Seattle.gov Web Content Style Guidelines

# Plain Language

#### Organize Information Clearly

* Put the most important information first.
* Group related elements.
* Use descriptive headings for each topic.

#### Use Personal Pronouns (You, We, I)

### Write This

OED creates action plans to promote growth in these key industry sectors::

* Workforce Development
* Manufacturing
* Maritime
* Life Sciences
* Information and Communications Technology
* Global Health/Healthcare
* Clean Technology
* Film and Music
* Tourism

**Not This**  
Tourism, Film and Music, Clean Technology, Global Health and Global Healthcare, Information and Communications Technology, Life Sciences, Maritime, Manufacturing and Workforce Development are the key industry sectors whose growth is promoted by the development and implementation of strategies and action plans, upon which OED strategically focuses.  
  
  
Use Familiar Words

* Avoid jargon and legalese.
* Limit use of abbreviations.
* Define acronyms and abbreviations.

**Write This**  
  
We rely on complaints from the public to identify potential violations of our housing, land use, construction, and other codes. We investigate your complaint and determine whether a property owner violated our rules.

**Not This**

As outlined in City of Seattle (COS) City Code SMC XXXXXX, it is the official position of COS that all complaints from customers are to be investigated in order to determine whether a property owner has violated COS rules pursuant to our Rules and Regulations as outlined in City of Seattle (COS) City Code SMC XXXXXX. Therefore COS wishes to invite members of the public to submit complaints in regards to violations that may or may not have occurred in the area of housing, land use, construction and other COS codes.

#### Be Concise: Use One Word to Replace Many

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Wordy: | Concise: |
| * for the reason that * considering the fact that * this is why | * because, why |
| * on the occasion of * in a situation in which * under circumstances in which | * when |

[***More examples***](#oneword)

#### Cut Every Word that Isn’t Needed

A sentence should be < 20 words; a paragraph < 6 sentences.

### Write This

Puget Sound experienced damaging winter storms, cold weather, lowland snow and heavy wind during 2006/2007. It remains to be seen whether this was an anomaly or a climate shift caused by global warming.

### Not This However, in the winter of 2006/2007, the Puget Sound area experienced a number of damaging winter storms, lowland snow, wind storms, and a weeks-long string of below-freezing days -- it remains to be seen whether this winter is an anomaly or part of a larger climatological shift caused by global warming.

#### Use Active Voice

### Write This

Please tell us how we can improve our service.

Ask for a printed document.

### Not This

Your comments and suggestions for improving our information to and coordination with you are very welcome. The documents listed here are also available in hardcopy from us.

#### Write Instructions in the Affirmative

### Write This

Complete the top section and sign at the bottom before sending us this form.

### Not This

Do not send in this form if you have not completed the top section and if you have not yetsigned it at the bottom.

#### Make the First Sentence Descriptive

### Write This

**Recycle at Your Home**  
  
Recycling is good for the environment, and it’s the law — City ordinance bans recyclable paper, cardboard, glass and plastic bottles, and aluminum and tin cans from garbage containers.

**Recycling is Free**

Recycling service is provided at no cost to Seattle residents.

* Recycling look up tool
* Print fliers for your home or workplace, multiple languages

### Not This

**Recycling is awesome**

Recycling is good for the environment, and the City of Seattle freely supports all efforts to recycle throughout the city, such as in homes, businesses or parks, using resources to help all City customers access SPU services.

#### Make Action Sequences Clear

### Write This

**8 Steps to Adoption**  
 **Step 1. Look at the adoption animals**  
Ask an Animal Care Officer or volunteer to show you around.  
  
**Step 2. Fill out the initial paperwork**  
Fill out the adoption application.  
  
**Step 3. Interview with the Animal Care Officer**  
The Animal Care Officer reviews your application with you and asks some follow-up questions.  
  
**Step 4. Interact with the adoption animals**  
Once the Animal Care Officer has signed your adoption application, ask the officer or a volunteer to take you to the adoption room. When you see an animal you’re interested in, the volunteer or staff member can take him out of his cage so you can spend time with him. If you live with other people, the whole family meets your prospective pet.  
  
**Step 5. Meet with the Animal Care Officer for adoption counseling**  
This interview helps you make an informed choice about adopting and helps us find the right home for the animal. If you are new to pet ownership, the Animal Care Officer can talk with you about the lifestyle changes that pets bring, the traits of different breeds, and more.  
  
**Step 6. Complete the final adoption agreement**  
Sign the forms covering fees, licensing, vaccines, and more.  
  
**Step 7. Pay the cashier**  
Click here for the complete list of fees.  
  
**Step 8. Schedule a time to take your new pet home**  
The Animal Care Officer lets you know when. This time varies according to your pet’s spay/neuter needs.

### Not This

The Animal Care Officer will review your completed application after you have taken a look at the adoption animals, and then you can interact with the adoption animals, followed by an adoption counseling session, signing more forms and an adoption agreement. You’ll also need to pay for services and schedule an appointment to take your pet home. The Animal Care Officer will show you around the animals, review your application, ask follow up questions, sign your adoption application, discuss lifestyle changes that pates bring, and let you know when you can bring home your pet. The interview process helps us find the right home for the animal and helps you make the right choice in new pets. Other forms you will need to sign include licensing, vaccines, spay/neuter needs, and so forth.

#### Make Pages Easy to Scan

### Write This

### You can:

### Call the City Information and Complaint Line at 206-684-2489 (CITY) voice or (TTY) 7-1-1

### Write to P.O. Box 94726, Seattle, WA, 98124-4726

### Send a fax to 206-684-5529

### Fill out our service request form

### Look up a phone number

### Download Find It, Fix It, our mobile service request app

### Not This

### You can call the City Information and Complaint Line at 206-684-2489 (CITY) voice or (TTY) 7-1-1, write to P.O. Box 94726, Seattle, WA, 98124-4726, send a fax to 206-684-5529, fill out our service request form, look up a phone number, download Find It, Fix It, our mobile service request app.

#### Limit Text on Top-Level Pages

### Write This

**Office of Arts & Culture Opportunities**  
*Opportunities* is a one-stop shop for the latest arts-related jobs, funding sources, calls for artists and training opportunities. You may also submit an opportunity in one of the categories below. We moderate submissions, and listings are posted at the discretion of staff. It may take a couple of business days for your listing to appear.

### Not This

**Job, Funding, Artist Calls and Training Opportunities at the Office of Arts & Culture**  
Funding for grants, fellowships and awards, calls for entry in the visual and performing arts, auditions, competitions and residencies, full-time jobs, part-time jobs, freelance positions, consultant positions, internships, workshops, forums and training seminars are all available as part of the one-stop shopping you may find in the categories of Funding, Calls for Artists, Jobs and Training that are listed below, for which you can also submit an opportunity. However these opportunity submissions are moderated and anything you submit will not be posted until after it has been reviewed and approved by an Office of Arts & Culture Opportunity Submission moderator, and also it may take a few business days until your opportunity submission has been reviewed and approved before it appears as a listing under the category in which you submitted it.

#### Good Writing Page Example from CMS-hosted website:



#### Required and Recommended Fields on CMS pages

In most cases, the Page Name as the page is being created, and the Title of the page, will be the same.

The Excerpt field should contain one or two concise sentences describing the content of the page, and/or what customers can find on the page. The Excerpt field will be used by other pages, either on your own department site, another department site, or on a Seattle.gov portal page.

Here’s an example of how the Title and Excerpt are used in a section of a Seattle.gov portal page:



Note the Title, Excerpt and Thumbnail Image field content represented in this example.

Thumbnail dimensions standards are 75 x 75 pixels. Thumbnails should contain an Alt Text description of the image.

#### Style Guidelines addendum

1. City font standard – Arial
2. Refer to the City of Seattle as “we,” not “the City”.
3. Refer to the customer as “you.”
4. Only capitalize proper nouns.
5. Use title case for page headings (capitalize first letter of all words with more than 3 characters).
6. Use title case for subheadings (capitalize first letter of all words with more than 3 characters).
7. Use “and” instead of ampersand in body text…except in entity title that specifically uses ampersand such as Office of Arts & Culture.
8. Use ampersand instead of text in headers, except in entity title that specifically uses “and”.
9. Spell out percent.
10. Use numbers (1-10, etc.) to help facilitate skimming. Spell out if it works better in the narrative.
11. Define acronyms on first use on each page, for example, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); thereafter, use acronym. Limit use of acronyms per page to 5.
12. Don’t use acronyms in titles.
13. Put spaces before and after en dashes ( – ) and forward and backward slashes ( / \). Google search interprets words separated by en dashes or slashes without spaces as a single word.

#### Use One Word to Replace Many:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Wordy: | Concise: |
| * for the reason that * considering the fact that * this is why | * because, why |
| * on the occasion of * in a situation in which * under circumstances in which | * when |
| * it is necessary that * there is a need/necessity for * it is important that | * must, should |
| * is able to * has the opportunity to * has the ability to | * can |
| * it is possible that * there is a chance that * it could happen that | * may, can, should |
| * kind of | * rather |
| * equally as | * equally |
| * by means of | * with, in, by |
| * in order to | * to |
| * due to the fact that | * because |
| * during the course of | * during |
| * along these lines | * (avoid using this phrase) |
| * in spite of the fact that | * although |
| * in the event that | * if |
| * in the vicinity of | * near |
| * it is felt that | * (avoid using this phrase) |
| * the reason why is that | * because |
| * on the part of | * by |
| * presents a summary of | * summarizes |
| * not strong | * weak |
| * in regard to the | * regarding |
| * is in the process of negotiating | * is negotiating |