

# Writing Style Guide

The RCCD Writing Style Guide complements the [existing branding and web style guides](#). The District follows the Associated Press style for news releases, public relations, marketing publications, and other materials. Additionally, internal guidelines are used for instances such as capitalizing "District" and "College." This guide addresses common grammar and usage questions encountered by Riverside Community College District (RCCD) employees and highlights where RCCD's internal guidelines differ from AP style. It is a fluid document that will be updated as new material becomes available.

For questions or suggestions regarding additional content, please contact the [Office of External Relations and Strategic Communications](#).

## Writing Essentials

- Use active voice.
- Frame statements positively.
- Use precise, specific language.
- Omit unnecessary words.
- Place emphatic words at the end of a sentence.
- Use colloquialisms without quotation marks.
- Keep the focus on the story, not yourself.
- Write with strong nouns and verbs.
- Avoid overwriting and fancy words.
- Avoid exaggeration and editorializing.
- Avoid qualifiers (very, all, little, pretty).
- Use standard spelling (e.g., "information" instead of "info").
- Avoid awkward adverbs (those not commonly spoken).
- Don't over-explain.
- Ensure clarity and accuracy.
- Avoid injecting opinions and bias.
- Prioritize clarity over shortcuts.
- Use one space after punctuation marks.
- Spell out acronyms on first use, with the acronym in parentheses only if it appears again.
- Avoid exclamation marks for emphasis; they can seem like shouting.
- Avoid repeating words in the same sentence or paragraph.
- Refrain from using contractions (e.g., don't, they're, isn't).

## Glossary

### A

**Abbreviations and acronyms:** Do not use abbreviations or acronyms that the reader would not quickly recognize. Spell out the first time (followed with abbreviation): Associated Students of Riverside City College (ASRCC). Thereafter writer is free to use ASRCC.

**Above:** Use for spatial relationships. Avoid using when referring to dollar amounts, people and measurements.

**Academic degrees:** If a mention of degrees is necessary to establish someone's credentials, the preferred form is to avoid an abbreviation and use instead a phrase such as: John Jones, who has a doctorate in psychology. Use an apostrophe in bachelor's degree, a master's, etc., but there is no possessive in Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science or associate degree. Use such abbreviations as BA, MA, Ed.D. and Ph.D. only when the need to identify individuals by degree on first reference would make the preferred form cumbersome. Use these abbreviations only after a full name; never after just a last name. When used after a name, commas set off an academic abbreviation: *John Snow, Ph.D., spoke*. Do not precede a name with a courtesy title for an academic degree and follow it with the abbreviation for the degree in the same reference.

**Academic departments:** Use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: the department of history, the history department, the department of English, the English department, or when department is part of the official and formal name: *University of Connecticut Department of Economics*.

**Academic subjects:** Languages should be capitalized: English, Russian; however, other subjects are lower case: math, political science, biology. The exception is when identifying degree, see Degree.

**Academic titles:** Capitalize and spell out formal titles such as chancellor, chairman, etc., when they precede a name. Lowercase elsewhere.

**Addresses:** Use the abbreviations Ave., Blvd. and St. only with a numbered address: *1600 Pennsylvania Ave*. Spell them out and capitalize when part of a formal street name without a number: *Pennsylvania Avenue*. Lowercase and spell out when used alone or with more than one street name: *Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues*. Similar words (alley, drive, road, terrace, etc.) always are spelled out. Capitalize them when part of a formal name without a number; lowercase when used alone or with two or more names.

**Administration:** Lowercase: the administration, the president's administration, the governor's administration, the Obama administration.

**Ages:** Always use figures. *The girl is 15 years old; the law is 8 years old; the 101-year-old house.* When the context does not require years or years old, the figure is presumed to be years. Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun. *A 5-year-old boy, the boy is 5 years old. The boy, 7, has a sister, 10. The race is for 3-year-olds. The woman is in her 30s.*

**All:** The word is frequently redundant: *All students* (by removing all you don't lose the meaning).

**Alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae, alum, alums:** Use alumnus (pl. alumni) when referring to a man who has attended a school. Use alumna (pl. alumnae) when referring to a woman. Use alumni when referring to a group of men and women. Use alum (pl. alums) for gender-neutral individuals who attended a school.

**Am and pm:** Lowercase, without periods (Note: RCCD policy is different than AP). Avoid the redundant: 10 am this morning. When the time overlaps am and pm, use both: 10 am to 3 pm; when within the same period, use 9 to 11 am. DO NOT USE :00 in time stamps, simply 1 pm. See Time for further explanation.

**Ampersand (&):** Use the ampersand when it is part of a company's formal name or composition title: House & Garden, Procter & Gamble, Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway. The ampersand should not otherwise be used in place of and, except for some accepted abbreviations: B&B, R&B.

**Anniversary, annual:** Avoid first anniversary, the redundant one-year anniversary and terms such as six-month anniversary (or other time spans less than a year). Similarly, avoid first annual. An event cannot be described as annual until it has been held in at least two successive years. Writer can use inaugural to identify a first-time event.

**Asterisk:** If using an asterisk, it must reference something on the page or document. It should not be used alone.

## B

**Board of Trustees:** Capitalize 'RCCD Board of Trustees' when first mentioned. Subsequent references may use 'BOT' or 'Board'.

## C

**Capitalization:** Words that are used generally, such as staff counselors, students, information sessions should be lowercase. Capitalize official committee names like. Distance Education Committee.

**Cents:** Spell out and lowercase the word cents, using numerals for amounts less than a dollar: *5 cents, 12 cents*. Use the \$ sign and decimal system for larger amounts: *\$1.01, \$2.50*.

**College:** Capitalize college when referring to a particular college within RCCD. However, when referring to multiple colleges, use lowercase. (When used in a sentence such as: college students attend here.)

**Composition titles (books, music, movies, etc.):** RCCD style is to use italics to identify the works, refrain from using quotation marks. Apply that guideline to book titles, computer game titles, movie titles, opera titles, play titles, poem titles, album and song titles, radio and television program titles, and the titles of lectures, speeches and works of art.

**Courtesy titles:** Do not use courtesy titles, other than Dr. for a medical doctor, except in direct quotations. *"Mr. Smith attended this year's banquet," said John Jones*. Otherwise, refer to both men and women by first and last name on first reference: *Susan Smith or Robert Smith*. Refer to both men and women by last name in subsequent references. On first reference use educational title to identify advanced degree, John Smith, Ph.D. DO NOT use title with degree credential — Chancellor John Smith, Ph.D.

## D

**Dash:** Use dashes to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or an emphatic pause. But avoid overuse of dashes to set off phrases when commas would suffice. SERIES WITHIN A PHRASE: When a phrase that otherwise would be set off by commas contains a series of words that must be separated by commas, use dashes to set off the full phrase: *He listed the qualities—intelligence, humor, conservatism, independence—that he liked in an executive*. ATTRIBUTION: Use a dash before an author's or composer's name at the end of a quotation: *"Who steals my purse steals trash." - Shakespeare*. When using a dash use a long dash — (over a -)

**Dates:** When using dates, use the following standard: *Tuesday, November 1, 2015*, (commas after the day and the date). When referring to the Roaring 20's - use an 's. Always use Arabic figures, without st, nd, rd or th. For fliers, when promoting an upcoming event, omit year — Transfer Faire, Thursday, May 12 (no year needed since RCCD doesn't promote events a year in advance). Also, when a time is attached, please use a comma to offset the time: Thursday, May 12, 1 pm.

**Days of the week:** Capitalize them. Do not abbreviate.

**Dean:** Capitalize when used as a formal title before a name: *Dean John Jones, Deans John Jones and Susan Smith*. Lowercase in other uses: *John Jones, dean of the College; the dean*.

**Dean's list:** Lowercase in all uses: *He is on the dean's list. She is a dean's list student*.

**Decades:** Use Arabic figures to indicate decades of history. Use an apostrophe to indicate numerals that are left out; show plural by adding the letter s: *the 1890s, the 1920s, the mid-1930s*. An alternative form *the '80s, the '90s* is acceptable if it is clear to which century it refers.

**Degree:** Use upper case when identifying degree discipline, such as **bachelor degree in Math; master's degree in Engineering; a Ph.D. in Social Outcomes**.

**Degree titles:** Use Dr. only for a person with a medical degree - *Dr. Sloan*. In education, educational credentials are used after the name. Also associate professor standard is lowercase after a person's name, with the department capitalized: *Andrew Robinson, Ph.D., associate professor, Math*.

**Departments:** Use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: the department of history, the history department, the department of English, the English department, or when department is part of the official and formal name: University of Connecticut Department of Economics. Exception: when identifying earned degree, see Degree above.

**Directions and regions:** In general, lowercase north, south, northeast, northern, etc., when they indicate compass direction; capitalize these words when they designate regions. Examples:

- Compass Directions: *He drove west. The cold front is moving east.*
- Regions: *A storm system that developed in the Midwest is spreading eastward. It will bring showers to the East Coast by morning and to the entire Northeast by late in the day. Showers and thunderstorms were forecast in the Texas Panhandle. High temperatures will prevail throughout the Western states. The North was victorious. The South will rise again.*
- With Names Of Nations: Lowercase unless they are part of a proper name or are used to designate a politically divided nation: *northern France, southern California, eastern Canada, the western United States*. But: *Northern Ireland, South Korea*.
- With States And Cities: The preferred form is to lowercase directional or area descriptions when referring to a section of a state or city: *western Montana, southern Atlanta*.

**Distances:** Always use figures: *He walked 4 (numbers under ten are spelled out – four) miles*.

**District:** Capitalize District when referring to RCCD.

**Dollars:** Always lowercase. Use figures and the \$ sign in all except casual references or amounts without a figure: Use a comma when amounts are over \$1,000. *The book cost \$4. Dad, please give me a dollar. Dollars are flowing overseas*. For specified amounts, the word takes a singular verb: *He said \$500,000 is what they want*. For amounts of more than \$1 million, use up to two decimal places. Do not link the numerals and the word by a hyphen: *He is worth \$4.35 million. He proposed a \$300 billion budget*. If an amount

does not have a specific number of cents, leave off the 00 (\$5, not \$5.00).

**Dual Heritage Terms:** It is no longer necessary to hyphen Asian American or Mexican American.

## E

### **e.g. vs. i.e.:**

*E.g.* is used before an item or list of items that serve as examples for the previous statement. *E.g.* is short for *exempli gratia*, which means “for example.” *I.e.* is an abbreviation for the phrase *id est*, which means “that is.” *I.e.* is used to restate something said previously in order to clarify its meaning. While *i.e.* is often set off by brackets or parentheses, it can sometimes follow a comma or em dash. It is usually followed by a comma that sets off the restatement that comes after.

- e.g. example: “The more they saw pain in minor injuries (e.g., hitting your head, cutting your finger) and the more they detected suffering in ambiguous facial expressions.”
- i.e. example: “An examination of the data in Table 1 indicates that all but one of the Council of Governments regions have experienced population growth due to natural increase (*i.e.*, had more births than deaths).”

**Email:** One word.

**Emeritus:** This word often is added to formal titles to denote those individuals who have retired retain their rank or title. When used, place emeritus after the formal title, in keeping with the general practice of academic institutions: *Professor Emeritus Samuel Eliot Morison*, *Dean Emeritus Courtney C. Brown*, *Publisher Emeritus Barnard L. Colby*. Or: *Samuel Eliot Morison*, *professor emeritus of history*.

## F

**Fiscal year:** The 12-month period that a corporation or governmental body uses for bookkeeping purposes.

**Formal titles:** Capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before one or more names: *Pope Francis*, *President Barack Obama*, *Vice Presidents John Jones and William Smith*. At RCCD, the preferred method is to place titles after one’s name: Michael Burke, chancellor, said... A formal title generally is one that denotes a scope of authority, professional activity or academic activity: *Sen. Dianne Feinstein*, *Dr. Benjamin Spock*, *retired Gen. Colin Powell*. Other titles serve primarily as occupational descriptions: *astronaut John Glenn*, *movie star John Wayne*, *peanut farmer Jimmy Carter*. A final determination on whether a title is formal or occupational depends on the practice of the governmental or private organization that confers it.

**Full time, full-time:** Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: *He's a full-time student*. *The program is only open to full-time students*. *He goes to college full time*.

**Fundraising, fundraiser:** One word in all cases.

## G

**Grades:** When indicating letter grades in print, use “quote” marks to set off the grade for easier reading: “A”

**Grade Point Average:** Should be referenced as GPA in all instances; no need to spell out first time.

## H

**Homepage vs. home page:** The correct term is "homepage" (one word). It refers to the main or introductory page of a website that typically serves as the starting point for navigation to other sections of the site.

**Hyphen:** Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. The principle of using a hyphen to avoid confusion explains why no hyphen is required with very and -ly words. Also please watch for sentences end, where hyphenated words might break over —self-contained...in these instances, please move the complete word to the next line.

## I

**ID:** Acceptable abbreviation for identification, including ID card. Spell without periods: Moreno Valley College student ID card.

**Internet:** Lowercase in all situations, except leading off a sentence.

## J

**Jr., Sr., III, etc.:** Abbreviate and capitalize when part of someone’s name; do not precede by a comma. Examples: Byron Dale Kimmel Sr. is my father. Byron Dale Kimmel Jr. is my brother. Byron Dale Kimmel III is my nephew.

## K

TBD

## L

**Legislative titles:**

- First-Reference: Use Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens. as formal titles before one or more names. Spell out and lowercase representative and senator in other uses. Spell out

other legislative titles in all uses. Capitalize formal titles such as councilman, councilwoman (do not use councilperson), delegate, etc., when they are used before a name. Lowercase in other uses. Add US or state before a title only if necessary to avoid confusion: *US Rep. Don Young of Alaska now has a Republican primary opponent, state Rep. Gabrielle LeDoux of Kodiak*. The use of a title such as Rep. or Sen. in first reference is normal in most stories. It is not mandatory, however, provided an individual's title is given later in the story. Deletion of the title on first reference is frequently appropriate, for example, when an individual has become well known: *Barack Obama declared Americans were ready to cast aside cynicism*.

- **Second Reference:** Do not use legislative titles before a name on second reference unless they are part of a direct quotation.

**LGBTQI+:** Acceptable in all references for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning and/or queer. In quotations and the formal names of organizations and events, other forms such as LGBTQIA and other variations are also acceptable with the other letters in the acronym explained. I generally stands for intersex, and A can stand for allies (a person who is not LGBTQI+ but who actively supports the LGBTQI+ community), asexual (a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction) or both. The word queer can be considered a slur in many contexts, so limit use of the word to quotes and names of organizations, following rules for obscenities, profanities, vulgarities as appropriate. Note that sex, gender and sexual orientation are not synonymous.

**Library:** Use lowercase in generic use and when speaking of the Dickinson College library. Use capital letters with formal title, the Jan Deer Library.

**Lists:** When reporting a list, do not use *and*, *but commas*; for instance: *credits, textbooks, classes and graduation*. Commas replace the use of *and* in media, therefore having a comma followed by *and* is redundant.

**Listserv vs. list serv vs. list serve:** The correct term is "listserv" (one word). "Listserv" is a trademarked name for a type of electronic mailing list software, but it is commonly used to refer to email list management in general.

## M

**Master degree:** Lowercase master of arts, master of science, master of Business Administration. Do not use periods when abbreviating MA, MS, MBA. A master's degree or a master's is acceptable in any reference.

**Military Designations:** Capitalize when referring to US forces: *the US Army, the Army, Army regulations*.

**Months:** Capitalize the names of months in all uses. When a month is used with a specific date, you can abbreviate using the following abbreviations: *Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec*. Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone. When a

phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas. EXAMPLES: *January 1972 was a cold month. Jan. 2 was the coldest day of the month. His birthday is May 8. Feb. 14, 1987, was the target date. She testified that it was Friday, Dec. 3, when the accident occurred.*

## N

**Nicknames:** List nicknames, surrounded by quotation marks, only when the formal and preferred names are unexpectedly different. Right: William “Buzz” Smith. Wrong: William “Bill” Smith.

**No.:** Use this capitalized abbreviation for number when referring to a position or rank. Examples: No. 1 city in America; No. 3 choice.

## O

**On campus/off campus:** Hyphenate only as a compound modifier. Examples: They live on campus. They live in off-campus housing.

## P

**Page numbers:** Use figures and capitalize page when used with a figure. When a letter is appended to the figure, capitalize it but do not use a hyphen: *Page 1, Page 10, Page 20A.*

**Percent:** *Spell out, unless part of a graph at which time, due to space limitations, it is okay to use %.*

**Phone number style:** RCCD style is (951) 222-8000 (do not use dots or any other symbol). When an extension is needed to signify a phone number, use (951) 222-8000, ext. 8004.

**Physician assistant:** No apostrophe in this medical profession title.

**Pound sign:** RCCD style does not use the #, but rather No. 4 in the rankings.

**Professor:** Title generally reserved for tenure-track faculty positions. Do not abbreviate “prof.” When introducing a faculty member, use the full academic title, including assistant, associate, adjunct, visiting, etc., as needed, along with the person’s name. Long titles are more easily read after the name, lowercase and surrounded by commas. Examples: Associate Professor of Psychology John Smith OR John Smith, associate professor of psychology, OR psychology professor John Smith. (The latter example is lowercase because it is simply an adjective, not a formal title; it is also confusing because it does not indicate academic rank, only that he teaches psychology.)

# Q

**Quotation marks:** Other than to quote someone, quotation marks should only be used to identify irony or unfamiliar terms: **IRONY:** Put quotation marks around a word or words used in an ironical sense: *The “debate” turned into a free-for-all.* **UNFAMILIAR TERMS:** A word or words being introduced to readers may be placed in quotation marks on first reference: *Broadcast frequencies are measured in “kilohertz.”*

# R

**Room numbers:** Use figures and capitalize room when used with a figure: *Room 2, Room 211.*

# S

**Seasons:** Lowercase spring, summer, fall, winter.

**Seasons for academic purposes:** When part of a formal name or headline on brochures, schedule of classes, course catalogs or similar material: *Fall of 2014, Spring 2014 or 2014 Spring semester.* When used in the body of text, lowercase.

# T

**Task force:** Two words.

**That:** (conjunction) Use the conjunction that to introduce a dependent clause if the sentence sounds or looks awkward without it. There are no hard-and-fast rules, but in general when in doubt, include that. Omission can hurt. Inclusion never does.

**Theater:** Use this spelling unless the proper name is specific, such as *Shubert Theatre.*

**Time:** Use am and pm, no periods with a space between the number: 5 pm when a time spans from am to pm or vice versa, use both: *8 am to 5 pm.* But when a time covers only one-time period, use am or pm just once: *8-11 am.* Use figures except for noon and midnight; never use 12 am (use midnight) or 12 pm (noon). Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: *3:30 pm.* Avoid such redundancies as *10 am this morning, 10 pm tonight.* DO NOT LIST TIMES AS 1:00 pm, except in formal invitations.

**Titles:** In general, confine capitalization to formal titles used directly before an individual's name. The basic guidelines: **LOWERCASE:** Lowercase and spell out titles when they are not used with an individual's name: The chancellor issued a statement, and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas: *The chancellor, Michael Borne, said it had to be this way. Michael Borne, RCCD chancellor, said this is the best way. Chancellor Lee said this is the best way. Pope Francis, the current pope, was born in Argentina.*

## U

**UC and CSU:** When indicating multiple universities will be in attendance, use: UCs and CSUs, don't use a 's. When full title of a school: University of California, Berkeley, (commas around the city it is located in).

**US:** No periods.

## V

**Veterans/Veterans Day/Veterans Services:** capitalize and no apostrophe when referring to Veterans Day, Veterans Services; veterans is never possessive.

## W

**Web Address:** Only include "http://" when it is necessary, such as when "www" is not present. Only break addresses at logical places, not in the middle of a word or grouping, and avoid using long and complex addresses. Right: For more information, go to [www.rccd.edu/admit](http://www.rccd.edu/admit). Wrong: For more information, go to [www.rccd. edu/admit](http://www.rccd.edu/admit). Wrong: Go to [www.rccd.edu/departments/colrel.28](http://www.rccd.edu/departments/colrel.28) Do not include index pages, such as [index.html](http://index.html), [index.htm](http://index.htm), [index.cfm](http://index.cfm), [index.asp](http://index.asp), [home.html](http://home.html), etc. Omit trailing slashes. Example: [www.rccd.edu/admit](http://www.rccd.edu/admit), not [www.rccd.edu/admit/](http://www.rccd.edu/admit/).

**WebAdvisor:** No space between words, capitalize the A.

**Which/that:** Use that and which in referring to inanimate objects. People cannot be a "that." Use that for essential clauses, important to the meaning of a sentence, and without commas. Use which for nonessential clauses, where the pronoun is less necessary, and use commas: If you can drop the clause and not lose the meaning of the sentence, use which; otherwise, use that. A which clause is surrounded by commas; no commas are used with those clauses.

**Who/whom:** Who is the pronoun used for references to human beings and to animals with a name. It is grammatically the subject (never the object) of a sentence, clause or phrase; whom is used when someone is the object of a verb or preposition.

## X

TBD

## Y

**Year-end:** Hyphenate.

**Year Usage:** When indicating a length in years, use 2005-12 (do not use 2005-2012). When referring to years in a decade there should be no apostrophe— the 1980s. The only time you would use 80's is if the 80 (singular) is a thing that can have possessions, and you're referring to one of them.

Z

TBD