

English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS)

Capitalize each word and spell out English Language Proficiency Standards on first reference. “The ELPS” (as it is often referred to whether singular or plural) outline English language proficiency level descriptors and student expectations for English learners. School districts are required to implement ELPS as an integral part of each subject in the required curriculum.

English learner (EL)

Spell out on first reference; only the word English is capitalized. English learner is preferred over English language learner.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Spell out on first reference and do not capitalize. An individualized education program (IEP) is a legal

document developed for a student deemed eligible for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The IEP includes a student’s present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, participation in state and district-wide assessments, transition services, annual goals, special factors, special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, extended school year services, and least restrictive environment.

504 Plan

Always use the complete term. Do not shorten to “504” and do not capitalize plan. Named for a federal civil rights law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a 504 plan lists the accommodations a student with a disability will receive (e.g., extended test time, note-taking aids, audiobooks, etc.) The purpose of the plan is to remove barriers to learning and allow the student equal access to education curriculum.

Local Education Agency (LEA)

Spell out local education agency on first reference and do not capitalize. A [local education agency](#) is a public authority legally constituted with administrative control, direction, or to perform a service function for public schools.

Open Education Resources (OER)

Spell out on first reference. Do not add a hyphen between “open” and “education” unless it is used in a context that creates ambiguity. Open education resources (OER) refers to the license associated with instructional materials that have been made freely accessible in perpetuity to school districts.

Reading Language Arts (RLA) vs. English Language Arts (ELAR)

The term reading language arts (RLA) has become the preferred term because it is encompassing of ELAR as well as Spanish Language Arts and Reading (SLAR) in grades K–6 (the grades with established SLAR TEKS).

State Adopted

Lowercase and only use a hyphen when the term serves as a compound modifier and the hyphen is needed for clarity (e.g., The district uses state-adopted science materials. The state adopted the materials in 2019.) The State Board of Education determines by majority vote whether materials are adopted or rejected. Following this action, TEA establishes contracts with publishers of adopted materials to ensure their availability to districts for the following eight years at an agreed-upon cost. For additional information, refer to “Proclamations” section of this guide.

Special Education (SPED)

Always spell out special education on external communication; the acronym SPED is reserved for internal use only at TEA. Refer to an individual as “a student receiving special education services.” Refer to the entries in this guide for “individualized education plan (IEP)” and “504 plan.” Cite a decision by a special education hearing examiner with this format: Student v. ABC Indep. Sch. Dist., No. 123-SE1234 (Tex. Educ. Agency Jan. 23, 2019). Cite a Texas federal case with this format: Example: Parent v ABC Indep. Sch. Dist., 123 F. Supp 2d. 234 (S. Dist. Tex.). Cite a federal appellate case with this format: Parent v. ABC Indep. Sch. Dist., 123 F3d. 234 (5th Cir).

State Board of Education (SBOE)

Capitalize the first letter of each word. Spell out on first reference. When referring to the SBOE as “the board” do not capitalize.

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

Spell out on first reference and capitalize the first letter of each word. It is acceptable to first use the abbreviation STAAR in a title or subtitle if the term is familiar to the specific audience and is also spelled out in full on the first reference in the body copy.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

Commonly referred to as “the TEKS” (pronounced teeks or occasionally tex). Spell out on first reference and capitalize the first letter of each word. It is acceptable to first use the abbreviation TEKS in a title or subtitle if the term is familiar to the specific audience and it is spelled out in full on the first reference in the body copy. It is acceptable to refer to the standards as “the TEKS” whether singular or plural since this is how it is commonly used in the field. The TEKS are state standards for what students should know and be able to do in each subject area. The State Board of Education has legislative authority to adopt the TEKS for each subject of the required curriculum and periodically reviews and revises the TEKS for each subject area. The scope of each review for each subject can be either a full revision or a streamlining of existing standards.

Legislative Terms

Bills, Plans, and Policies

Lowercase unless naming a specific one (e.g., House Bill 3). Capitalize bills or joint resolutions that have been signed into law. Also capitalize formal accepted titles of plans, policies, acts, programs, and similar documents or agreements. When referencing a bill, include the following information in order: a label indicating the legislative branch that initiated the bill (House Bill or Senate Bill), the unique bill number, and the legislative session during which the bill was considered (see the “legislative sessions” entry in this section). Use the full citation the first time the bill is mentioned. Throughout the rest of the document, abbreviate the bill labels as HB and SB and omit the legislative session. Example: House Bill (HB) 1, 78th Texas Legislature, Second Called Session, 2003; HB 1; Senate Bill (SB) 13, 72nd Texas Legislature, 1991; SB 13.

Government Bodies and Departments

Capitalize the full names of legislative and deliberative bodies, departments, bureaus, and offices.

Legislative Sessions

Lowercase unless referring to the name of a specific one. Include the following information in order: the number of the session, the year, and the number of the special session (if applicable). Do not simply state “regular session.” The 140-day session held between January and May of each odd-numbered year is the regular session. All other sessions are called special sessions and are numbered consecutively. Even if the special session occurs in a different year than the regular session, state the year of the regular session.

- ✓ 77th Texas Legislature, 2001
- 78th Texas Legislature
- Fourth Called Session, 2003

Proclamations

Lowercase the word proclamation, unless referring to the name of a specific one (e.g., The State Board of Education issued Proclamation 2020.) Proclamations are named for the year the materials are available in the classroom. The State Board of Education issues a proclamation to call for new instructional materials. A proclamation lists the subject areas scheduled for review at a particular time. It contains a schedule of adoption procedures, requirements, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, and instructions for providing electronic files for braille and large type materials for the production of accessible formats.

Texas Administrative Code (TAC) and Texas Education Code (TEC)

The Texas Administrative Code (TAC) is a compilation of all state agency rules in Texas. **The Texas Education Code includes all laws and rules passed by the state legislature that apply to most educational institutions supported in whole or part by state tax funds.**

Follow these rules when referencing the TAC or TEC:

- Order a legal reference from general to specific: Texas Education Code, §13.048; Texas Civil Statutes, Article 6252-13(a), §6(c)
- Use this format when referencing the Texas Administrative Code, United States Code, and Code of Federal Regulations, respectively: 19 TAC §74.1; 32 USC, §21.11; 34 CFR, §19.1
- Order TAC references from general to specific. Example: subsection (b)(1)(A); paragraph (1)(A)(iii); subparagraph (A)(iii)(I)
- When referring from one subdivision to a similar subdivision within the same immediately higher subdivision, make the reference with respect to the immediately higher subdivision using the phrase “of this (name of the higher subdivision).” Example: subsection (d) of this section; paragraph of this subsection; subparagraph (A)(iii)(I) of this paragraph
- When referring from one section of TAC to a subdivision of TAC outside of that section but within the same title, make the reference with respect to the TAC title using the phrase “of this title relating to [title of subdivision].” Example: Chapter 74 of this title (relating to Curriculum Requirements); Chapter 74, Subchapter A, of this title (relating to Required Curriculum); §74.11 of this title (relating to High School Graduation Requirements).
- When referring to a subdivision of TAC in another TAC title, include the following information in order: the number of the title, the word “TAC,” the subdivision designation, and the phrase “(relating to [title of the subdivision]).” Example: 1 TAC §91.24 (relating to How to Submit Executive Orders, Opinions, and Exempt Filings).
- In rule text, as in any other document, do not use the words “above” or “below” to refer to other parts of the document. Instead, use appropriate variations of words such as “previous,” “preceding,” or “following.”

§ Section Symbol

When referencing a single section of the Texas Administrative Code or Texas Education Code, place one section symbol (§) before the section number. When referencing three or more sections in a series, place two section symbols in front of the first section number only. When referencing a range of three or more consecutive sections, place two section symbols in front of the first number and place an en dash between the numbers.



§74.1

§74.1 and §74.2

§§74.1, 74.2, and 74.11

§§74.1–74.3

Abbreviations

Acronyms and Initialisms

Refer to the “Academic and Legislative Terms” section of this guide for acronyms/initialisms commonly used at TEA. For additional guidance, refer to [CMOS 10.2–10.9](#).

The plural form of an acronym or initialism should not have an apostrophe (e.g. guidance for ESCs). Adding an apostrophe makes the acronym plural (e.g., TEA’s new insurance plan).

In most cases, an acronym/initialism should only be used if it has been spelled out on a previous reference. Exceptions:

- It is acceptable to first use an acronym in a title or subtitle if it is widely familiar to the specific audience and it is spelled out in full on the first reference in the body copy.
- An acronym may be used in a table or chart for aesthetic reasons even if it is the first reference on the page/document—as long as it is spelled out in first reference in the body copy.
- Some widely familiar abbreviations do not need to be spelled out (e.g., URL, FBI, DIY, GPS, FDA, NASA, etc.).

Addresses and Locations

Street names should not be abbreviated in running text. If abbreviating as part of a postal address, follow the rules in [CMOS 10.33–10.34](#).

Names of states and territories should be spelled out with the city set apart by commas. Two-letter postal code abbreviations may be used in tables, bibliographies, or mailing addresses.



Our building in downtown Austin, Texas, is just a short walk from the Texas State Capitol.

Place names with “Fort,” “Mount,” or “Saint” should be spelled out, unless space limitations require abbreviating. Then use Ft., Mt., or St.

United States should be spelled out in most cases. The abbreviation US (no periods) can be used in adjective form (e.g., US dollars) or when needed because of space constraints in a table or graphic treatment.

Country names should not be abbreviated in running text but may be abbreviated in a table or list. The abbreviation should be clearly identified in proximity to its use (e.g., in a caption, footnote, or body text). Use the abbreviations in [CMOS 10.31](#).

Company Names

Company names should be spelled out in full in running text; however, some full company names include an abbreviation or an ampersand (e.g., Walker Jones & Co.). When in doubt, check the company's website to find out the official name.

Professional Titles

Abbreviate titles when they are used before a full name: Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Mr., Mrs., Ms., Rep., Rev., Sen. Abbreviate junior or senior after an individual's name; do not use a comma (e.g., John F. Kennedy Jr.).

Texas Education Agency (TEA)

Spell out on first reference within a document. Only add "the" before TEA when usage in a sentence requires it; otherwise, it is not necessary. Reference the *TEA Brand Book* for guidelines on using the TEA name and logo alone or in relation to affiliates or sub brands.

Capitalization

In general, CMOS calls for [sparing use of capital letters](#), known as "down style." This means lowercase is the default in most cases unless a word is a proper noun.

The following quick-reference list includes terms and phrases that are frequently encountered in our work at TEA. Refer to "Academic and Legislative Terms" for more capitalization guidance, including academic subject areas, degrees, governmental bodies, bills, and statutes.

Do capitalize:

- Academic subjects that are also proper nouns: English, Spanish
- African American, Hispanic, Asian, Black, White, and other ethnic and racial groups
- Names of specific fund, plan, or program: Permanent School Fund
- Names of specific school districts or education service centers: Houston Independent School District, Region 20 Education Service Center
- State of Texas
- Texas Legislature
- TEA division, department, and unit names: Instructional Materials Division, Curriculum, Standards and Student Support Services

Do not capitalize:

- academic or professional titles unless they precede someone's name
- academic subject areas that are not otherwise a proper noun: math, science, social studies
- supporting standard

- email or web addresses (e.g., john.smith@tea.texas.gov or tea.texas.gov/texas-schools)
- education service center, unless part of the proper name of a specific ESC
- federal
- grade levels (e.g., grade 8 or eighth grade)
- internet
- local education agency
- nation, national
- readiness standard
- state, unless referring to the State of Texas
- student expectation
- web, website, web page

All Caps

Do not capitalize entire words or sentences. Use lowercase except when uppercase is clearly required. Do not use all caps to emphasize individual words; apply bold format instead (not underline or italics, which are reserved for specific purposes).

Names of Places, Monuments, and Geographic Areas

Capitalize entities that appear on maps, as well as the adjectives and nouns derived from them. When referring to a specific governmental body, the words state, city, and the like are usually capitalized. Words denoting political divisions such as republic, state, and precinct are lowercased when preceding a name.

✓ She works for the Village of Tanglewood Forest.

That is a City of Austin ordinance.

Washington State

the state of Washington

Professional Titles

Capitalize professional, academic, military, civil, and religious titles only when preceding a name; otherwise, they should be lowercase.

✓ Jasmine Smith, vice president of finance, will lead the meeting.

The presentation will be delivered by Vice President of Finance Jasmine Smith.

John Williams is the commissioner of education.

Texas Education Commissioner John Williams will meet with you now.

Racial, Ethnic, and National Groups

Names of racial, ethnic, and national groups should be capitalized, such as African American, Black, Latino, Chicano, Brown, Asian American, Caucasian, White, etc. Adjectives associated with these names are also capitalized. Refer to “Awareness and Representation” for additional guidance.

Seasons of the Year

Lowercase winter, spring, summer, and fall in body text, even when referring to a specific semester or quarter of the school year.

- ✓ It’s time to enroll for the spring 2019 semester.
- fall 2020–21
- first quarter of 2019

Dates and Times

For additional date and time guidance not addressed in this section, refer to [CMOS Chapter 9](#).

Days, Months, and Years

Express years in numerals unless they begin a sentence. Use cardinal numbers for specific dates. Do not use ordinals (e.g., October 12th) for dates. Place a comma after the year when the month-day-year format appears in a sentence. Only use numeral date styles (e.g., 12/7 or 5/10/2020) in calendars, tables, or charts where space constraints warrant it.

- ✓ TEA will issue new guidance in 2021.
- Twenty twenty-one will be a good year.
- May 26, 2008, is the last day of school.
- On November 5, students will take the assessment.

Decades and Centuries

Decades can be spelled out and lowercased or expressed in numerals. Do not use an apostrophe between the year and “s.” If omitting the first part of the year, use an apostrophe to indicate the missing digits. Spell out and lowercase particular centuries; numerals may be used for a century or a range.

- ✓ the 1980s
- the ‘80s
- the eighties

- ✓ the twenty-first century
- the eighth and ninth centuries
- the 1800s

Time of Day

Use numerals when emphasizing the exact time something happens (with zeros for even hours). Spell out noon and midnight. Lowercase a.m. and p.m. with periods. The word “to” is preferred when stating a time range, but a hyphen (not an en dash) is acceptable for short formats (e.g., calendar or list of multiple events). In running text, spell out the time when expressing even, half, or quarter hours.

- ✓ The teacher has office hours from 11:30 a.m. to noon.
- The webinars are set for 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m., 1:30-3:00 p.m., and 3:15-4:00 p.m.
- Visit the museum anytime between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.
- Her day begins at five o'clock in the morning.
- The meeting continued until half past three.

Numbers

For additional number guidance not addressed in this section, refer to [CMOS Chapter 9](#).

General Numbers

CMOS usually recommends spelling out whole numbers zero through one hundred. However, many publications follow a widely accepted rule of only spelling out numbers below 10 and using numerals for 10 and above. Either rule is acceptable but should be followed consistently for all numbers appearing within a particular document, website, or other body of work. Also:

- Do not start a sentence or list item with a number. Either use the word form or rewrite the sentence.
- Use commas when numbers are larger than three digits (except years and addresses).
- Spell out thousands and hundreds, except when used for monetary amounts.
- Spell out million and billion.
- When using a decimal for an amount less than one, do not add a zero in front of the decimal. Do include at least two places after the decimal.

- ✓ Eighty-seven people attended the class.
- Volunteers handed out 10,000 no. 2 pencils.
- The district employs 3,427 teachers.

- ✓ The city grew from two million in 1974 to seven million in 1992.
The estimated world population is 7.8 billion people.
He thought the answer to the problem was .05, but it was actually .10.

Money

Monetary amounts can be spelled out or expressed numerically. Only add zeros and a decimal point to an even dollar amount when it appears in context with a fractional dollar amount. Do not add a decimal when using the cents symbol. Do not use a zero before the decimal for an amount less than one dollar.

- ✓ Kids 12 and under can enter for seventy-five cents.
A train ticket costs \$3 for adults.
The bus fare used to be 75¢, but now it is \$1.00.
Prices ranged from \$0.85 up to \$12.00.
They quickly spent all thirty-seven dollars.
The grant provides \$1.5 million in program funding.

Ordinals

When stating numbers as ordinals, follow the same rules as regular numbers for spelling them out. Do not use superscript for the letters used for ordinals (“st,” “th,” or “nd”).

- ✓ First grade students will watch the performance.
We enjoyed the view from the twenty-fifth floor balcony.
Nathan was in 135th position out of 150.

Page Numbers

When referencing a fixed page or chapter within the same body of work, spell out “page” or “chapter” and use a numeral to identify the location. When expressing a range of page numbers, use an en dash, not a hyphen. For detailed source citation rules, refer to [CMOS Chapter 14](#).

- ✓ The lesson is on page 12 of the workbook.
Please read pages 75–110.
Before the exam, students should complete practice test (page 23).
Refer to chapter 4 for a complete list of titles.

Percentages

Percentages are usually expressed in numerals, except when they start the sentence. The word percent is usually spelled out; however, the symbol % is common in scientific or statistical content (no space between the numeral and %). Either symbol or spelling it out is acceptable, but be consistent throughout a document or body of work. Note that the adverb “percent” is not interchangeable with the noun “percentage.”

- ✓ Fewer than 5 percent of the employees use this parking lot.
- Twenty-two percent agree, 61 percent disagree, and 17 percent are neutral.
- Tomorrow we expect to reach 70–75 percent completion.
- The auto loan has an interest rate of 2.6 percent.
- Only 20% of the students attended the event.
- The new policy resulted in a 20%–25% increase.

Telephone Numbers

Format telephone numbers with the area code in parentheses. Extensions should only be included for internal communications when the audience is limited to TEA staff (e.g., an internal newsletter). For international numbers, use spaces rather than hyphens as separators, and do not use parenthesis. Include a plus symbol, which stands in for the international prefix, immediately before the country code.

- ✓ (512) 463-9000
- +52 55 0000 0000 (for a number in Mexico City, Mexico)
- +66 2 000 0000 (for a number in Bangkok, Thailand)

Punctuation

Refer to CMOS [Chapter 6](#) for detailed punctuation guidance.

Apostrophe

Add apostrophe and “s” to all singular nouns and names, even if they already end in “s.” If the noun is plural, add only an apostrophe (except irregular plurals like children).

- ✓ My boss’s vacation begins tomorrow.
- Texas’s education system serves many students.

- ✓ The teacher collected the students' assignments.
Children's literature is important.

Closing Punctuation (Period, Question Mark, Exclamation Point)

Use only one space after a period, question mark, or other closing (end of sentence) punctuation. Only use exclamation points sparingly and with a strong rationale. In a quote or parenthesis/brackets, closing punctuation belongs inside the quotation marks or closing parenthesis/brackets.

Colon

Use a colon to introduce a list at the end of a complete sentence. Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is followed by a complete sentence. Otherwise, the first word is lowercase.

Comma

Appositives

Use commas around appositives that are simply providing extra information, but do not use commas around appositives that are necessary to the meaning of the sentence.

- ✓ The painter Pablo Picasso was famous for his use of cubism.
His daughter, Paloma Picasso, is famous for her jewelry designs and signature fragrances.

Commas with Conjunctions

Use a comma in a series (known as a serial comma or Oxford comma) before the conjunction in lists of three or more items. Do not use a comma when there are only two items. Do use a comma with a coordinating conjunction that connects two independent clauses. Do not use a comma when a dependent clause follows the word "but."

- ✓ The students looked forward to planting kale, carrots, and herbs.
Marie slept through her alarm, but she still made it to class on time.
The bus never came, so we took a taxi.
He remembered everything but his phone when rushing out the door.

Introductory Phrases

Use a comma after an introductory adverbial phrase when misreading is likely without the comma. Use a comma after a dependent clause that comes before the independent clause.

- ✓ On the other hand, the extra rain will benefit the plants.
With only five minutes left, Monique rushed through the final steps.
Before sitting down to dinner, the committee took a vote.

- ✓ If it is below 45 degrees, you should wear the heavy coat.
Because the movie was sold out, there was no parking left.

I.e., E.g., and Etc.

Use a comma after “e.g.” (equivalent to “for example”) and “i.e.” (equivalent to “that is”) within a sentence. Use a comma before “etc.” or “et cetera” and equivalents.

That and Which

A restrictive relative clause, often introduced by “that” (or by “who/whom/whose” and occasionally “which”), should not be set off by commas. Also, these pronouns should generally be omitted if a sentence is just as clear without them (e.g., “the book I just finished” vs. “the book *that* I just finished”). Nonrestrictive relative clauses introduced by “which” (or “who/whom/whose”) are set off from the rest of the sentence by commas.

- ✓ Jackson ate all the cookies that appeared on his plate.
Diego knows this is the one assignment that could turn his grade around.
The first workshop, which was well attended, covered five topics.
Diary of a Wimpy Kid, which she finished this morning, is due back on June 16.

Too and Either

The adverbs “too” and “either” used in the sense of “also” generally do not need to be preceded by a comma.

- ✓ She finished the essay and the extra credit too.
Sabrina prefers vanilla; her brother does too.
They don't want to go bowling or to the movies either.

Dashes and Hyphens

Em Dash

Use an em dash to set off an amplifying or explanatory element in the middle of a sentence. It can function as an alternative to parentheses or a colon—especially when an abrupt break in thought is called for. Do not add a space before or after the em dash. To insert an em dash, use one of these keyboard shortcuts:

- Type two hyphens and some systems will automatically replace with an em dash as you type.
- On a PC, hold ALT and type 0151 on the number keypad (turn on number lock).
- On a Mac, hold shift+option and hit the hyphen button.

- If none of these shortcuts work, find the menu option to insert a symbol (location in the menu varies in different versions of Word).

✓ Finalists Cynthia and Randall—both known for creating beautiful cakes—had an equal chance of winning the baking contest.

She outlined a plan for the team to attend monthly trainings and hold quarterly workshops—a strategy they hoped would improve morale.

En Dash

An en dash is used between two numbers to imply “up to and including” or “through.” Do not add a space before or after the en dash. To insert an en dash, use one of these keyboard shortcuts:

- On a PC, hold ALT and type 0150 on the number keypad (turn on number lock).
- On a Mac, hold option and hit the hyphen button.
- If none of these shortcuts work, find the “insert a symbol” menu option in Word (location of this menu varies depending on the version).

✓ That rule was charged during the 2010–11 school year.

Please refer to pages 75–110.

Here are the figures for 2001–10.

The curriculum was approved for grades K–2.

Students were divided into age groups 5–8 and 9–12.

Hyphens

Use hyphens sparingly and only to provide clarity with compound terms. When in doubt, look it up! Check the dictionary or refer to the [CMOS Hyphenation Guide](#) for a list of common examples.

Hyphenate compound adjectives only if required for clarity.

✓ Ryan works for the fastest-growing company in Austin.

Simone led the high-level discussion.

Do not hyphenate a compound adjective after a linking verb.

✓ The school serves at-risk students.

The school has many students at risk of dropping out.

Use a hyphen to create compound modifiers when the first word of the modifier is the adverb “well.”

- ✓ The well-dressed gentleman entered the room.

Ellipsis

An ellipsis is a series of three dots that signals the omission of a word, phrase, or more from a quoted passage. An ellipsis can also indicate faltering speech or incomplete thoughts. For interruptions or abrupt changes in thought, use an em dash instead. CMOS prefers three spaced periods (rather than the single ellipsis symbol that can be inserted). Do not use an additional period when an ellipsis ends a grammatically incomplete quotation.

- ✓ “But . . . but . . . that’s not what I meant!” cried Steven.
The essay began with, “The best day of my life was when . . .”

Parentheses and Brackets

Brackets

Brackets can be used to indicate text that was inserted into a quoted passage by someone other than the writer, usually for clarification.

- ✓ “They [members of the Parent Teacher Association] voted in favor of the change.”

Parentheses

Use parentheses to set off material from the surrounding text. Like dashes but unlike commas, parentheses can set off text that has no grammatical relationship to the rest of the sentence. When a parenthetical is a complete sentence, the closing punctuation mark is placed inside the closing parenthesis.

- ✓ Next time Steph will try a different ingredient (maybe green beans or broccoli) to see if the recipe turns out better.
Joe and I ran back to class in the rain. (Oh, how I wish I had worn boots.) We made it right on time.

Quotation Marks

Use double quotation marks to surround quoted words, phrases, and sentences. Closing punctuation (periods, exclamation points, question marks) and commas go inside quotation marks. Use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

- ✓ “Phyllis, your outfit is so cute,” she said.

- ✓ “Don’t be ridiculous!” Jerome cried. “That would be like starting all over again.”

Semicolon

Use a semicolon instead of a period between two sentences with very closely related ideas or in a series when one or more units contain commas.

- ✓ Call me back after lunch; I will know the answer by then.
The conference attracted attendees all the way from Dallas, Texas; Portland, Oregon; and New Haven, Connecticut.

Text Formatting Guidance

Bold, Italics, Underline

See “Titles of Works” for additional text formatting rules.

Bold can be used to add emphasis to a particular word or phrase in a sentence or to differentiate between text sections or levels of headings to indicate text hierarchy.

Italics is generally reserved for specific uses (e.g., applicable titles of works).

Some of the acceptable uses of italics according to CMOS:

- Italicize isolated prefixes, suffixes, or words and phrases from another language, unless they appear in a standard English-language dictionary.
- Italics generally should not be used just to differentiate text or to indicate text hierarchy. Use other text characteristics, such size, color, and font weight first. It is permissible to use bold and italics to further emphasize something in a block of bold text.
- When a word or term is referring to itself, it can be italicized or put in quotation marks.

Underline should be reserved almost exclusively for hyperlinked text, especially in online documents and on web pages.

Titles of Works

Capitalize and italicize the titles of all:

- Albums
- Blogs
- Books
- Documents, including PDF, PowerPoint, Word, etc.
- Journals
- Movies

- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Operas
- Plays
- Radio/TV shows
- Teaching guides, handbooks, workbooks
- Webinars
- Works of art

Titles contained within larger works should appear in quotations:

- Articles within a journal
- Chapters within a book
- Episodes within a series
- Posts within a blog
- Sections within a document
- Songs within an album

Refer to the “Getting Started” section of the *Dyslexia Handbook*.

The teacher frequently referenced *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

His article “Early voting shows record turnout” was published in *The Austin American-Statesman*.

“Peak Performance” is widely considered one of the best *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes of all time.

Hyperlinks, URLs, and Email Addresses

Email Addresses

When stating a full email address, do not capitalize any letters. Avoid line breaks in email addresses as much as possible; if unavoidable, break the line between elements. When adding punctuation around an email address treat it as a single word. See Hyperlinks for guidance when linking an email address in text.



Questions? Contact help@tea.texas.gov.

Submit your application to john.smith@tea.texas.gov.

Hyperlinks

Adhere to Section 508 [accessibility standards for all hyperlinks](#). Hyperlinks can be embedded into any content, including Word, PowerPoint, and PDFs, that will be shared or posted electronically.

Keep in mind with content that is long-lasting or evergreen, hyperlinks may need to be updated over time to avoid frustrating the user with broken links or outdated/expired content. Consider this when choosing what to link.

Do not use generic phrases such as “click here,” “read more,” or “more info” for hyperlink text. Do not include any surrounding punctuation as part of the hyperlink.

To adhere with Section 508 accessibility standards, as well as usability best practices, hyperlinks should consist of descriptive, meaningful text that explains/sets an expectation for where the user will go if they choose to click. Be concise, but include whatever words are necessary to make the link meaningful; there is no maximum allowable limit for link text.

The universal style for hyperlinks (including URLs and email addresses) is blue and underlined; some websites use blue only without the underline. If there is a strong rationale to support an exception, it must still comply with 508 accessibility standards. The chosen format should be applied consistently throughout the entire document or website.

URLs

If a document is expressly intended for printing, the entire URL may need to be displayed. However, URLs that include long strings of letters and numbers are not readable or useful, and they may frustrate individuals using screen readers because the whole link will be read aloud. In that case, a better solution is to hyperlink meaningful text (refer to “hyperlinks” section of this guide) or use an online tool to create a shortened URL.

Always include the full URL in formal text citations for electronic resources.

When displaying the URL, do not include **http://** or **https://** and do not place the URL inside of brackets. Words in a URL usually should not be capitalized, except when a capital letter is part of a case-sensitive resource identifier. URLs should not contain spaces.

In running text, avoid beginning a sentence with a URL. Avoid line breaks in URLs as much as possible; if unavoidable, break the line between elements. When adding punctuation around a URL, treat it as a single word.

Lists and Outlines

Items in a list should consist of parallel elements. Where similar lists are close together, consistent treatment is essential.

To ensure accessibility compliance with Section 508, do not use indents and tabs for list formatting and alignment. Instead, use list formatting tools built into the application (e.g., Word, PowerPoint, etc.)

A vertical list is best introduced by a grammatically complete sentence, followed by a colon.

Only use introductory numerals or letters if they serve a purpose to indicate the order of items in a list (e.g., in which order tasks should be done, chronology or relative importance among the items, or to facilitate text references).

Bullet Lists

TEA style is to capitalize the first letter of each item in a bullet list (or list with any other symbols/markers in front of each item) even if it is not a complete sentence. Only use closing punctuation if the items are complete sentences.

Ordered Lists

If the items in a vertical list are numbered, a period follows the numeral. Capitalize the first letter of each list item even if it is not a complete sentence. Only use closing punctuation if the items are complete sentences.

Outlines and Multi-Level Lists

For detailed formatting guidance on outlines and lists with multiple levels, refer to [CMOS 6.132](#). For the use of roman numerals and letters in a list, see [CMOS 6.132](#).

Run-In Lists

When numerals or letters are used to mark the divisions in a run-in list (a list that is part of the body text), enclose them in parentheses. The items are separated by commas unless any of the items require internal commas, in which case all the items will usually need to be separated by semicolons.

✓ For the duration of the screen time study, students were asked to limit: (a) television, (b) video games, (c) social media, and (d) texting.

Compose three sentences to illustrate analogous uses of (1) commas, (2) em dashes, and (3) parentheses.

Tables

Tables should be used only for data. They should not be used as a layout tool for text layout or design.

As a state agency, TEA must comply with Section 508 accessibility guidelines. Improper use of tables is one of the top issues that prevents a document from passing accessibility review prior to posting or sharing.

If a table contains full sentences or paragraphs, this text should be removed from the table and reformatted as body copy. Consider organizing the text with other formatting options such as using nested subheadings or a vertical list.

When using a table for data, format it accessibly (see Section 508 guidelines for full details). The top row should be designated as a header row. Do not use merged or split cells. Every column should have the same number of rows; every row should have the same number of columns. Check that reading order makes sense when read top to bottom, left to right.

Captions, Credits, and Citations

CMOS provides extensive details for formatting citations, captions, and source credits in Chapters 3, 4, 14, 15, and 16. Follow guidance in these chapters except when formal permission has been granted; follow the grantor's requests for special wording or placement (within reason).

Captions for Graphic Elements

A caption appears outside, usually below, an illustration or photograph unlike a legend, key, or label, which typically appears within an illustration. It may consist of a word or two, an incomplete or a complete sentence, several sentences, or a combination.

Captions should be capitalized in sentence style. When titles appear in captions, apply the same rules apply as in body text for capitalization, italicizing, or adding quotation marks.

No punctuation is needed at the end if the caption is an incomplete sentence. If a caption is a complete sentence, or includes a mix of phrases and complete sentences, use closing punctuation. If most captions within the same body of work are complete sentences, use closing punctuation on all captions for consistency.



Student field trip to The University of Texas, fall 1982

Dripping Springs High School sophomore Melissa Richardson designed the new Permanent School Fund logo in 2019.

For illustrations included in appendices, follow this caption/citation format:

Fig. 1 Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima, Winter, 1945 (Photograph by Joe Rosenthal. In Joe Rosenthal and the flag-raising on Iwo Jima. By The Pulitzer Prizes. New York: Columbia University, 2019, 12.)

Credit Lines

Refer to [CMOS Chapter 3](#) for detailed guidance on various types of source credits for photographs, illustrations, or text passages. The credit line should typically include: author name, title, publication details, and (occasionally) copyright date, as well as any page or figure number if applicable.

Credit lines or source credits placed near the image, photograph, or text should be capitalized like a regular sentence.

When a credit line accompanies a caption, place the credit line at the end of a caption.

When crediting a photographer or illustrator, the name may appear in small type parallel to the bottom or side of a photograph.

Provide a credit when using data or adapting an illustration from another source for reasons of professional courtesy and for readers' information.

If most or all of the images or illustrations in a work are from a single source, that fact may be stated in a note, preface, or acknowledgments or on the copyright page, unless permission dictate credit must be given directly with the image.



Map by Joseph Smith

Photograph by Lacey Henderson

Photograph courtesy of Smithville Independent School District

Legislators attend a groundbreaking ceremony for the new building on May 8. Courtesy of Jasmine Singletary.

Reproduced by permission from Ansel Adams, *The Negative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 27.

Reprinted by permission from Johnson (2017, fig. 4).

Citations (Notes and Bibliographies)

Follow CMOS when using notes or bibliographies for formal citations in academic materials. CMOS also addresses in comprehensive detail formats for citing various types of sources in line with text and linking to an online source. Refer to the Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide for general guidance. Refer to [CMOS Chapter 14](#) for complete guidance.

Languages Other than English

Refer to [CMOS Chapter 11](#) for general guidance that applies to all languages and some specific guidance (including capitalization and diacritic marks) for Arabic, African languages, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Russian, and Spanish.

Non-English Words in English Content

Italics are used for isolated words and phrases from another language, especially if they are not listed in a standard English-language dictionary or are likely to be unfamiliar to readers. If such a word or phrase becomes familiar through repeated use throughout a work, it can be italicized only on its first occurrence.

Besides titles of works that are meant to be italicized, proper nouns from other languages are generally not italicized, even on first mention. This extends to named places and structures, institutions and companies, brand names, and other categories.

Capitalization should follow predominant usage in the original language. For titles of works from other languages, a simple guideline that applies to most situations is to capitalize only the words that would be capitalized in normal prose—the first word of the title and subtitle and all proper nouns or any term that would be capitalized under the conventions of the original language.

Spanish Translations

According to [Texas Administrative Code §206.51](#), state agencies should consider providing content in other languages and make reasonable efforts to ensure limited English-proficiency users can access certain information on the agency's website.

In Texas, Spanish is the most frequently spoken language other than English. Acceptable Spanish language references include:

- [Digital.gov Spanish Language Style Guides and Glossaries](#)
- [Head Start Style Guide for Translations in Spanish](#)

Google translate and other online translation programs should not be used for translations because they may not be accurate.

When translating content into Spanish, refer to the latest [TEA List of Translated Terms](#), which is maintained by the TEA Spanish translation team. The capitalized terms on this list are typically treated as proper nouns when used in relation to assessments; when used in general running text they may be lowercase. Follow the capitalization indicated for the Spanish translation, even if it differs from the English capitalization.

Give careful attention to acronyms; the Spanish language reader may also need to know and recognize the acronym in English.

✓ SSES, por sus siglas en inglés

All content that has already been translated into English from another language (most frequently Spanish) should be submitted to the [TEA translation team](#) for review before it is disseminated.

