

ABC STYLE GUIDE

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The ABC Style Guide is a set of standards for written communications distributed by Associated Builders and Contractors and its chapters. Maintaining consistency not only improves the quality of communications produced by ABC, but also strengthens the association's brand and messaging. ABC primarily follows Associated Press style, and this guide offers a summary of the rules and mistakes most pertinent to the organization.

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Writing Goals and Principles

Write to express, not impress. Eliminate all unnecessary words and phrases; they weaken your communication. Be thorough, but concise. Make sure content is clear, useful and consistent.

Try to keep sentences short (approximately 20 words). Vary sentence length and structure to maintain interest and flow.

Keep paragraphs short (one to six sentences). Convey one idea or message per paragraph.

Do not depend on spell check. Proofreading out loud can reveal small errors the eye misses, as well as issues with sentence length and comprehension. Read copy once for typos and grammatical errors, and a second time for flow and organization.

Voice and Tone

ABC's voice is uniform across communications, but the tone should change depending on the platform and audience (e.g., a committee email versus a blog post or a conference program).

ABC's voice is authoritative, informative, productive, reliable, trustworthy and respectful. It is never sloppy, inappropriate or arrogant.

When it comes to tone, err on the side of formal versus informal, and speak to members like the business and construction experts they are. Avoid slang and jargon.

ABC-Specific Guidelines

On first reference, use Associated Builders and Contractors.

- Use ABC on second reference or in materials directed to internal audiences (e.g., chapters or members) already familiar with the association
- Never: The Associated Builders and Contractors or Associated Builders & Contractors
- The possessive form is Associated Builders and Contractors’
- Only in legal documents: Associated Builders and Contractors Inc.

Capitalize the full proper names of ABC chapters.

- Lowercase “the chapter” and “the association” when referencing generally; also lowercase “chapters” when listing two or more chapters
- When distinguishing between the national office and a chapter, capitalize ABC National
 - ABC’s Metro Washington Chapter was recognized three times at the awards breakfast.
 - The ABC Maine and Chesapeake chapters offer online training.
 - The association lobbied for fair and open competition.

Use “chair” or “chairperson” to identify leaders; the plural is “chairs.”

Capitalize the full proper names of committees or councils; lowercase general references. Lowercase the word “committees” when listing more than one.

- The Mechanical Contractors Council will meet on Tuesday.
- The ABC Executive Committee met last month. During the meeting, the committee approved the 2016 budget.
- The Communication, Finance and Workforce Development committees will meet in March.

For “Board of Directors,” capitalize and use the full name on first reference; lowercase subsequent and general references.

- The ABC National Board of Directors met in June. At the meeting, several board members pledged to become partners in the Construction Coalition for a Drug- and Alcohol-free Workplace.
- The ABC Virginia Chapter Board of Directors will meet in June. The board plans to set annual recruitment goals at the meeting.

Do not capitalize
merit shop
unless it is part
of a title.

Do not capitalize “merit shop” unless it is part of a title (e.g., Merit Shop Training Inc., the educational affiliate of the ABC Texas Gulf Coast Chapter).

- Choose carefully among nonunion, open shop and merit shop: all nonunion contractors are open shop; merit shop refers specifically to ABC members.
- Capitalize names of labor unions, but do not capitalize “organized labor” or “building trades.”
- Do not capitalize contractor, member, strategic partner or association unless it is part of a proper name or a headline or title.

It’s OK to use ABC PAC on first reference.

Do not capitalize (or hyphenate) “free enterprise” unless you’re referring to the Free Enterprise Alliance (FEA).

Use right-to-work. (Include quotes only for the purpose of explaining the term.)

Do not refer to construction workers as men or guys; it’s better to say the “construction workforce” or “craft professionals” or “journey-level worker.”

AQC is an accreditation or a credential; STEP is a status or level.

Excellence in Construction® and ABC Young Professionals™ are trademarked.

- Only use the trademark symbol once—the first time the term is mentioned (but not in the headline, title or anyplace it would end up in the URL of web copy).
- Always make the symbol a superscript and put punctuation before it.
 - Excellence in Construction.® (not Excellence in Construction®.)

Construction Executive magazine is italicized; newsletter titles are not (Newsline, Merit Connection).

- Construction Backlog Indicator and Construction Confidence Index are capitalized.
- Webinar titles are capitalized online or in promotional materials; no quotes.
- Blog names and hashtags are generally lowercase but can include capitalization for the sake of clarity (e.g., TheTruthAboutPLAs.com, HaltTheAssault.com or #ABCMeritShopProud).
- Apps are referred to as the ABC Events app and ABC Action app; only capitalize the name of the app as it appears in app stores.

Do not refer to
construction
workers as
men or guys.

Keep one word and lowercase: “email,” “website” and “internet.”

- Do not capitalize any letters in email addresses and do not include “www” or “http” in website names.
 - For more information, visit abc.org.
 - If you have questions about the ABC Style Guide, email reichle@abc.org.

The preferred style for telephone numbers is: (202) 595-1505.

The full address for ABC National is: 440 First St., N.W., Suite 200, Washington, DC, 20001.

Speaker bios should be about 65 words long and include the person’s company, title and expertise, with academic degrees if space allows or they are material to the speaking engagement.

- Use full name on first reference; use last name only on subsequent references.
- Capitalize titles when they directly precede a name; lowercase titles when they follow a name.
- Never use Dr., Mrs., Mr., etc.
- Avoid using abbreviations (B.A., M.A., Ph.D.) when mentioning someone’s academic degrees; instead, use “bachelor’s degree” (or Bachelor of Arts degree), “master’s degree” (or Master of Science degree), “associate degree” or “doctorate.”
- Avoid listing professional designations such as CET, AIA, LEED AP, etc., unless material to the topic. CPA or CFP can be appropriate if the speaker is presenting on an accounting or financial topic.
 - John Boerstler is executive director of NextOp, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing job placement assistance, mentorship and support to veterans. NextOp connects skilled mid-level service members with Gulf Coast employers in the energy, construction and health care sectors—all at no cost to the veterans or employers. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps for eight years and was a 2011 Marshall Fellow.

Capitalize titles when they directly precede a name; lowercase titles when they follow a name.

Government-Specific Guidelines

Do not capitalize “federal” unless it is part of a proper name or title.

Always capitalize “Congress” but do not capitalize “congressional” unless it is part of a proper name or title.

Lowercase and spell out “fiscal year 2021” on first reference; abbreviate it to “FY 2021” on subsequent references.

Use “U.S. House of Representatives” and “U.S. Senate” on first reference; “House” and “Senate” are acceptable on subsequent references.

Capitalize “Democratic Party” and “Republican Party” (GOP is an acceptable synonym).

For political titles, use full name and title on first reference, along with their party affiliation and state (offset by commas); on second reference, use last name only.

- Abbreviate “senator” before a name as “Sen.” (“Sens.” when listing multiple) and abbreviate “representative” before a name as “Rep.” (“Reps.” when listing multiple); same for “governor” as “Gov.”/“Govs.”
- Lowercase “senator,” “representative” and “governor” when referenced generally.
- When referring to several representatives and senators, use *members of Congress*.
- Use “President Biden” on first reference; “Biden” on subsequent references.
- Lowercase general references to “the president” and “the administration.”
 - Rep. Virginia Foxx, R.-N.C., and Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., introduced similar bills endorsed by several members of Congress.
 - When asked about the bill, Sens. Cornyn and Rubio said they were hopeful it would pass.
 - It’s important for ABC members to reach out to state representatives and governors through grassroots efforts.
 - President Biden issued the executive order yesterday. Prior to that, the Biden administration reiterated the importance of apprenticeships.

When referring to several representatives and senators, use *members of Congress*

Use the following abbreviations when referring to an elected official's state; states with shorter names are not abbreviated:

Ala.	Colo.	Ga.	Iowa	Md.	Mo.	N.J.	Ohio	S.C.	Vt.	Wyo.
Alaska	Conn.	Hawaii	Kan.	Mass.	Mont.	N.M.	Okla.	S.D.	Va.	
Ariz.	D.C.	Idaho	Ky.	Mich.	Neb.	N.Y.	Ore.	Tenn.	Wash.	
Ark.	Del.	Ill.	La.	Minn.	Nev.	N.C.	Pa.	Texas	W.Va.	
Calif.	Fla.	Ind.	Maine	Miss.	N.H.	N.D.	R.I.	Utah	Wis.	

Capitalize the name of a bill (no quotes necessary) followed by the bill number in parentheses.

- If the bill is commonly referred to by a shortened name or acronym, use it on second reference.
- If the bill has been introduced in both the House and Senate, refer to both bill numbers in parentheses.
- On subsequent references, do not capitalize “act.”
 - Associated Builders and Contractors today voiced its strong support for the Fair and Open Competition Act (H.R. 1858/S. 907).
 - ABC submitted testimony on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Under WIOA, grant money is available for skilled trades training.
 - The Davis-Bacon Act established the requirement for paying prevailing wages on public projects. ABC has called for an overhaul of the 90-year-old act.

Capitalize the full proper names of courts at all levels (e.g., the “U.S. Supreme Court” or the “District Court”); do not capitalize “the court” on second reference or when speaking generally.

- Use digits for courts identified by a number
 - The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is considering the contractor’s case. It will take several months for the court to resolve the case.
- Do not italicize court cases
 - The case of *Schneider Electric v. Western Surety Company* underscores the problematic interaction of incorporation by reference clauses in surety bonds.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Capitalize and spell out proper names on first reference; on second reference, use the acronym or abbreviation or spell out general references to the proper name; do not add an acronym or abbreviation in parentheses after the name.

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics released the latest unemployment numbers last week. BLS data is released monthly.
- The 2021 ABC Legal Conference took place in June. Presentations from the conference will be available online next week.

Always spell out “subcontractors” and “general contractors” (never “subs” or “GCs”).

Use “No.” with a digit to indicate position or rank.

- Arizona Is the No. 1 Merit Shop Construction State, According to ABC’s 2020 Scorecard.

Spell out “United States” when used as a noun; abbreviate “U.S.” when used as an adjective.

- Insurance premiums have been rising steadily in the United States.
- More than 87% of the U.S. construction workforce chooses not to join a union.

Spell out
United States
when used
as a noun.

Abbreviate “Ave.” “St.” and “Blvd.” when used with a numbered address; spell out all similar words (Drive, Road, Terrace, Alley, Circle, Court). Use U.S. Postal Service guidance for mailing addresses.

- Spell out all street names when used generically or with two or more names.
- Use digits for addresses (Exception: spell out “First” through “Ninth” when used as street names).
- Abbreviate compass points to indicate directional parts of a street or city quadrants.
 - The tour will depart from 440 First St., Suite 200.
 - The closest Metrorail station is at the corner of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues.
 - The hotel is located at 100 S. Fairfax Drive, and the restaurant is located at 100 First St., N.W.

Numbers

Spell out:

- A number at the beginning of a sentence unless it is a year
 - Twenty-six students graduated from the ABC Inland Pacific Chapter’s training program.
- Numbers used in casual expressions
 - Members raised thousands of dollars for ABC PAC.
- Numbers below 10
 - The Craft Professional of the Year was selected from a group of four finalists.
- “First” through “ninth” when indicating a sequence
 - Competitors who placed second and third in the National Craft Championships received a tool set.
- Fractions; use hyphens between words
 - Two-thirds of STEP participants logged fewer jobsite accidents last year.
- Numbers at the beginning of a headline
 - Ten Ways to Improve Efficiency Onsite

Use digits for:

- A year that starts a sentence
 - 2016 was a great year for membership recruitment.
- Numbers 10 and higher
 - All 68 chapter presidents met at the ABC National office.
- “10th” and higher when indicating a sequence
 - ABC celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2020.
- Percentages; it is now acceptable to use the % symbol instead of writing out “percent”
 - More than 87% of construction workers choose not to join a union.
 - The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a 0.7% change in unemployment.
- Measurements
 - The 200,000-square-foot building will be completed in December.
 - The job entails removing 1 million cubic yards of dirt from the site.
- Ratios and court decisions; use hyphens between numbers
 - In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the previous ruling.

Spell out
numbers below
10; use digits
for numbers 10
and higher.

- Dollar amounts
 - The executive order on PLAs affects projects exceeding \$25 million.
 - Wages are increasing by 5 cents per hour.
- Ages
 - Former ABC National Chair Joe Rodgers passed away at age 75.
- Congressional districts
 - Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., represents the 23rd district of California.

When you do not know an exact number or if a number is too cumbersome to spell out, use “more than,” “fewer than” or “less than.”

- Do not use “over” or “under” with numerals.
- Use “fewer than” when referring to individual items.
- Use “less than” when referring to an amount/quantity.
 - More than 200 ABC members visited their representatives on Capitol Hill during Legislative Week.
 - Contractors with fewer than 10 employees are not subject to the new regulation.
 - Less than 13% of construction workers join a union.

Dates, Times and Seasons

Spell out months when used alone or with a year but no date.

- Abbreviate the following when used with a specific date: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.
- Do not use an ordinal number (1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th) after a specific day of the month
 - The committee approved the bill in September 2019, but the Senate didn't vote on it until Dec. 2.

There's no need to reference the year if something is occurring (or occurred) in the current year; however, in "evergreen" materials that are updated infrequently, exist online or do not display a date, it is best to include the year for the sake of clarity.

- If the full date and year is used, a comma must precede and follow the year.
 - Experts testified Nov. 30, 2015, and the new regulations are scheduled to take effect Feb. 3.

Use 1990s (not 1990's).

Use 3 p.m. (not 3:00 pm).

- Exception: The "3:00" style is acceptable for schedule-at-a-glance charts in meeting programs/agendas so all times align graphically in columns.

Geography

Lowercase compass directions and sections of a state or city; capitalize U.S. regions.

- The office is located north of Raleigh in eastern North Carolina.
- Clark Construction performs work all along the East Coast.

Only capitalize "city" if it's part of a proper name ("New York City" vs. "the city of Chicago")

Spell out the names of the 50 U.S. states, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base. Exception: These cities do not need to be followed by a state:

Atlanta	Dallas	Las Vegas	New York	Salt Lake City
Baltimore	Denver	Los Angeles	Oklahoma City	San Antonio
Boston	Detroit	Miami	Philadelphia	San Diego
Chicago	Honolulu	Milwaukee	Phoenix	San Francisco
Cincinnati	Houston	Minneapolis	Pittsburgh	Seattle
Cleveland	Indianapolis	New Orleans	St. Louis	Washington

- Gorski Engineering, Collegeville, Pennsylvania, performs work throughout Philadelphia.

Capitalization in Titles and Headlines

Capitalize all words in headlines except articles, prepositions and conjunctions of three or fewer letters (a, an, the, for, of, on, up, and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet.); unless any of those start the title.

- ABC to the White House: Do Not Exclude 87% of America's Construction Industry From Your Infrastructure Plan.

Capitalize “up” when used as an adverb particle:

- Construction Spending Is Up.

Punctuation and Formatting

Spacing

- Only use a single space between sentences.

Commas

- An essential clause cannot be eliminated without changing the meaning of a sentence and therefore should not be offset by commas; a nonessential clause can be eliminated without changing the basic meaning of a sentence and therefore must be offset by commas. Use “which” for nonessential phrases.
 - The Users Summit that was held in New Orleans attracted the most ABC members to date.
 - The summit, which attracted the most ABC members to date, was held in New Orleans.
- The same rules apply to essential phrases (do not use a comma) and nonessential phrases (use a comma).
 - The website abcvotes.com is a great resource. [ABC has several websites, so the name is essential to the meaning of the sentence.]
 - The 2021 Craft Professional of the Year, Pat Willburn, hails from Texas. [His name is not essential to the sentence: The 2021 Craft Professional of the Year hails from Texas.]
- In a series, do not put a comma before the conjunction (and, or) unless the final element of the series also includes a conjunction (i.e., the comma would help clarify the series).
 - The conference is geared toward ABC chapter attorneys, chapter executives and attorneys specializing in employer labor law.
 - The task force developed guidance on the type and frequency of crane inspections, who should conduct the inspections, and what the qualifications should be for in-house and third-party inspectors.

Only use a
single space
between
sentences.

- When one or more elements of a series contain information that must be offset by a comma, use a semicolon to separate each element.
 - Panel participants included Mike Bellaman, president and CEO of Associated Builders and Contractors; John Engler, president of the Business Roundtable; and Mark Edward Tucker, executive director and president of the American Institute of Architects.
 - The ABC Craft Professional of the Year worked on carpentry jobs in Portland, Oregon; Sacramento, California; San Francisco; and Tucson, Arizona.

Quotations

- Put a comma, question mark or exclamation point inside the closing quotation mark if it is followed by attribution; if the quote requires a question mark or exclamation.
- Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes and for content quoted in a headline.
 - “How can we reach out to more construction management students?” asked ABC President and CEO Mike Bellaman.
 - “ABC’s grassroots efforts are a great way to participate at the local level, or as Joe Rodgers always said, ‘Get into politics or get out of business,’” Bellaman said.
 - ABC Disappointed With Final ‘Persuader’ Rule
- Radio and television program, podcast and blog titles are put in quotes; book, magazine and newspaper titles and names are italicized.
 - ABC leaders were quoted in *The Washington Post* and “The 11th Hour” on WRTA-AM radio in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

Magazine and newspaper titles and names are italicized; newsletter names are not.

Colons

- Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.
 - Though most people are focused on the oil crisis, another shortage looms large: water.
 - ABC’s mission is clear: Advance the merit shop philosophy and encourage open competition.

Exclamation Points

- Use only to express a high degree of emotion (use sparingly).

Parentheses

- Place punctuation inside the parentheses when a complete sentence appears inside the parentheses; place punctuation outside the parentheses when the parentheses contains only a word or phrase.
 - Chapters should send their grant applications to ABC National. (ABC National will forward all chapter applications to CURT at one time.)
 - Try to keep the grant application brief (approximately 10 pages).

Possessives

- Use “apostrophe s” for singular and plural nouns that do not end in “s.”
 - The chapter’s Community Service Committee formed a new partnership with Habitat for Humanity.
 - The chair’s travel plans depend on the weather.
- Use only an apostrophe after plural nouns and singular proper names that end in “s.”
 - Members’ attendance at ABC Leadership Week has increased dramatically during the last two years.
 - Associated Builders and Contractors’ 68 chapters are located across the country.

Words ending
in *ly* do not
require a hyphen.

Hyphens

- Use when two or more words that express a single concept precede a noun.
 - The full-time job requires some travel. (Alternative: Some travel is required if you want to work here full time.)
 - The grand opening for the 12-story office building occurred this morning.
- Words ending in “ly” do not require a hyphen.
 - The federally funded job finished two weeks ahead of schedule.
- Use hyphens when modifying three or more words in an adjective phrase.
 - Know-it-all attitude, black-and-white photography, get-out-the-vote efforts.
 - Avoid duplicate vowels, so anti-intellectual is hyphenated but preconference isn’t.

Word Usage

Companies and organizations are single entities and therefore take a singular possessive (it vs. they; its vs. their).

- Because ABC National emphasized recruitment last year, it grew to 21,000 members.
- The U.S. Department of Energy reported one of its main goals for 2021 is to advance more nuclear energy projects.

“Contractor” can refer to a business or entity (its) or a person (he, she or they).

- The company earned its Accredited Quality Contractor credential in 2007.
- The contractor arrived early for a meeting with her business partners.

“That” introduces an essential clause; “which” introduces a nonessential or parenthetical clause that must be offset by commas.

- OSHA approved a new rule that requires contractors to provide employees with personal protective equipment.
- The new rule, which OSHA announced last month, could mean increased expenses for business owners.

Who modifies
a person; *that*
modifies a
thing or entity

“It’s” means “it is;” its is a possessive pronoun.

- It’s not the first time that ABC explained its position on the issue to Congress.

“Who” modifies a person; “that” modifies a thing or entity.

- The employee who arrives at the jobsite first today will receive a free cup of coffee.
- Contractors that use STEP often change employees’ attitudes about safety.

“Who” is grammatically the subject (never the object) of a sentence, clause or phrase:

- The employee who resolved the problem was awarded a bonus.

“Whom” is used when someone is the object of a verb or preposition:

- The employee to whom the bonus was awarded got the promotion.

“Affect” is a verb that means to influence; “effect” is a verb that means to cause, but is usually used as a noun that means “a result.”

- Project labor agreements affect bidding on a project.
- Only by voting in this election can we effect change.
- Project labor agreements have a negative effect on communities.

“Because” denotes a specific cause-effect relationship; “since” is used when referencing a period of time.

- Because the project developers signed a PLA, no ABC members bid on the contract.
- The rule has not been updated since the 1980s.

“Between” is used with two items; “among” is used with more than two items.

- Negotiations between the contractor and supplier are at a standstill.
- The funds were divided among four agencies.

“Anticipate” means to look ahead and prepare for something; “expect” means to make a reasonable estimate or regard something as likely to happen.

- ABC’s travel teams anticipate the outcome of the election will depend on a few key states.
- Economists expect the nonresidential construction industry to continue rebounding in 2021.

Ensure means
to guarantee;
insure refers
to insurance

“Ensure” means to guarantee; “insure” refers to insurance.

- LEED accreditation ensures contractors are truly qualified to build green projects.
- The ABC Insurance Trust insures many merit shop contractors.

“Continual” means frequently recurring; “continuous” means to occur without pause/interruption.

- The continual attacks on merit shop contractors are unacceptable.
- The continuous rain prevented the concrete from being poured today.

“Will” expresses future action; “would” expresses a conditional action or eventuality.

- Under the new law, crane operators will need to complete more training.
- If passed, the legislation would prevent merit shop contractors from participating in certain training opportunities.

“Compare to” likens things; “compare with” considers their similarities and differences.

- ABC’s economist compared the construction market to a dark storm.
- Compared with the housing market, commercial construction is performing well.

“During” means throughout the course of a period of time; “over” is a preposition that means above/higher or an adverb that means concluded/remaining.

- During the past year, the chapter recruited 20 new members.
- The contractor built condos over a remediated landfill.
- The membership drive is over in two weeks.

“e.g.” means for example; “i.e.” means in other words; both require a comma.

- Quality contractors recycle materials (e.g., plastics, steel and glass) on a regular basis.
- Quality contractors recycle materials (i.e., place them in separate bins onsite).

Use “whether” (not “whether or not”).

- Public comments will determine whether the proposed rule is revised.

“Latino” and “Hispanic” are not interchangeable. Hispanic refers to individuals who are either Spanish-speaking or descended from Spanish-speaking countries.

Latino refers to people of Latin American origin. So it would include people from Brazil, but not people from Spain. People from Spain are both Spanish and Hispanic. And people from Mexico are Hispanic, not Spanish.

“Hispanic” is the preferred term to describe people who are either Spanish-speaking or whose ethnic origin is a Spanish-speaking country.

- “Latino” is also acceptable as a noun or adjective.
- People from Brazil and Portugal are not Hispanic; they are Brazilian and Portuguese.
- Only people from Spain are Spanish.
- It’s best to ask people which term they prefer.

“Council” is an advisory group; “counsel” refers to legal guidance.

“Capitol” only applies to the building in Washington, D.C.; all other references should be spelled “capital.”

“Cement” is a soft powdery substance made from limestone, clay, sand and shale; “concrete” is a mixture of water, cement, sand, gravel and crushed rock.

Wireless internet is referred to as “Wi-Fi.”

Use “internet of things” (not “Internet of Things”); IoT is acceptable on second reference.

Use “toward,” not “towards.”

Use “forward,” not “forwards.”

Use “workers’ compensation” (not “worker’s comp”).

