

# CCSF LANGUAGE STYLE AND USAGE GUIDE

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## STATEMENT OF INTENT

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The *CCSF Style and Usage Manual* provides universal and easy-to-use guidelines for the editors and writers of CCSF publications. This is not a guide to academic writing but a set of basic rules to guide the production of public-facing material. The manual is organized by topic, alphabetically. Marketing advertisements and collateral composed mostly of short lines of text, such as direct mail, brochures, and flyers, may require different treatment. For style questions not covered in this manual, please refer to the AP Stylebook or [AP Quick Reference Guide](#). CCSF will expand and update this style and usage guide as needed.

## VOICE GUIDELINES

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The following are general guidelines for the written voice to be used for web pages and collateral materials targeting faculty, students, and industry partners. This segment will continue to be developed as new requirements emerge.

As a general rule, CCSF publications should have a positive, clear, and inclusive tone. Please use active sentence construction, when possible, rather than passive.

### Pedagogical, policy, and college procedure publications

This voice should lean more formal than conversational. It will include pedagogical terminology. If pedagogical terms are widely understood within the education community, they need not be defined. A few pointers:

1. Avoid contractions (e.g., will not instead of won't).
2. Use the third person (the college or CCSF) rather than the first (I, we) or second (you).
3. First and second person may be used when they are part of a quotation.
4. Keep sentences as short and clear as possible.

### Marketing, publicity, and information for students

This voice should be more casual, with the aim of being clear, accessible, and inclusive. These guidelines apply to materials targeting both current and prospective students, as well as alumni. Standard grammar and usage rules still apply. The following are guidelines to observe:

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1. Contractions are allowed.
2. Do not use the pronoun “we” to refer to CCSF. This works against the college’s aim of setting an inclusive tone for campus publications. Please use “CCSF” or “the College” when applicable.

Example: CCSF values the social development of its students. The college offers a variety of cultural opportunities.
3. The pronoun *you* may be used to refer to the general audience of students.

Example: Librarians are available to help you navigate research databases.
4. The pronouns *they* and *their* may be used as both a singular and plural pronoun to enable gender inclusivity.

Example: Students know that they will register for spring courses in December.  
Example: A prospective student may withdraw their application before February.
5. Choose active verbs constructs over passive.

Example: Five thousand students took the exam, and 4,012 of them passed it.  
(Not: The exam was taken by 5,000 students and passed by 4,012.)
6. Aim for short and clear sentences. If a sentence is taking on multiple clauses, split it into a few shorter sentences.
7. If you have the option of using a simple, well-known word, choose it over the more obscure or complicated word.
8. Avoid pedagogical or theoretical terminology when writing student-facing materials, unless you are writing for a specific cohort who will understand the terminology universally.

## Industry-facing

Writers should aim for a clear, crisp, and accessible voice for readers who may not be familiar with technical, policy, or pedagogical jargon. Industry partners can include both large corporations and small, family businesses. Materials should portray CCSF as an accessible, welcoming, and orderly organization.

1. Contractions are allowed.
2. Do not use the pronoun *we* to refer to CCSF.
3. Avoid the using the second person to refer to the reader. Instead, use third-person labels such as “industry partners.”
4. Avoid technical, policy, and pedagogical jargon.
5. Choose active verb constructs over passive.
6. Aim for short and clear sentences.

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## ADA ACCESSIBILITY

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CCSF aims to provide ADA-compliant content on its website and online materials. Below are guidelines suggested specifically by [WebAIM](#), an organization that specializes in online text accessibility.

### Link phrasing

#### When providing a hyperlink

1. Avoid non-informative link phrases such as:

click here, here, more, read more, link to [xyz], info

Instead of “Click here to access department phone numbers,” the link phrase should simply read “department phone numbers.” Link phrasing should match the title of the page it is linking to as exactly as possible.

Example: Ideally, the embedded link would be titled “Department Phone Numbers” for ease of use.

2. URLs as link phrases

You may use a URL as a link if the URL is short and understandable. Do not use long URLs as link phrases.

Example: “<https://www.ccsf.edu/en/student-services/financial-aid.html>” is not an acceptable link phrase. However, [www.ccsf.edu](http://www.ccsf.edu) is acceptable, if you are directing a reader to the CCSF home page.

3. Images as link phrases

If you use an image as a link phrase, you must provide a written label that conveys both the image and the content of the link.

Example: A linked image of a soccer ball should include a label that reads “Soccer at CCSF” so it is accessible for all readers.

4. Link phrase appearance

Link phrases should be underlined and bolded. Link appearance should remain consistent throughout CCSF’s online publications.

### Bold, italics, and underlining

1. All three of these features should be used at a bare minimum. The rest of this document outlines when italics should be used in titles.
2. These features should not be used for emphasis or to grab a reader’s attention.

### Document structure

1. Headings, lists, and other structural elements give meaning and structure to web pages. Please maintain consistent structure within a web page.
2. Data tables should be labeled with headers.
3. Lists should be justified left (i.e., never centered).
4. Punctuation should be the same from list item to list item.
5. Please refer to [WebAIM](#) for further guidance.

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## Online media

1. Online videos and audio must have captions and a transcript. Archived media may have just a transcript.

## Written content

1. Do not use color alone to convey information. Any color coding must be accompanied by written labels.
2. Please apply ADA guidelines to all non-HTML content (e.g., PDFs, word processing documents, Power Point presentations, Adobe Flash Player documents). If non-HTML documents cannot be made ADA accessible, please consider converting them to HTML format.

## GENERAL USAGE GUIDE

### Abbreviations

#### 1. In titles

Abbreviations should be written out in their full text when they are part of website or article titles. If an abbreviation is part of an already published work, do not change it to the full text.

Example: *In Defense of American Liberties: A History of the ACLU* by Samuel Walker

#### 2. Initial/subsequent use

The first time an abbreviation is used in a publication, the expanded form should be used in the sentence, with the abbreviated form in parentheses.

Example: The campus chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was founded in 1978.

#### 3. Ampersands

In running text, use *and* rather than an ampersand. Ampersands may be used in lists, charts, and graphic elements. In titles of publications and names of organizations, departments, institutes, and centers, change ampersands to *and*. Use *and* with multiple authors.

Example: She sold her AT&T stock because of the company's R&D policies.

Example: Black & Decker won the Clear Manual Award from Editor and Publisher.

Example: Bailey, Rachel. *Victorian Childhood*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

#### 4. a.m. and p.m.

Use a space between the number and a.m. and p.m. Write a.m. and p.m. with periods, no spaces, and lowercase formatting.

Examples: 6 a.m., 10 p.m., from 1 to 3 p.m., from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m., from 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

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## 5. e.g. and i.e.

The abbreviations e.g. and i.e. are not interchangeable. The abbreviation e.g. means “for example,” whereas i.e. means “that is” or “namely.” Both are set off by commas in running text, and both are followed by a comma in standard usage.

Example: CCSF students have access to internships in numerous fields, e.g., tech, medicine, and education.

Example: The cost of living, i.e., high rents and mortgages, can prove prohibitive for our students.

## 6. States

In running text, spell out state names when standing alone or following the name of a city. For example, the District of Columbia may be spelled out or abbreviated when used alone, but use DC (no periods). If the city may be confused with the state of Washington, use formalized “Washington, D.C.”

For bibliographies, tables, lists, and mailing addresses with zip codes, states are usually abbreviated. Use the two-letter postal code (caps and no punctuation).

Example: CCSF is located in San Francisco, CA.

Capitalize the word state (and city) only if part of the official name (i.e., when state is used to distinguish a state from a city of the same name.)

Examples: New York state, New York City, the city of New York, in the state of Maryland

## 7. Political affiliations

Political affiliations in parentheses use postal code abbreviations.

Example: Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA)

Example: Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

## 8. Units of measurement and symbols

10 mi.

3 mph

5 mm

9½', 96" (use the prime ['] and double prime ["] symbols for foot and inch, not curly quotation marks and apostrophes)

77°

5¢ or \$.05

\$5 billion

US\$4 (no spaces, no periods when distinguishing U.S. dollars from other dollar-based currencies)

from \$6.75 to \$8.00, but from \$6 to \$8 (use zeros after the decimal if one or both numbers include a decimal fraction)

10 percent (at the start of a sentence: Ten percent)

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## Apostrophes

1. Do not use apostrophes in pluralized numbers or acronyms.

Example: her late 20s

Example: multiple DUIs

## Academic terminology

### 1. Academic grades

Always capitalize academic grades. Do not use quotes or italics. No apostrophe for the plural.

Examples: B+, C, F

Example: He got all As.

### 2. Awards

Only capitalize full official names.

Example: the Chancellor's Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Scholarship

Example: the award for undergraduate scholarship

Example: the 2018 undergraduate scholarship award

### 3. Conferences

Capitalize the full official names of conferences. Do not capitalize an initial *the*.

Example: I am attending the Fifth Annual Associated Writing Programs Conference

If a conference title is descriptive, put it in quotation marks.

Example: I attended three conferences, but my favorite was "Prose, Poetry, and Pedagogy."

### 4. Course Titles

Do not use quotation marks or italics for official course titles. Follow the rules for capitalizing book titles in which first, last, and all other major words are capitalized; articles, conjunctions, and prepositions—i.e., “small words”—are not.

Example: This semester I'm taking Introduction to European Economics.

Example: I decided to take an intro to European economics course.

### 5. Degrees and majors

When a degree is written out in running text, do not capitalize it.

Example: She earned her bachelor's degree in physics.

Always capitalize the abbreviated form of the degree.

Example: I finished my MA in 2003.

Do not use periods between letters when abbreviating a degree.

Example: an MFA in visual art, a PhD in English

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Use an apostrophe, in the singular possessive form, when writing out master's degree.

Example: I have a master's in biology.

When combining name, degree, discipline, and year: Jane Doe, MA '18 history

Always capitalize class when designating a graduating class.

Example: We were in the Class of 1995.

## 6. Lectures

Put lecture titles in quotation marks with no italics.

Example: Today's lecture, "Poetry of the Colonial Resistance," takes place at noon.

Example: Today's lecture on colonial resistance poetry takes place at noon.

Capitalize, as you would a book title, the name of a lecture series. Do not use quotation marks, underline, or italics.

Example: The lecture on colonial poetry was part of the Poetry of Resistance series.

## 7. Semesters

Do not capitalize references to semesters or seasons, except with a designated year.

Example: fall semester

Example: I will graduate in Spring 2019.

## 8. Titles of works

Italicize (no underline or quotation marks) the following: titles of books, plays, films, blogs, journals, long poems, newspapers, radio programs, television series, games, exhibits, exhibit catalogs, and individual works of art are italicized, with no quotation marks.

Example: We played *Monopoly* all weekend long.

Example: *Beloved* is my favorite book.

Put in quotation marks (no underline or italics) the titles of songs, articles, episodes in a television series, papers presented at conferences, book chapters, panel discussions, and most poems.

Example: The students are studying the T.S. Eliot poem, "The Wasteland."

## 9. Universities with branches

Use a comma to designate the location of the branch after the main university name. Never use dashes.

Example: University of California, Davis

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## Dashes

### 1. En dashes and Em dashes

En dashes are most often used between two inclusive numbers. An en dash is longer than a hyphen (and so called because it is the width of the letter *N*).

Example: pp. 5–10

Example: 1990–1995

Example: Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist (Pulitzer Prize is an open compound, which must be followed by an en dash, not a hyphen.)

Example: post–World War I

An em dash is approximately twice as long as an en dash (and is the width of a letter *M*). It signals a break in thought that is more robust than the break signaled by a comma. In print, do not use a space on either side of dashes.

Example: She decided—and it was a tough decision to make—that she did not want to go to graduate school.

## Digital Communications

### 1. Websites and links

Do not italicize, underline, or put quotation marks around website addresses.

Example: Begin your search on [google.com](http://google.com).

Website addresses on digital material should be hyperlinked.

Example: Begin your search on [google.com](http://google.com).

Do not indent paragraphs. Separate paragraphs with a double line break.

## Gender-neutral language

### 1. Gender-neutral professional titles

Avoid terms that presume or specify the male gender. Use gender-neutral terms whenever possible. Below, the terms on the left should be avoided. The terms on the right should be used.

chairman *chair*

businessman *executive, manager, director, professional*

cameraman *camera operator*

congressman *representative*

craftsman *artisan, craftsperson*

fireman *firefighter*

forefathers *ancestors*

mailman *mail carrier*

mankind *humanity, humankind, humans, human beings, people*

man in the street *average person*

manpower *personnel, workers, employees, workforce*

man hours *work hours, staff hours*

weatherman *meteorologist, weather forecaster*

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## 2. Gender-neutral pronouns

CCSF prefers gender-neutral pronouns (*they* and *their*).

## 3. The singular *their* and *they*

*Their* and *they* may be used as singular pronouns when gender is not being specified.

Example: Every student should register their bicycle with the public safety office.

## 4. Mr./Mrs./Ms./Miss

Do not use the above designations. When referring initially to an individual, use their first and last names. In subsequent references, use last names only. An exception may be made for student profiles, which should carry a familiar and accessible tone. For student profiles, the initial first name/last name will be followed by the use of the first name.

## Italics

### 1. Non-English words

Italicize words from other languages which are not commonly used in English.

Example: The family set up an *ofrenda* during the last week of October.

Example: The family had a laissez-faire approach to discipline. (Laissez-faire is a term commonly used in English.)

## Numbers

### 1. Spelling out numbers

Except in charts and tables, spell out whole numbers one through nine, both cardinal (e.g., one) and ordinal (e.g., first), and common fractions. For numbers nine and higher, use numerals. Some exceptions are noted below.

Example: 5 pencils, 19 pencils, fifth pencil, 19th pencil

The letters -nd, -rd, or -th in ordinal numbers should not appear as superscripts (152<sup>nd</sup> and 153<sup>rd</sup>, not 152<sup>nd</sup> or 153<sup>rd</sup>).

Fractions involving a number under nine should be spelled out.

Example: three-fourths of students

Fractions with two numbers higher than nine should be written as numerals,

Example: 14/15th

### 2. Exceptions to spelling out numbers

In running text (a paragraph or a series of paragraphs), if you have both numerals and spelled-out numbers for a category, use numerals for all numbers in that category.

Example: Last week, we played 20 soccer matches. We won 15, lost 3, and tied 2.

Example: 4 credit hours

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### 3. Exceptions to using numerals

Do not begin sentences with numerals. Spell them out.

Example: Four thousand dollars were found in a bag.

Example: Seven out of 20 students were absent today.

### People with disabilities

Avoid referring to people by their disability or any other physical attribute as though that attribute defines them.

Example: students with disabilities, visually impaired, hearing impaired, developmentally challenged (not the handicapped, the disabled.)

People with dwarfism should be described with the terms “short stature,” “little person/people,” or “someone with dwarfism.” This terminology accords with the terminology of Little People of America. Do not refer to a person with dwarfism as a “dwarf,” unless that term was used in quotation. Some people with dwarfism are fine with this term. Others are not.

### Punctuation

#### 1. Commas: In a series

Use a comma before the conjunction (usually and or or) in a series of three or more.

Example: He made rice, chicken, and salad.

Example: She will major in math, physics, or English.

If even one element in the series contains a comma, separate the elements with semicolons.

Example: The caterer served gazpacho, which was warmer than it should have been; spaghetti, which was undercooked; and a kale parmesan salad.

#### 2. With Jr. and Sr.

Do not use commas around Jr., Sr., and other designations of generation.

Example: Jane Doe Jr.

Example: Jane Doe III

#### 3. With academic, professional, and religious designations

Use a comma following a personal name.

Example: Jane Doe, PhD

Example: Jane Doe, Esq.

#### 4. With organizational acronyms and abbreviations

Do not use commas around Inc., Ltd., LLP, or similar abbreviations as part of a company’s name.

Example: Castro and Valdez LLP

Example: Sprint Communications Inc.

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## 5. In compound sentences

Use a comma to separate the two parts of a compound sentence.

Example: Yumi worked on her screenplay every morning before class, and Ivan worked on his novel.

Example: He worked on his novel, and she wrote her screenplay.

When you have a compound verb, do not insert a comma between the subject and a compound verb unless you have a good reason, such as a parenthetical.

Example: Yumi worked on her screenplay every morning and studied in the evening.

Example: Yumi worked on her screenplay every morning, no matter how exhausted she was, and studied every evening.

## 6. Exclamation points

Exclamation points should be used sparingly. Most sentences do not need them. If they do appear, it will most likely be in a line of spoken dialogue.

Example: “Look out!” he yelled.

## 7. Periods and colons

Use only one space after a colon or terminal punctuation (period, question mark, exclamation point).

Example: The department was founded in 2007. It continues to flourish today.

When a colon is used within a sentence, the first word following the colon is not capitalized.

Example: The department offers three minors: genetic engineering, biology, and biochemistry.

When the colon introduces two or more sentences, the first word following it is capitalized.

Example: The school has two goals: The first is to maintain a high degree of educational integrity. The second is to be as inclusive as possible.

## 8. Quotation marks with other punctuation

Periods and commas go inside quotation marks. Other punctuation marks go outside quotation marks.

Example: We get going “when the going gets tough.”

Example: “See you in three days,” she said.

Colons and semicolons go outside quotation marks.

Example: Wong decided to “go for broke”; Everett played it safe.

Example: What will follow are three lines from “Ode on a Grecian Urn”:

Exclamation points and question marks that are part of the quoted material go inside the quotation marks. Otherwise, they go outside.

Example: Did he say “thank you”?

Example: I shouted “You’re the bees knees!”

Example: Did you really just say “You’re the bees knees!”?

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## Racial and ethnic terms

1. Racial and ethnic identifications should only be used when directly relevant to the material being written.
2. African American (for double-barreled terms, do not use a hyphen)
3. Latinx/Latina/Latino
4. South Asian (to refer to people who identify as being from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal)
5. Asian (to refer to people who identify as being from the Asian continent, including South Asia)
6. Asian American, Latin American, Mexican American (any regional or national identification + “American”)
7. When writing about a group or an individual, ask yourself whether your descriptions or references are “othering” or exoticizing the group/individual. Make sure you are not making assumptions about the CCSF population being predominantly white or American-born. The CCSF student body and faculty are diverse, and all writing that describes and addresses them should take this diversity into account.

## References to LGBTQ communities

1. Just as you avoid assuming a white/American mainstream, avoid assuming a heterosexual mainstream. Stay away from heterocentric presumptions in your writing (i.e., referring to a couple as a man and a woman).
2. CCSF materials should use the term LGBTQQI, in accordance with the terminology of the LGBTQQI Studies department at CCSF. LGBTQQI stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning Queer Intersex.
3. The term “queer” may also be used, in accordance with the terminology used by the [Queer Resource Center](#) at CCSF.
4. When writing about a transgender person, always use the person’s chosen name. Never put this name in quotation marks. When possible, ask an individual for the pronouns they use (he-him/she-her/they-them) and stick to these pronouns.
5. If it is not possible to ask a transgender person which pronoun they use, use the pronoun consistent with the person’s appearance and gender expression, or use the pronoun “they.”
6. Be consistent in using the pronoun/gender identification designated by the transgender person. Do not refer to the sex assigned at birth, even if you’re referring to a time before the person transitioned.

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7. Please refer to updated/current terminology below:

<u>Avoid using:</u>	<u>Instead use:</u>
A homosexual person	gay/lesbian/queer person
Homosexual relations	relationship/couple or (if necessary) gay/lesbian/same-sex couple
Sexual preference	Sexual orientation or orientation
Gay/homosexual/transgender lifestyle	Avoid this phrase altogether, unless in a quotation
Admitted/avowed homosexual	out gay man, out lesbian, out queer person Example: Tammy Baldwin was the country's first out senator.
Transgendered	Transgender/ transgender person or people
Preferred pronoun	Pronoun

## Sentence fragments

1. When sentence fragments are accepted

Sentence fragments are acceptable in marketing material, which often requires short, catchy phrases.

Sentence fragments may also be used when quoting someone's spoken statement, i.e., in a student profile.

Example: Raj spoke highly of his fellow students: "So inspirational. All of them."

2. Beginning sentences with *but* and *and*

Do not begin sentences with *but* or *and* unless the sentence is a quotation.

Example: "I owe them everything." She turned to look out the window. "And I've never even told them that."

## Series of terms/items

1. Order of items

When you have several items in a series, order them shortest to longest.

Example: We brought a flask, two frying pans, an electricity generator, a tent that my brother lent me, and more food than we could have possibly eaten.

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## Years, academic and fiscal

If a fiscal year spans two calendar years, use only the year of the final month.

Examples: fiscal year 2018

fiscal year '18

Academic years show the year of both the beginning and final month. Spell out and lowercase the words.

Examples: academic year 2018–2019

academic year 2018–19

academic year '18–'19

the 2018–19 academic year

the '18–'19 academic year

Abbreviations are appropriate in column and row headlines of charts and when the terms are used extensively in running text. Choose a format and use it consistently throughout your publication. Use en dashes between inclusive numbers (see “En dashes and em dashes,” p.7).

Examples: FY2018

FYs2018–19

FY2014 and FY2015

AY2014–15

AYs2013–15 (two academic years)