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U.S. Department
of Transportation

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

ELECTRONIC MAIL

July 8, 2014

RE: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request #ES14-002550

This responds to your June 20, 2014 FOIA request seeking the NHTSA Style Manual.

Enclosed is information responsive to your request.

Pursuant to 49 CFR Part 7, there is no charge for this response.

I am the person responsible for this decision. If you wish to appeal this decision, you may do so by writing to the Chief Counsel, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, West Building, W41-227, Washington, DC 20590, pursuant to 49 CFR § 7.32(d). An appeal must be submitted within 45 from the date of this determination. It should contain any information and argument upon which you rely. The decision of the Chief Counsel will be administratively final.

Very Truly Yours,

Andrew J. DiMarsico
Senior Attorney

Enclosure

National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

Style Guide

Revised
March 2007

NHTSA
www.nhtsa.gov

Table of Contents

Introduction

The NHTSA Style Guide was created in an effort to provide guidance to writers and enhance overall communications within the agency.

NHTSA relies mainly on the *Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual* (2000 Version) for writing guidelines. There are many instances, however, in which NHTSA overrides *GPO* rules. In addition, NHTSA, like most Government agencies, has a lot of its own buzz words, phrases, and mission-specific terminology that can't be found in *GPO* or a standard dictionary. To maintain consistency within NHTSA publications, this style guide was produced. The NHTSA Style Guide includes many of the most commonly used *GPO* rules as well as rules that are specific to NHTSA.

This guide may be used in conjunction with other references, such as the *GPO Style Manual* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition*, and can be referenced for all NHTSA publications.

Levels of Editing

The Office of Communications Services (OCS) edits a variety of written documents and publications. Based on the customer's needs, when text is submitted to OCS for review it will go through one of the following three levels of editing:

LIGHT: Light editing involves basic editing for GPO and NHTSA compliance and to eliminate obvious or egregious errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, or content. Light editing also includes editing for consistency within a publication and among all NHTSA publications. No "wordsmithing" is involved.

MEDIUM: Medium editing includes everything in light editing, but also involves "wordsmithing" (i.e., choosing better or more appropriate words, tightening text). For example, "All of the states in the nation," may be changed to, "All States in the Nation."

HEAVY: Heavy editing includes all of the above, but also involves extensive revision and editing. Rewriting or reorganization of text may be necessary. Text can be added or deleted as needed.

Fact-Checking

Fact-checking is not a job function or responsibility of Communications Services staff members. The customer is solely responsible for the accuracy of publication content. If inaccuracies or errors in data are discovered during the editing or proofreading phases of publication, the Service Advisor will bring such mistakes to the customer's attention.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Many agencies and organizations use acronyms, abbreviations, or initials to reference their names. Spell out names of all organizations on first reference, unless noted otherwise below. Follow the first reference with the acronym in parentheses if the name is likely to be used again in the same text. For all subsequent references, the acronym alone may be used. If the name will not be referenced again, <u>no acronym is necessary</u>. For commonly known agencies' acronyms, such as the CIA, FBI, or DOT, there is no need to include the acronym in parentheses.

Example: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has conducted extensive research on impaired driving. …NHTSA has concluded that…

The same rules apply for abbreviated terminology. Spell terms out on first reference and include the corresponding acronym, if applicable, in parentheses. The acronym may be used in subsequent references.

Example: The blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level of the driver was .06, whereas the pedestrian had a BAC level of .12. *(Note: the "C" in BAC always stands for concentration, **not** content.)*

Some common terms and their acronyms/abbreviations:

◆ and (&) – The ampersand may be use in titles, headings, and in the names of companies that use it (Dun & Bradstreet). In text, always write out the word *and*.
◆ blood alcohol concentration (BAC)
◆ grams per deciliter (g/dL)
◆ miles per gallon (mpg)
◆ miles per hour (mph)
◆ Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP)
◆ Southwest (SW.) – When referring to the sectional division of a city.
◆ Unites States (U.S.) – Abbreviate when using U.S. as a modifier (e.g., U.S. Government, U.S. highway system), *but* write out when using it as a noun (All highways in the United States…).
◆ Virginia (VA) – When abbreviating the name of a State, always use the ZIP code abbreviation (VA as opposed to Va.); but never use the abbreviation alone in text. (People in Maryland usually…, *not* People in MD usually…)

In the *GPO Style Manual*:
Abbreviations and Letter Symbols (pages 147-157)
List of Common Abbreviations (pages 148-170)

Addresses, Phone Numbers, and URLs

Addresses

◆ The correct ways to write the Department of Transportation's address are:

400 Seventh Street SW., Washington, DC 20590

Write the address this way if writing the address on one line.
Note: Do not use a comma after street; use one period after SW; use a comma after SW. (only in sentence format); place a comma after Washington; do not use periods in DC; and do not place a comma between DC and the ZIP Code.

and

400 Seventh Street SW.
Washington, DC 20590

◆ When words such as *Avenue, Boulevard, Building, Court, Drive, Place, Road, Square, Street,* and *Terrace* follow a name or a number, always write them out. Only abbreviate such words in footnotes, lists, sidenotes, tables, etc.

◆ When these words are part of a name, do not abbreviate them – even in footnotes, lists, sidenotes, tables, etc. (14th Street Bridge).

Phone Numbers

◆ The correct way to write all phone numbers is 888-327-4236 *not* (888) 327-4236 or 1-888-327-4236. Basically, use hyphens instead of parentheses and never put a 1- in front of any phone number.

URLs

◆ Web addresses should not be underlined. If Microsoft Word automatically hyperlinks a URL, go to Edit, undo autoformat.

◆ Web addresses should be preceded by www. (It is unnecessary to include http://) *For more information, visit www.safercar.gov.* However, when referring to the vanity name of a Web site, the www. can be omitted. *Safercar.gov is a valuable source of information for consumers.*

◆ It is unnecessary to introduce a Web address by saying "may be found on the Web at…" or "on the World Wide Web at…"

◆ The word Internet may be used in place of the word Web.

In the *GPO Style Manual*:
Addresses (pages 149 and 219)
Phone Numbers (Rule 12.7 on page 182)

Capitalization

General capitalization rules can be found in the *GPO Style Manual.* The following is just a quick reference list of commonly used terms and their appropriate capitalization.

◆ Agency is capitalized only when one is referring, on subsequent (second, third, etc.) reference, to a unit that has *Agency* as part of its formal name.

◆ Chart* is capitalized in the title of a chart (Chart 2) or in reference to a specific chart (as seen in Chart 2), but lowercased when used generically in text (as seen in the following chart).

◆ Federal is always capitalized.

◆ Figure* is capitalized in the title of a figure (Figure 11) or in reference to a specific figure (as seen in Figure 11), but lowercased when used generically in text (as seen in the following figure).

◆ Government is capitalized when one is referring to institutions, agencies, and people (the U.S. Government), but lowercased in generic and collective uses (Federal, State, and local government).

◆ Internet is always capitalized.

◆ Nation/National is capitalized when used as a synonym for this country or in reference to its agencies and institutions (the Nation's capital), but lowercased when used generically (many nations have recommended…).

◆ State is capitalized when one is referring to any of the 50 States, named or unnamed, but lowercased when used generically (state of mind). See *GPO Style Manual* p. 58

◆ Table* is capitalized in the title of a table (Table 4) or in reference to a specific table (as seen in Table 4), but lowercased when used generically in text (as seen in the following table).

◆ To (and all articles, prepositions, and conjunctions less than four letters in length) is *only* capitalized when used as the first word of a sentence, or as the first word of a new line in a headline or title.

◆ Web/Web site is capitalized in all references to the World Wide Web.

◆ ZIP Code is always capitalized (all three letters and the *c* in *Code*).

  * The capitalization of these terms is NHTSA's preference, not required by GPO.

Consumer Campaigns (always italicized):

◆ *Buckle Up America*

◆ *Click It or Ticket*

Terms that should always appear lowercased:

◆ versus (always lowercased; always spelled out unless used in legal terms)

◆ e-mail (unless in a title or at the beginning of a sentence)

◆ on-off switch

In the *GPO Style Manual*:
Capitalization Rules (pages 23-34)
Capitalization Examples (pages 35-62)

Compounding Examples

A compound word is the joining of two or more words, either with or without a hyphen. A complete list of the compounding examples can be found in the *GPO Style Manual*, but this is a list of commonly used compound terms.

African-American
air bag
alcohol-involved
alcohol-related
computer-simulated
crashworthy, crashworthiness
drunk driving, *but* drunk-driving issues
frontal crash and side-impact crash ratings
frontal-offset crashes, left-offset crashes,
    right-offset crashes
go-cart
handheld
head-on crash
health care, health care system
heavy-vehicle occupant
high-backed booster seats
high-speed crash
high-visibility campaigns
impaired driving/driver, *but* impaired-
    driving legislation
intelligent-vehicle systems
lane changing, lane changing behavior
late-model vehicle
light-vehicle occupant
low-speed test
lower-limb injury
motorcycle
multi-impact
multiple-vehicle crash
noncollision
non-intersection location
nonmotorist
nonoccupant

ongoing
online
on-off switch
out-of-position sensors
overinflated, underinflated
pickup truck
police-reported crash
property-damage-only crash
real-time communication, *but* the real time
    is 6:15
real-world crash statistics
rear-end crash
roofbag
school-bus-related crash
seat belt
side-impact air bags
side-impact crash
single-vehicle crash
speed-related
twenty-five
two-point, three-point attachments
Web site
weekend
zero tolerance, *but* zero-tolerance laws

2-door vehicle, 3-door vehicle, 4-door
    hatchback
18-wheeler
12-year-old passenger,
    but the passenger was 12 years old
a 6-percentage-point decrease,
    but 6 percent of the respondents
    6 percentage points (see **Numerals**)

Numerals and Time Measurement

A figure is used for a single number of 10 or more with the exception of the first word in a sentence. Exception: When 2 or more numbers appear in a sentence and 1 of them is 10 or larger, figures are used for every number.

BAC (Blood Alcohol Concentration)

.08 *not* 0.08 (for BACs, do not include the zero before the decimal)

Note: This is measured in grams per deciliter (g/dL) and should <u>never</u> be referred to as a percentage. Use *grams per deciliter* on first reference. The number alone, or the number and *g/dL*, are acceptable for subsequent references. *Example: The driver had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .12 grams per deciliter (g/dL), and the pedestrian had a BAC of .09 at the time of the crash.*

Traffic Fatality Rates

Traffic fatality rates should never be referred to as percentages. These rates are measures in fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
Incorrect: The traffic fatality rate reached an all-time low of 1.46 percent.
Correct: The traffic fatality rate reached an all-time low of 1.46 per 100 million VMT.

Percentages

Always spell out the word *percent* in text.
The survey showed that 27 percent of drivers…
It is acceptable to use the % symbol in a set of parentheses to amplify or explain a text reference.
A majority (74%) of respondents admitted to…

2 percentage points
2 percent of the population
a 2-percentage-point decrease
Explanation: Only use a hyphen between the number and the word *percent/percentage* when the percentage is modifying something, such as an increase, decrease, change, or chance.
(a 16-percent increase in crashes)

Dates

In text, write: August 24, 1986
Never: 8-24-86, 24 August 1986, or 8/24/86

Saturday, July 20, 2002
September 1999, *not* September, 1999

In the middle of a sentence, a comma should always follow the year.
(The crash took place on February 4, 1994, in Baltimore, Maryland.)

Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. are appropriate abbreviations in footnotes, but March, April, May, June, and July are never abbreviated. All months should be spelled out in text.

Time

6 p.m. (no :00) or 6:15 a.m. (a.m. and p.m. will always be lowercased and include periods)
noon or midnight (not 12 p.m. or 12 a.m.)

Age

6 years old
a 6-year-old
at the age of 8
age 12 or younger (*Note:* if context is clear, the word *age* is not necessary)
age 10 or older
ages 18-24
18- to 24-year-olds
from *birth* to age 4 (never use age 0/zero)

In the *GPO Style Manual*:
Numerals (pages 181-189)

Punctuation

The following are just a few commonly used (and misused) GPO punctuation rules.

◆ Comma
The serial comma (sometimes called the "Oxford" comma) is always used.
The rates were higher in Florida, Montana, and California.
Note: Never use a comma before an ampersand (&). Brown, Wilson & Co.

A comma is required inside closing quotation marks.
"Freedom is an inherent right," he insisted.
Items marked "A," "B," and "C," inclusive, were listed.

A comma is required to separate thousands, millions, etc., in numbers of four or more digits.
4,520
50,680
1,250,000
but *1,000,000,000 is more clearly illustrated as 1 billion.*

A comma is required after the name of a State, when the name of a city precedes it.
The event held in Salt Lake City, Utah, was a huge success.

A comma is required after the year in <u>complete</u> dates within a sentence.
This was reflected in the June 13, 1959, report.
but *This was reflected in the June 1959 report.* (only month and year are referenced)

A comma is required before etc. and et al.
Use this rule in letters, documents, etc.
Source: Jenkins, Smith, et al.
but *Jenkins et al.* (no comma before et al. if only one name precedes it)

A comma is required after e.g. and i.e.
Some States (e.g., Maryland, New York) do not have such a law.
Most respondents (i.e., the students who were surveyed) did not agree.

◆ Periods are always placed <u>inside</u> quotation marks at the end of a sentence.
"The bridge," according to the engineer, "will be completed in 2007."

◆ Colon

A colon is used to introduce any matter that forms a complete sentence, question, or quotation.

The following question came up for discussion: What policy should be adopted?
There are three factors as follows: First, law enforcement participation; second, availability of volunteers; and third, financial resources.

A colon (or an em dash) should be used after an introductory phrase that reads into subsequent lines in order to indicate repetition of such phrase.

The campaign encourages children to:

◗ *Wear helmets when riding their bicycles;*

◗ *Look both ways before crossing a street; and*

◗ *Keep bicycle tires fully inflated.*

When using an em dash:
The campaign encourages children to –

◗ *Wear helmets when riding their bicycles;*

◗ *Look both ways before crossing a street; and*

◗ *Keep bicycle tires fully inflated.*

◆ Semicolon

Note the use of semicolons in the example given above. In a list of phrases that complete an introductory phrase, use a semicolon after each line in the list, excluding the last line. Write the word *and* after the last semicolon, and use a period at the end of the last line.

◆ Footnotes

◗ Footnote numbers or symbols should be placed after periods in sentences, rather than before them.

◗ In cases of multiple citations, a single space should separate them (do not separate with commas)

A previous report had indicated that the decrease in fatalities was directly related to the new legislation.[4 19]

◗ The numbers should be superscripted

The audience was identified through data.[1]

Charts, Tables, and Figures

The following are general guidelines for using charts, tables, and figures.

◆ Titles

Titles for all charts, tables, and figures begin with the type and number (e.g. Table 4) followed by a period. The name of the table then follows, using initial caps on all major words of four or more letters (e.g. Alcohol-Related Fatalities Among Teenagers, 1995-2005). Do not use punctuation at the end of a title.
Table 4. Acohol-Related Fatalities Among Teenagers, 1995-2005

◆ Headings

◗ Keep headings simple. Use as few words as possible and abbreviate if necessary. The names of months (except May, June, and July) may be abbreviated.

◗ When using time in tables, follow the format explained on page 7 **(Numerals and Time Measurement: Time)**. For example, use 6-9 a.m., 9 a.m.-noon, etc. Do not capitalize a.m. and p.m.

◗ When referring to BAC levels, follow the format explained on page 6 **(Numerals and Time Measurement: BAC)**. Do not place a zero before the decimal point (e.g., .08) and capitalize the l in g/dL (e.g. .08-.10 g/dL).

◗ When using age in tables, never use 0 as a child's age (i.e., 0-4 years old). Instead, use <5. *Tip: Watch for autoformatting of age headings. For example, Microsoft Word may interpret the 5-9 age group as the date May 9th.*

◗ When using percentages, write out the word percent in headings (Percent Wearing Helmets) and use the symbol with numerals within the table (42%).

◆ References to Charts, Tables, and Figures

◗ When referring in text to charts, tables, and figures, follow the capitalization guidelines on page 4 **(Capitalization)**. Capitalize the words chart, table, and figure only in the title itself or in reference to a specific chart, table, or figure (e.g., See Chart 1). Do not capitalize otherwise (e.g., As seen in the following chart).

Terms and Grammatical Errors to Avoid

Terms

Terms to Avoid	Terms to Use
accident, wreck	crash, collision
bicyclist	pedalcyclist
broad array (broad array of exhibits)	array (array of exhibits)
car (when referring to vehicles in general)	vehicle/motor vehicle
car seat	child safety seat
citizen(s) (when referring to the general public)	person/people
community-based (community-based meetings)	community (community meetings)
datum	data (the word *data* is accepted in singular <u>and</u> plural forms now: *The data is essential to the study.*)
death(s)	fatality/fatalities
drunk, drunk driving/driver	impaired, impaired driving/driver
elderly/senior driver	older driver
impact (as a verb: The campaign *impacted* a large percentage of the State.)	affect, influence (The campaign *influenced* a large percentage of the State.)
materials (used generically)	supplies, items, products, etc.
partner, partner with (as a verb: The agency partnered with the United Way on the project.)	join, work with, support, etc. (The agency worked with the United Way on the project.)
persons (as the plural of person)	people
police, police department, police officer (used generically)	law enforcement, law enforcement agency, law enforcement officer
safety belt	seat belt
utilize	use

Grammatical Errors

Common Grammatical Errors to Avoid:

◆ Agreement in Number

Incorrect: <u>A child</u> should always wear <u>their</u> seat belt.
Correct: <u>A child</u> should always wear <u>a</u> seat belt.
              <u>Children</u> should always wear <u>their</u> seat belt<u>s</u>.
*Note: **Child** is singular, while **their** is plural.*

Incorrect: <u>The data</u> gathered in Florida <u>are</u> essential to the study.
Correct: <u>The data</u> gathered in Florida <u>is</u> essential to the study.
*Note: **Data** may be used in the singular (collective).*

◆ Subject-Verb Agreement

Incorrect: <u>A committee</u> of local officials <u>are</u> expected to make the decision.
Correct: <u>A committee</u> of local officials <u>is</u> expected to make the decision.

◆ Dangling/Misplaced Modifier

Incorrect: <u>While awaiting</u> the committee's decision, <u>the new campaign materials</u> were distributed by volunteers. *(The campaign materials were not waiting.)*
Correct: <u>While awaiting</u> the committee's decision, <u>volunteers</u> distributed the new campaign materials. *(The volunteers were waiting.)*

Recommended Resources

◆ *Government Printing Office Style Manual,* 2000 edition

 Since the *GPO* doesn't say much about grammar and usage, the following are some good resources recommended by the *GPO* itself.

  ◗ *Chicago Manual of Style*

  ◗ *New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*

◆ *Garner's Modern American Usage* by Brian Garner

◆ *Associated Press Stylebook (AP Stylebook)* 2002 edition (for press releases, etc.)

◆ *Lapsing into a Comma* and *The Elephants of Style,* both by Bill Walsh

◆ *Woe is I* and *Words Fail Me,* both by Patricia O'Connor

◆ *The New Fowler's Modern English Usage, 1996*

Dictionaries

◆ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 10th Edition*

◆ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged*

Online

◆ *Government Printing Office Style Manual Online*
 www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/index.html

◆ *Merriam-Webster Online*
 www.m-w.com

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