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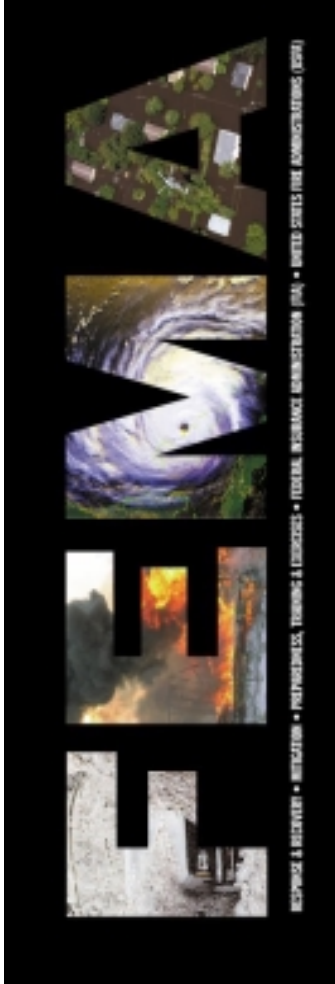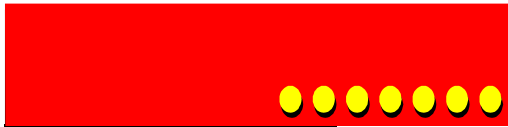Request date: 20-June-2014

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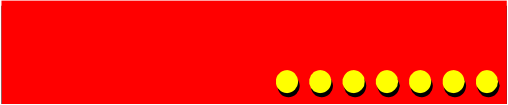Posted date: 17-August-2015

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FEMA

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (FEMA) • UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION (USFA)

FEDERAL INSURANCE & MITIGATION ADMINISTRATION (FIMA) • RESPONSE & RECOVERY

PREPAREDNESS, TRAINING & EXERCISES • MITIGATION • INSURANCE & GRANTS • RESPONSE & RECOVERY

Office of Public Affairs
Style Guide

FEMA Office of Public Affairs Style Guide

Abbreviations/Acronyms

Use the full, proper name of an organization, company, agency, etc. followed by the acronym or abbreviation in parenthesis ONLY if you refer to the organization again. If you mention the American Red Cross once, for example, you do not need to put (ARC) after the name. Once the name is spelled out in first reference, all subsequent references must use the acronym/abbreviation. Do not switch back and forth between initials and the full name in subsequent references.
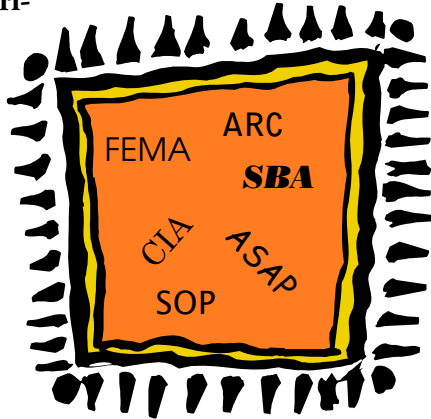
Limit how many acronyms/abbreviations you use in any one sentence. NOT: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) have joined together to issue Public Service Announcements (PSAs). You might, instead, use a generic term for Public Service Announcement, such as "a promotional campaign" in the first sentence, and then introduce the specific vehicle – the PSA – in the next sentence.

Some organizations and government agencies are now widely recognized by their initials and the full name is not necessary even on first reference. CIA and FBI are two examples, per AP style.

For states, use the AP style for state abbreviations. Do NOT use the two-letter Post Office standard. See States section.

Addresses

Use abbreviations (Ave., Blvd., St.) only with numbered addresses, otherwise spell them out (i.e. He lives on Pennsylvania Avenue. He lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.). Spell out and capitalize "First" through "Ninth" when used as street names, use the number for 10th and above. Abbreviate compass points used to indicate directional ends of a street or city quadrant without periods (1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW).

Altogether vs. All Together

Altogether means totally or wholly. All together means everybody together or at the same time.

Ampersand (&)

Use when only part of a company's formal name (Baltimore & Ohio Railroad). The ampersand should not be substituted for the word "and."

a.m. and p.m.

Use a.m. and p.m. as lower case with periods. Do not use uppercase and do not be repetitive with "at 10 a.m. in the morning on Thursday" or "at 12 noon."

Apostrophes

The apostrophe signals possession ("the file's contents") or a contraction ("it's a file.") It is not used to form the plural of a noun.

YES: 1990s, LANs, TVs.

NO: 1990's. An apostrophe can also signal something is left out, as in: He lived in the '80s.

Assure, Ensure, Insure

Assure means to give confidence or to reassure. Ensure means guarantee or make safe. Insure means to buy or issue insurance.

Attribution

All quotations must have attribution attached to it. Use only one attribution per quote.

YES: "This is a terrific opportunity for disaster prevention," Jones said. "FEMA is looking forward to working with this community in the future."

NO: Alexander Jones spoke at the meeting.
"This is a terrific opportunity for disaster prevention. FEMA is looking forward to working with this community in the future." **(No attribution)**

NO: "This is a great opportunity for disaster prevention," Jones said. "FEMA is looking forward to working with this community," he said. **(Second "he said" is incorrect.)**

Between vs. Among

Between is used to refer to two people or entities (the partnership between Project Impact and Tulsa, Okla.). Among refers to three or more people or entities (FEMA chose from among four communities for the honor.)

Bullet Rules

- Capitalize the first word of a bullet;
- Make sure the structure is consistent (start with either a verb or a noun, but all should be the same); and
- End each bullet (unless it is a complete sentence) with a semicolon, except the last bullet, which takes a period.

Bullet Use

Use bullets when you want to:

- Introduce a set of steps or the sections of a document;
- Highlight important components that will help clarify the discussion; or
- Break up dense text.

Capitalization

These words are not capitalized when they stand alone and not part of a full formal name: contractor, federal, government, nation, national, region, regional, state, agency, department. Even if you are using the word "agency" to refer to FEMA, it is lower case when standing alone.

Titles are capitalized when used before a name and lower case when used after. See "Titles" for examples and more information.

Captions

FEMA captions should be written in present tense and should be as descriptive as possible within two or three sentences. Identifications are necessary when there three or fewer identifiable individuals.

Captions also should include the city and state where the photo was taken, the date and the name of the photographer.
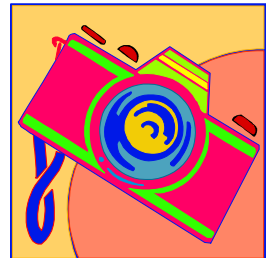
City/State Punctuation

The correct punctuation for a city/state combination is: The meeting will be held in Miami, Fla., on Wednesday. Note the comma after the state. This is often erroneously omitted.

Commas

A comma is used to make the sentence meaning clearer and to help the reader understand relationships within the sentence. Commas are used to divide compound sentences, to set off nonrestrictive phrases, to enclose parenthetical phrases, to set off adverbial clauses at the beginning of a sentence and in many other instances.

Although not a classic rule of grammar, one of the best rules of thumb for positioning a comma is this: If you read your sentence aloud, where do you naturally pause? These pauses are generally good places for commas. See serial commas.

Courtesy Titles

FEMA does not use courtesy titles, including Mrs., Ms., Mr. or Dr. In most instances, an individual's full name is used on a first reference and then last name is used in subsequent references. Occasionally, FEMA publications will include a professional title, such as Director or Gov. in front of the last names of individuals in subsequent references.

Dates

Abbreviate the month when used with a specific date, such as: Dec. 9, 2000. Spell out when the month is used alone with a year. There is no comma between the month and year. This is correct: September 2000.

Dollar Figures

Specific dollar figures should use the dollar sign and not the word "dollar."

NO: 12 million dollars
YES: $12 million

Dollar figures should also be rounded to the nearest whole number unless there is a reason the exact figure is necessary. Figures in the millions should only have two numbers to the right of the decimal.

NO: FEMA spent $45,883.45
YES: FEMA spent $45,900 or FEMA spent $46,000

NO: FEMA's budget was $345,375,643.00
YES: FEMA's budget was $345.37 million

Except vs. Accept

Accept means to receive, except means to exclude.

Effect vs. Affect

Both words can serve as either nouns or verbs. These broad definitions show the basic differences in usage:

1. **Effect** (verb) To bring about, cause to happen, accomplish (e.g., the meeting effected a compromise between the participants).
2. **Effect** (noun) A result, influence, or action (e.g., the drug had a calming effect on the patient).
3. **Affect** (verb) To have an effect on, to influence, to move or stir the emotions of (e.g., the music affected them profoundly).

Usages 2 and 3 are most common; 1 is used infrequently.

e.g. vs. i.e.

If you want to say "for example," use **e.g.,** (The colors of the American flag are symbolic, e.g., blue represents loyalty.")

If you want to say "that is," use **i.e.,** (The colors of the American flag-i.e., red, white, and blue-are symbolic.)

Always place a comma after e.g. and i.e. when used in a sentence.

e-mail

The correct usage is e-mail, not E-mail and not email.

Farther vs further

Use farther for distance and further to mean additional or continued.

Foreign Phrases

Foreign terms, primarily Latin ones that are commonly used in modern English, need not be italicized. Examples include per se, ad hoc, e.g., i.e., in situ, in vitro, per diem.

Hurricane/Tropical Storm

When using the official name of a hurricane or tropical storm, the term preceding the name is capitalized.

Correct: Hurricane Bonnie or Tropical Storm Earl

However, when used alone, without a proper name, hurricane and tropical storm are lowercase. When referring to more than one hurricane or tropical storm, the term preceding the name is also lowercase.

Correct: Both hurricanes Fran and Floyd hit North Carolina.

Correct: The community was hit by a tropical storm.

Hyphens

Hyphens are used to make the text easier to read and understand. Generally speaking, hyphens are not used with adverbs that end in -1y (e.g., federally approved landfill, fully accredited university) or with proper nouns (e.g., Virginia Commonwealth laws). Hyphens also are not used with temporary noun compounds formed by a noun and a gerund (e.g., decision making, problem solving).

Hyphens are used with compounds beginning with all, self, half or low, such as low-level contamination), and with the adverbs will, ill, better, best, little, lesser and least when placed before the noun, such as in well-prepared document or better-qualified candidate. Hyphens also are used with an adjective or noun plus the past participle (-ed) or the present participle (-ing), in such words as EPA-approved document or grass-eating species.

Remember, though, when used in a sentence where it is not directly modifying the noun, the hyphen is NOT used, e.g., the document was EPA approved or the species was grass eating.

Hyphen also are used with a cardinal number plus a unit of measure placed before the noun [e.g., 100-acre site] and with phrases as adjectives (e.g., day-to-day activities, camera-ready copy, user-friendly system)

Hyphens are NOT used with permanent compound words, such as statewide or multicolored. Consult a dictionary to be sure.

Its vs it's

Remember, "it's" is a contraction for "it is" and "its" is a possessive meaning something belonging to "it."

Its vs theirs

Agencies and states are singular and the possessive "its" should be used rather than "theirs." You can avoid this by substituting a plural noun, such as "state officials" for the singular noun.

NO: The state is trying to ensure <u>their</u> residents are prepared.

YES: The state is trying to ensure <u>its</u> residents are prepared

YES: <u>State officials</u> are trying to ensure <u>their</u> residents are prepared.
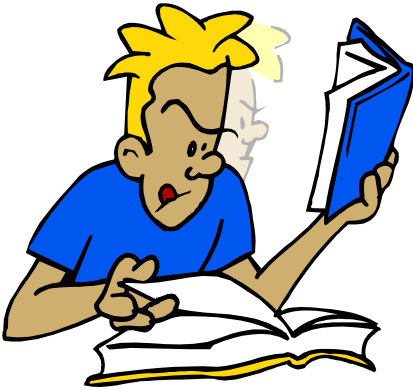
"-ize" Words

Choose less bureaucratic alternatives. Examples: "use" or "employ" for "utilize;" "set priorities" or "rank" for "prioritize." Consult a thesaurus for help.

Lay/lie

Use lay when referring to something being put down or placed. Its use requires a direct object. Hens lay eggs and librarians lay books on a table. Other tenses for lay are: laid and laying.

Lie means to recline or be in a location. It doesn't need an object. The coral reef lies north of the island. Sleeping dogs lie. Other tenses for lie are: lying, lain and lay (which creates much confusion).
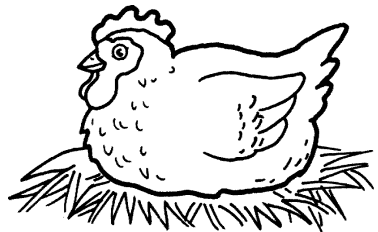
More Than vs. Over

The phrase "more than" is more specific than and preferred to the word "over." Over implies a physical place rather than a number. Likewise, "fewer than" and "less than" are preferable to "under." Under implies a physical place rather than a number.

Numbers

Numbers one through nine are words; 10 and above are numerals.

Parallel Construction

Words and phrases that do the same kind of work are easier to read if they are similar (parallel) in grammatical construction. Make sure items in a list, especially verbs, have the same structure.

NO: Anita is responsible for **editing** and **handles** production.

YES: Anita is responsible for **editing** and **handling** production.

Percent

Spell out percent. Do not use %. Do not make it two words.

Project Impact

Whenever practical, on first reference use the full name: Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities. Use Project Impact on second and subsequent references. Do not abbreviate as PI.

Punctuation in Quotations

Punctuation goes *inside* quotation marks.

Quotations

Quotes generally should sound conversational (not bureaucratic or filled with jargon) and should not be more than four sentences total (Three is ideal, with the first sentence coming before the attribution and the second and third coming after.) If longer than four sentences, the quote should be broken into two quotes or trimmed. Quotes should not convey general information.

NO: "We will be holding a press conference at 3 p.m. tomorrow," FEMA Director Bill Smith said.

Generally, quotes should start their own paragraph and should not be preceded by a lead-in phrase.

YES: "We believe the best way to reduce disaster damage is by helping communities identify their specific risks," said John Smith, federal coordinating officer.

NO: When asked how he thought residents could protect themselves, John Smith, federal coordinating office, said, "We believe the best way to reduce disaster damage is by helping communities identify their specific risks."

Try to avoid "bumping" quotes, in other words, having one quote directly follow another without an intervening paragraph.

Preferred:
"This is a terrific opportunity for disaster prevention," FEMA Director Joe Smith said. "FEMA is looking forward to working with this community to reduce future disaster risk."
North Carolina's governor agreed. **(intervening graph)**
"We are looking forward to working with FEMA now and in the future," Gov. Jim Smith said. "This is a great opportunity."

Redundant Statements

Take care to avoid redundant statements such as these: absolute necessity, close proximity, end result, plan in advance, follow after, any and all, new innovation, unless and until, few in number, estimated at about, untimely death, pre-plan etc.
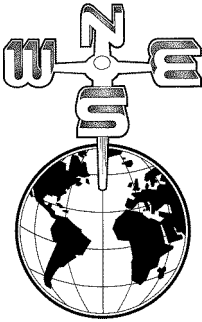
Regional Areas

Uppercase the names of recognized regions, such as Northern California or New England. Lowercase when the referenced area does not refer to a recognized region, such as northern Ohio. Always lowercase when using north, south, east or west in a directional context i.e., He went north when the flooding began.

Said

Use "said" in quote attributions. Avoid using stated, announced, reiterated, etc. simply as alternatives to "said." In nearly all circumstances, "said" works just fine. Do not use "says" in attribution.
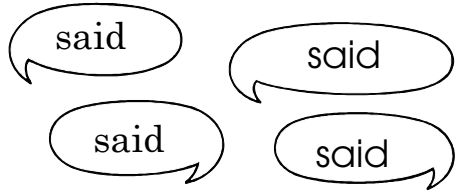
Semicolons

A semicolon indicates a more definitive break in thought than a comma and is used wherever a comma would not be distinctive enough. Semicolons are used to join two clauses that are closely related. The two clauses need not be complete sentences, but many times they are. Semicolons should also be used to separate a list of items that have been punctuated internally with commas.

Serial Commas

Generally speaking, don't use a comma before the "and" in a simple list of three or more items (parking, concierge and security). The exception to this is when the list is complex.

Sexist Language

Most sexist language is inadvertent. Be vigilant about avoiding gender stereotyping and other subtle sexist language. Use gender neutral terms such as chair instead of chairman or police officer rather than policeman. Also, avoid making assumptions about gender in professions that are often seen as traditionally male or female. Nurses are not always women and doctors are not always men. When necessary, avoid the awkwardness of using his/her by making nouns plural.

NO: This is a matter between a patient and his doctor.

NO: This is a matter between a patient and his/her doctor

YES: This is a matter between patients and doctors.

Spacing After Periods

There is only ONE space after a period in all circumstances. The double space after the period is NOT correct style.

State Abbreviations

Use the Associate Press state abbreviations not the post office state abbreviations. Note that some states are spelled out.

Correct:

Alabama Ala.
Alaska
Arizona Ariz.
Arkansas Ark.
California Calif.
Colorado Colo.
Connecticut Conn.
Delaware Del.
Florida Fla.
Georgia Ga.
Hawaii
Idaho
Illinois Ill.
Iowa
Indiana Ind.
Kansas Kan.
Kentucky Ky.
Louisiana La.
Maine
Maryland Md.
Massachusetts Mass.

Michigan Mich.
Minnesota Minn.
Mississippi Miss.
Missouri Mo.
Montana Mont.
Nebraska Neb.
Nevada Nev.
New Hampshire N.H.
New Jersey N.J.
New Mexico N.M.
New York N.Y.
North Carolina N.C.
North Dakota N.D.
Ohio
Oklahoma Okla.
Oregon Ore.
Pennsylvania Pa.
Rhode Island R.I.
South Carolina S.C.
South Dakota S.D.
Tennessee Tenn.
Texas
Utah
Vermont Vt.
Virginia Va.
Washington Wash.
Washington, D.C.
West Virginia W. Va.
Wisconsin Wis.
Wyoming Wyo.
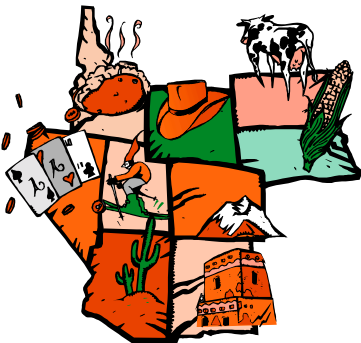
Temblor vs tremblor

Temblor is another name for an earthquake. Tremblor is NOT a word.

Tenses

Make sure they agree, both within a sentence and throughout a document.

That vs. Which

Writers tend to overuse "which" and under use "that." "That" is the defining pronoun; "which" is the nondefining. "Which" phrases are usually set off with commas; they have a more parenthetical feel than "that" phrases.

I'm taking the bike <u>that</u> is in the garage. (defines a particular bike: that one, in the garage)

I'm taking the bike, <u>which</u> is in the garage. (adds a fact about the bike)

Titles

Job titles are only capitalized before a person's name: FEMA Director Bill Brown. They are lower case after: Bill Brown, director of FEMA. Generally speaking, put long titles after the name, not before. **NO:** Federal Emergency Management Agency Associate Director for Mitigation Michael Smith.

Web site

FEMA adheres to the Washington Post style regarding Web site. The term is two words, with Web capitalized. Also, the correct usage is World Wide Web, on the Web, but www.fema.gov. Do NOT add http://.
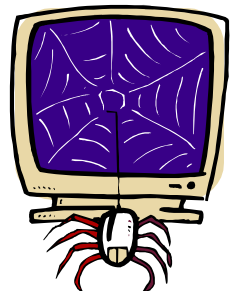
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