NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Journey.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Communications & Marketing

NDOT Style Guide and Editorial Guidelines

Version 1

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Introduction

Consistency in what we say and how we say it defines how the public views us. Use this style guide to help you write and create material that inspires confidence in the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). Following this style guide is mandatory.

NDOT uses Associated Press (AP) Style in all communication and marketing materials. If you have questions about AP style, please call the Communications & Public Policy Division at (402) 471-4567.

Editorial Guidelines

A

abbreviations, acronyms

Write out the words that make up an acronym during its first use, with the acronym in parentheses.

Correct: Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT). S*ee* NDOT

Abbreviate titles when used before a full name.

Correct: Dr., Gov., Mr.

accident

Collision or crash, not accident. An accident is defined as anything that happens by chance without an apparent cause, or a mishap, especially one causing injury or death. Highway collisions or crashes usually have an underlying cause. As a result, words such as collision and crash are more accurate. Use people-first language when describing a collision. See *collision, crash*.

Correct: The driver of the car ran the stop sign and caused a collision.

addresses

Use abbreviations only with locations that feature a numbered address:

Correct: 100 College Ave.

Spell out and capitalize when they are part of a formal street name without a number.

Correct: The building is on College Avenue.

affect, effect

Affect, as a verb, means to influence. *Affect* as a noun is only used in reference to a display of emotion. Avoid using *affect* as a noun.

Correct: The project will affect traffic.

Effect is used as a noun, meaning the result of something.

Correct: The effect was overwhelming.

age

Always use numerals when referring to an individual or entity

Correct: 1-year-old child

Correct: The building is 5 years old

Correct: The student, 19, has a brother in his 20s.

apostrophe

Use apostrophes to form possessive nouns, to show the omission of letters, and to indicate plurals of letters, numbers, and symbols.

Correct: The 1960s was a turbulent decade.

Correct: NDOT has over 100 safety DVDs to loan to districts.

For plural nouns ending in s, add only an apostrophe.

For singular common nouns ending in s, add 's

Correct: The 1960s was a turbulent decade.

Correct: NDOT has over 100 safety DVDs to loan to districts.

associations

Use uppercase for the association names.

Correct: Nebraska Association of Public Employees

assure, ensure, insure

To assure someone is to remove doubt,

Correct: I assure you; I will get to work on time.

To ensure something is to make sure it occurs, to guarantee it.

Correct: I need to go to bed early to ensure I get to work on time.

To insure something or someone is to cover with an insurance policy.

Correct: Drivers may see an increase in their premium when the insure their cars this year.

B

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 single words. Also, reference lists intended as a menu of options require no punctuation.

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

Make sure you bring:

- Boots
- Hats
- Gloves
- Jackets

To prepare for winter travel across the state passes, consider:

- Checking pass condition reports before you depart.
- Packing a winter emergency kit in your car.
- Telling family or friends about your route and schedule.
- Updating your first aid training.

C

capital, capitol

Capital and capitol are pronounced the same but have different meanings.

Capital is the more common word, with a wider range of meanings. It can be used as a noun to refer to financial assets, to a city serving as the official seat of government, or to an uppercase letter. It can also be used as an adjective to mean "vital," "excellent," or "punishable by death."

Correct: Lincoln is the capital city of Nebraska.

Correct: The word "January" is always written with a capital J.

Capitol is a noun that refers to the building in which the legislative government meets.

Correct: The state capitol of Nebraska is in Lincoln.

capitalization

Do not capitalize "federal," "state," "department," "division," "board," "program," "section," etc., unless the word is part of a formal name. Capitalize common nouns such as party, river and street when they are part of a proper name. Examples:

Correct:

- The Nebraska Department of Transportation has 15 divisions and eight districts.
- Many employees of the State of Nebraska work on federal projects.
- She crossed the bridge over the Missouri River.
- He drove across the Mormon Bridge.

Incorrect:

- NDOT has 15 Divisions and eight Districts.
- Public Involvement Section works on Federal projects.
- Please print 10 copies of the Program Book.
- Nebraska Board of Public Roads Classifications and Standards has seven Board members.

chair

The preferred reference instead of chairman, chairwoman, chairperson. Capitalize before a name.

Correct: The chair attended the meeting.

city

Lowercase except as part of the formal title of city government.

Correct: The City of Lincoln is the capitol of Nebraska.

Correct: The city has three highways running through it.

collision

Highway collisions or crashes usually have an underlying cause. As a result, words such as collision and crash are more accurate. Do not use accident. Use people-first language when describing a collision. See *accident, crash.*

Correct: The driver of the car ran the stop sign and caused a collision.

comma in a series

Use comma to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in most simple series:

Correct: District 2 is working on Dodge, Pacific and Harney streets.

If omitting a comma before the conjunction could lead to confusion, then use it:

Correct: Traffic will be maintained with lane restrictions, a pilot car and flaggers, and temporary traffic signals.

The sentence above has two conjunctions; a comma before the second "and" is for clarity.

comprise, compose

Comprise means "to be made up of." The whole of something comprises its parts.

Compose means "to make up." The parts of something compose the whole.

Correct: A computer is composed of a motherboard, a processor, and screen.

Incorrect: A computer is comprised of a motherboard, a processor, and screen.

Correct: The building is composed of many floors

Incorrect: The building is comprised of many floors

courtesy titles

Do not use courtesy titles such as Mr., Mrs., Ms. The exception is Dr., which can be used on first reference. The preferred style is to use the academic degree designation rather than the Dr. courtesy title.

Correct: John Doe, Ph.D., Jane Doe, Ed.D.

crash

Highway collisions or crashes usually have an underlying cause. As a result, words such as collision and crash are more accurate. Use people-first language when describing a collision. Do not use accident. See *accident, collision.*

Correct: The driver of the car ran the stop sign and caused a crash.

D

dateline

Abbreviate Nebraska. Abbreviate months, with the exception of March, April, May, June, July

Correct: April 4, 2023 (Lincoln, Neb.)

dates

Use day of the week, comma, month, date, comma, and finally year when needed, followed by a comma or other punctuation mark (most often a period).

Correct: Monday, April 1, 2018

Correct: On Monday, April 1, 2018, the students attended class.

For dates, do not use superscript

Correct: April 1

Incorrect: April 1st

Month-year combinations don't require commas.

Correct: April 2018

Incorrect: April, 2018

When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. March, April, May, June and June are spelled out.

Use an apostrophe to indicate numbers from a year that are left out. Do not use an apostrophe before the letter "s."

    Correct: The last time the road was repaired was '99.

    Correct: The road was constructed in the 1990s.

    Incorrect: The road was constructed in the 1990's.

Separate dates involving spans of time with an en-dash or hyphen.

    Correct: 2000–05

days of the week

Avoid abbreviating except in table format. Do not use periods after abbreviations in table format.

    Correct:

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

    Incorrect:

Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.

    Correct: The library is open Monday through Saturday. It is closed on Sunday.

    Incorrect: The library is open Mon. through Sat.. It is closed on Sun.

dimensions

Use numerals and spell out inches, feet, yards, etc. to indicate depth, height, length and width.

- He is 5 feet, 6 inches tall.
- The rug is 9 feet by 12 feet.
- The land reaches a height of 600 feet above sea level.

directions

Lowercase when referring to compass direction: east, western, northwest, southbound, etc. Capitalize when referring to a region.

    Correct: If you drive north for three miles, you will be at your destination.

    Correct: The storm hit the Midwest hard.

disabled, handicapped, impaired

In general, do not describe an individual as disabled or handicapped unless it is clearly pertinent to a story. When such words are used, never use them as modifiers before the noun.

    Correct: The person with disabilities was describing his accident.

    Incorrect: The disabled person was speaking.

distances

Always use numerals:

    Correct: Crews will pave 4 miles of I-80.

    Incorrect: Crews will pave four miles of I-80.

drone

Spell out "unmanned aircraft system" followed by "commonly known as a drone, …". On second reference, use the term "drone." Do not use the abbreviation UAS or UAV. See *unmanned aircraft system*.

E

e.g., i.e.

The term e.g. is used to mean "for example" and is used to demonstrate more than one example. The term i.e. is used for rephrasing, meaning "that is" and is used in singular instances.

Correct: "She's a Husker, i.e., she's from Nebraska.

Correct: The library is a great place to find free resources (e.g. wifi, audiobooks and bestsellers).

email

No hyphen, all lowercase.

emoji

Use emoji like you would gestures or context. Do not use parentheses to describe an emoji to avoid confusing readers.

Correct: I travel in trains, planes and automobiles.

Correct: I travel in 🚆 ✈ and 🚗

Incorrect: I travel in 🚆 (trains) ✈ (planes) and 🚗 (automobiles)

F

farther, further

The widely accepted rule is to use farther when being literal and discussing a physical distance.

Correct: "He went farther down the road."

Further is used when discussing a more symbolic distance or to discuss a degree or extent.

Correct: "I wanted to discuss it further, but we didn't have time."

federal

Lowercase when used as an adjective to distinguish something coming from the federal government. Use a capital letter for government bodies that use the word as part of their formal name.

Correct: federal funding, federal court, federal government.

Correct: Federal Highway Administration.

fiscal year, FY

Spell out "fiscal year" the first time in documents for a general or external audience, followed by FY in parentheses.

Correct: NDOT's fiscal year begins June 1. Each FY is June 1 through July 31.

Incorrect: The FY begins June 1 and ends July 31 of the following year.

H

highway designations:

Spell out the first time, followed by abbreviated form in parentheses. Use the abbreviated form on all other references. Do not capitalize highway or interstate if referencing without a number. Abbreviations are okay in headline.

Correct: The interstate remains open.

Correct: Interstate 80 (I-80) is closed due to a crash at mile marker 348. I-80 will reopen as soon as police and emergency vehicles have cleared the area.

Correct: United States 77 (US-77) in Nebraska runs through Gage, Lancaster, Saunders, Dodge, Burt, Thurston, Dakota counties.

Correct: Nebraska Highway 25 (N-25) is located in Hitchcock, Hayes, and Lincoln counties.

homepage

One word. NDOT has one homepage, the first page of the site, and other pages are webpages.

http:, https:

Include with URLs that do not begin with www.

Correct: https://dot.nebraska.gov

Correct: www.amazon.com

I

imply, infer

Imply means to suggest or hint at what we mean but not say directly.

Correct: I didn't mean to imply that your grasp on grammar is bad.

Infer means to come to a conclusion based on something you think someone implied.

Correct: Am I right to infer that you think my grammar is bad?

internet

Do not capitalize.

iPad, iPhone

Standard Apple spelling. No hyphens.

its, it's

Its with no apostrophe is the possessive word

Correct: The sun is very bright, its rays blinded me.

It's is a contraction used where a sentence would normally read "it is."

Correct: It's warm and sunny outside.

Correct: It is warm and sunny outside.

J

job titles

Capitalize titles when they precede a name; general occupational titles should be lowercase. For dignitaries, keep the title on second reference.

Correct: District 2 Engineer Tom Goodbarn is attending a conference.

Incorrect: The District Engineer is in a meeting

Correct: Governor Jim Pillen participates in a monthly call-in show sponsored by the Nebraska Broadcasters Association. Governor Pillen is joined by Mark Vail of KLIN.

L

legislative titles

Abbreviate Rep., Reps., Sen., and Sens. as formal titles before one or more names in text. Spell out and lowercase representative and senator in other uses.

Correct: I met with Sens. Fischer and Ricketts yesterday.

Correct: I met with the senators from the western part of the state yesterday.

Correct: At lunch, I saw the representative from 3rd District.

Legislature

Capitalize when preceded by the name of a state. Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped but the reference is specifically to that state's Legislature. Lowercase legislature when used generically.

Correct: Nebraska Legislature

Correct: The Legislature convenes annually on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January in Lincoln.

Correct: There is a legislature in every state.

M

money

Always lowercase. Use the dollar sign except for casual references and amounts without a figure:

Correct:	$10	$1,000	$90,000
Incorrect:	10 dollars	1,000 dollars	90,000 dollars

Use exact figures up to $1 million. On figures more than $1 million, use a decimal. With ranges of amounts, don't drop designators such as million. Spell out million and billion following numerical figures.

Correct: $2.7 million, $6.28 billion

Correct: $8 million to $10 million

Incorrect: $8 to $10 million

N

names

On first reference, use the person's first and last name. On second reference, use only the last name, without title.

In general, use only last names on second reference. When it is necessary to distinguish between two people who use the same last name, use the last name on subsequent references.

Correct: Tom Goodbarn is the new District 2 engineer. Goodbarn was the engineer in District 1, located in southeastern Nebraska.

Nebraska Department of Transportation

Spell out in first mention as "the Nebraska Department of Transportation," followed by NDOT in parentheses. Abbreviate as NDOT in additional mentions, dropping "the."

Correct: The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) is the third largest agency for state of Nebraska.

Correct: NDOT is the third largest agency for state of Nebraska.

Incorrect: The NDOT is the third largest agency for state of Nebraska.

NDOT

Abbreviation for the agency. Must be spelled out on the first mention.

Correct: The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) has eight districts. NDOT also has 16 divisions.

Capitalize the word District and use the numeral for the number of the district. Lowercase district when used generically.

Correct: District 7 staff met with county officials.

Correct: The districts are ready for winter.

numbers

One through nine are spelled out, 10 and above are Arabic numerals. Exceptions: spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence; use numerical figures in percentages and tables. Use as the abbreviation when indicating position or rank.

Correct: No. 1 choice

Cardinal: Spell out one through nine and use numerals for 10 and above.

Ordinal: Spell out first through ninth and use figures for 10th and above.

Fraction: Use a hyphen when fractions are expressed in words and use numbers rather than words for mixed numbers.

Correct: In the survey, one-third of the respondents gave a score of 4 1/2 or better.

Percent: Use the % sign when paired with a number.

Correct: Average hourly pay rose 3% from a year ago.

When showing a range of percentages use the word with both numerals.

Correct: Between 5 percent and 10 percent of the employees agree.

In casual uses, use words rather than figures and numbers.

Correct:	She said he has a zero percent chance of winning.
Range:	Do not use "from" with a hyphen or en-dash. Use the noun after both numbers in ranges.
Correct:	from 300 to 400
Incorrect:	from 300–400
Correct:	$12 million to $14 million
Incorrect:	$12 to $14 million
Ratio:	Use figures and hyphens with no spaces.
Correct:	Fred used a ratio of 2-to-1 whereas a ratio of 5-3 was used by Maggie.

O

online

One word: do not hyphenate or capitalize.

P

period

Use a single space after a period and any other punctuation.

phone numbers

Use either parentheses or hyphens around area codes. Use hyphen between other number sets. Do not use periods.

Correct:	(402) 571-4567 or 402-471-4567
Incorrect:	402.471.4567

postal state abbreviations

Do not use postal state abbreviations to abbreviate states in text. See *state names.*

AL	CO	HI	KS	MA	MT	NM	OK	SD	VA
AK	CT	ID	KY	MI	NE	NY	OR	TN	WA
AZ	DE	IL	LA	MN	NV	NC	PA	TX	WV
AR	FL	IN	ME	MS	NH	ND	RI	UT	WI
CA	GA	IA	MD	MO	NJ	OH	SC	VT	WY

principal, principle

Principal can be used as a noun to refer to a person in authority, the perpetrator of a crime, or the capital sum of a loan. It can also be used as an adjective to mean "first," "most important," or "primary."

Correct:	The principal at our school is strict when it comes to attendance.
Correct:	The principal finding of the study is sound.

Principle is a noun used to refer to a legal, moral, scientific rule or standard.

Correct:	He refused to pay the extra shipping costs on principle.

    Correct: What are the 4 principles of scientific method?

program

Lowercase when using generally, unless referring to a formal program.

    Correct: Nebraska Surface Transportation Program

    Correct: We will print copies of the program book on request.

pronouns

Maintain subject-pronoun agreement. Avoid referring to an inanimate subject as "they."

    Correct: Microsoft unveils its new product this week.

    Incorrect: Microsoft unveils their new product this week.

Another option is to rewrite it so that a person is the subject.

    Correct: Microsoft executives unveil their new product this week.

Do not attempt to achieve gender neutrality with pronouns using s/he or he/she. Rewrite the sentence in a plural form to make it easier to read.

    Instead of: A staff member can access the data by logging into his or her account.

    Rewrite as plural: Staff members can access the data by logging in to their accounts.

publication titles

Capitalize periodicals, such as magazines and newspapers. Capitalize and use quotation marks on magazine article titles and books.

    Correct: "Standard Specifications for Highway Construction"

    Correct: The National Academies Press (NAP) publishes transportation journals.

Q

quotation marks

Quotation marks should enclose a direct quote or a special or unusual meaning. Single quotation marks should be used only for a quote within a quote. Do not use quotation marks for emphasis.

The period and comma always go within the quotation marks. The dash, semicolon, question mark and exclamation point go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence.

Quotation marks are also used to indicate the title of an article or section of a larger document.

    Correct: Franklin said, "A penny saved is a penny earned."

    Correct: The reporter told me, "When I interviewed the quarterback, he said they simply 'played a better game.'"

    Correct: Phillip asked, "Do you need this book?"

    Correct: Does Dr. Lim always say to her students, "You must work harder"?

S

state

Do not capitalize unless part of a formal name or when as an adjective.

Correct: The Nebraska Department of Transportation oversees the state highway system.

Incorrect: Nebraska roads are built and maintained with State funds.

state names

The following states are abbreviated. Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah are never abbreviated. Do not use postal abbreviations. See postal state abbreviations.

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

statewide

No hyphen, always one word.

suffixes

Abbreviate Jr., Sr., III, punctuate. Capitalize first letter only. You do not need to precede with a comma.

Correct: Martin Luther King Jr.

Incorrect: Martin Luther King, Jr.

T

that, which

The difference between which and that depends on whether the clause is restrictive or nonrestrictive.

Restrictive clauses contain information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence.

- In a restrictive clause, use that.

Correct: His car that has a flat tire is in the garage.

(He owns multiple vehicles; one is a car with a flat tire.)

Nonrestrictive clauses do not limit the meaning of the sentence. You can remove details, but the meaning of the sentence won't change.

- In a nonrestrictive clause, use which.

Correct: His car, which has a flat tire, is in the garage.

Correct: His car is in the garage.

(He owns a car, and it has a flat tire.)

time

Use figures except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes. Do not include zeros in full-hour times. Use both a.m. and p.m. if it is not the same time of day. Use an en-dash or hyphen with no spaces to depict spans of time.

Correct: The meeting is 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m. on Tuesday.

Incorrect: The meeting is from 8:30–5 p.m. on Tuesday.

Correct: The meeting is from 8–9:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

Incorrect: The meeting is from 8 a.m.–9:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

U-Z

United States, U.S.

Spell out when it stands alone; use U.S. when it is a modifier

Correct: The United States is relatively young by world standards, being less than 250 years old.

Correct: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has approximately 37,000 civilians and soldiers. delivering engineering services in more than 130 countries.

unmanned aircraft system

Use on first reference when referring to a drone, followed by "… also known as a drone…" Do not abbreviate as UAS or UAV. See *drone*.

URL

Capitalize and use without periods when referring to a Universal Resource Locator, the address of a website. Also known as a link.

web

Lowercase when referring to the World Wide Web. May be used in first and second references.

Correct: the web, webmaster, website, webpage

ZIP code

A comma is not necessary between the state and the ZIP code. Include the plus 4 if using a PO box.

Correct: Lincoln NE 68502

Correct: Lincoln NE 68509-4759

Additional Resources

- [Glossary of Road Design and Construction Terms](#)
- [AP Style Guide](#)

Commonly Confused Words

assure, ensure, insure
affect, effect
comprise, compose
capital, capitol
farther, further
imply, infer
its, it's
that, which
principal, principle

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