About the OSPI Style Guide

Why do we have an OSPI Style Guide?

Is it email or e-mail? Preschool or pre-school? When do you capitalize state? What’s the difference between an en dash and em dash? Ask these questions in a room full of OSPI staff and you’ll get many different answers. Why is that?

- We were not all taught the same thing. We’ve had different teachers, attended different schools, and had professions in a variety of industries. Yes, there is general agreement on many rules, but there isn’t agreement on everything.

- Language, including the rules of what’s “right” and “wrong,” is not static. Like it or not, meanings of words change, and new words appear. Grammar rules change, too.

It’s ok to have an opinion about these things, but as an organization, it’s critical that OSPI show consistency across all channels of communication: email, newsletters, websites, reports, tweets, bulletins, and anything else in print and online.

This is where the OSPI Style Guide comes in. A style guide is a resource for writers and editors. It helps communicate clearly and consistently across all media to all audiences.

What is the OSPI Style Guide?

The OSPI Style Guide is used by staff, contractors, and partners when they are writing and editing content for OSPI. It ensures effective editorial styles and standards for OSPI print and electronic communications. The guide is organic, meaning it adapts to authors’ and editors’ needs, as well as the personality of OSPI.

The OSPI Style Guide is housed on the OSPI intranet (under Communications).

Am I required to use the OSPI Style Guide?

Yes. Whenever you are writing or editing on behalf of OSPI, you are required to follow the OSPI Style Guide.

A copy of the OSPI Style Guide should be given to contractors and partners who are writing content for OSPI.

Who is the Style & Brand Committee?

Volunteer members with backgrounds in writing, editing, and communications. Members are well-versed on the organizational structure and dynamics of OSPI and consider the needs of all programs and departments when making rules.

Please visit the OSPI intranet to see the current list of committee members.
The committee:

- Is sponsored by the Chief of Staff and Communications.
- Maintains the OSPI Style Guide.
- Responds to questions related to the OSPI Style Guide and its standards.
- Meets as needed to rule on questions of style and usage.
- Advocates and promotes the work of the committee.
- Communicates to team members regarding updates and changes to the Style Guide.

How are decisions made?

Decisions are made by the OSPI Style & Brand Committee. The committee respects and considers every recommendation and request:

- Discussion and rulemaking is conducted by email or through a committee meeting.
- To inform our decisions, we refer to authoritative guides, including but not limited to The AP Stylebook, The Gregg Reference Manual, dictionaries, and other government style guides.
- A vote of seven committee members (one of which must be from the Communications office) is required to make a change to the OSPI Style Guide.

When a decision is made to change a rule, it is noted in the OSPI Style Guide and is date stamped. We communicate critical changes through the OSPI weekly newsletter.


Any staff person may recommend a change to the OSPI Style Guide, request clarification on something, or suggest a new entry. Send questions and suggestions to style@k12.wa.us. Please be as specific as possible. If you believe something in the Style Guide needs to change, cite references that support the need for the change.

What if I can’t find something in the Style Guide?

The backbone of OSPI communication is the Associated Press (AP) style, and if you don’t find the answer in the Style Guide, defer to AP style. Generally, you can find these answers through Google, but you can also reach out to Communications at commteam@k12.wa.us for assistance.
abbreviations

If the word is an abbreviation, use a period:
  e.g. Dept. of Education, Rep. Smith, First St.

academic degrees

bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, associate degree, doctoral or doctorate degree

Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Use abbreviations only to identify many individuals by degree:
  e.g. John Smith, Ph.D., Tina Jones, Ph.D., and Lisa Law, Ph.D.

acronyms

Do not use an acronym/initialism if the entity is mentioned only once.

Spell out for first citation and follow with the acronym in parentheses:
  e.g. The Legislature created the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL). CISL works in collaboration with agency staff.

To make an acronym/initialism plural, add an “s”: GLEs

Do not use periods between each letter

To form the singular possessive, add an apostrophe:
  e.g. OSPI’s staff

To form the plural possessive, add an “s” plus an apostrophe:
  e.g. NBCTs’ attendance

ages

Do not spell out. Always use figures for ages.
  e.g. age 16
  e.g. The boy is 5 years old.
  e.g. The 6-year-old girl is in a class for students aged 5–7.

ampersand (&)

Use only if part of a formal name:
  e.g. Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics (STEM)
Otherwise spell out and: science and mathematics

**bulleted lists**

Use bulleted lists to improve a document’s readability.

Use a colon to introduce lists. Capitalize the first letter of each item in the list and end each section of the list with a period, unless the items are only a few words.

Reference lists intended as a menu of options need no punctuation. Lists with complete sentences do.

Keep all items parallel by using the same language structure throughout the list.

**Bulletin**

Bulletins are official correspondence from OSPI.

To cite a Bulletin:

- e.g. Bulletin No. 045-14 School Apportionment and Financial Services, School Apportionment and Financial Services (B045-14)

**capitalization**

The general rule is to capitalize only when it is part of a proper name or formal title:

Superintendent:

- e.g. State Superintendent Chris Reykdal

State: Lowercase state when referencing the state of Washington or Washington state

City and county:

- e.g. Royal City, city of Olympia, Thurston County

Committee, commission, board, department, or director:

- e.g. As the director of the department, XYZ Director Jane Smith will lead the board meeting, county board of commissioners.

Federal:

- e.g. Washington receives approximately $950,000 in federal funding each year to support the education of youth experiencing homelessness.

Program:

- e.g. Consolidated Program Review, School Construction Assistance Program, BUT not program in Homeless Children and Youth program

If using a proper noun that has embedded caps (capitalized letters that are not the first letter of the word), follow the example of the subject of the noun:

- e.g. YouTube, PowerPoint, CorePlus

Avoid ALL CAPS unless for critical information; it is harder to read and
is generally perceived as shouting at the reader.

century

Capitalize “Century” only when it’s part of a proper name:
   e.g. 21st Century Community Learning Centers

citation style

If citing sources in a document, use the most recent edition of APA to cite. For legal documents, Legal BlueBook citation may be used.

class of (graduating class)

Always capitalize “Class” when referencing a single class:
   e.g. Class of 2019.
Use lowercase when referencing a range:
   e.g. classes of 2017–19; classes of 2017 and beyond.
Use an en dash for a range:
   e.g. classes of 2017–19

commas

Serial comma: Also called the oxford comma, it clarifies meaning when placed before conjunctions (and, or, but) in a series of words in a sentence.

OSPI uses the serial comma to avoid ambiguity and to make lists easier to comprehend.

Common Core State Standards, CCSS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics

CCSS is used to refer to the entire standards set (ELA and Math).
The standards are part of the Washington State K–12 Learning Standards.

composition titles

Use italics for book titles. Do not underline a book title unless it is a hyperlink.

Put quotation marks around computer game, movie, poem, album, song, radio, and television titles, and the titles of lectures, speeches, and works of art.

contractions (can’t, we’re, you’re)

Contractions are acceptable in most informal writing, such as email, newsletters, and webpages.

Do not use contractions in official correspondence, such as bulletins and legislative reports.

curriculum, curricula

Curriculum is a collection of subjects taught.
Curricula is the plural of curriculum. Curriculums is also allowed, though not preferred.

**dashes**

There should be no spaces between dashes and the adjacent material.

**hyphen (-):**
- Indicates breaks within words that wrap at the end of a line
- Connects compounded words like “data-sharing”
- Connects grouped numbers, like a phone number: XXX-XXX-XXXX
- The hyphen does not indicate a range of numbers, like a date range, which is the job of an en dash

**en dash (–):**
- Depending on the context, the en dash is read as “to” or “through”
- Represents a span or range of numbers, dates, or time:
  - e.g. the 2018–19 school year
  - e.g. grades 4–6
  - e.g. 11 am–noon
  - If you introduce a span or range with words such as from or between, do not use the en dash: e.g. He served as superintendent between 2000 and 2004.
- If the compound modifier is two or more words:
  - e.g. high school–level curriculum
  - e.g. New York City–area hotels
- Conflict or connection:
  - e.g. The liberal–conservative debate
  - e.g. The Los Angeles–Seattle flight
  - e.g. The railway runs south–north
- To add an en dash, either hold down ALT and quickly type 0150 on the number pad, or hold down the CTRL key and press the minus key on the number pad.

**em dash (—):**
- Depending on the context, the em dash can take the place of commas, parentheses, or colons:
- In place of commas to enhance readability; dashes are more emphatic than commas:
  - e.g. When the patient was finally discovered—nearly three days after his fall down the mountain—he had
severe hypothermia and was barely conscious.

- In place of parentheses to give the content more emphasis:
  
  e.g. Upon discovering the error in the test booklet, the tests—all 50,000 of them—were recalled.

- In place of colon to emphasize the conclusion of the sentence:
  
  e.g. The jury finally reached a verdict—guilty.

- To add an em dash, either hold down ALT and quickly type 0151 on the number pad, or hold down the CTRL-ALT-Minus (Minus key on number pad)

**data**

A plural noun, it usually takes plural verbs and pronouns: The data have been carefully collected.

**data-sharing agreement**

Always hyphenate.

**dates**

Strive for consistency. Rewrite or rephrase to keep a consistent style across publications.

Omit the year for a future event if it’s the current year, or if it is clear or implied.

Do not use superscripts (*June 12th*).

Do not use a comma between month and year.

Common uses:

- February 2009 was a cold month.
- The report will be released on Monday, February 26.
- On February 26, 2019, the school board presented its materials.

**deadlines**

Make your deadlines stand out, either by bolding or placing separated from the rest of the content. Avoid wordiness.

Applications are due November 1, 2020

**department**

Preference is to spell out: e.g. Department of Education.

When abbreviation is necessary, use Dept.

**directions and regions**

Lowercase when referring to compass direction: east, west, north, south.

Capitalize when they designate regions: e.g. She has a Southern accent. The North was victorious. The students in Western Washington had
several snow days. The students in Southern California never have snow days.

**disability**

RCW 44.04.280 requires the use of terminology (in state laws) that puts the person before the disability. As a best practice, the terminology listed below should replace the terms disabled, developmentally disabled, mentally disabled, mentally ill, mentally retarded, handicapped, cripple, and crippled.

- e.g. individuals with disabilities, individuals with developmental disabilities, individuals with mental illness, individuals with intellectual disabilities

**disaggregated data**

Refers to numerical or non-numerical information that has been (1) collected from multiple sources and/or on multiple measures, variables, or individuals; (2) compiled into aggregate data—i.e., summaries of data—typically for the purposes of public reporting or statistical analysis; and then (3) broken down in component parts or smaller units of data.

**dollar amounts**

- $12 million: Spell out and lowercase million, but do not spell out the number.
- Abbreviate when tight on space, such as charts and tables, and in headlines (Three Districts Share $10M Grant)
- NOT $12 million dollars (redundant)

**dropout (n.), drop out (v.)**

- Schools are trying to reduce the dropout rate.
- The number of high school dropouts in Washington decreased.
- Students drop out of the program every year.

**E-Certification**

When referencing the OSPI E-Certification portal, always capitalize both the E and C, and include the hyphen.

**e-learning**

- Lowercase e, unless at the beginning of a sentence: *E-learning is here to stay.*

**early learning**

- From birth through grade 3

**Education Data System, EDS**

- NOT Educational Data System

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA**

- The national K–12 education law
ellipses (…)

An ellipsis (plural: ellipses) is a punctuation mark consisting of three dots without spaces on either side, or between each dot.

Use an ellipsis when omitting a word, phrase, line, paragraph, or more from a quoted passage.

Ellipses save space or remove material that is less relevant:

Full quotation: “Today, after hours of careful thought, we vetoed the bill.”

With ellipsis: “Today…we vetoed the bill.”

email

No hyphen, no capitalization

emphasis

Use **bold** for emphasis. For multiple lines of important text, consider breaking them out from the rest of paragraph.

If the whole sentence is bolded, bold punctuation as well. If only certain words in a sentence are bolded, including the word next to the punctuation mark, only bold those words.

If you have something for emphasis within an emphasized sentence, italicizing is acceptable.

**Do not underline or highlight.** Underlining should be reserved for links, and highlighting should not be used in formal documents. To denote changes, use ADA compliant red text (#CC0000, R: 192, G: 0 B: 0 is compliant).

ESD, Educational Service District

Spell out on first reference: There are nine Educational Service Districts in Washington.

ESD or ESDs on second reference: The school board in ESD 101 will meet this week.

Use the apostrophe when possessive: The ESDs’ phone numbers are listed below.

etc.

Spelled out as et cetera

Use a comma before and after etc. except at the end of a sentence.

Do not use at the end of a series introduced by as such or for example.

  e.g. Please send extra school supplies for the school supply drive, such as pencils, pens, and notebooks.

Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA


FAQ, Q&A

FAQ stands for frequently asked questions and implies a short and
targeted list of questions and answers.
Q&A stands for question and answer and is a useful format for dialogue-type questions:

Q: Do I need to apply for a Washington state license? A: Yes

federal court
  Lowercase

financial aid
  Lowercase

fiscal year
  The 12-month period that a governmental body uses for bookkeeping purposes.
  Washington state’s fiscal year is July 1–June 30.
  The federal government’s fiscal year is October 1–September 30.

Form Package
  Capitalize: Form Package 408

formative assessment
  Lowercase

fractions
  two-thirds
  1/2, NOT ½
  For mixed numbers, use 1 1/2 with the space between the whole number and the fraction.

free and reduced-price meals
  Add the hyphen, even though the U.S. Department of Agriculture does not.
  Do not drop the word “price.” NOT: free and reduced meals

full time, full-time, FTE
  Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier. Use FTE on second reference.
  e.g. The distribution is based on the average number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students in the school district during the previous year.
  e.g. Parents and guardians of students who were enrolled full time or part time in Washington public schools during state testing may view their child’s test.

government
  Always lowercase, never abbreviate
  e.g. the state government, the federal government, the U.S. government
**governmental bodies**

Capitalize the full proper name of governmental bodies: The U.S. Department of Education

Also capitalize the name if flip-flopped but omits “of”: The Education Department

**Governor**

On first reference: Governor Jay Inslee

On second reference: the Governor

But lowercase governor in other instances and when not referring to a specific governor: The governors convened in Washington, D.C.

**grade level, school grades**

kindergarten, 1st grade, 2nd grade, 3rd grade, 4th grade, 5th grade, 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade

Do not use superscript (e.g., 3rd).

Do not capitalize grade levels, including freshman, sophomore, junior, senior

Single grade reference:

3rd grade: The state assessment is taken in 3rd grade.

5th-grader (use hyphen): The 5th-graders were excited about graduation.

5th-grade teacher

Use en dash for sequential grades: The school teaches grades 1–4.

**headlines, headings, and subheads**

Use title case for headlines, lowercasing prepositions that are three letters or fewer: How to Apply for a Grant

Use numerals for all numbers: 80 School Districts Receive Competitive Grants to Improve Safety

Use single quotes for quotation marks: Michelle Obama Says ‘Cheese Dust Is Not Food’

Abbreviate millions/billions figures: 3 Districts to Share $10M Grant

If there is a colon, capitalize the first word after the colon

**high- (adj.)**

Hyphenate when adjective: high-quality assessments

BUT: The assessments are high quality.

**high-need, high need**

Hyphenate when it modifies: high-need schools

Do not hyphenate when it does not modify: schools with high need

Always singular: high-need student, student with high need
When referring to students receiving special education services, consider another word choice, because “high need” is an abstract term without specific definition. Would one of these work better or just as well?

- Students who receive special education services
- Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Students with disabilities

`home school`

- home school, home schooler, home schooling, home schooled

The bill would require parents to sign a statement if they plan to home school. A home schooler from Olympia said she supported the bill.

A hyphen is necessary when it modifies: Home-schooling laws are followed by home-school families and home-schooled students.

Also called home-based instruction

`iGrants`

- The ‘i’ is lowercase. One word. Plural.

  NOT iGrant, Igrants, iGrants system

`individualized education program, IEP`

- Not capitalized. IEP on second reference. The p stands for program (not plan).

`in regard to`

- Do not use ‘in regard to’ as it is not plain talk. Consider using about, concerning, or on.

`internet, intranet`

- Lowercase

`italics`

- Italicize titles of works (i.e. books, magazines, newspapers, movies, albums, etc.) or to introduce technical, foreign, or unfamiliar terms. **Do not** use italics for emphasis.

`K–12`

- Use en dash (not a hyphen), which indicates range (from grade K to grade 12).

  Do NOT write K12 without the en dash.

`K–20 Education Network`

- Use the en dash, which indicates range (from grade K to grade 20).

  The K–20 Education Network is a high-speed, high-capacity network that links K–12 school districts, libraries, colleges, and universities across 476 locations in Washington.

  Both K–20 Education Network and the shortened K–20 Network are
kindergartner and kindergartener are both acceptable, but keep consistent throughout document.

learning standards
Washington State K–12 Learning Standards

legal citations
On first use, spell out entirely. When citing a chapter, include the word “Chapter” before the chapter number. When citing a section, omit the word Chapter.


On subsequent uses, abbreviate Revised Code of Washington and Washington Administrative Code. When citing chapters in subsequent uses, put RCW/WAC after the chapter number.

Chapter 28A.180 RCW, RCW 28A.320.202

legislative, legislative session
Do not capitalize. The 105-day Washington state legislative session begins Monday.

Annual legislative sessions are identified by the year in which they occurred: Lawmakers wrapped up the 2014 session with a flurry of bills.

Legislature, legislature
Proper titles:

Washington State Senate: http://leg.wa.gov/senate
Washington State House of Representatives: http://leg.wa.gov/house

Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped but the reference is specifically to that state’s legislature. The Legislature will vote on the K–12 budget this week.

Lowercase state when its needed for clarification. If approved by the state Legislature this year...

Lowercase when used generically: No legislature has approved the amendment. Across the country, the legislatures are discussing this topic.

Legislative Citations
Legislation that passed:

- First reference: House Bill/Senate Bill 1234 (YEAR) Session Law (link to bill page on leg website)
Every Reference thereafter: HB/SB 1234 (YEAR) (do not link)

Legislation that has not passed:

- Indicate the version of the bill being referenced, for example:
- Initial reference: Fourth Substitute House Bill 1541 (YEAR) or Substitute Senate Bill 5656 (YEAR) (link to bill page on leg website)
- Every Reference thereafter, use the acronym: 4SHB 1541 (YEAR) or SSB 5656 (YEAR) (do not link)

Key:

| House = H   | Engrossed = E  |
| Senate = S  | Second = 2    |
| Bill = B    | Third = 3     |
| Substitute = S | Fourth = 4  |

liaison

Parent Liaison (is capitalized) when referring to OSPI’s Special Education Parent Liaison. This term replaces Ombudsman.

local educational agency, LEA

educational, not education

The local educational agency must submit the application by November 1.

Plural: local education agencies, LEAs (no apostrophe)

long-term, long term

Hyphenate when a compound adjective: We have a long-term solution.

Two words when the phrase modifies an adverb or when it is the object of a preposition: Your solution will not work in the long term.

Memorandum (singular), Memoranda (plural)

Sunset in 2017, Memoranda were official correspondence from OSPI.

There are two ways to cite a Memorandum:

1. Memorandum No. 029-14 Student Transportation
2. Student Transportation (M029-14)

months

Spell out the full month, unless when short on space, such as in tables and graphs.

He was born in January 1993. He was born on January 10, 1993.

Place a comma after the calendar year if it does not conclude the sentence: Submit your application by January 1, 2010, for first consideration.

multi-

multi-agency, multi-state, multi-use
The dictionary's primary spelling will vary on which *multi-* words should have a hyphen, but the hyphen never changes the meaning; use the hyphen when in doubt.

**multiple-choice**
Always hyphenate.

**n-size**
The minimum number of students in a particular racial or ethnic group for which disaggregated data must be reported.
Include the hyphen. Lowercase n. No quotation marks.

**news release**
An official statement published by the OSPI Communications office.

**non-public**
Hyphenate: non-public schools, non-public agency. NOT: NonPublic Office of Non-Public Education (U.S. Department of Education)

**numbered list**
Use numbered lists for instructions. This shows at a glance how many steps there are and ensures the user follows them in order, reducing the chance of missing a step.

To create an account:
1. Log in to EDS
2. Select your application
3. Select My Preferences
4. Select Change My address

Do not use a numbered list if specific steps are not required. Instead, use a bulleted list.

A list does not require end punctuation.

**numbers**
In general, spell out one through nine. Use figures for 10 or above and whenever preceding a unit of measure or referring to ages of people, events, or things. Also, in all tabular matter, and in statistical and sequential forms.
Abbreviate to no. when indicating position or rank (No. 1).

Expressions: spell out

A thousand times yes!
The bus stop is a quarter of a mile from his house.

Dollar amounts

$12 million (NOT: $12 million dollars, which is redundant)

Lists/sequence of figures:
There were 5 children on the bus and 25 waiting to be picked up.

In this case, 5 and 25 are considered a list/sequence.

Try not to begin a sentence with a number:

Due to bad weather, 10 people canceled. (NOT: Ten people canceled due to bad weather.)

**office**

Capitalize when part of the proper name: Washington State Office of the Attorney General.

Lowercase all other instances: The office of the attorney general.

**Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the**

NOT the OSPI

NOT Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Use the only when the proper name is spelled out: According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction...

On the OSPI website, use OSPI on first reference.

**Ombuds**

Replaces Ombudsman: The Office of the Education Ombuds

**paraeducator**

One word, no hyphen

**percent**

Percent means parts per hundred.

Use percent symbol (%): The poll shows 26% agree with the governor.

Spell out percent with spelled out numbers or for informal uses: five percent; there is a large percentage of students who receive services.

Repeat percent with each individual figure: 10% to 15%.

**phone numbers**

Use hyphens: XXX-XXX-XXXX

**PO Box**

Do not use periods.

**point of view**

Use third-person speech in formal writing at OSPI. Formal writing is any writing that bears the OSPI logo. (OSPI has developed new discipline rules, here’s what districts should know.)

Use first-person speech in informal writing. Examples of informal writing include when writing internally, or on social media. (We’ve developed new discipline rules, and we’re looking for internal feedback).

When representing the agency as oneself, informal writing may be
used (i.e. hosting a webinar, in email, etc.).

**Policymaker, Policymaking**

One word

**Possessive Apostrophe**

No possessive apostrophe if it is meant in a descriptive sense, and “for” or “by” is implied:

- sports for boys = boys sports

Use possessive apostrophe when “of” is implied:

- The boys’ clothes were soaked (clothes of the boys)

**Possessive Pronouns**

Use a person’s preferred pronouns when known.

If unknown, or referring to people generally, use “they” in place of he/she, him/her, (s)he, s/he, himself/herself, etc. unless required by policy or law.

- Students shall have 24 credits to graduate with their class.

- NOT: He/she shall have 24 credits to graduate with his/her class.”

**Post-**

- postgraduate, postsecondary, postscript

Hyphen is needed only when it precedes a capitalized word: post-Darwinism

**Prekindergarten, PreK**

- Lowercase, no hyphen. Spell it out when not listed in a grade span.

- All ages before kindergarten, from birth through preschool.

- PreK when listed in a grade span, such as PreK–3

**Prepositions**

It’s acceptable to end a sentence with a preposition: What did you step on?

Attempts to rewrite (On what did you step?) are admirable, but not necessary.

Don’t end the sentence with a preposition when it’s not necessary:

- Instead of: Where are you at?
  - Drop the preposition: Where are you?

Don’t add a preposition in a sentence when it’s not necessary:

- Instead of: She jumped off of the rock.
  - Drop the preposition: She jumped off the rock.

A short list of the more common one-word prepositions
The age or grade span that preschool encompasses can vary.

Examples of how preschool may be defined:

- All learning and situations prior to the start of formal schooling, anything preschool or birth–age 5.
- Educational programs for 3- and 4-year-olds

Lowercase, no hyphen. Spell it out when not listed in a grade span.

**professional learning vs. professional development**

Professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, job imbedded, and collaborative approach to improve educational outcomes for all students.

In contrast, professional development is a one-time event without follow-up.

**proven**

Use only as an adjective: a proven strategy

**quotation marks**

Use double quotation marks to quote someone, except when it’s a headline/title.

Use single quotation marks in headlines to quote someone, or for a title:

- ‘Everybody Stretches’ Without Gravity, Says NASA Study
- ‘Spotlight’ Wins Big at 88th Academy Awards

Use double quotation marks to emphasize a word:

- The term “children” is defined in the program regulations as persons 18 years of age and under.
- Select “Next” and then “Submit.”

The ending period and comma always go within the quotation marks.

When indicating a spoken quote with a question mark, the dash, semicolon, question mark, and exclamation point go within quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only:

- He asked, “How long will it take?”

They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence:

- Who wrote “Gone with the Wind”?

Sometimes rewriting the sentence is better:

- She asked who wrote “Gone with the Wind.”

**ratios**

Use figures and hyphens: the ratio was 2-to-1, a ratio of 2-to-1.
**reengagement**
No hyphen

**Report Card**
An online database that is maintained by OSPI: [http://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us](http://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us)


Not to be confused with the Nation’s Report Card: [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov)

**rulemaking**
One word, no hyphen

**school**
Capitalize when part of a proper name: Evergreen Elementary School

Capitalize when part of a program name: the Mental Health and Schools Program

Do not capitalize a general reference: Private schools have access to federal supplemental education programs.

**school board**
When referencing a specific school board, use the proper title.

  e.g. North Thurston Public Schools Board, The Board of Directors of Spokane Public Schools

When in doubt, check the school board’s website.

**school districts**
There are 295 school districts in Washington.

Do not capitalize unless it is in the proper title.

When referencing a specific school district, use the proper title. Some do not use School District, but Public Schools. When in doubt, check the district’s website.

**schoolwide**
One word, no hyphen

**Senate, senators**
Washington State Senate, the Senate, state senators.

**sign-up (n. and adj.), sign up (v.)**
Hyphenate when it modifies: The sign-up form is at the back of the room.

Use two words in verb form: Sign up for the newsletter.

**spacing between sentences**
Use only one space between sentences.
To remove all double spaces in a document (and replace with a single space), do a global Find and Replace:

- In the “find” field, hit your spacebar twice
- In the “replace with” field, hit your spacebar once
- Select “replace all”

If you’re not sure you want to replace ALL, click on “find next” to see what effect the Find and Replace will have before you implement it.

**state**

e.g. the state Legislature, the state Treasury Department

Capitalize when part of a proper name: Washington State School Directors’ Association

**State Superintendent Chris Reykdal**

First reference: State Superintendent Chris Reykdal
Second reference: Superintendent Reykdal

**statewide**

One word, no hyphen

**student-level data**

Always hyphenate

**superintendent**

Capitalize when used as a formal title before a name: State Superintendent Chris Reykdal, Superintendent Reykdal

Do not abbreviate unless to fit a character limit, such as for social media: Supt or Supt.

**teacher-leader**

Always hyphenate

**theatre**

As a discipline, use theatre: The arts standards include art, dance, music, and theatre.

BUT: The students toured the new theater.

**time, time of day, time zones**

am and pm, (NOT a.m. and p.m.)

Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: 3:30 am

Exclude minutes if it’s on the hour: 5 pm (NOT 5:00 pm)

Use the en dash between times, with no spaces before or after the en dash: 9 am–noon.

Noon is 12 pm. Noon is preferred, but the latter is also acceptable. Midnight is 12 am, and is part of the day it begins, not the day it ends.
**Title**

When introducing it, provide its full, proper name description.

On first reference: Title V, Part A - Innovative Programs

On second reference: Title V, Part A

Consider the reader when referencing; the reader may not be familiar with Title V but know Every Student Succeeds Act.

**toward**

NOT “towards”

e.g. Teachers are moving toward the new standards.

**tribe, tribal**

Capitalize tribe when it follows the name of a specific tribe: The Yakama Tribe began the program in 2006.

Retain capitalization when the tribe’s name is dropped but the reference is specifically to that tribe: The Yakama Tribe owns the land and rejects calls from local developers for the Tribe to sell the property.

But tribal is capitalized only when part of a formal name. The Muckleshoot Tribal Council approved the agreement, the result of talks between county and tribal negotiators.

**underlining**

Underlining of text should only be done to signify a hyperlink.

Underlining should never be used to emphasize text.

**unfunded**

No hyphen

**U.S.**

Abbreviation is acceptable as noun or adjective for the United States.

**Washington state**

Omit the word state whenever possible. Often, it’s unnecessary.

Lowercase state when it is necessary, such as when discussing the state in a national context: The national Teacher of the Year award went to a Washington state 1st-grade teacher.

Capitalize state when it is part of the proper name: The Washington State Legislature voted on the bill.

Use state when necessary to distinguish the state from the District of Columbia.

**Washington State K–12 Learning Standards**

The full, all-encompassing name for all learning standards in all content areas, including the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards.

When specifying a content area, use the following construction:
Integrated Environmental and Sustainability K–12 Learning Standards
Social Studies K–12 Learning Standards

**well-being**
Always hyphenate

**who**
who = subject, whom = object
Best analogy is “he” and “him” or “she” and “her” or “they” and “them”
who = he, whom = him. Who hit whom? He hit him.

**workgroup, task force**
Either is acceptable, but use one or the other and be consistent.

**year, years**
school year 2015–16 (Use en dash)
Use commas with a month and day: On September 7, 2009, she celebrated her 5th birthday.
Do not state the year for a future event if it’s in the current year, or if it is clear or implied: The next meeting is June 5.

**year-end (adj.)**
Always hyphenate

**yearlong**
One word
**Commonly Confused Words**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word 1</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Word 2</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accept</td>
<td>To agree to receive or do</td>
<td>Except</td>
<td>Not including</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverse</td>
<td>Unfavorable, harmful</td>
<td>Averse</td>
<td>Strongly disliking; opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice</td>
<td>Noun. Guidance or recommendations about what to do</td>
<td>Advise</td>
<td>Verb. To recommend something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect</td>
<td>To change or make a difference to</td>
<td>Effect</td>
<td>A result; to bring about a result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All together</td>
<td>All in one place, all at once</td>
<td>Altogether</td>
<td>Completely; on the whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ready</td>
<td>Everything is ready</td>
<td>Already</td>
<td>An action is completed by a certain time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Along</td>
<td>Moving or extending horizontally on</td>
<td>A long</td>
<td>Referring to something of great length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aloud</td>
<td>Out loud</td>
<td>Allowed</td>
<td>Permitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternately</td>
<td>Taking turns</td>
<td>Alternatively</td>
<td>As an option; instead of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among</td>
<td>Used for three or more (she had to choose among three colleges)</td>
<td>Between</td>
<td>Used for two things (she had to choose between Harvard and Yale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraise</td>
<td>To assess</td>
<td>Apprise</td>
<td>To inform someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assent</td>
<td>Agreement, approval</td>
<td>Ascent</td>
<td>The action of rising or climbing up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beside</td>
<td>By the side of, separate from</td>
<td>Besides</td>
<td>In addition to; also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biannual</td>
<td>Twice in one year</td>
<td>Biennial</td>
<td>Every two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bimonthly</td>
<td>Every two months</td>
<td>Semimonthly</td>
<td>Twice a month (biweekly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitol</td>
<td>A building that houses a government’s legislative branch</td>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>A town or seat that is the seat of state government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word 1</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Word 2</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Censure</td>
<td>To criticize strongly</td>
<td>Censor</td>
<td>To ban parts of a book or film; a person who does this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite</td>
<td>To quote or mention</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>A place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complacent</td>
<td>Smug and self-satisfied</td>
<td>Complaisant</td>
<td>Willing to please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complement</td>
<td>An addition that improves something</td>
<td>Compliment</td>
<td>To praise or express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compose</td>
<td>To make up (the class is composed of students of several grades)</td>
<td>Comprise</td>
<td>To consist of, or include (students of several grades comprise the class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concurrent</td>
<td>Simultaneous</td>
<td>Consecutive</td>
<td>Successive; one after another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continual</td>
<td>Repeated with breaks in between</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>Without stopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convince</td>
<td>To cause another to feel sure or believe something to be true</td>
<td>Persuade</td>
<td>To talk someone into doing something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>A group of people who manage or advise</td>
<td>Counsel</td>
<td>Advice; to advise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion</td>
<td>Singular (there is one criterion for this job)</td>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Plural (several criteria need to be met for this job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cue</td>
<td>A signal for action; a wooden rod</td>
<td>Queue</td>
<td>A line of people or vehicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently</td>
<td>At this time; now</td>
<td>Presently</td>
<td>Soon; in a little while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defuse</td>
<td>To make a situation less tense</td>
<td>Diffuse</td>
<td>To spread over a wide area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denote</td>
<td>To indicate specifically; to mean (home denotes a place where you live)</td>
<td>Connote</td>
<td>To imply or suggest (home connotes warmth and safety)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discreet</td>
<td>Careful not to attract attention</td>
<td>Discrete</td>
<td>Separate and distinct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinterested</td>
<td>Impartial</td>
<td>Uninterested</td>
<td>Not interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicit</td>
<td>To draw out a reply or reaction</td>
<td>Illicit</td>
<td>Not allowed by law or rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word 1</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Word 2</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td>For example; to make certain</td>
<td>i.e.</td>
<td>In other words; to give specific clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure</td>
<td>To make certain that something will happen</td>
<td>Insure</td>
<td>To provide compensation if a person dies or property is damaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envelop</td>
<td>To cover or surround</td>
<td>Envelope</td>
<td>A paper container for a letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every-</td>
<td>(adjective) commonplace, ordinary</td>
<td>Every day</td>
<td>Each day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer</td>
<td>Things that can be counted (fewer students)</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Quantities of things that can't be counted (less coffee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flaunt</td>
<td>To show something in a very open way to that other people notice</td>
<td>Flout</td>
<td>To break or ignore a law or rule without showing fear or shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fore-</td>
<td>An introduction to a book</td>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>Onwards, ahead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His-</td>
<td>An important occurrence that stands out in history</td>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>Any occurrence in the past, having the character of history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imply</td>
<td>To suggest indirectly</td>
<td>Infer</td>
<td>To draw a conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's</td>
<td>It is; is has</td>
<td>Its</td>
<td>Belonging to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loath</td>
<td>Reluctant, unwilling</td>
<td>Loathe</td>
<td>To hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose</td>
<td>To unfasten; to set free</td>
<td>Lose</td>
<td>To be deprived of; to be unable to find</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militate</td>
<td>To be a powerful factor against</td>
<td>Mitigate</td>
<td>To make less severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescribe</td>
<td>To authorize use of medicine; to order authoritatively</td>
<td>Proscribe</td>
<td>To officially forbid something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Most important; the head of a school</td>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>A fundamental rule or belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word 1</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Word 2</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote</td>
<td>To state the exact words someone else said (she quoted Hemingway in her paper)</td>
<td>Quotation</td>
<td>An actual statement being quoted (she read a quotation every day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectfully</td>
<td>Politely; with respect</td>
<td>Respectively</td>
<td>The order in which things are given back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>The ability to see</td>
<td>Site</td>
<td>A location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometime</td>
<td>Indistinct or unstated time in the future</td>
<td>Some time</td>
<td>A considerable period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationary</td>
<td>Not moving</td>
<td>Stationery</td>
<td>Writing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Than</td>
<td>Used to compare (she thinks she is smarter than us)</td>
<td>Then</td>
<td>A time that is not now (it would be better to meet Friday because then I’ll be ready)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Til</td>
<td>A contraction of until</td>
<td>Till</td>
<td>To cultivate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To</td>
<td>Toward</td>
<td>Too</td>
<td>Also</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Versus</td>
<td>In comparison or opposition to</td>
<td>Verses</td>
<td>Plural of verse, a line of poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>What or which person(s) (who was elected?)</td>
<td>Whom</td>
<td>Used as an interrogative or relative; object of a verb (the man whom you wrote to)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This section outlines contract language that may differ from this style guide. Please contact the OSPI Contracts Office if you have questions about this section.

**data-sharing agreement**

Datasharing or Datashare is one word.

**dollar amounts**

Dollar amounts are spelled out, followed by the number in parentheses. The contract/agreement shall not exceed twelve million dollars ($12,000,000).

**figures**

In agreements and contracts, numbers are always spelled out first and then followed in parentheses. e.g. You are required to facilitate twenty-one (21) meetings.

**fiscal year**

The twelve- (12-) month period must be spelled out first with the number in parentheses.

**numerals**

Numbers are spelled out first, then in parentheses. e.g. Nine (9) days.

**prepositions**

In contract writing, do not end a sentence with a preposition.

**shall, will**

Shall is a mandatory requirement. Will is a preferred requirement.

**spacing between sentences**

Double spacing is preferred in agreements and contracts.

**Superintendent**

Capitalize Superintendent or Superintendent’s Designee in agreements and contracts.

**time, time of day**

Time zone is required in all contract documents, especially RFPs/RFQs/Informal Solicitations. The solicitation audience may or may not be from Washington.

**Washington State**

All templates and special/general terms have State capped when it follows the state name. Do not capitalize state when it precedes the name of the state: The state of Washington.
Acronyms and Initialisms

Please note: Some terms are not capitalized when used in context. For example, individualized education program (IEP). Contact commteam@k12.wa.us with questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21CCLC</td>
<td>21st Century Community Learning Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALE</td>
<td>Alternative Learning Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP</td>
<td>Advanced Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWSP</td>
<td>Association of Washington School Principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEAC</td>
<td>Bilingual Education Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>Beginning Educator Support Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAA/CIA</td>
<td>Certificate of Academic Achievement/Certificate of Individual Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACFP</td>
<td>Child and Adult Care Food Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBA</td>
<td>Classroom-Based Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEDARS</td>
<td>Comprehensive Education Data and Research System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEP</td>
<td>Community Eligibility Provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNS</td>
<td>Child Nutrition Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Consolidated Program Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSTP</td>
<td>Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTE</td>
<td>Career and Technical Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>District Assessment Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCYF</td>
<td>Department of Children, Youth, and Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DLD</td>
<td>Digital Learning Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSHS</td>
<td>Department of Social and Health Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDS</td>
<td>Education Data System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELP</td>
<td>English Language Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELPA21</td>
<td>English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOC</td>
<td>End-of-Course (exam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EOGOAC</td>
<td>Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESA</td>
<td>Educational Staff Associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Educational Service District (There are 9 ESDs in Washington)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESEA</td>
<td>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESSA</td>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act (replaces <em>No Child Left Behind</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAPE</td>
<td>Free Appropriate Public Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>Food Distribution Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEPPP</td>
<td>Financial Education Public-Private Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FERPA</td>
<td>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFVP</td>
<td>Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GATE</td>
<td>Graduation: A Team Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLE</td>
<td>Grade Level Expectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCP</td>
<td>Highly Capable Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIB</td>
<td>Harassment, Intimidation, or Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIPAA</td>
<td>Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSPE</td>
<td>High School Proficiency Exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HQ</td>
<td>Highly Qualified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HQT</td>
<td>Highly Qualified Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Individualized Education Program (NOT “Plan”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iGrants</td>
<td>iGrant System (the “s” in iGrants stands for “system”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAP</td>
<td>Learning Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEA</td>
<td>Local Education Agency (not synonymous with school district)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>Limited English Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRE</td>
<td>Least Restrictive Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOE</td>
<td>Maintenance of Effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSP</td>
<td>Measurements of Student Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTSS</td>
<td>Multi-tiered System of Supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEA</td>
<td>National Education Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'LGBTQ+' is the preferred agency acronym.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Assessment of Educational Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBCT</td>
<td>National Board Certified Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBPTS</td>
<td>National Board for Professional Teaching Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind (See also: Every Student Succeeds Act)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSLP</td>
<td>National School Lunch Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OEO</td>
<td>Office of the Education Ombuds (NOT Ombudsman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OER</td>
<td>Open Educational Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONE</td>
<td>Office of Native Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSPI</td>
<td>Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PESB</td>
<td>Professional Educator Standards Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSE</td>
<td>Public School Employees of Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parent-Teacher Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QEC</td>
<td>Quality Education Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REAP</td>
<td>Rural Education Achievement Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFP</td>
<td>Request for Proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFQ</td>
<td>Request for Qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTL</td>
<td>Readiness to Learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBAC</td>
<td>Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC is the group, NOT the test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBE</td>
<td>State Board of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBP</td>
<td>School Breakfast Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCTS</td>
<td>Standard Choice Transfer System (an application within EDS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>State Education Agency (OSPI is the state education agency in Washington state)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAC</td>
<td>Special Education Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEL</td>
<td>Social Emotional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Supplemental Educational Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMP</td>
<td>Special Milk Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSFP</td>
<td>Simplified Summer Food Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFSP</td>
<td>Summer Food Service Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLDS</td>
<td>Statewide Longitudinal Data System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLE</td>
<td>Supportive Learning Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLP</td>
<td>Student Learning Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMP</td>
<td>Special Milk Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSAE</td>
<td>Student Support and Academic Enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSO</td>
<td>Seamless Summer Option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STARS</td>
<td>Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEAM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBIP</td>
<td>Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ToY</td>
<td>Teacher of the Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPEP</td>
<td>Teacher and Principal Evaluation Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAAS</td>
<td>Washington Alternate Assessment System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WaKIDS</td>
<td>Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WASA</td>
<td>Washington Association of School Administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEA</td>
<td>Washington Education Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEC</td>
<td>Washington Educators’ Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WELPA</td>
<td>Washington English Language Proficiency Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINS</td>
<td>Washington Integrated Nutrition System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WISSP</td>
<td>Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRC</td>
<td>Washington Reading Corps (Corps is not an abbreviation, so no period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSAC</td>
<td>Washington Student Achievement Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSIPC</td>
<td>Washington School Information Processing Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSPTA</td>
<td>Washington State Parent-Teacher Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSSDA</td>
<td>Washington State School Directors’ Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTECB</td>
<td>Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Culturally Responsive Style Guide represents the current collective thinking and research on culturally responsive language, systems, and practices at the time it was written. Our understanding, knowledge, and experiences continue to evolve. While this guide offers suggestions for language to use (or not to use), the larger lesson is to approach issues around culture, gender, equity, and diversity with humility, curiosity, and openness.

The guide will continue to be updated going forward. It is also important for each of us to continue our own learning in order to recognize and respect the diversity of individuals and groups that comprise our communities and our school systems around Washington.
Purpose of the Guide

**Words matter.** At OSPI, we want to ensure we are communicating clearly, consistently, and compassionately with and about those we serve—students, families, educators, staff, administrators, communities—and each other as colleagues. We also want to ensure those we serve feel included, valued, and respected when we speak with or about them. This guide will help provide everyone at OSPI with standards and guidance for how to communicate in a professional manner, while also reflecting OSPI’s core values of equity and inclusion. This is important to:

- Establish OSPI as an anti-racist agency
- Identify and dismantle opportunity gaps for students through ongoing analysis and effort
- Value each student, family member, educator, colleague, and stakeholder as people and honor their identities as individuals, as well as members of multiple communities and cultures

It is important to approach this guide, as well as the agency’s focus on equity, with a growth mindset. By this, we mean we know our knowledge is not fixed and that we are always learning. Depending on our own unique personal and professional experiences, we will each find ourselves on a different place along the continuum of social and cultural awareness and comfort. Regardless, we can choose to approach our own learning with humility and grace. As we do this, it is critical that we give ourselves—and each other—the time and space to continue to explore new ideas, to listen to and learn from each other, and to give and accept feedback. Above all, we will work together to create a culturally responsive workplace in which sincere questions, curiosity, and growth are honored, expected, and encouraged.

OSPI’s Equity Statement

Each student, family, and community possess strengths and cultural knowledge that benefits their peers, educators, and schools.

Ensuring educational equity:

- Goes beyond equality; it requires education leaders to examine the ways current policies and practices result in disparate outcomes for our students of color, students living in poverty, students receiving special education and English learner services, students who identify as LGBTQ+, and highly mobile student populations.
- Requires education leaders to develop an understanding of historical contexts; engage students, families, and community representatives as partners in decision making; and actively dismantle systemic barriers, replacing them with policies and practices that ensure all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools.
Culturally Responsive Content & Communication

In general, when communicating, we should write with a particular audience in mind, making sure to use easily understandable plain talk, person-first language (rather than deficit-based language), and, when appropriate, content- and discipline-specific vocabulary. More information about how to use each of the following can be found below.

Plain Talk

Please refer to the section entitled “Plain Talk and Readability” in the OSPI Style Guide. In this context, plain talk includes referring to specific groups by name whenever possible versus collective terms or euphemisms, such as “at-risk” or “students furthest from educational justice.”

Person-First Language

Writers should take care to use language that is both accurate and respectful to people or groups. Staff are encouraged to use person-first language or action descriptions, each of which is defined below, along with guidance on using person-first language when referencing specific student groups.

Person-First Language

The idea behind person-first language is that the writer literally puts the person first, with any characteristics or categories following as a secondary aspect of the person. Person-first language is ideal when the characteristic described has historically been associated with negative stereotypes. The most common example of this terminology is people with disabilities or students with disabilities rather than disabled people or disabled students. Describing someone as a disabled person emphasizes their disability as their primary or only relevant characteristic.

Another example is the term homeless. Our preference most often is to use the phrasing “students experiencing homelessness.” In this case, we not only put the person first, we also recognize that most students do not themselves determine their housing status and that it can change.

Person-first language is also important in describing behavioral health conditions. For example, rather than stating “the student is bipolar,” person-first language would state, “the student was diagnosed with bipolar disorder.” Again, we are putting the person first and the characteristic language second.

Action Descriptions

If a person-first option isn’t apparent or if it seems inappropriate in a particular case, another option is to use action words to describe people. Examples would be “students who are undocumented may be eligible ...” or “Susan, who lives with cerebral palsy, faces additional obstacles.” But, aim to be positive or neutral; for example, we wouldn’t say “Susan, who suffers from cerebral palsy ...” because the word suffers assumes Susan’s experience and negatively so. Using action words minimizes unintentional “othering.”

Using Person-First Language When Referencing Certain Student Groups

What do we call students who are not English language learners, migrant, in
foster care, experiencing homelessness, etc.; when comparing data between binary groups? Please refer to the chart below for suggestions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Identified</th>
<th>Group Not Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>Native speakers of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students whose native language is other than English</td>
<td>Students whose native language is English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in foster care</td>
<td>Students not in foster care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students experiencing homelessness</td>
<td>Students not experiencing homelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students facing housing instability</td>
<td>Students experiencing housing stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from low-income families</td>
<td>Students from middle- and higher-income families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students eligible for free and reduced-price meal programs</td>
<td>Students not eligible for free and reduced-price meal programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who are migratory</td>
<td>Students who are not migratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with military parents</td>
<td>Students with non-military parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with 504 plans</td>
<td>Students without 504 plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students eligible under 504</td>
<td>Students without disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>Students without IEPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with IEPs</td>
<td>Students without IEPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Content Area and Discipline-Specific Vocabulary**

In general, when writing about particular groups, **respect how people belonging to these groups talk about themselves**. Person-first language and action descriptions are a good start, and probably the appropriate defaults. However, in a situation where a person or group of people have a different preference—and we are aware of it—their preference should be honored. Below you will find additional guidance on what to consider when writing about gender identity and race/ethnicity.

**Gender Identity**

In Washington, everyone has the right to be treated consistent with their asserted gender identity and to be addressed by their correct name and pronouns, unless there is a legal reason not to do so. If you do not know what pronouns someone uses, it is appropriate to respectfully ask, “What are your pronouns?” You can also make it easier for people by adding your pronouns to your email signature or by introducing yourself with your pronouns (e.g., “My name is Jane Doe, and I use she/her pronouns.”). In terms of general writing or situations where a person’s gender identity is unknown or irrelevant, gender-neutral writing is ideal.

**Gender-Neutral Pronouns.** “They,” “their,” “them,” and “themselves” should be used as gender-neutral, singular pronouns. Merriam Webster notes that as English lacks a gender-neutral singular pronoun, “they” has been used for this purpose for over 600 years. The APA blog recommended that the singular “they” be preferred in professional writing over “he or she” when the reference is to a person whose gender identity is unknown or to a person who uses
Data Collection and Reporting. Many OSPI and district forms or data collection documents ask people to indicate their “sex.” Usually what that means is that a person is supposed to check a box marked either “male (M)” or “female (F),” depending on the sex they were assigned at birth. However, in Washington, a third option—“other/nonbinary (X)” is now available on documents like birth certificates, driver’s licenses, and in student data information systems like CEDARS. So, how does the availability of this additional option change OSPI’s data collection practices (e.g., forms, surveys, etc.)? It depends.

- If the form is designed to collect information about a person’s sex for purposes of federal reporting, then only M/F should be provided as options (since the federal government does not presently recognize the X gender designation).

- For state or local forms, additional options—including X—may be offered. Further, when developing or revising a state or local form that asks people to indicate their sex, it is also worth considering whether this information is truly needed. If not, then consider removing it altogether. If, on the other hand, it is essential to know a person’s sex, then consider asking for it in one of three ways:
  - **Write-in option:** Allow people to write in their own answer (e.g., Sex: ____________). *This option is preferred when the goal is to allow people to self-identify.*
  - **Set options:** Provide a list of set options for people to choose from (e.g., Sex: (circle one) M/F/X).
  - **Hybrid option:** Provide a set list of federal or state options when data reporting or analysis is a priority, as well as an open-ended option for anyone who does not want to select one of the options provided or who wants to add a specific descriptor (e.g., Sex: check one or provide your own description: M/F/X/________).

When determining which approach to use, it is also important to think about the purpose of the form. For example, if the form’s purpose is to collect a large amount of information (e.g., a survey with a large sample size) and disaggregating data into different categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, etc.) is important, allowing people to fill in completely open-ended responses can make the data difficult to disaggregate and report. In that situation, a check box or hybrid checkbox may be preferable.

Note: Asking a person to designate their sex is different from asking them to designate their gender identity, and for some people, being asked to designate their sex assigned at birth can be triggering. (If you’re unsure what the difference between sex and gender identity is, please refer to the Culturally Responsive Style Guide’s index to access specific definitions for each term.) OSPI’s Equity and Civil Rights Office is happy to help you determine how to best phrase your data collection requests (or any other questions you may have): 360-725-6162 or equity@k12.wa.us.

Race and Ethnicity

Race is a social construct without biological meaning. What this means in

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plain English is that rather than being fixed in biology or genetics, race is now understood to be a categorical system created to confer privilege to different groups of people based upon physical appearance (such as skin color), divide people into groups ranked as superior and inferior, and determine which groups are entitled to important legal rights (e.g., citizenship, property rights, voting rights, etc.) in the United States and throughout the world.

Ethnicity is also considered to be a social construct that further divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics, such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Because of the history of enslavement of Africans and genocide of Native Americans by European colonists, as well as multiple other forms of xenophobia and systemic racism perpetrated in the United States over the last 400 years, issues around race and ethnicity are among the most difficult and uncomfortable to discuss. Yet, they are also among the most important issues impacting students, families, and educators. It is important to communicate clearly and accurately about issues of race and ethnicity, as well as about racial and ethnic identity rather than avoiding or silencing these conversations altogether.

**Colorblindness.** In an attempt to downplay the above and emphasize our shared humanity regardless of race or ethnicity, some people may adopt or espouse the concept of “colorblindness.” However, this approach is misguided for the simple reason that colorblindness ignores and erases the individual and collective experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) living within societies pervaded by systemic and institutionalized racism.

**Tribal Sovereignty.** Tribal sovereignty refers to the inherent right of tribal nations to self-govern and ensure tribal lifeways of their citizens, lands, waters, and resources are secure and honored. The relationship between tribal nations and other governments (including other tribal nations, nations, federal, state, local) is government-to-government. The identity and historical and legal rights of American Indian and Alaska Native learners are citizens and descendants of sovereign tribal nations and not through the socially constructed designation of race or ethnicity.

**Using Bias-Free Language.** Writers are advised to consult the APA Style Guide for more detailed guidance on how to use bias-free language when writing about race and ethnicity. It includes guidance on issues such as:

- Spelling and capitalization of racial and ethnic terms
- Terms for specific groups within the categories of people with ancestries from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the Americas, and Indigenous peoples from around the world
- Parallel comparisons among groups
- Avoiding essentialism
- Limited use of the term “minority”
- Examples of bias-free language
- Examples of dated terminology to be avoided

Please note the Culturally Responsive Language Index in this guide also includes definitions and discussion of important concepts related to various forms of racism, ethnocentrism, White supremacy, and White privilege.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Ideal Language</strong></th>
<th><strong>Terms to Avoid</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity gap</td>
<td>Achievement gap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals who are undocumented, immigrants</td>
<td>Aliens, Illegals, Illegal immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific race, ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a disability, student with autism</td>
<td>Challenged, differently abled, handicapped, special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People, residents, community members, Washingtonians</td>
<td>Citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Americans, First People, Tribal Affiliation or Membership</td>
<td>Like other non-tribally specific names used when referring to citizens of tribal nations within the United States, the terms “Indian,” “American Indian,” “Native,” “Indigenous,” have historic, political, and legal connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIPOC, people of color</td>
<td>Minorities, colorblind, oriental, non-White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be specific—name the country (e.g., China) or the geographical region (e.g., East Africa). When communicating the level of monetary resources, use low-, middle-, and high-income countries.</td>
<td>Developing nations, developing world, first world, third world, global south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequities due to racism</td>
<td>Disparities due to race/ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ people, the LGBTQ+ community</td>
<td>Homosexual, non-straight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>Transgendered, Transsexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual orientation</td>
<td>Sexual preference(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific, person-first description. Naming the groups according to their preferred term, e.g., “students in foster care”</td>
<td>Marginalized communities, marginalized people, special populations, vulnerable populations, underserved, at-risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: Persons 65 or older</td>
<td>Elderly, aged, middle-aged, old people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student group</td>
<td>Subgroup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools or districts</td>
<td>In the field, to the field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collecting data that is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and other student groups is important for understanding and addressing opportunity gaps that stem from historical oppression and ongoing discrimination. For example, public districts and schools still operate on geographic boundaries, which means they continue to be impacted by “redlining” and other forms of race-based housing segregation.

Data by itself will not change policies and practices, but it can be an important tool to identify needs and gaps and to support efforts to change policies and practices that have been overtly or covertly discriminatory. It is also important to accurately understand and describe the populations of students and families served by the education system, as well as those who serve them in various communities. Schools continue to be racially and socioeconomically segregated, and the changing demographics of Washington and of the K–12 population mean that there is a growing difference between the demographics of the student population versus the demographics of educators.

For federal reporting, Washington is required to collect student race and ethnicity data using these seven categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, More than One Race, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and White.

As noted above, people have more complex racial and ethnic identities than can be characterized by seven categories. Collection and reporting of data limited to these categories can mask differences within these groups. By disaggregating the information within these groups, disparities that may have remained hidden can be described more accurately.

Students and families must be given the opportunity to self-identify their racial and ethnic identities. Allowing students and families to self-identify increases inclusivity and response rates, resulting in higher quality data. As a result of the recommendations from the Race and Ethnicity Student Data Taskforce, schools are now required to offer and to allow students to self-identify under a larger range of categories and to record any and all racial and ethnic identifiers provided by the student. When it is available, and particularly when referring to individuals, use the specific terms that students, families, or educators use to refer to themselves.

A number of OSPI and district forms or data collection documents ask people to indicate their race and ethnicity. Historically, that meant selecting only one of the seven categories listed above. Beginning with the 2018–19 school year, expanded race categories were added to Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) in alignment with the recommendations of the Race and Ethnicity Student Data Taskforce. Districts will have four years, through the 2021–22 school year, to fully implement the recommendations. The current lists of expanded categories for ethnicity and race can be found in Appendices Y and Z of the CEDARS Data Manual. OSPI staff should be aware of these changes when requesting information about a person’s race or ethnicity. Some options to consider when drafting a form, survey, or other collection are listed in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data collection is solely for federal reporting purpose</td>
<td>Use a list for respondents to select from the seven federal categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection includes federal reporting and other purposes</td>
<td>Provide list described above with additional open-ended questions for respondents to select multiple racial/ethnic identifiers and/or specific identifiers that fall within the federal categories (hybrid approach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection is not for federal reporting purposes but will require quantitative/statistical analysis based upon race, ethnicity, or other identifying factors</td>
<td>Consult with Student Information on providing a list of standard disaggregated identifiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection is intended to allow respondents to self-identify and quantitative/statistical analysis is not needed</td>
<td>Consider providing open-ended choices such as: Race________________________________________ Ethnicity: ___________________________ Tribal membership: ____________________________ National origin: ____________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As language and terminology evolve, people are talking and thinking about identity in new and different ways. Below, we have provided an index of commonly used terms to use as a starting point for conversations about identity.

**achievement gap**

Any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as White students and Black students, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households.\(^2\) See **Opportunity Gap**.

**anti-racism**

Recognizing the impact of racist actions and policies, anti-racist individuals or organizations actively seek to replace racist actions, policies, and institutions with those that support racial equity. (Adapted from: [https://nmaahc.si.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/racialhealinghandbook_p87to94.pdf](https://nmaahc.si.edu/sites/default/files/downloads/resources/racialhealinghandbook_p87to94.pdf))

**assigned sex**

Describes the sex a person was given at birth based on their anatomy. Falls within three categories: female, male, and intersex.

**assimilation**

An individual’s or a group’s adaptation to a host society or culture. Often this occurs when the non-dominant group adjusts or integrates their behaviors or attitudes in an attempt to be accepted into the dominant group’s cultural norms, either willingly or forcibly, for the sake of personal and/or professional survival.\(^3\)

**bias**

Prejudice or preference toward a thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Bias can be explicit/conscious or implicit/unconscious.\(^4\) See **Implicit Bias**.

**BIPOC**

An acronym referring to Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

**belonging**

When one’s well-being is considered and one’s ability to design and give meaning to society’s structures and institutions is realized. More than tolerating and respecting differences, belonging requires that all people are welcome with membership and agency in the society.


Belonging is vital to have a thriving and engaged populace, which informs distributive and restorative decision making. See Othering.

cisgender
An adjective that is used to describe a person whose assigned sex aligns with their gender identity and gender expression (e.g., someone who was assigned female at birth whose gender identity is also female). Most people are cisgender.

culture
Encompasses the languages, customs, beliefs, rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of social groups that make their social environments meaningful.

cultural appropriation
“Taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else’s culture without permission. This can include unauthorized use of another culture’s dance, dress, music, language, folklore, cuisine, traditional medicine, religious symbols, etc. It’s most likely to be harmful when the source community is a minority group that has been oppressed or exploited in other ways or when the object of appropriation is particularly sensitive (e.g., sacred objects).”

cultural competency
Cultural competency “includes knowledge of student cultural histories and contexts, as well as family norms and values in different cultures; knowledge and skills in accessing community resources and community and parent outreach; and skills in adapting instruction to students’ experiences and identifying cultural contexts for individual students.”

cultural humility
A construct for understanding and developing a process-oriented approach to competency. Cultural humility is the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the person. Cultural humility is guided by a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique, a desire to fix power imbalances where none should exist, and the development of partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others.

cultural proficiency
In education, cultural proficiency is about educating all students to high levels through knowing, valuing, and using as assets their cultural backgrounds, languages, and learning styles. This is a transformational approach and an inside-out perspective on change, involving making the

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8 RCW 28A.410.260
commitment to lifelong learning for the purpose of being increasingly effective in serving and integrating the needs of cultural and ethnic groups. Educators must have the capability to recognize their own assumptions in order to retain those that facilitate culturally proficient actions and to change those assumptions that impede such actions. Similarly, educators as a community apply this inside-out process to examine school policies and practices that either impede or facilitate culturally proficient practices. Cultural Proficiency is about being effective thinkers and educators in cross-cultural situations.10

culturally responsive teaching
Teaching that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning. Characteristics of culturally responsive teaching include positive perspectives on parents and families, communication of high expectations, learning within the context of culture, student-centered instruction, culturally mediated instruction, reshaping the curriculum, and teacher as facilitator.11

English learners (EL)
Students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses.12

equality
Refers to everyone having the same treatment without accounting for differing needs or circumstances. Equality, in the simplest terms, means fairness.

equity
The act of developing, strengthening, and supporting procedural and outcome fairness in systems, procedures, and resource distribution mechanisms to create equitable (not equal) opportunity for all people. Equity has a focus on eliminating barriers that have prevented the full participation of historically and currently oppressed groups.13

ethnicity
A social construct that further divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.14

ethnocentrism
The attitude that one’s own group, ethnicity, or nationality is superior to


gender binary
The idea that gender is limited solely to two categories, male and female, rather than a more fluid classification of genders that exist along a spectrum.

gender diverse
Describes a person whose gender expression differs from stereotypical expectations about how they should look or act based on the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify outside traditional gender categories (e.g., as both genders, gender neutral, or as non-binary are examples of gender diverse).

gender expression
The external ways in which a person expresses their gender identity to the world, such as through their behavior, emotions, style of dress, hairstyle, makeup, interests, or choice of toys, colors, or activities.

gender identity
A person’s innate sense of their own gender—whether female, male, both, gender diverse, or other—regardless of assigned sex at birth. The most commonly used terms to describe gender identity include, but are not limited to, cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary.

home language
The language used most often in the child’s home.

identity
The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a thing or person is definitively recognized or known or the set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.¹⁶

ideology
A manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture. The integrated assertions, theories, and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program.¹⁷

implicit bias
The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection. The implicit associations we harbor in our subconscious cause us to have feelings and attitudes about other people based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. These

associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages. In addition to early life experiences, the media and news programming are often cited as origins of implicit associations.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{institutional racism}

Institutional racism is distinguished from the explicit attitudes or racial bias of individuals by the existence of systematic policies or laws and practices that provide differential access to goods, services, and opportunities of society by race. Institutional racism results in data showing racial gaps across every system. For children and families, it affects where they live; the quality of the education they receive; their income; types of food they have access to; their exposure to pollutants; whether they have access to clean air, clean water, or adequate medical treatment; and the types of interactions they have with the criminal justice system.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{interpreter}

\textbf{Certified Interpreter:} An interpreter who is certified as competent by a professional organization or government entity through rigorous testing, based on appropriate and consistent criteria. Interpreters who have had limited training or have taken a screening test administered by an employing health interpreter or referral agency are not considered certified. Some programs offer a certificate of completion, but this does not equal certification.

\textbf{Qualified Interpreter:} An individual who has been assessed for professional skills, demonstrates a high level of proficiency in at least two languages and has the appropriate training and experience to interpret with skill and accuracy while adhering to the National Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice published by the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Educational Interpreter:} School district employees, whether certificated or classified, providing sign language interpretation, transliteration, or both, and further explanation of concepts introduced by the teacher for students who are deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{intersectionality}

The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, etc.) combine, overlap, or intersect; especially in the experiences of historically marginalized individuals or groups.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. (2015). \textit{Understanding implicit bias}. \url{http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias}

\textsuperscript{19} Morgan, J. D., De Marco, A. C., LaForett, D. R., Oh, S., Ayankoya, B., Morgan, W., Franco, X., & FPG’s Race, Culture, and Ethnicity Committee. (2018, May). \textit{What racism looks like} [Infographic]. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. \url{https://fpg.unc.edu/sites/fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/other-resources/What%20Racism%20Looks%20Like.pdf}


\textsuperscript{21} RCW 28A.410.271

\textsuperscript{22} Merriam-Webster. (n.d.) \url{https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality}
**LGBTQ+**

An acronym used to refer to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning communities. The + allows space for other diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression groups. While LGBT and LGBTQ are often used as short-hand umbrella terms meant to capture multiple sexual orientations and gender identities, LGBTQ+ is ideal due to its more inclusive nature. (Equity Language Guide; Governor’s Interagency Council on Health Disparities; approved December 6, 2018.)

**internalized racism**

The “internalization of racial oppression by the racially subordinated.”23 It can occur when people of color internalize ideas, beliefs, actions, and behaviors that support or further their oppression.24 It can include, but is not limited to, believing in negative racial stereotypes, adaptations to white cultural standards, and thinking that supports the status quo (e.g., denying that racism exists).25

**macroaggressions**

Large-scale, overt comments or actions that are intentionally directed at a target individual or group (e.g., someone of a particular race, gender, or culture or an entire race, gender, or culture).26

**microaggressions**

Brief, commonplace, and repeated verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, comments, or behavior—whether intentional or unintentional—that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward a targeted individual (e.g., a person of a particular race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc.) or group. Because of their persistent and cumulative impact on the target person’s physical, psychological, and emotional health, microaggressions can often be even more damaging than overt expressions of racism, prejudice, or bigotry.27 These can be further broken down into three forms:

**microassaults**

Conscious and intentional actions or slurs, such as using racial epithets, displaying swastikas or deliberately serving a white person before a person of color in a restaurant.

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**microinsults**
Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

**microinvalidations**
Communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white people often ask Asian Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

**multiculturalism**
Cultural pluralism or diversity (as within a society, an organization, or an educational institution) or as a multicultural social state or a doctrine or policy that promotes or advocates such a state.

**multicultural education**
Any form of education or teaching that incorporates the histories, texts, values, beliefs, and perspectives of people from different cultural backgrounds. At the classroom level, for example, teachers may modify or incorporate lessons to reflect the cultural diversity of the students in a particular class. In many cases, “culture” is defined in the broadest possible sense, encompassing race, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, and “exceptionality”—a term applied to students with specialized needs or disabilities. Generally speaking, multicultural education is predicated on the principle of educational equity for all students, regardless of culture, and it strives to remove barriers to educational opportunities and success for students from different cultural backgrounds.

**native language**
An older term that the education and linguistic fields are trying to move away from because it lacks clarity and can be considered as “othering” speakers of languages other than English. The term is also sometimes confused with a tribal language spoken in the home. “Home language” is the term that replaces “native language.”

**nonbinary**
An adjective that can be used to describe a gender identity that does not fall into one of the two traditional (binary) categories—male or female. It can indicate a gender identity that is something other than male or female, that is neither entirely male nor entirely female, or that blends elements of being male or female.

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opportunity gap

The ways in which a variety of factors—such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, community wealth, familial situations, or others—contribute to or perpetuate different educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment for different groups of students.

See Achievement Gap.\(^\text{30}\)

othering

To view or treat (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself. Opposite of belonging.

race

A “social construct without biological meaning”.\(^\text{31}\) What this means in plain English is that rather than being fixed in biology or genetics race is instead understood to be a categorical system created to confer privilege to different groups of people based upon physical appearance (such as skin color), divide people into groups ranked as superior and inferior, and determine which groups are entitled to important legal rights (e.g., citizenship, property rights, voting rights, etc.) in the United States and throughout the world.

racial equity

The condition that would be achieved if one’s racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.\(^\text{32}\)

racial equity policy

An organizational policy that confirms the importance of an explicit focus on the eradication of racial inequities to improve people’s lives—especially the lives of BIPOC. Ibram Kendi, a best-selling author, historian, and a leading anti-racist voice, refers to these as “anti-racist policies.”

racial inequality

Differential opportunities and outcomes reinforced by systemic policies (official and unofficial) and practices based on race. Examples of racial inequality are numerous and interconnected. Policies such as redlining, environmental racism, unequal access to healthcare, and others contribute to unequal outcomes between members of different racial groups, such as disparities in rates of infant mortality, lifespan, wealth, and home ownership. (Adapted from the Racial Equity Tools Glossary)

racial injustice

The systematic unfair treatment of people based on race, resulting in unequitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial injustice is the reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce inequitable access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all.

racial microaggressions

See Microaggressions.
**racism**

The belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race; a doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles; a political or social system founded on racism; racial prejudice; or discrimination.\(^{33}\)

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.\(^{34}\)

**sexual orientation**

A collection of terms (e.g., straight, bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, asexual, etc.) used to describe to whom one is emotionally, physically, and/or romantically attracted. Note: Gender identity terms (e.g., cisgender, transgender, nonbinary) are not sexual orientation labels.

**stereotypes**

False, oversimplified, prejudiced, or exaggerated generalizations about an individual or group.

**transgender**

An adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., someone who was assigned female at birth, but whose gender identity is male).

**transitioning**

A verb describing the process through which a transgender person begins to live in congruence with their gender identity. Each person’s transition is distinct, but possible steps may include any combination of legal, medical, or social changes (e.g., changing their name and pronouns, identification documents, appearance, etc.).

**tribal consultation**

Government-to-government relationship building, planning, and agreements between tribal nations, districts, or other educational entities. Tribal consultation is to be meaningful, timely, and ongoing.

**tribal sovereignty**

Refers to the inherent right of tribal nations to self-govern and ensure tribal lifeways of their citizens, lands, waters, and resources are secure and honored.

**universal interventions**

Programs or approaches that promote the mental health and well-being of everyone in a group or community rather than just a particular individual or group (e.g., a whole school program to prevent bullying or to promote resilience rather than a more targeted intervention focused on one particular group).

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**white fragility**

Discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.³⁵

**white privilege**

White privilege is the unearned, mostly unacknowledged social advantage white people have over other racial groups simply because they are white.³⁶ It is a set of advantages and/or immunities that white people benefit from daily that are not available to BIPOC. White privilege exists both with and without white people’s conscious knowledge of its presence, and it helps to maintain the racial hierarchy in this country.³⁷ White privilege is when white people have greater access to power and resources than people of color in the same situation do.³⁸

**white supremacy/white supremacy culture**

The idea (ideology) that white people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. While most people associate white supremacy with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and the neo-Nazis, white supremacy is ever present in our institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness, and humanity to the white group while casting people and communities of color as worthless (worth less), immoral, bad, and inhuman and “undeserving.” Drawing from critical race theory, the term “white supremacy” also refers to a political or socio-economic system where white people enjoy structural advantage and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a collective and an individual level. [https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#white-supremacy](https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#white-supremacy)

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Overview of Applicable Civil Rights Laws

In Washington, individuals who identify as part of a protected class are protected from discrimination and discriminatory harassment under federal and state civil rights laws.

**Discrimination and Protected Classes**

Discrimination is the unfair or unequal treatment of a person or group because they are part of a defined group, known as a “protected class.” A protected class is a defined group of people who share common characteristics. Discrimination can occur when a person is treated differently or denied access to programs, services, or activities because they are part of a protected class. Discrimination can also occur when a school or school district fails to accommodate a student or employee’s disability. Protected classes are protected from discrimination and discriminatory harassment under federal and state civil rights laws. In Washington, discrimination based on the following protected classes is prohibited:

- Age*
- Disability
- Families with children*
- Gender identity and expression
- Honorably discharged veteran or military status
- Marital status*
- National origin
- Race and color
- Religion and creed
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Use of a trained dog guide or service animal

*Age and marital status are protected classes under RCW 49.60 (the Washington Law Against Discrimination), which is the general nondiscrimination statute in Washington but not under RCW 28A.642 (the Equal Educational Opportunity Law), which specifically prohibits discrimination in Washington K–12 public schools.

**Discriminatory Harassment**

Discriminatory harassment is also prohibited in Washington public schools. When harassment is based on protected class and creates a hostile environment, schools must take steps to protect students and investigate—as
soon as they know or reasonably should know—even if a parent or student does not file a complaint. This rule applies to sexual harassment, too.

Harassment creates a hostile environment when the conduct is so severe, pervasive, or persistent that it limits a student’s ability to participate in, or benefit from, the school’s services, activities, or opportunities. A hostile environment could impact a student’s school life in many ways. Physical illness, anxiety about going to school, or a decline in grades or attendance could signal a hostile environment.

### RELEVANT FEDERAL NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964</th>
<th>Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in all programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance</th>
<th>U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights 206-607-1600 TDD: 206-607-1647 <a href="mailto:OCR.Seattle@ed.gov">OCR.Seattle@ed.gov</a></th>
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<tr>
<td>Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972</td>
<td>Prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division 202-514-4609 TTY: 202-514-0716 <a href="http://www.justice.gov/crt">www.justice.gov/crt</a></td>
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<td>Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973</td>
<td>Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in all programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance</td>
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<td>Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act</td>
<td>Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities</td>
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### RELEVANT STATE LAWS

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<th>Chapters 28A.642 and 28A.640 RCW</th>
<th>Discrimination Prohibited/ Sexual Equality</th>
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<td>Prohibits discrimination in Washington K–12 public schools on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, veteran or military status, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability</td>
<td>OSPI Equity &amp; Civil Rights 360-725-6162 TTY: 360-664-3631 <a href="mailto:equity@k12.wa.us">equity@k12.wa.us</a></td>
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<td>Chapter 392-190 WAC</td>
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If you have questions about state or federal civil rights laws, you can contact the Equity and Civil Rights Office at OSPI, which works to ensure that each student has equal access to public education without discrimination by raising awareness of rights and responsibilities under civil rights laws, developing tools and resources to facilitate equal access to all school programs and activities, and monitoring and enforcing school district and charter school compliance with state and federal civil rights laws. You can reach the Equity and Civil Rights Office at 360-725-6162 or equity@k12.wa.us.
Standards and Guidance

Coming Soon
# Image and Language/Vocabulary Checklist

For any document, presentation, or publication developed for internal or external audiences, review for inclusivity based on the following:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Images</th>
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References


December 2020

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Creating Content for Web-Based Audiences

The goal of most websites is to create dynamic content that engages the intended audience and answers their questions. At OSPI, our content is of interest to a variety of audiences, with varying levels of knowledge about the public education system and our role as a state agency. This presents opportunities and challenges in creating web content—the most easily accessible type of content for these audiences—to develop greater understanding of OSPI’s roles, priorities, and programs.

Content Process

Creating content is a five-step process.

Content Governance

Web content at OSPI is governed through five core levels:

1) Content Leads
2) Content Contributors
3) Communications
4) Website Governance Committee
5) Executive Leadership

The roles and information about these groups will be expanded and included here as final decisions are made.

Before You Write Your Content

After identifying the need to create new content for your page, or create a new page entirely, you’ll need to take a few minutes to plan your content. While this step may seem unnecessary, it is a vital step to identify the goal, organization, and layout of your content.

Identify Your Audience

Before you begin, take some time to identify the audience for your content. If you need to create a page outlining the program requirements for a grant, understand that parents and families are not likely going to read it (nor should they). We are invested and interested in our work—that’s why we’re here. But not everyone is, and it’s best to develop content specific to the people who’ll be using it.

So, who are our audiences?

During the web redesign project, OSPI used survey data to identify five main audiences. In your planning process, identify one or two audiences who needs this information, and develop the content with them in mind. The five audiences are below.

**District Staff:** This audience makes up about a quarter of traffic to the website. They are often looking to log in to EDS, or need to find school or district performance data. They are interested in up-to-date
information that is easy to find, as they know information often changes.

**Educators:** Educators make up nearly half of the people who visit our website. They are looking primarily for licensing and certification information, learning standards, and professional development opportunities. They like to be able to easily find what they are looking for.

**Educational Support Staff:** This group does not visit the site often. When they do, they are looking for licensing information, professional development, and health services information. They want information that is visual and has people-friendly language.

**Families:** One of our smallest audiences, families are often visiting our site when they have not been able to find answers at their local district level. They are looking for testing information, learning standards, help with civil rights issues, and dual credit information. They want to find their information quickly, so the fewer clicks, the better.

**Community Members:** Making up a small portion of our audience, this group is often looking for data, learning standards, and licensing or certification information. They are interested in the tangible work that OSPI is doing, why we do it, and how it helps students.

**Plan Your Content**

After you have identified the audience you will be writing for, the next step is to plan your content. Think about why your audience is coming to your webpage and what they are looking for. Then think about what they need to know. Your goal is to combine these two things into a neat, helpful package that is easy to read and understand.

**Chunk Your Content and Identify Meaningful Headings**

Many people, especially here at OSPI, are used to developing technical assistance documents and guidance, and are tempted to create long, wordy webpages that include hundreds of words on every scenario that may arise.

*Don’t do that.*

Focus on the most important information, the things that your audience will need to know, and break your information down into manageable sections. These sections should have two to three sentences, and address something specific. Spending some time identifying your headings is an important step and can serve as a guide for your audience to the information. People will be scanning your page for what they are looking for. Give it to them in the heading and provide the answer in the two or three sentences below.

**A Note on Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

For years, people have developed Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents as a way to easily share the most pertinent information for their audience. They have provided this information as a shortcut around their lengthy, dry content. The FAQ has become so common, in fact, that recent research has shown that it is losing effectiveness, because people increasingly will not read a lengthy, 30-word question to understand what the section is about.

Instead of developing a FAQ, use information that would be in the document on your webpage, separated by meaningful headings, with the topic of the section as close to the beginning as possible.
Inverted Pyramid

The inverted pyramid is a style of newswriting that is very helpful when developing content for the web. When writing in the inverted pyramid style, you should start with your key point. Users will often only read the first few words in a section before deciding if it is going to answer their question. If they do not immediately see the answer they are looking for, they may jump down to a bulleted list, or they may just leave.

Once you have created your meaningful headings, organize them logically, but with the most important sections first. Begin with broad sections that the largest portion of your audience will be interested in knowing about, and provide specific and detailed information further down. Few will get to the end, but those who do will be the ones who need the information and have found it on your page.

Writing Your Content

Write for Your Audience

Remember to focus on your intended audience. What do they need to know to complete their task? Do they need to know about the history of the program? If you provide links to resources and examples, will your audience realistically be able to use them? Avoid providing too much information because you know someone will want it occasionally. Keep your page clean and concise, and let them contact you if they cannot find what they need.

Active Voice

Use active voice whenever possible. Writers should put the action first when writing in active voice.

For example, “The report was reviewed in draft form by about a dozen people” is written in the passive voice. The subject, about a dozen people, are being acted upon by the action, the review of the report.

Putting the subject first gives us: “About a dozen people reviewed the report in draft form.”

This is much more readable and adds credibility. Here is another example of active voice.

ACTIVE: Melanie will lead the discussion.
PASSIVE: The discussion will be led by Melanie.

Learn more about active voice on plainlanguage.gov

Plain Talk

For more on Plain Talk, check out the Plain Talk section, but remember these basic guidelines:
• Understand your audience’s needs
• Include only relevant information
• Use words your customers use
• Use active voice
• Keep sentences and paragraphs short
• Design clear pages

Keep Content Current/Write for Medium-Term

While your content does not need to be ‘evergreen,’ or applicable during any time, it is good to realistically think about how often you will update this page and how the information will look the day before it’s updated. If you are looking at this page in three months, or six months, will it still make sense? Will it be outdated?

Use Templates and Style Guides

Refer to the OSPI Style Guide and make sure your content aligns with agency style, tone of voice, level of professionalism, and Plain Talk and readability guidelines outlined in this guide. If you are unsure, ask for help from a Content Contributor or check in with the Communications office at commteam@k12.wa.us.

After You Have Written Your Content

Check for Understanding

When you have finished writing your content, provide it to someone in your audience and have them review it. Do they understand it? You can also provide it to someone elsewhere in the agency who does not know your program very well. Do they learn what you want them to know? Do they know what steps you want them to take? If not, you will need to revise your content.

Revise

Revise your content to make sure it is optimized to answer the questions your users have when they come to your webpage. When you finish, check for understanding again.

Update Content Often

Programs are always changing. It is imperative that you go back and review your content every few months. When you post your content, set a calendar reminder for three months to go back and review your updates to make sure the content is current, and make additions and removals as necessary.

The new website also has an option to automatically unpublish your page after a certain amount of time. If the information on your page is time-sensitive, set the unpublish function, and don’t worry about broken links. The web team monitors for them and can help you get them updated when your content expires.

Become a Content Wizard

This Writing for the Web section is only a starting point for OSPI staff. Some other incredible resources include:
• **Letting Go of the Words** by Ginny Redish. Copies of this book reside around the agency. Communications also has a couple, so reach out to them if you want to check out a copy.

• **Writing for the Web training.** Provided by the Department of Enterprise Services (DES), this one-day training features a ton of helpful information and hands-on instruction.

• **Hemingway App.** This web-based text editor can help you test your content for readability using Plain Talk principles. It doesn’t save content though, so make sure you take it with you!

• **Flesch-Kincaid checker in Word.** This feature analyzes your text to let you know the grade level for your content. Learn how to turn it on.
What is Plain Talk?

Also known as *plain language*, Plain Talk messages are clear, concise, and visually easy to read. Plain language uses common words, rather than jargon, acronyms, or unnecessary legal language.

A popular plain language myth is that you have to “dumb down” content so everyone can read it. That’s not true. Plain language allows you to write for your audience using language the audience understands and feels comfortable with.

Plain Talk is Required

- Plain language is not optional—it is required. OSPI will use Plain Talk guidelines in all communication with customers, including website content and email.
- In Washington state, [Executive Order 05-03](#) requires all state agencies to use simple and clear language when communicating with constituents and businesses.
- At the federal level, U.S. federal departments must comply with the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#). The [Federal Plain Language Report Card](#) evaluates compliance.

Basic Guidelines of Plain Talk

- Understand customer and audience needs
- Include only relevant information
- Use words your customers use
- Use active voice
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short
- Design clear pages

Tools and Resources

- To help you “Plain Talk” your text: [HemingwayApp.com Editor](#) and [StoryToolz Readability Checker](#)
- State and federal guidance: [Washington Plain Talk Guidance](#) and [Federal Plain Language Guidelines](#)
- For government agencies: [Center for Plain Language](#) and [Usability.gov](#)

Plain Talk Tips

Aim for an average of:

- < 3 sentences per paragraph (< 2 for web copy): Readers skip long paragraphs.
- < 14 words per sentence: Sentence length is one of the top two predictors of readability. When sentences are fewer than 14 words, comprehension is 90 percent higher. Vary your sentence
length to build drama, create rhythm, and make your points powerful.

- < 2 syllables per word: Words of three or more syllables add to reading difficulty.
- < 5 characters per word: Word length is one of the top two predictors of readability.

5 Steps for Making Your Text Readable

Sources: The Center for Plain Language and Plainlanguage.gov

Step 1. Identify and describe the target audience.

Know your audience. Take your audience's current level of knowledge into account. Know the expertise and interest of your average reader and then write to that person.

- Research and define the target groups that will use the document or webpage.
- List and prioritize top tasks or goals by audience group.
- List what people need or need to know.
- List characteristics of the groups that should influence design (e.g., age, computer experience, students, teachers, families, community members, etc.).
- Address the user
  - Use pronouns to speak directly to the reader (e.g., "you must provide a copy of the grant application")
  - Define pronouns clearly, ensuring that readers understand what pronouns refer to.
  - In a question-and-answer format, use "I" in the question to refer to the user
  - Avoid using "he" or "she," and address the reader directly
- Address audiences separately.

Step 2: Structure the content to guide the reader through it.

Organize the information so readers can quickly and confidently find the information they are looking for.

- Organize the content so it flows logically
- Present important information first in each section, subsection, and paragraph. Break content into short sections that reflect natural stopping points
- Write headings that help readers predict what is coming up
- Have a topic sentence
- Place the main idea before exceptions and conditions
- Use transition words
- Use lists
Step 3: Write the content in plain language.

Readers should understand the words and grasp the intended message quickly and confidently. Choose your words carefully and be consistent in your writing style.

- Keep it short and to the point
  - Write short but logical sentences
  - Write short paragraphs that cover one topic per paragraph
  - Minimize abbreviations
  - Minimize definitions
  - Use the same terms consistently
  - Include the details that help the reader complete the task
  - Leave out details that don’t help or may distract readers, even if they are interesting
- Set a helpful tone—use a conversational, rather than legal or bureaucratic, tone
- Use positive language
- Pick the right words
  - Use strong verbs in active voice
  - Use present tense
  - Use contractions
  - Use examples
  - Use “must” to indicate requirements
  - Use words the audience knows—use technical language appropriate for audience
  - Avoid jargon—words that are unnecessarily complicated used to impress, rather than inform
  - Make elements of titles or lists parallel (for example, start each with a verb)

Step 4: Use information design to help readers see and understand.

Writing that is legible and well-organized is far easier to read. You can use design elements to help users read and understand information.

- Use headers and sub-headers to organize the information
- Use typography (font size, color, bold, etc.) to guide the reader’s attention
- Use whitespace to organize the information
- Use images (e.g., charts, tables, visuals) to make content easier to understand
- Highlight important concepts using bold or italics (underlining draws attention but is harder to read)—but don’t overdo it
- Minimize cross-references
### Simple Words and Phrases: Instead of... Try...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Try...</th>
<th>Instead of...</th>
<th>Try...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Additional</strong></td>
<td>More, added, other</td>
<td>In accordance with</td>
<td>By, per, under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assist, assistance</strong></td>
<td>Aid, help</td>
<td>In the process of</td>
<td>(omit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attempt</strong></td>
<td>Try</td>
<td>Is applicable to</td>
<td>Applies to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commence</strong></td>
<td>Begin, start</td>
<td>Modify</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comply with</strong></td>
<td>Follow</td>
<td>No later than</td>
<td>By</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuing ongoing efforts</strong></td>
<td>Efforts</td>
<td>Previously</td>
<td>Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critically important</strong></td>
<td>Critical or important</td>
<td>Prior to</td>
<td>Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currently</strong></td>
<td>(omit), now</td>
<td>Provided that</td>
<td>If</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrate</strong></td>
<td>Show</td>
<td>Request</td>
<td>Ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eliminate</strong></td>
<td>Cut, drop, end</td>
<td>Require</td>
<td>Must, need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employ</strong></td>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Subsequently</td>
<td>After, later, then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensure</strong></td>
<td>Make sure</td>
<td>Successfully complete</td>
<td>Complete, pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expedite</strong></td>
<td>Speed up, hasten</td>
<td>Terminate</td>
<td>Stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Finalize</strong></td>
<td>Complete, finish</td>
<td>The month of</td>
<td>(omit)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequently</strong></td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>Utilize</td>
<td>Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify</strong></td>
<td>Find, name, show</td>
<td>Validate</td>
<td>Confirm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implement</strong></td>
<td>Carry out, start</td>
<td>We would appreciate it if...</td>
<td>Please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Get more at [PlainLanguage.gov](http://PlainLanguage.gov), or visit [ScienceGeek](http://ScienceGeek) for a list of education jargon to avoid (and to have a little fun with the “jargon generator”).
**Font Standards**

**OSPI’s primary official font: Segoe UI (Sans Serif)**

**Segue UI 11:** The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 12345678910 **BOLD italics**

**Segue UI 12:** The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 12345678910 **BOLD italics**

Segue (SEE-goh) is a typeface, or family of fonts, that is best known for its use by Microsoft. The company uses Segoe UI in its online and printed marketing materials, including recent logos for a number of products. Additionally, the Segoe UI font sub-family is used by numerous Microsoft applications.

**Use:**
- General email communications (Outlook and GovDelivery)
- Print and online publications
- Templates

**OSPI’s secondary official font: Palatino (Serif)**

**Palatino 11:** The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 12345678910 **BOLD italics**

**Palatino 12:** The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. 12345678910 **BOLD italics**

Palatino has larger proportions, increasing legibility. Palatino was particularly intended as a design for trade or ‘jobbing’ use, such as headings, advertisements and display printing, and was created with a solid, wide structure and wide apertures that could appear clearly on poor-quality paper, when read at a distance or printed at small sizes. Linotype licensed Palatino to Adobe and Apple who incorporated it into their digital printing technology as a standard font.

**Use:**
- Official correspondence
- Contrasting font option for design
- Available as an alternative to Segoe UI

*Using an application that does not offer the OSPI font standard of Palatino or Segoe UI? When in doubt, contact communications.*
Email Signature Block

A standard email signature block presents a professional and consistent image for OSPI. The information we ask you to include will help the public and other agencies recognize your email as OSPI correspondence. If this guidance does not address your specific need or question, contact commteam@k12.wa.us. For a quick video on how to create your signature in Outlook, go here: Outlook Help.

Create an email signature block in Outlook. See page 4 for technical instructions.

External email:

- At minimum, include your full signature when you initiate an email or when replying to an email string for the first time. Follow the standard outlined on page 2.
- Your email signature block may vary based on the recipient(s) of the email. You may want to create more than one signature (see examples on page 3).

Internal email:

- Using an internal email signature is very helpful to colleagues.
- Include name, job title, program area, and phone number.

DO:

- Use the ADA-compliant, printer-friendly, agency standard: Black, Segoe UI, size 11*.
- Link to OSPI’s website: k12.wa.us
- Use the agency vision statement: *All students prepared for post-secondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.*
- The OSPI vision statement is italicized. Include both commas, **DO add punctuation to the end of the vision statement.**
- Use the OSPI Style Guide. For example, phone numbers are hyphenated and email addresses are lowercased.

*Take audience accessibility into consideration. E.g., if your audience needs larger font for visual impairment, continue to use Segoe UI in a larger size consistently.

DO NOT:

- Do not include backgrounds, quotations, images, nonstandard fonts or colors, additional hyperlinks, or social media hashtags to your signature.

OPTIONAL:

- Questions about special exceptions to your signature should be directed to the Communications Office.
- Connect with us goes to a “landing” web page with links to the GovDelivery subscription page and OSPI social media accounts: www.k12.wa.us/connect

- If your program/department uses GovDelivery for bulk communications, you may include a customized “Subscribe to email updates” link. This is for GovDelivery subscriptions only. Contact the Communications Office for support.

- The nondiscrimination statement and legal disclaimer are optional, but is added when the email content and/or audience requires one or both. Visit the intranet for nondiscrimination statement guidance and translations: http://insideospi/sites/PoliciesForms/Pages/NonDiscriminationStatement.aspx

- Gender pronoun preference is optional for inclusion on OSPI's standard signature. See the example for Alex Conley.

- Email sent from your mobile device should follow the standard as closely as possible. See page 4 for iPhone instructions, or refer to your email client's instructions.

Anatomy of the OSPI Signature

**Segoe UI 11**  
**Point Black**

- Put your name in bold, the rest in regular font. Do not use a “fancy” font for your name.

- Lowercase email addresses and hyperlinks.

- Do not add to your signature:
  - Backgrounds
  - Quotations
  - Photos, logos, animation, or other images
  - Additional hyperlinks
  - Nonstandard fonts or colors
  - Social media hashtags

If your program uses GovDelivery for bulk email, a customized “subscribe to email updates” link may be added to the signature block.

Connect with us
www.k12.wa.us/connect

Subscribe to email alerts
[insert your custom GovDelivery link]

**Nondiscrimination statement**

OSPI provides equal access to all programs and services without discrimination based on sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, honorably discharged veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Questions and complaints of alleged discrimination should be directed to the Equity and Civil Rights Director at 360-725-6162/TTY: 360-664-3631; or P.O. Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504-7200; or equity@k12.wa.us.

**Legal disclaimer**

This communication, including attachments, is intended solely for the use of the individual to whom it is addressed, and may contain information that is privileged, confidential, proprietary or otherwise exempt from disclosure under applicable state and federal laws. If you are not the addressee, or are not authorized to receive for the intended addressee, you are hereby notified that you may not use, copy, distribute or disclose to anyone this communication or the information contained herein. If you have received this message in
error, immediately advise the sender by reply email and destroy this message.

**Legal disclaimer (abbreviated)**
This information is for informational purposes only. It does not provide legal advice or establish an attorney–client relationship. Please contact an attorney for legal advice specific to the facts and circumstances of your individual situation. All communications with OSPI are subject to public disclosure under state law (Chapter 42.56 RCW).

**Notice of public disclosure**
Public documents and records are available to the public as provided under the Washington State Public Records Act (RCW 42.56). This email may be considered subject to the Public Records Act and may be disclosed to a third-party requester.

**ADA Notification for events**
To arrange accommodations for persons with disabilities, please contact [First Name Last Name] at [phone number], TTY 360-664-3631 or by email, [email address] within three business days of this event - [date here]. Please note that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) does not require OSPI to take any action that would fundamentally alter the nature of its programs or services, or impose an undue financial or administrative burden.

**Examples**

**STANDARD SIGNATURE with all required elements:**

Benjamin Franklin  
Fiscal Analyst  
Agency Financial Services  
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)  
600 Washington St. SE | Olympia, WA 98504-7200  
Office: 360-725-6000  
benjamin.franklin@k12.wa.us  
www.k12.wa.us

*All students prepared for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.*
STANDARD SIGNATURE with connect link, fax, gender pronouns:
Alex Conley
Pronouns: she, her, hers
Director of Health and Fitness Teaching and Learning
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
P.O. Box 47200 | Olympia, WA 98504-7200
Office: 360-725-6000 | fax: 360-555-1234
alexandra.conley@k12.wa.us
www.k12.wa.us

Connect with us
www.k12.wa.us/connect

All students prepared for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

When writing on behalf of another person, such as a director:

Sherry Johnson
On behalf of Mary Smith, Assessment Director
Assessment and Student Information
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
P.O. Box 47200 | Olympia, WA 98504-7200
Office: 360-725-6000
sherry.johnson@k12.wa.us
www.k12.wa.us

All students prepared for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

NOTE: If you are sending from Mary Smith’s email address, using “on behalf of” is not necessary.

How to Customize Your Signature in Outlook

1. Home tab > New Email
2. Insert tab > Signature dropdown > Signatures... [This opens the Signature dialog box]
3. Click New
4. Type a name for the signature – such as “Full Signature” or “Internal” or “Sig with Legal Disclaimer–whatever label works best for you.
5. Create the signature block according to the OSPI signature standards.
6. Click OK when finished.

To set your default signature, follow steps 1 and 2. Then, under “Choose default signatures”, select your default signature for “New messages” and “Replies/forwards.”
When you need to insert a signature other than your default into a message:
Insert > Signature > Select the one you want to use from the dropdown. It will take out the default signature and replace it with the one you selected.

**On an iPhone**

You can create one custom signature per email address.

1. Settings
2. Mail, Contacts, Calendars
3. Signature
4. If you have more than one email address on your iPhone, select ‘Per Account.’
5. Customize the signature field.

The signature will auto-populate when you create a new email and when you reply to an email.
Revision Log

January 26, 2021

Added Culturally Responsive Style Guide

October 2, 2020

Added entries for legal citations, PO Box, agency citation style, emphasis, underlining, italics.

July 17, 2019

Newly rewritten guide

Added to Guide:
- Writing for the Web (May 2018)
- Email signature block standard (May 2018)
- Agency Font Standards (May 2018)

Updates to Guide:
- am/pm (March 2019)
- percent (June 2019)
- He/she vs. their (June 2019)
- First vs. Third person speech (March 2019)
- Legislative Citations (May 2018)
- Latinx (October 2018)
- Executive Correspondence standards

Removed from Guide:
- Punctuation, Grammar and Usage (added to A-Z Reference)
- OSPI Departments and Programs
- Language Use for Individuals with Disabilities (will be in Culturally Responsive Style)
- Usability and Digital Content
- Educational Service Districts (ESDs)
- School District/ESD Lookup
- Basic Education Act
- Style Sheet Template
- How to Request a Change to the Style Guide (added to About)
- Removed ‘percentage point’ entry as Style now allows the use of the percent symbol (%) in writing.