

ODHS and OHA Writing Style Guide

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Contents

- The Writing Style Guide’s purpose ii**
- Introduction 1**
- Common mistakes and pointers 2**
- Other writing basics 5**
- Plain language 9**
- Word usage 12**
- Capitalization 25**
- Numbers 29**
- Punctuation 33**
- Spelling 41**
- Equity-centered communication 44**
- Government terms 76**
- Specialty writing for public health 79**
- Tips for making forms 81**
- Figures and tables 83**
- Citations 87**
- Report writing 88**
- Index 89**

The Writing Style Guide's purpose

The ODHS and OHA Writing Style Guide is based on these values:

Language is ever-changing, so this guide is, too.

ODHS and OHA will regularly revise the Writing Style Guide to capture the newest, most equitable changes to the written word.

The words we use reflect our intention to be anti-racist, strength-based organizations.

Words carry power and impact. We choose words that are strength-based rather than deficiency-based or negative. When the written and spoken word align with these intentions, we can begin to address inequities.

ODHS and OHA work together to improve how our agencies communicate.

ODHS and OHA actively and intentionally collaborate to create this guide and work toward clearer, more equitable messages to and about the people we serve.

This guide is the foundation for improving how we communicate. But it's only the beginning.

The ODHS and OHA Writing Style Guide gives the basics of how to write with ODHS and OHA standards in mind. However, employees need other help to learn to write clearly, succinctly and equitably. The agencies are working toward this goal as they plan training, employee feedback and electronic resources.

Introduction

This Style Guide's goal is to help you write more effectively and accurately. The information can help you write using correct grammar and plain language so all readers can understand our agencies' communications.

This guide applies to all Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) staff. Please follow this guide whether you are creating a report, an email, a social media post, a form, a slide show presentation or any other document.

You can also use these guidelines for all verbal communications.

ODHS and OHA use the most recent versions of the following style guides for all writing. These manuals are listed in priority order.

- ODHS and OHA Writing Style Guide
- American Heritage Dictionary
- The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook

Because the English language is ever evolving, these manuals are updated often and may not always agree. Where there is disagreement among these reference manuals, follow the usage recommendations provided in the highest priority manual on the list.

ODHS and OHA use the most recent versions of the following style manuals for specialty writing:

- Council of Science Editors' Manual for Authors, Editors and Publishers for scientific reports and for tables, charts and indexes.
- Vancouver system for citations and bibliographies. Vancouver style is used by the National Library of Medicine and National Institutes of Health. For more information on the Vancouver system, go to https://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html. Many universities also provide short Vancouver style guides for public use.

For help writing ODHS and OHA policy, please go to [the Shared and Central Services Policy Committee Writing Tips on the OWL](#).

The purpose of using these manuals is to ensure that all written materials produced by ODHS, OHA and Shared Services staff represent the departments in a consistent, accessible and grammatically accurate manner. [Shared Services policy 130-001](#) defines the role of Publications and Creative Services in creating materials for ODHS and OHA. These guidelines also relate to creating forms.

If you would like to suggest a change to or ask a question about this guide, please contact WritingStyleGuide.info@odhsoha.oregon.gov. You may also contact this email to sign up for our email list and receive updates to this guide as they happen.

How to search the guide

To search for a topic:

- Click on the magnifying glass symbol in Adobe Reader.
- Press "Ctrl" and "F" on Windows or "Command" and "F" on Mac, or
- Use the index at the back of this guide.

Common mistakes and pointers

We all make mistakes in our writing. Here are some common mistakes and pointers for better communication.

Audience

- Think about who you are writing for so you can match your tone and information to their needs.
- Are you writing for staff, partners, the public, legislators or the media?

Equity considerations

- [Equity](#) is a guiding model for language and action. Terms may change over time, and this guide will be updated as needed.
- Ensure information is written in [plain language](#), is culturally responsive and is readily available in languages that represent the communities.
- Use gender-inclusive language.
- Be aware of [ableism](#) and how it enters the language we use when referring to people with and without disabilities.
- Write to empower the individual when making decisions about what terms to use.
- Work with community partners to identify priorities and communication strategies. This includes the need to build awareness and acceptance, and to rectify historical and contemporary injustices.

Text

- Size: 12 point minimum. Use minimum 14-point font for Aging and People with Disabilities.
- Standard agency fonts: Noto Sans and Noto Serif.
- Alternate agency fonts: Aptos Sans and Aptos Serif.
- Colors: Use black text. Colored text is hard to read.
- Do not use italics for full paragraphs or long sentences — it is hard to read. It's OK to use italics to emphasize a word or two.
- Do not use a lot of bold or all-capitalized text.
- Only use underlining for links and hyperlinks. Go to the [“Use of hyperlinks and links”](#) section below.

Dates and time

- Write “June 2,” not “June 2nd.”
- Write “8 a.m.” rather than “8:00 a.m.” Always use a.m. or p.m. Use noon instead of 12 p.m. and midnight instead of 12 a.m.

Use of hyperlinks and links

- Use descriptions with embedded hyperlinks and links instead of URLs in electronic documents. However, if a document is print only or may be printed for better access, also write out the URL or clearly identify it another way so readers can access the link.
- Don't use "Click here." Just write out the link or hyperlink the words.

State, State of Oregon

Do not use State of Oregon or capitalize state; just use Oregon. For the few exceptions to this rule, go to the ["Capitalization"](#) section.

Numbers

- In general, spell out numbers one through nine. However, write out the number if it is at the beginning of a sentence.
- Use commas for numbers 1,000 and higher.

Spaces between sentences

Use one space after a sentence — not two.

Use of last name after first reference

Use the person's last name after the first reference to their full name. This is especially important in more formal messages. When you are writing a personalized message, you can choose to use first name after the first reference.

Page numbers and headers

When writing a multi-page document, add page numbers in the footers at the bottom and headers at the top of the page. It helps the reader navigate.

Making documents accessible

Integrate accessibility into all documents. Accessible documents are "usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design."*

Accessible documents provide access for a broad range of users, including those who experience one or more of the following:

- Are blind or have low vision
- Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Experience color blindness
- Have a learning disability

*Learn more about [Universal Design](https://universaldesign.org/definition) at <https://universaldesign.org/definition>.

- Have a mobility or dexterity disability
- May use assistive technology such as, but not limited to, screen readers, mouse alternatives or magnification tools.

Accessibility checkers are built into [Microsoft Word and PowerPoint](#) and can be used to identify incorrect use of headings, alt text, color, fonts, tables and charts. Learn more about [how to fix accessibility checker errors in Word and PowerPoint](#). You can also check accessibility of [Adobe PDFs](#).

Other writing basics

Audience

Most writing at ODHS or OHA is for a general audience — the public, clients, partners, employees and the media. Identify your audience first, then write or edit. Consider the audience’s perspective when it comes to text and presentation. What terms will be clear to them and which ones need description? What information will be most helpful to them? When considering your audience, do the following:

- Write at an eighth-grade level for general audiences.
- Write at a 10th-grade level for internal ODHS or OHA audiences and legislators.
- Write at a 12th-grade level for expert audiences.

ODHS and OHA use the [Flesch-Kincaid readability tests](#) to measure a piece of writing’s grade level. Some people also use <https://hemingwayapp.com/help.html> and find it helpful as a tool to help improve their writing literacy. When writing, you should also consider layout, design and the terms your audience understands.

Acronyms

Avoid using acronyms. If an acronym is essential and repeated, spell out what it stands for the first time you use it and follow with its acronym.

- ⇒ Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) support this policy. ODHS and OHA also support other language access policies.

The agencies’ acronyms are “ODHS” and “OHA,” not “the ODHS” and “the OHA.” Also, eliminate “the” before division and program names whenever possible.

Alternate (alt) text

- Include alt text in all documents.

Alt text tells people what is in an image, such as text or basic essential details. If an image fails to load, alt text will display in its place.

- Include descriptions for images.

An image description gives more details than alt text and allows someone to learn more about what is in an image that goes beyond alt text. Alt text gives the user the most important information, while image descriptions provide even more detail.

- How can I learn more about alt text?

Go to page 67 for more information about [alt text](#).

Learn more about writing alt text at <https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired/>.

Bullets

Use bullets rather than long sentences or paragraphs to help reduce reading level. Bullets are especially useful to help readers quickly identify key issues and facts. Try to make each bulleted item a complete sentence and use a period at the end of each. Simple “shopping list” types of bulleted items should not have any punctuation. Go to the entry on [bullets](#) in the “Punctuation” section for more information.

Capitalization of headlines, headings and document titles

Capitalize the actual title of the document. Only capitalize the first word or any formal names or titles in headlines, section headings and subheadings.

Childcare, daycare, health care and home care

Use the American Heritage Dictionary’s spelling of childcare, daycare and health care. Home care and health care are treated as two separate words, not combined and not hyphenated. Follow these guidelines in all communications, including program titles. However, use “healthcare” — without a space — when it is used in the proper name of an organization, such as “Modern Healthcare” or “Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.”

Commas

Do not use a comma before “and” or “or” in a series unless one or more additional “and” or “or” is in the sentence, or when deleting the comma creates confusion. (Using the final comma is also referred to as the Oxford comma.) For more information on using commas, go to [the “Punctuation”](#) section.

Composition titles and names of forms

Surround the following with quotation marks:

- The title of a composition, such as books, reports, brochures, movies, plays, poems, albums, songs, lectures and speeches
- Section and chapter titles within a document

Exceptions are titles of reference material and holy books such as the Bible, which are capitalized but do not have quotations marks around them when cited within the text.

- ⇒ “2021 Climate Change Report”
- ⇒ American Heritage Dictionary
- ⇒ American Journal of Public Health
- ⇒ Adult Foster Home Provider Complaint Form
- ⇒ OHA Diversity & Inclusion/Affirmative Action Plan, “Training overview” section

Dashes

- Use hyphens in words that require hyphenation. Do not put a space before or after a hyphen.
- Use the endash in ranges such as dates or page numbers. Do not put a space before or after an endash.
- Use the emdash in the body of text to substitute for the phrase “that is” or to serve as parentheses. An emdash gets spaces on both sides. Go to the [“Punctuation”](#) section for more information.

Fonts

(Go to the [ODHS Graphics Standards Manual](#), [OHA Graphic Standards Manual](#) or [Shared Services Brand Standards Manual](#) for more information.)

Use the following fonts for all standard business writing (for example, reports, correspondence and testimony):

- Use minimum 12-point Noto Sans or Noto Serif.
- Use 14-point font for Aging and People with Disabilities.
- You may use Aptos Sans or Aptos Serif when needed.

One space between sentences, not two

Use just one space between sentences. You no longer need to use two spaces, which were widely used during the days of the typewriter.

Policy writing

For help writing ODHS and OHA policy, please go to [the Shared and Central Services Policy Committee Writing Tips on the OWL](#).

They, she or he, other options

Use “they,” “them” and “their” as singular gender-neutral pronouns when you don’t know the person’s gender and for people who identify as neither male nor female or ask not to be referred to as he, she, him or her.

The singular “they” has appeared in written and spoken speech for centuries. However, “they” and “their” are again becoming common as singular pronouns.

⇒ “Each student should bring their own notebook.”

At this writing, at least one major media organization has changed its style guide to reflect this. This use of “they” or “their” can be confusing, however, unless the context is very clear.

If possible, rewrite a sentence as plural. Do not use constructions such as he/she or s/he.

⇒ “All students should bring their own notebooks” rather than “Each student should bring his or her notebook.”

Always make sure to clarify the context of who “they” or “their” references.

You can also use the singular they when referring to an individual who does not identify as male or female and prefers “they” as a pronoun.

⇒ The manager is flexible in their approach.

URLs

Use the full URL when writing a web address, including the http:// or https://. If the URL appears at the end of the sentence, place a period after the URL without a space between the URL and the period.

Do not use the phrase “log on to” unless you must enter credentials to gain access to the website.

The abbreviation “URL” is always capitalized. “URL” stands for “uniform resource locator.”

⇒ The information is available at <http://www.oregon.gov/DHS>.

⇒ If you need more help, contact us at <https://secure.oregon.gov>.

⇒ You can reach the service desk by email at service@dhsosha.state.or.us.

website, web

ODHS and OHA follow current AP guidelines, spelling “website” as one word in lowercase unless it begins a sentence. All forms of the word “web” related to the World Wide Web are lowercase.

⇒ You will find it on the OHA website.

⇒ I couldn’t find it anywhere on the web.

Plain language

Oregon law requires all state agencies to prepare public communications in language that is as clear and simple as possible (ORS 183.750). This includes publications, forms and instructions, licenses, agency notices and administrative rules. HB 2702 specifies an additional standard for written documents.

Plain language is good for everyone. It saves time, resources and explanation for both staff and those we serve. When we write documents clearly and concisely, more people can understand them. In addition, documents written in plain language are easier to translate into other languages. Plain language serves clients well and makes them the priority.

Five plain language rules to follow:

1. Use common words that clearly and directly state what you mean.
2. Use short, simple sentences.
3. Share information in a logical order.
4. Avoid jargon or abbreviations.
5. Write like you talk.

For a handy guide with more information on ODHS and OHA plain language guidelines, go to <https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/me3835.pdf>.

Common plain language mistakes

In order to, to

You can almost always remove “in order to” without changing the meaning of the sentence. Just use “to.”

Instead of this	Use this
ODHS created the program in order to help families find after-school program resources.	ODHS created the program to help families find after-school program resources.

In the process of

You can almost always remove “in the process of” from a sentence.

Instead of this	Use this
ODHS is in the process of revising its policies.	ODHS is revising its policies.

Of its, of the

In most cases, you can make your writing more concise by avoiding “of.” Use a possessive instead.

Instead of this	Use this
The council strives to reflect a variety of concerns and goals of its members.	The council strives to reflect its members’ concerns and goals.
The meeting of the board will be held Monday.	The board meeting will be held Monday.

Overused and vague words

Avoid these words whenever possible.

Instead of this	Use this
aggregate	combined, total
implement	achieve, carry out, start
impactful	effective

That are, who are

In almost all cases, the words “that are” and “who are” are unnecessary and should be deleted from a sentence. This also holds true for “that is” and “who is.”

Instead of this	Use this
The people who are going to the concert left earlier.	The people going to the concert left earlier.
The programs that are most important are being funded.	The most important programs are being funded.
The person who is in the waiting area is a woman.	The person in the waiting area is a woman.

The reason is, because

These terms mean the same thing. Use either “the reason is” or “because,” but not both. Using both is redundant.

Instead of this	Use this
The reason we are doing this is because evidence shows it works.	We are doing this because evidence shows it works.

Words containing “ize”

Writers often tack “ize” on to nouns to change them into verbs. However, “izing” words often reduces clarity, precision and correct tone. You should use the simplest version of a word whenever possible.

Instead of this	Use this
incentivize*	boost, motivate
operationalize	begin, initiate
utilize, utilization	use
contextualize	explain
systematize	arrange, frame

**The only exception is “incentivized metrics” in Medicaid.*

Before using an “ize” word, check your dictionary. Make sure the word has a unique meaning and sounds correct.

- ⇒ OHA’s Tobacco Prevention and Education Program report humanizes the struggles of people who are trying to quit smoking. (The report makes the struggles seem more human.)

Legal language can be plain language

ODHS and OHA should work with the Oregon Department of Justice (DOJ) to support plain language requirements. Language provided or approved by DOJ does not have to be left in the original language if it is hard to understand. When possible, ODHS and OHA staff should collaborate with DOJ to promote plain language.

If legal information such as Oregon Administrative Rules must be included in the document, a viable option is to include a plain language version in the text and cite the actual legal language on the back of a document or as a footnote. In the end, clearly communicating the required message should be your top priority.

Plain language resources

Go to <https://www.oregon.gov/das/Pages/writingplainlanguage.aspx> for information and resources.

Go to <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/> for more resources on the value of plain language and writing tips from today’s plain language experts.

Word usage

This section offers some basic rules of grammar, usage and style. It is organized alphabetically.

A, an

To determine whether to use “a” or “an” before a word or term that does not begin with a vowel, pronounce the phrase out loud. If the next word begins with a vowel sound, use “an.”

- ⇒ An 11th grader asked me a question about history.
- ⇒ It was an \$8 million program.
- ⇒ It was an honorable cause.
- ⇒ Hurricane Katrina was a horrible event.
- ⇒ The holiday was created to recognize a historic event.
- ⇒ The insurance won't pay for an MRI.

About, approximately

According to the Associated Press (AP), “about” and “approximately” can both be used to mean an estimate or almost exactly. “About” is more casual and shorter.

- ⇒ Salem, Oregon, is about 50 miles south of Portland.
- ⇒ Oregon's bonus was an increase of approximately \$13.4 million more than the state's 2009 award.
- ⇒ It's about a block from here.

Adverse, averse

“Adverse” = harmful or hostile; “averse” = opposed to.

- ⇒ The wildfire created adverse conditions for many Oregon communities.
- ⇒ I am averse to this legislation.

Affect, effect

“Affect” used as a verb means to change something.

“Effect” used as a noun means the result or outcome of something.

- ⇒ Their testimony will affect the decision.
- ⇒ The decision will have a positive effect on the program.

Affect, impact

The verb “affect” means to change something. The verb “impact” means to hit or strike; as a noun, it means the effect of one thing on another. It is best to avoid using “impact” as a verb. The exception is using “impact” to describe consequences of racial and ethnic bias and discrimination; “harm” may also be used in this instance. Also avoid other forms of “impact,” such as “impactful” and “impacting.” Avoid using “impact” in business writing; use “affect” as a verb and “effect” as a noun.

- ⇒ The budget cut will significantly affect the program.
- ⇒ The budget cut had a major effect on the program.
- ⇒ The budget cut had a major impact on the program.

Afterward, forward, backward and toward

Do not include an “s” on the end of these words.

Aid, aide

“Aid” = help or assist; “aide” is the person who does the helping.

- ⇒ The county requested aid from state agencies to respond to the disaster.
- ⇒ Her aide helped finalize the details.

All right (not alright)

“All right” is always two words. Do not use “alright.”

- ⇒ It’s all right to take that action.
- ⇒ He said, “All right, I’ll do it.”

Alternate, alternative

“Alternate” is an adjective meaning a choice between two or more options. “Alternative” is mostly used in its noun form.

- ⇒ They had no alternative but to leave.
- ⇒ They had an alternate plan.
- ⇒ ODHS and OHA use the alternate format statement at the end of most documents.

Assure, ensure, insure

“Assure” means to remove doubt or cause a person to feel sure.

“Ensure” makes sure something happens.

“Insure” is what insurance companies do.

In almost all cases, you should use “assure” only immediately before a reference to a person or group.

- ⇒ They assured us that all the information was correct.
- ⇒ I ensured that the commissioner signed the letter before sending it.
- ⇒ DAS insures all agency-owned vehicles.

Because, since

“Because” denotes a cause-and-effect situation. “Since” implies the passage of time.

- ⇒ They took that action because the rules required it.
- ⇒ It has been a long time since the board changed the rules.

Before (not prior to)

Use the preposition “before” rather than “prior to” in all instances. “Prior” can be used as an adjective (prior engagement).

- ⇒ If you plan to attend, please notify the contact person at least 24 hours before the meeting.

Believe, think

“Believe” = to accept as true or real. “Think” = to reach a decision through reason or logic.

“Think” is preferred in business writing; an alternative is “estimate.”

- ⇒ Department staff think approximately 100,000 people are eligible.
- ⇒ Department staff estimate approximately 100,000 people are eligible.

Between

When using the construction “Between a and b,” always use “and,” not “to.”

- ⇒ Between 1,000 and 2,000 people attended the rally.
- ⇒ The item will cost between \$500 and \$600.
- ⇒ It will last between six and 12 months.

Between, among

“Between” = two; “among” = more than two.

- ⇒ Conflict existed between the two of them.
- ⇒ Conflict existed among the three of them.

Biannual, biennial, semiannual

“Biannual” and “semiannual” = occurring twice a year, such as the equinox. “Biennial” = occurring every two years, such as the legislative session.

For clarity, use “semiannual” instead of “biannual” when you mean something occurs twice a year.

- ⇒ The Legislature used to meet on a biennial basis.
- ⇒ I get my teeth cleaned on a semiannual basis.

Capital, capitol

“Capital” = cash, money, power, importance and greatness. Therefore, having capital means having money; capital letters are important letters; capital ideas are great ideas; and the capital city of Oregon is Salem. Capitalize when referring to the building by its proper name.

“Capitol” = the building, which has a dome.

- ⇒ She acquired enough capital to start her own business.
- ⇒ The Legislature meets in the Oregon State Capitol.
- ⇒ The group’s annual gathering in the capital city filled many restaurants and hotels.

Caregiver, caretaker

A caregiver takes care of people. A caretaker takes care of places or things.

Chair, chairman, chairwoman, chairperson

Whenever possible, use “chairperson.” However, the best rule is to follow the usage of the organization or group. Capitalize only when used as a formal title before a person’s name.

- ⇒ Jane Doe is the committee chairperson.
- ⇒ The committee chairperson is Grace Kainani Cruz .
- ⇒ Budget Committee Chairperson José Hernandez convened the meeting.

Compared to, compared with

“Compared to” shows the likeness between items; “compared with” shows the differences.

- ⇒ “They compared her tennis to Serena’s” means she plays at Serena’s level.
- ⇒ “She’s short compared with Serena” means their heights are different.

Complement, compliment

“Complement” makes something complete or goes along with something; “compliment” says something nice and polite. “Complimentary” is something free.

- ⇒ The new program complements the department’s mission.
- ⇒ I compliment you on your writing.

Continual, continuous

“Continual” = occurring regularly, such as loan payments; “continuous” = occurring without interruption, such as a waterfall.

- ⇒ We process paychecks on a continual basis.
- ⇒ We fed a continuous form into the printer.

Counsel, council

“Counsel,” as a noun, means “advice.” When used as a verb, it means “to advise.”

- ⇒ They provided counsel to the department director.
- ⇒ She counseled the department director.

“Council” means a group of people. “Council” is always a noun.

- ⇒ The city council provided counsel to the mayor.
- ⇒ The Baker City Council passed the resolution. (Capitalized because it is a formal title.)

Data

“Data” typically takes a singular verb and pronoun when you are writing for general audiences.

- ⇒ The data is sound.

In scientific and academic writing, data is plural, datum is singular.

- ⇒ Sea level is the assumed mean level of the sea, serving as a datum to calculate land elevation.

Emigrate, emigrant; immigrate, immigrant

“Emigrate” = exiting from [one place]; “immigrate” = incoming into [one place].

Emigrant = someone who leaves [one place]; immigrant = someone who comes in [to another place]

- ⇒ Many people who emigrate from California immigrate to Oregon.
- ⇒ He is an emigrant from Canada.
- ⇒ I am an immigrant to Minnesota.

Farther, further

“Farther” = a physical distance; “further” = to a greater degree.

- ⇒ The town is 10 miles farther down this road.
- ⇒ After yesterday’s hearing, the Legislature is even further from agreement on this issue.

Fewer, less

Use “fewer” for plural nouns referring to individual items. Use “less” for singular nouns related to bulk or quantity.

- ⇒ There are fewer pieces; there is less pizza.

Fewer than, over; above, more than, under

“Fewer than,” is used for numbers or individual items. “Over” means physically on top of something.

- ⇒ There are fewer than 100 lights over the floor.

The same is true of “above” and “under,” which show physical location, and “more than,” which is used for numbers or individual items.

- ⇒ More than 10 squirrels were under the tree and above the rocks.

First, third person

The department always refers to itself in the third person in all written materials produced for external audiences. This includes correspondence, reports and legislative testimony. When writing about the department’s programs or activities or positions on issues, never say “we,” “us” or “our” if the audience is external.

- ⇒ The Oregon Department of Human Services supports this proposal.
- ⇒ The Oregon Health Authority’s success in this effort is encouraging.

For example and that is (not e.g. and i.e.)

Spell out “for example” or “that is” whenever possible rather than using their abbreviations (e.g. and i.e.).

- ⇒ The director (that is, Sonja Jung) says to do this.
- ⇒ For example, writers Du Bois, Garcia Marquez and Yu say to do this.
- ⇒ She wore her favorite color (that is, red).

Gender, sex

Gender is a social identity. Sex is a biological identity. When referring to male or female in text or charts, sex is the correct term. Go to the [“Equity-centered communication”](#) section and the [ODHS and OHA Gender Identity and Expression policy](#) for more guidance.

Good, well

“Good” is an adjective that describes nouns and pronouns; “well” is an adverb that describes verbs.

“I feel good” means I’m healthy; “good” describes me.

“I feel well” means my fingers work; “well” describes “feel” (the verb).

⇒ The soup tastes good. (“Good” describes the soup.)

⇒ The car runs well. (“Well” describes “runs.”)

Historic, historical

“Historic” = something or someone important or famous in history; “historical” = whatever happened in the past, whether it was important or not.

⇒ Creation of the Oregon Health Plan was a historic event.

⇒ The historical use of this service has been minimal.

⇒ Historical injustices harmed the group.

Hopefully, hope, hoped

“Hopefully” is how dogs wag their tails and children look at candy. In pretty much all business writing, use “hope” or “hoped.”

⇒ The director hopes the new system will improve service.

⇒ The new system has delivered the hoped-for results.

However, however

Always use a comma after “however” when you start the sentence or after a semicolon.

⇒ I like Bob. However, I don’t like his driving.

I, me, myself

“I” is the subject; “me” is the object; “myself” is the reflexive. To choose among “I,” “me” and “myself” in a sentence, use a simple test. Eliminate the other person(s) and see if the sentence sounds right.

Incorrect	Correct
[Ramon and] me went to the meeting. “Me went to the meeting?”	[Ramon and] I went to the meeting. “I went to the meeting?”
[Ramon, Nikita and] myself went to the meeting. “Myself went to the meeting?”	[Ramon, Nikita and] I went to the meeting. “I went to the meeting?”

Use “myself” in a sentence only when you are doing something to yourself. The same usage pattern is true of all pronouns that end in “self” or “selves.” These are used when the sentence’s subject and objects are the same.

- ⇒ I buy clothes for myself.
- ⇒ My son feeds himself.
- ⇒ She dresses herself.
- ⇒ You drive yourself to work.
- ⇒ They purchased a home for themselves.

ID, I.D.

The correct term for identification is “ID” in upper case without periods. I.D. is an abbreviation for inside diameter.

- ⇒ She showed their ID when they entered the building.
- ⇒ She pulled out several IDs.

Imply, infer

“Imply” = to suggest, “infer” = to assume.

- ⇒ She implied (suggested) the bill would pass.
- ⇒ I inferred (assumed) she had inside information.

Irregardless

“Irregardless” is not a word. “Regardless” is correct.

- ⇒ I took walks regardless of the weather.

Last, past

“Last” = final or ultimate. “Past” = gone by or earlier.

The correct use of these words depends on whether you use “the” in front of them. Use “the past” to refer to the past week, month or year. Using “the last” can be confusing because it implies that it was the final occurrence. Without “the” it’s OK to say “last.”

- ⇒ This event took place during the past year.
- ⇒ It was the last year the event took place.
- ⇒ I went to a movie last year.

Lead, led, lead

“Lead” when pronounced “leed” is the present tense of the verb. The past tense is “led.” When the noun “lead” is pronounced like “led,” it’s a metal.

- ⇒ She will lead the committee.
- ⇒ She led the committee.
- ⇒ Eating lead is bad for you.

Lie, lay

“Lie” = to rest or recline, or tell a falsehood; “lay” = to place or put an object somewhere.

- ⇒ The dog lies in his bed most of the day.
- ⇒ Was that the truth or a lie?
- ⇒ Please lay the completed tests on the table.
- ⇒ I laid the book on the table.

Like, such as

Use “like” as a preposition to compare nouns and pronouns. It requires an object. “Such as” introduces examples while “like” indicates only similarity and cannot be used for examples.

- ⇒ The department has many offices, such as Child Welfare and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- ⇒ The truck rides like a car.

Loan, lend

“Loan” is a noun; “lend” is a verb. You apply for a loan; the bank lends you money.

Log in, login

“Log in” is a verb. “Login” is a noun.

- ⇒ You log in to a computer.
- ⇒ You use your login to access a program.

Moneys, monies

Use “moneys” when referring to the plural of “money.”

⇒ The program is supported by General Fund moneys.

None, no one

Use a singular verb after “none” if it is being used to mean “no one” or “not one.”

⇒ No one is going.

⇒ None of the parts fits.

OK, okay

The correct term is “OK” with no periods.

⇒ It’s OK to attend the meeting.

On

Do not use “on” before a day or date.

Incorrect	Correct
We met on May 3.	We met May 3.
The meeting will take place on Friday.	The meeting will take place Friday.

Only

Use the word “only” immediately before the exact word you are describing. Otherwise, you risk altering the meaning of the sentence.

⇒ Only clients can attend the January event. (No one but clients is allowed to attend.)

⇒ Clients only can attend the January event. (They can’t do anything else regarding the event, such as read about it.)

⇒ Clients can attend only the January event. (They cannot attend an event any other month.)

⇒ Clients can attend the January event only. (Who knows what this means, because “only” has nothing after it.)

Orient (not orientate)

The correct term is “orient.”

⇒ The tour guide will help orient you.

⇒ There is a group orientation to help you get oriented.

Preventive (not preventative)

“Preventive” is correct.

- ⇒ We support preventive medicine.
- ⇒ We will take preventive measures.

Principal, principle

“Principal” is an adjective or a noun depending on its use; “principle” is something you believe in. In modern usage “principal” also refers to a person, because the word “administrator,” “partner” and other nouns that used to follow the word “principal” have been dropped and the adjective is used as a noun. It also references money.

- ⇒ The principal goal of the legislation is to save lives.
- ⇒ Our program values the principles of trust, respect and teamwork.

Proved, proven

“Proved” and “proven” are both acceptable as the past participle of “to prove.” Use “proven,” however, as an adjective before a noun.

- ⇒ The vaccine has proved [or been proven] effective.
- ⇒ COVID-19 is a proven killer.

Recur, reoccur

“Recur” describes something that occurs regularly. “Reoccur” is just something that happens again, but not regularly.

- ⇒ The staff meeting recurs every Tuesday.
- ⇒ The violation reoccurred later that month.

Stationery, stationary

“Stationery” is paper; “stationary” is when you stand still.

- ⇒ The program’s stationery includes its logo on both the envelopes and the paper.
- ⇒ The boulder was stationary while the rescue crew moved around it.

Than, then

“Than” is used for comparisons. “Then” is a time.

- ⇒ If I stand on a stool, then I will be taller than you.

That, which

“That” introduces essential clauses; “which” introduces nonessential clauses. However, you can often delete “that” without changing the meaning.

- ⇒ Say “the report that the manager prepared” if there are lots of reports and it is essential to mention you’re looking for the one the manager wrote. In most cases “that” can be eliminated and the sentence still will make sense.
- ⇒ Say “the report the manager prepared, which I read last week, is very thorough” because the fact that I read it isn’t really essential to the message. The real message is that the report is thorough. A comma usually precedes “which” in a sentence, and the sentence won’t make sense if “which” is eliminated.

Instead of this	Use this
The director decided that the problem was more complex than it first appeared.	The director decided the problem was more complex than it first appeared.

That, which, who

“That” and “which” refer to places, objects and generic animals.

“Who” refers to a person or persons. “Who” is also used for named animals.

- ⇒ Many people who receive Medicaid have low incomes.
- ⇒ The legislators who serve on the committee are interested in this.
- ⇒ Timmy was saved by Lassie, who pulled him out of the well.

They, she or he, other options

The use of “they” or “their” as a singular personal pronoun is common in spoken English and is gaining acceptance in written English: “Each student should bring their own notebook.” This use of “they” or “their” can be confusing, however, unless the context is very clear.

It is often possible to rewrite a sentence as plural: “All students should bring their own notebooks” is better than “Each student should bring his or her notebook.” Do not use constructions such as he/she or s/he.

If a rewritten sentence is too awkward, or if you end up with multiple uses of “he or she” and “she or he” in one passage, use of the “singular they” is permissible. Always make sure, however, that it is clear from the context who “they” or “their” is referring to. (Consider adding a footnote to the first use of this construction to let the reader know it was intentional.)

The singular “they” can also be used when referring to individuals who may not identify as male or female or who use “she/they” or “he/they” pronouns. “They” should be used if that is an individual’s identity.

In any case, be consistent throughout the document. Go to the [“Equity-centered communication”](#) section for more information.

United States, U.S.

Use “United States” when the term stands alone. Use “U.S.” with both periods as an abbreviation only when it is used as an adjective.

- ⇒ The United States is changing its foreign policy.
- ⇒ U.S. policies tend to change with each administration.
- ⇒ The U.S. Department of Justice occasionally audits state agencies.

Use (as a noun — “yooce”), usage

Except for times when “usage” is appropriate (a measure of use, or the accepted rules for speaking or writing a given language), write “use.”

- ⇒ Water use is an environmental issue.
- ⇒ The new meters will measure water usage.
- ⇒ I looked in the dictionary for the proper usage.

Versus, vs., v

Spell out “versus” when used in a sentence. Use “vs.” in headings and titles. Use “v” when referring to court cases.

- ⇒ It’s a question of efficiency versus effectiveness.
- ⇒ The judge ruled on the “Smith v Jones” last week.

Who, whom

“Who” = he, she or they (subject). “Whom” = him, her or them (object).

Who asked whom = she asked them.

To know whether to use “who” or “whom,” try answering the question the sentence asks. Only use “whom” if you could answer “him,” “her” or “them.” If your answer would be “he,” “she” or “they,” use “who.”

- ⇒ Whom did you ask? (I asked them.)
- ⇒ Who went to the dance? (He went to the dance.)
- ⇒ I know who did it. (I know she did it.)

Capitalization

ODHS and OHA capitalize proper names and titles. This includes the title of the document. Only capitalize the first word in the section headings and subheadings. This is also the case for titles (including axis titles) of graphs, tables, figures and charts. Go to the [“Figures and tables”](#) section for examples.

Bullets

When using a bulleted list in text, always capitalize the first word of each bulleted item.

⇒ How to feel better:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Soothe a sore throat with ice chips, cold drinks, Popsicles, smoothies or milkshakes.
- Use lozenges (only for those more than 6 years of age).
- Use a clean humidifier or cool mist vaporizer.
- Take acetaminophen, ibuprofen or naproxen to relieve pain or fever.

⇒ Our business continuity plan contains these options:

- Require staff to meet at a designated location to conduct work.
- Enable staff to work from home or to work irregular schedules.

Compass directions and regions

Use designations such as “north” and “eastern” in lowercase when referring to a compass direction. Capitalize these terms when referring to a region.

⇒ They lived southwest of Salem.

⇒ He lived in Southwest Oregon.

Director, director

Only capitalize “director” when using it as a title before a proper name.

⇒ Oregon Health Authority Interim Director James Schroeder updated the weekly COVID-19 statistics.

⇒ Fariborz Pakseresht, ODHS director, made the announcement.

Federal, federal

Always use “federal” in the lowercase unless it is part of a formal title.

⇒ The department has published the new federal policies.

⇒ The Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a report.

Funds and fund types

Go to the [“Government terms”](#) section.

Graphs, tables, figures and appendices

When referring to a graph, table, figure or appendix in a document, capitalize “graph,” “table,” “figure” and “appendix” only when referring to it by its specific name or number.

- ⇒ Go to the figure below for specific rates.
- ⇒ Go to Graph 1 or the table in Appendix F for the top 10 issues.

Go to the [“Figures and tables”](#) section for more guidance.

Headlines, headings, title of the document

Only capitalize the first word and any formal names or titles in headlines, section headings and subheadings. For the document’s actual title, capitalize all words except minor ones (such as “a,” “the” and “of”) that are not the first or last word of the title.

internet

Do not capitalize “internet.” Use “website” as one word and not capitalized.

- ⇒ The internet is a rich source of information.
- ⇒ Find the information on the OHA website.

intranet

Do not capitalize “intranet.”

- ⇒ The intranet is a rich source of information.
- ⇒ If you cannot find it on the OHA intranet, try the internet.

President, president

Capitalize president only as a formal title before one or more names. Lowercase in all other uses:

- ⇒ President Joe Biden
- ⇒ Former Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama
- ⇒ The president said she will look into the matter.
- ⇒ They are running for president.
- ⇒ Lincoln was president during the Civil War.

Go to [“Titles”](#) for more information.

Use the first and family name on first reference to a current or former U.S. president or the president-elect: former President Barack Obama, President Joe Biden, President-elect Joe Biden. On subsequent references, use only the last name.

For presidents of other nations and of organizations and institutions, capitalize president as a formal title before a full name. On second reference, use only the last name.

- ⇒ President Emmanuel Macron of France
- ⇒ President Amanda Nabih of Acme Corp.

State, state

You can almost always use “Oregon” without the words “state of” preceding it.

Instead of this	Use this
The status of people with disabilities in the state of Oregon.	The status of people with disabilities in Oregon.

When referring to forms of employee identification, do not use “state of Oregon ID” because this could also refer to a driver’s license. Instead, refer directly to the office it is coming from.

Instead of this	Use this
Please bring your state of Oregon ID in order to access the building.	Please bring your official OHA identification badge to access the building.

When it is part of a title created by another agency, it is appropriate to use “State of Oregon.” Although it is not required to change the name of previously created documents, new documents should simply be written as “Oregon” whenever possible. Where “state of Oregon” is the choice, do not capitalize state.

- ⇒ “Oregon Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan.”

Titles

When using a full, formal title in front of a person’s name, capitalize the title.

- ⇒ OHA Director John Kapena supports the bill.
- ⇒ Hoku Miyamoto, OHA director, spoke in support of this bill.
- ⇒ Juan Morales, chief operating officer, approved the budget.
- ⇒ The Office of Human Resources administrator needs to be involved.

Note: If the title is used in a list, such as a list of speakers at a conference, the title can be capitalized.

Titles upon first, subsequent references, acronyms

Use the full name or title upon first reference. Place the acronym in parentheses after it if you are going to refer to the name later in the text. In subsequent references, use the acronym unless there are several pages between acronym references, in which case you should repeat the full name and acronym to remind the reader. If you are not going to use the term again after the first reference, do not list the acronym.

- ⇒ We will ask the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to change the requirements. The decision will be up to CMS. Oregon Health Authority (OHA) is changing its requirements. By doing so, OHA hopes to improve customer service.

Acronyms are all caps, but the terms they stand for are only capitalized if they are proper names.

- ⇒ CCO: coordinated care organization (generic meaning; no specific CCO)
- ⇒ EOCCO: Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization.

In a news release, you do not need to put the acronym in parentheses. Simply use the acronym the next time you refer to the noun you are shortening.

It is occasionally appropriate to delete the title on first reference, for example, when an individual has become well known.

- ⇒ Kate Brown declared Juneteenth a state holiday. The Governor's proclamation followed federal legislation making Juneteenth a national holiday.

Numbers

Dates, days

Do not use nd, th, rd or st in dates. Use only the number.

⇒ We met May 2.

Do not use the word “on” before a day or date, unless getting rid of “on” would be confusing or if “on” is at the beginning of a sentence. Abbreviate months (except March, April, May, June and July) when part of a full date (month, date, year).

⇒ We met Monday.

⇒ We met Dec. 2, 2011, in a four-hour session.

⇒ The manager hired his executive assistant on Friday. Their name is Friday Esquivar.

⇒ On Tuesday, the Legislature passed the bill.

Dimensions

Use figures and spell out “inches,” “feet,” “yards,” etc., to indicate depth, height, length and width. Hyphenate adjectives before nouns.

⇒ He is 5 feet, 6 inches tall [or] the 5-foot-6-inch man

⇒ The 5-foot man is on the team.

⇒ The basketball team signed a 7-footer.

⇒ The car is 17 feet long, 6 feet wide and 5 feet high.

⇒ The rug is 9 feet by 12 feet [or] the 9-by-12 rug.

⇒ The building has 6,000 square feet of floor space.

Dollar amounts

Do not use any digits after the decimal point when writing whole dollar amounts in text. Use digits after a decimal point for a whole dollar amount only in charts and tables.

⇒ The ticket cost \$10.

⇒ The ticket cost \$10.50.

Fractions

Spell out fractions in text unless the fractions are combined with a whole number. When using digits for a whole number and fraction combination, place a hyphen between the whole number and the fraction. When you are referring to half of something, just say “half,” not “one-half.”

⇒ Two-thirds of the staff attended.

⇒ The meeting room was three-fourths full.

⇒ The speech lasted 8-1/2 minutes.

⇒ Half the audience fell asleep.

Numbers

In most uses, spell out the numbers “one” through “nine” and use digits for “10” and higher. There are exceptions when you are referring to a person’s age, a percent, a dollar amount or a measurement. In these cases, always use digits. Go to the [“Specialty writing for public health”](#) section for more information.

- ⇒ She is 6 years old.
- ⇒ We saw seven 7-year-olds.
- ⇒ The 6-year-old lives in a three-year-old building.
- ⇒ More than 50 percent of U.S. residents were born after 1968.
- ⇒ Just two of us went to the movie.
- ⇒ Just 4 percent of the movie’s audience was younger than 10.
- ⇒ We paid \$4 for a coffee.
- ⇒ By the next day the price had risen to \$4.25.
- ⇒ The room was 9x27 feet.
- ⇒ The speech lasted 8-1/2 minutes.
- ⇒ I worked there for three years.
- ⇒ The 5-year-old boy is 5 years old.
- ⇒ The woman is in her 30s.
- ⇒ There were 4 out of 10 girls in the club. (Use figures for ratios for context.)

Use commas for numbers 1,000 and higher, unless you are writing out a year.

- ⇒ We sent 1,200 invitations.

Spell out numbers at the start of sentences. If it is a long number, reword the sentence. You can use the actual number if it is the start of a bullet.

- ⇒ The meeting was held in the auditorium. Fourteen people attended the meeting.
- ⇒ There were 4,275 people at the conference.
- ⇒ 879 out of 900 people were using the service. (This example is for number use in a bullet.)

Write “million” instead of using zeros.

- ⇒ The program cost \$10.5 million.
- ⇒ There are approximately 3 million people in Oregon.

When using a dollar sign (\$), do not write “dollar” or “dollars” after the amount. The dollar sign always goes before the number.

- ⇒ We considered buying a \$4,000 software program.
- ⇒ The project will cost from \$12 million to \$14 million.

Numerical suffixes

When referring to dates in text, do not use “rd,” “th,” “st” or other suffixes. The numbers stand alone. Use these suffixes only when referring to a school grade above ninth grade, a ranking or place in a contest, or in tables. In text, these references follow the same guidelines as general number references (spelling out ninth and lower grades, and using digits for 10th and higher grades). Digits are always acceptable in tables.

- ⇒ We met May 10.
- ⇒ The meeting consisted of 1,500 ninth and 10th graders.
- ⇒ The tests took place in the third, eighth, 10th and 12th grades.
- ⇒ Oregon’s bonus award was fourth highest.

Percent, %

Spell out “percent” in text; it is easier to read than the % sign. You can use “%” in tables and figures to save space.

Percent, percentage

Use “percent” when referring to a specific number. Use “percentage” when a number is not given.

- ⇒ In Oregon, 13 percent of children are uninsured.
- ⇒ A growing percentage of children in Oregon are insured.

Time of day

When referring to a time, always use “a.m.” and “p.m.” in lowercase with periods and a space after the number. Do not use “:00” when referring to a whole hour. When listing a range of times, such as for a meeting, either use “from” and “to” or an endash without spaces on either side between the times, but not a combination of “from” and an endash.

- ⇒ We were supposed to be at work at 8 a.m., but we arrived at 8:04 a.m.
- ⇒ She likes to take a walk at 3:30 p.m. every day.
- ⇒ We met from 3:30 to 5 p.m.
- ⇒ We met 3:30–5 p.m.
- ⇒ The next day we met noon–2 p.m.
- ⇒ The procedure lasted for 6 hours, 23 seconds.
- ⇒ The agency’s audits occurred in 1990, 1996 and 1990.

When writing an agenda or list of several times in a column, you can include the “:00” on hours to align the columns.

- ⇒ 10:30–11:00 a.m.
- ⇒ 11:00–11:30 a.m.
- ⇒ 11:30–noon

Years

Offset a year with commas only when the full date is being used. Do not use a comma before a year when it follows a month without the exact date. Use the full four digits for both years when referring to a multiyear span of time.

- ⇒ She was born in 1999.
- ⇒ She was born in December 1999.
- ⇒ She was born Dec. 1, 1999.
- ⇒ She was born Dec. 1, 1999, in Salem.
- ⇒ She was born during the 1999–2001 biennium.

Punctuation

Academic degrees, certifications, licenses

Use periods to identify a person’s academic credentials. Use professional accreditation abbreviations sparingly and do not use periods within them.

- ⇒ Natalia Dorale, M.D.
- ⇒ Casey Boze-McGraw, CPA

On second reference, use last name only. Do not use a courtesy title such as Dr. before a name.

Ampersands

Use “and” rather than ampersands (&) in your writing. However, you should use an ampersand when it is part of a formal title or proper name.

- ⇒ ODHS Aging and People with Disabilities
- ⇒ Oregon Health & Science University
- ⇒ U.S. News & World Report

Apostrophes (possessives, contractions)

Apostrophes are used to show possessive case or to create a contraction.

Apostrophes and nouns

- A singular or plural noun that does not end in ‘s’ — add ‘s (committee’s plan, agency’s policy, children’s parent)
- A singular noun that ends in ‘s’ — add ‘s only if next word does not begin with ‘s’ (boss’s idea, boss’ suggestion)
- A singular proper noun that ends in ‘s’ — add ‘ after s (ODHS’, United States’)
- A plural noun that ends in ‘s’ — add ‘ after s; do not add ‘s (agencies’ agree, bosses’ meeting)

Apostrophes can show there is something missing.

- ⇒ Rock ‘n’ roll
- ⇒ Music of the ‘60s

Apostrophes do not always belong in plural nouns. When used with numbers and abbreviations, they only show possession.

- 1960s = the decade; 1960’s = something that belongs to the year 1960 (for example, “1960’s styles”)
- PCs = a lot of computers; PC’s = something that belongs to a specific computer (for example, “the PC’s capacity”)

Its, it's

- “Its” is a possessive.
- “It’s” is a contraction of “it is.”
 - ⇒ It’s time we took off its lid.

Their, they’re, there

- “Their” is the possessive equivalent of “our” or “your.”
 - ⇒ Their children are adults.
- “They’re” is a contraction of “they are.”
- “There” is a place.
 - ⇒ They’re at their home over there.

Your, you’re

- “Your” is the possessive equivalent of “our” or “their.”
- “You’re” is a contraction of “you are.”
 - ⇒ You’re your best friend.

Single apostrophe – overruling the Microsoft Word programmers

When you need to use a single apostrophe at the start of a word for a purpose other than to begin a quote within a quote, the apostrophe always appears with the tail down (’). Don’t be fooled by the programmers of Microsoft Word, who make all apostrophes before words appear tail-up (‘). This is not correct.

- ⇒ ’Twas the night before Christmas.
- ⇒ Most people who lived through the ’60s don’t remember them.

To get around this issue in Microsoft Word:

- On the “File” tab, click “Options.”
- Click “Proofing,” and then click “AutoCorrect Options.”
- In the AutoCorrect dialog box, click the “AutoFormat As You Type” tab, and under “Replace as you type,” make sure the “ ‘Straight quotes’ with ‘smart quotes’ ” option is checked.
- Click “OK.”

Bullets

Try to make each bulleted item a complete sentence and use a period at the end of each one. Simple “shopping list” types of bulleted items should not have any punctuation. If there is only one choice to be made from a list, use “or” before the last bullet.

⇒ Primary care practices:

- Primary care clinics
- Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs)
- Rural health centers

⇒ Protect your PIN!

- Keep your PIN secret. Memorize it!
- Do not write your PIN on your card.
- Do not let anyone (not even the store clerk) see your PIN when you enter it into the point of sale (POS) machine.
- Do not let anyone use your card and PIN.

⇒ Participants can go to one of these primary care practices:

- Primary care clinics
- Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), or
- Rural health centers.

Commas and semicolons

We **do not** use a comma before “and” or “or” in a series, except where it would help avoid confusion. (Including the comma is also referred to as the Oxford comma.) Go to [“Commas and semicolons in a series”](#) for more information.

⇒ One goal is to increase the quality, reliability and availability of care for everyone living in Oregon.

⇒ This drives performance excellence, better communication between employees and managers, and employee recognition.

Commas and time

Do not place a comma at the end of a dependent time-related clause unless it separates two numbers. You can also rewrite the sentence so the dependent clause is at the end.

⇒ Some time during the next few years we will take a vacation.

⇒ During the 1990s we used to take vacations.

⇒ In 1996 we took a vacation.

⇒ In 1996, 100 people took the same vacation.

Commas and dates

Use commas to offset a year in a month-day-year format, but not in a month-year format.

- ⇒ We met May 3, 2007, for two hours.
- ⇒ We met in May 2007 for two hours.

Commas and addresses

Use commas to offset a state when you mention a city and state in a sentence.

- ⇒ She has lived in Beaverton, Oregon, for the past 20 years.

Commas and semicolons in a series

When you list a series of items, the use of commas and semicolons is determined by the complexity of the items in the series. In a simple series, only the “and” or “or” appears before the last word. In that instance, there is no comma before the final “and” or “or.”

- ⇒ Doctors, nurses, physician assistants and other medical staff
- ⇒ Doctors, nurses, physician assistants or other medical staff

When at least one of the items in the series includes the word “and” or “or,” place a comma before the final “and” or “or.”

- ⇒ Doctors and nurses, legislators, and the community
- ⇒ Legislators, parents and students, and school officials

In general, use the semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can show, but less than the separation a period suggests.

When the items in the series are groups of items that contain commas, you separate the groups of items with semicolons and place a semicolon before the final “and” or “or.”

- ⇒ Doctors, nurses and physician assistants; parents and students; and legislators

Semicolons between clauses

Use semicolons to link two related clauses of a sentence when each clause could stand alone as a separate sentence, but the two clauses share a common thought. When in doubt, it's easier to use two sentences.

- ⇒ Most of the parents preferred the new policy; the students did not.
- ⇒ Most of the parents preferred the new policy. The students did not.
- ⇒ Most of the parents preferred the new policy, but the students did not.
- ⇒ Most of the parents preferred the new policy. However, the students did not.

Ellipses

In general, treat an ellipsis as a three-letter word, constructed with three periods with a space before the first and after the third period. Use an ellipsis to indicate you are deleting one or more words to shorten quotes, texts and documents.

- ⇒ Today ... the Oregon Legislature vetoed the bill. (Note: The ellipsis stands for deleted text not relevant to the sentence.)
- ⇒ We have determined ... this fire was accidental.

Exclamation point

Avoid overuse. Substitute a comma or period in most instances. Place the mark inside quotation marks when it is part of the quoted materials. Avoid combining an exclamation point with a comma or period. Only use an exclamation point if it really is exclamatory, such as “Fire!”

Instead of this	Use this
The program includes dynamic speakers!	The program includes dynamic speakers.
“Halt!”, the man yelled.	“Halt!” the man yelled.

Hyphens and dashes

Hyphens

A hyphen (-) is a punctuation mark used to join words and to separate syllables of a single word. It is different from a dash and has different uses.

A hyphen connects parts of a word that have been split. It can also connect two or more words. This typically occurs when the combined words are being used as an adjective that appears immediately before the noun being described.

- ⇒ The out-of-state move occurred when they moved out of state.
- ⇒ In Spanish-speaking households most members are Spanish speaking.
- ⇒ The 5-year-old boy is 5 years old.
- ⇒ Use 10- or 11-point type for footnotes.

In the first three examples above, hyphenate the compound adjective (with two or more words put together) when it appears before the noun it modifies. When the same words appear after the verb, do not hyphenate them.

In the last example, you can eliminate the first use of “point.” If you do this, be sure to leave a space after the hyphen. This is the only situation in which there is a space before or after a hyphen.

Do not hyphenate numeral-word combinations except for compound adjectives. A compound adjective is formed when two or more adjectives are joined together to modify the same noun. These terms should be hyphenated to avoid confusion.

Instead of this	Use this
Diana submitted a 6 page document.	Diana submitted a six-page document.
The budget for that program is \$5-million.	The budget for that program is \$5 million.
The program is 10-years old.	The program is 10 years old.
The boiling point of water is 212-degrees F.	The boiling point of water is 212 degrees F.
Today is the first 80 degree day this year.	Today is the first 80-degree day this year.

Do not use a hyphen when one of the compound adjectives ends with “ly”.

- ⇒ They can smell the highly flammable gas.
- ⇒ It is a widely used procedure.

Dashes

There are two main kinds of dashes: the emdash and the endash.

Endash

The endash is used to show a range of numbers or years.

- ⇒ 23–27 types of homes
- ⇒ Go to the example on pages 31–32.

Emdash

An emdash has two primary uses. Used alone, it substitutes for the phrase “that is.” Used as a pair, emdashes substitute for parentheses. Put a space on both sides of each emdash.

- ⇒ She wore her favorite color — red.
- ⇒ All employees must take the course — Diversity in the Workplace — when they are hired.
- ⇒ All employees must take the course (Diversity in the Workplace) when they are hired.

Dashes and colons

Use either an emdash or a colon before a list that doesn't use bullets. The less formal or complex the list, the better it is to use an emdash. Use a colon for all bulleted lists. When using bulleted lists, follow the guidelines for using commas and semicolons in a series to decide which mark should be used with each bulleted item.

- ⇒ The policy includes three options — cancellation, renewal or replacement.
- ⇒ He liked many animals — dogs and cats; horses, ponies and mules; and rabbits.
- ⇒ He liked many animals:
 - Dogs and cats
 - Horses, ponies and mules
 - Rabbits

Punctuation marks within quotations

Periods and commas

Periods and commas always go inside single and double closing quotation marks.

- ⇒ “This is an important issue,” they said.
- ⇒ Akiko said the report is due “no later than June 30.”
- ⇒ Alberto’s book, “The Importance of MOEs,” will be printed next week.
- ⇒ Sue said, “I sent you an email labeled ‘high priority.’”
- ⇒ The email was labeled “high priority,” but I still didn’t read it.

Question marks and exclamation points

Question marks and exclamation points go inside the closing quotation marks if they apply directly to the quote, and outside the marks if they apply to the sentence outside the quote. When the question mark or exclamation point appears inside the quotation marks, you do not use a comma. Use exclamation points sparingly, and never more than one at the end of a sentence.

- ⇒ “Did you read my report?” the director asked.
- ⇒ “I loved the report!” Jim exclaimed.
- ⇒ When will others say, “We loved the report”?
- ⇒ They all said it was a “great report”!

Semicolons and colons

Semicolons and colons always go outside single and double closing quotation marks.

- ⇒ She said this is an “important issue”; I think we need a report.
- ⇒ Alejandro said the report is due “no later than June 30”; I think it’s late.
- ⇒ Tereza said, “There were two components to the email labeled ‘high priority’: funding sources and expenditure patterns.”
- ⇒ The email was “high priority”; it was about MOEs.

Single quotation marks and double quotation marks

You can use single quotation marks as apostrophes or as quotations within quotations. Use double quotation marks in all other uses (around quotes and to highlight unusual or incorrect words). Do not use quotation marks to show emphasis or importance.

- ⇒ Dorothy Parker once said, “Whenever the doorbell rings I ask, ‘What fresh hell is this?’ ”
- ⇒ Try not to “upsized” the project.
- ⇒ He called for more “nukular” weapons.

Always place a space between a single quotation mark and a double quotation mark.

- ⇒ Adebena said, “I sent you an email labeled ‘high priority.’ ”

Again, however, Microsoft Word programmers make a double quotation mark after a space appear tails-up. Use the directions in the [“Single apostrophe – overruling the Microsoft Word programmers”](#) section to change your options in Microsoft Word.

Slashes

Avoid using slashes whenever possible, except in very common terms such as “24/7” and “9/11” and in fractions. Avoid “and/or” whenever you can.

Do not use a slash to show a word in its singular and plural forms (for example, committee/committees or agency/agencies). Instead, modify the sentence, using “and” or “or” instead of a slash. Spell out terms such as “child” and “children” rather than using a slash.

If you do have to use a slash, there is no space on either side of it.

Spelling

acknowledgment

addenda (needs plural verb)

AIDS

anytime (adverb meaning “at any time”); any time (adjective and noun)

any one (when singling out one element of a group); anyone (for an indefinite reference)

backup (noun and adjective)

bloodborne

braille

breastfed, breastfeed

caregiver

casework or caseworker

childcare (except Self-Sufficiency Programs uses “child care”)

copay and copayment

cosponsor or cosponsored

course work

coworker

criteria (takes plural verb)

cross-cultural

database

daycare

decision-making

email

every one (meaning each individual item, singular); everyone (meaning all persons, singular)

fact sheet

fax

food stamps (use when citing as a practice; in Oregon, generally refer to as “SNAP”)

framework

fundraiser

hand-washing

health care

HIV, HIV-positive

home care (except for Home Care Commission, which spells it “homecare” in text but not in its name)

internet

intranet

judgment

land use (no hyphen when used as noun or adjective)

lifelong

long-term

low-fat

media (plural verb)

mid or mid- (No hyphen is needed unless a capitalized word or a number follows “mid.” For example, midair, mid-America, mid-30s.)

non- (Only use a hyphen if you are creating a word that has a special meaning or if “not” does not make sense before the word. You should also use a hyphen before a proper noun or in awkward words such as “non-nuclear.”)

nonprofit (adj. and noun)

offsite or onsite

online

policymaking

preschool

problem-solving

self-concept

self-confidence

self-directed or self-direction

self-esteem

Social Security number

short-term

socioeconomic

surgeon general

task force

time frame

timeline

toll-free

underway

voicemail

web (Note: The web is a document publishing service that acts as a subset of the internet.)

web page, web feed

website, webcam, webcast and webmaster

well-being

workday (except Workday when referring to the management and time tracking platform)

Workers' Compensation (when citing the program)

workers' compensation (when citing as a practice, service)

workforce

work group

workload

workplace

worksite

workspace

workstation

workweek

ZIP code

Equity-centered communication

The ODHS|OHA Writing Style Guide emphasizes building a community of [equity](#) and belonging by treating every person with respect. This is best displayed when using terms that do not maintain stereotypes or bias. These terms also do not blame individuals for the systemic oppression that affects their life circumstances or health.

The goal of this section is to guide ODHS and OHA staff to use language that empowers the people of Oregon and is a reminder that the words we use matter. As you create and review documents, resources, policy and internal communications, look for opportunities to apply the guidance below. In working to be anti-racist and anti-hate organizations, we recognize the historic and [structural racism](#), oppression and trauma experienced by people in Oregon. Words and tone matter.

What you will find in this section

“**Apply an equity framework**” describes key considerations for framing information about [health inequities](#) and social service disparities.

“**Glossary**” includes definitions of key terms.

Table 1 describes “**overarching equity principles**” to consider throughout ODHS’s and OHA’s written and spoken communication.

Table 2 lists **current terms for select population groups**, as well as terms to avoid. These entries represent an ongoing shift toward equitable and inclusive language.

Table 3 provides **additional equity considerations** for developing community guidance and communications.

Table 4 gives links to **references, other resources and style guides** for use of inclusive language. This equity guide is based on those sources.

Apply an equity framework

When ODHS and OHA prepare to send information, staff make several decisions about what to emphasize, how to explain it and what should be left unsaid. When communicating about inequities, be sure to do the following:

- Ensure information is written in plain language, is culturally responsive and is readily available in languages that represent the communities. Ensure that information is provided in a variety of accessible formats.
- Use gender-inclusive language.
- Be aware of [ableism](#) and how it enters the language we use. Use [person-first](#) language whenever possible. However, you should also consider the context and the community you’re representing. If it’s clear that the material is about disability pride or disability justice, identity-first language may be appropriate.

- Write to empower the individual when making decisions about what terms to use.
- Work with community partners to identify priorities and communication strategies, including the need to build awareness and acceptance, and to correct historical and contemporary injustices.

Specific guidelines

- Emphasize the values of ensuring that everyone has the right to excellent health, access to care and culturally responsive services free from [racism](#), bigotry and bias.
- Recognize that reducing inequities contributes to the common good.
- Explain that some inequities can be prevented by equitable programs, policies and services. Recommend solutions (or the need to develop innovative solutions).
- Some people may not have the resources to follow recommendations based on “ideal world” scenarios. Due to historic and ongoing [structural racism](#) and lack of inclusive infrastructure, funding may not reflect a community’s true needs.
- Meeting an immediate need may not solve structural problems (that is, the factors that caused or could have prevented the need).

Also consider the following as you discuss and apply plain language to your writing:

Note: Examples of these principles can be found in Table 2.

- Make sure to ask how a person or group identifies themselves; do not assume that you know. Individual communities have unique identities.
- Use inclusive and people-first language, but be aware of the context and community being represented.
 - » For example, if it’s clear the material is about disability pride or disability justice, identity-first language may be appropriate.
- Equity work is [intersectional](#). Individuals may belong to several groups subjected to historical and contemporary discrimination and, therefore, may experience layered health and social inequities. Further examine these inequities to better understand, interpret and communicate outcomes. When writing, remember the following:
 - » Population groups are not alike in their health and living circumstances.
 - » Do not assume that race and [ethnicity](#) cause poverty.
 - » There is diversity within and across communities, with variations in history, [culture](#), norms, attitudes, behaviors, lived experience and many other factors. Be cautious in generalizing about a community (for example, “the Hispanic community”), and know your audience.
 - » Long-standing systemic health and social inequities — including some that have been introduced and maintained by federal, state and local policies — have put some population groups at increased risk.

- » Take every action possible to avoid implying that a person, community or population is responsible for increased risk of adverse outcomes.
- Always consider the relationship between inequities and the social determinants of health and equity. These determinants are economic stability, education (access and quality), health care (access and quality), neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context.*
- State the situation or share the data as presented, being mindful of internal biases and data fallacies that affect how the data was collected. Additionally, consider the cultural context. Objective data often centers or favors the majority population.
- Review the content while looking for unintentional stereotyping, stigmatization or blame brought about through word choices and images. Groups most harmed by social inequities may experience systemic or individual acts of racism, ableism, discrimination, bigotry and bias.
- “Affected” versus “impacted”: Be aware of grammatical rules when choosing between these two words. “Impacted” is often used when describing the serious effects of inequities, but “affected” is grammatically correct. It is important to realize the importance of connotations and your audience. One option is to use “harmed” to refer to the serious effects of inequities.

Glossary

Note: While definitions and terms may vary between ODHS’s and OHA’s glossaries, they should align in principle. Sources cited in Table 4 and subject matter experts within ODHS and OHA were consulted for these definitions.

Ableism:

Discrimination in favor of nondisabled people. Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. (Go to [systemic ableism](#) for more.)

Accessibility:

When a person experiencing an equity barrier has the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services in an equally integrated and effective manner and with equivalent ease as someone without that barrier. Efforts are consistent with principles of dignity, independence, integration and equality, ensuring all people receive the same value and quality of service and information. This includes but is not limited to language access, physical access and communication access.

**Healthy People 2030, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. [Cited 2021 July 2], Available from: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>.*

Colonize, colonialism:

Some form of invasion, dispossession and conquering of a people. To colonize is to take over or impose one's values, attitudes and beliefs on another. The invasion does not need to be military. It can begin — or continue — as geographical invasion in the form of agriculture, urban or industrial trespassing. The result of physical colonizing is original inhabitants' loss of vast amounts of lands. It is often legalized after the fact. The long-term result of colonialism is the institutionalized creation of privilege for certain groups, which then creates inequities. The colonizer and colonized relationship is by nature inequitable and benefits the colonizer at the expense of the colonized.

Culture:

A social system of meaning and custom a group of people develops to ensure its adaptation and survival. Cultures are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

Disability:

A physical, emotional or mental condition that substantially limits one or more major life activities (Americans with Disabilities Act definition of a person with a disability). The ADA makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person with a disability, a person with a record of an impairment, a person regarded as having a disability or a person associated with a person with a disability.

Discrimination:

Distinguishing, singling out or making a distinction. In everyday life, when faced with more than one option, we discriminate in arriving at almost every decision we make. However, in the context of civil rights law, unlawful discrimination refers to unfair or unequal treatment of an individual (or group) based on certain characteristics, including age, disability, ethnicity, gender, marital status, national origin, race, religion and sexual orientation. Learn more about discrimination at <https://www.findlaw.com/civilrights/civil-rights-overview/what-is-discrimination>.

Diversity:

The range of human differences, recognizing that everyone and every group is valued. Diversity broadly includes but is not limited to race, ethnicity and gender as well as age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language and physical appearance. It also includes different ideas, perspectives and values.

Equity:

A term acknowledging that all people or all communities are not starting from the same place due to historic and current systems of oppression. Equity provides different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs to achieve fairness in outcomes. Equity strives for the distribution and redistribution of power and resources to communities and people most harmed by systemic and individual acts of racism and oppression (varied sources, including the [State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan](#)).

Ethnicity:

A concept accepted by people in society that arranges people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and where ancestors resided.

Health disparities:

Differences in health outcomes.

Health equity:

Oregon will have established a health system that creates health equity when all people can reach their full health potential and well-being and are not disadvantaged by their race, ethnicity, language, disability, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, intersections among these communities or identities, or other socially determined circumstances.

Achieving health equity requires the ongoing collaboration of all regions and sectors of the state, including Tribal governments, to do the following:

- Address the equitable distribution or redistribution of resources and power.
- Recognize, reconcile and rectify historical and contemporary injustices.

Health inequities:

Systematic, avoidable, unjust and unfair differences in health status and mortality rates across population groups. These differences are rooted in social and economic injustice attributed to the social, economic and environmental conditions in which people live, work and play.

Implicit bias:

Negative associations that people unknowingly hold, also known as unconscious or hidden bias. They are expressed automatically, without awareness. These learned stereotypes and prejudices operate automatically and unconsciously when interacting with others.

Inclusion:

The value and practice of authentically and intentionally bringing traditionally excluded individuals and groups into processes, activities, decision-making and policymaking in a way that shares power.

Institutional racism:

A system in which institutional policies and practices create different, inequitable outcomes for different racial groups.

Intersectionality:

Methodology of studying and examining how various socially and culturally constructed categories (sex, gender, race, class, disability, etc.) interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels and contribute to systematic inequities. Intersectionality examines and attempts to clarify ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. It is a way to see the interactive efforts of various forms of discrimination and disempowerment. Intersectionality looks at the way racism interacts with patriarchy, heterosexism, classism, xenophobia and ableism. It views the overlapping vulnerabilities created by these systems to create specific challenges. It means significant numbers of people in our communities aren't being served by social justice efforts because they do not address particular ways they are experiencing discrimination.

Language discrimination:

Refers to the unfair treatment of an individual based solely on how they speak — such as accent, size of vocabulary and phrasing. It is also discrimination based on an individual's use of language that is not the predominately socially accepted language. It can also involve a person's access to information because their language is not represented in provided documents.

Medical versus social model of disability:

The medical model focuses on seeing people with disabilities as “broken”; it works to “fix” them with cures and prevention. The social model incorporates the entire person and sees society and the environment as the disability and barrier. For example, a person with hearing loss is not disabled by the hearing loss itself, but by the environment not providing the appropriate resources for that person.

Microaggression:

Everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental snubs or insults — whether intentional or unintentional — that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target persons based solely on their group membership.

People-first language:

Puts the person before the life experience or circumstances, physical or mental health condition and diagnosis. People-first language describes what the person has, not who the person is. The basic idea is to use a sentence structure that names the person first and the condition second. For example, “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled person” or “disabled” or “person experiencing houselessness” rather than “homeless” or “houseless” to emphasize they are people first. Note: Some communities or individuals may prefer identity-first language (go to [Table 2, Disability](#)).

Race:

A concept accepted by people in society that groups people based on skin color and other apparent physical differences without any genetic or scientific basis. This social construct was created and used to justify social and economic oppression of people of color.

Racism:

Distinct from racial prejudice, hatred or discrimination, racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

Service equity:

Promotes health, safety and independence for all Oregonians by adapting services and policy to recognize, address and eliminate discrimination and disparities in the delivery of human services.

Structural racism:

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequities. It is a feature of the society in which we all exist.

Systemic ableism:

A system of institutions, policies and societal values that disadvantage people based on social values of intelligence, physical abilities and mental abilities. Systemic ableism relates to barriers such as attitude, communication, physical space, policy, programs, criminal justice, social and environmental issues, and transportation. Advocates define systemic ableism as a system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on socially constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity.

Table 1. Overarching equity principles

Note: Terms to avoid are in the left column, and current terms to use are in the right column.

Avoid vague terms for groups harmed by inequities.	
<p>Avoid using the following terms as adjectives. They are vague and can imply a condition is inherent in a group rather than the result of causal factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable groups • Marginalized groups • High-risk groups • At-risk groups • High-burden groups • Hard-to-reach groups • Targeted population 	<p>Instead, name the community or populations harmed by health inequities and most affected by social inequities.</p> <p>When you need to include a broad range of groups, use the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disproportionately affected • Groups that have been economically and socially marginalized • Groups placed at higher risk or put at higher risk of [outcome] • Groups at higher risk of [outcome] • Groups experiencing disadvantage • Groups experiencing disproportionate impact • Community we are seeking to reach • Communities with insufficient resources or infrastructure
Be mindful of ableist language.	
<p>Avoid disability terms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differently abled • Special needs • “Handicap-able” • People of all abilities • Physically, mentally, emotionally challenged 	<p>Use people-first language such as “person with a disability” instead.</p>
<p>Avoid “Suffers from [diagnosis]” and “[injury] victim.”</p>	<p>Use “person living with [diagnosis or injury]” instead.</p>
<p>Avoid using “blind spot.”</p>	<p>Use “something that has been missed or not noticed” instead.</p>
<p>Avoid using “standing” as in “person in good standing,” “standing in solidarity” or “standing up a project.”</p>	<p>Use “united in solidarity” or “starting a project” instead.</p>

<p>Avoid terms associated with mental or physical conditions, such as “crazy” or “paralyzed.”</p>	<p>Use neutral terms such as “unusual” and “frozen” instead.</p>
<p>Avoid using some common words and phrases with racist, sexist, ageist or homophobic histories and connotations.</p>	
<p>Don’t use “sunset” to refer to when something is ending.</p> <p>History: It has racist links to “sunset towns” or “sundowning” where Black people could be harmed or murdered for being in a town past sunset.</p>	<p>Use “ending” or “closing” instead.</p>
<p>Don’t use “grandfathered in” and “grandfather clause” to refer to people allowed to continue following an existing set of rules even after new rules are put into place.</p> <p>History: Relates to voter restrictions such as literacy tests, which were created to keep Black, Indigenous and people of color from having the same rights and access.</p>	<p>Use “exempted” or “excused” instead.</p>
<p>Don’t use “field staff,” “field work” and “field workers” to refer to office and staff.</p> <p>History: Linked to both enslavement of individuals and also derogatorily used for agricultural migrant workers.</p>	<p>Use “ODHS OHA staff” and “local office” instead.</p>
<p>Don’t use “pioneering” to refer to new ideas or methods. It is commonly but inappropriately used in business communication.</p> <p>History: The word can be seen as a racist symbol of colonialism by those whose ancestors were harmed by the historical definition of the word “pioneer.”</p>	<p>Use “innovative” or “new” instead.</p>

Avoid dehumanizing language.

Use person-first language whenever possible. Describe people as having a condition or circumstance, not being a condition.

Note: Go to Table 2 for current terms for specific groups.

Avoid using the term “stakeholder.”

The term can imply a business transaction or monetary investment where people either win or lose. In health and human services, we need to build relationships and partnerships by using respectful, strength-based language.

The term stakeholder is rooted in colonial practices; for example, “I am putting a stake in the ground to claim this land as mine.” This power dynamic is counter to the government-to-government relationship between the state and the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon, who value equal negotiations and honoring the Tribes as sovereign nations.

Use one of these alternate words, depending on your audience:

- Collaborators
- Partners
- Interested groups
- Allies
- Community members
- Persons affected by [policy, program, practice]

Avoid the following terms:

- Alcoholics (or others with an addiction)
- Cancer (or other disease) patients
- The diabetes (or other disease) population
- The homeless
- Victims

Use these terms instead:

- People with [disease or life circumstance]
- Patients with [disease] (if being treated)
- People experiencing [health outcome or life circumstance]
- People who are experiencing [condition]
- Survivors

Identify the specific communities you are writing about.

Remember there are many types of communities. [Diversity](#) in communities is vast and should not be generalized.

Avoid these vague terms:

- Minorities
- Minority
- Sexual minority
- Religious minority
- Political minority

Instead, state the actual community you are referring to, such as “the Marshallese community” or “the LGBTQIA2S+ community.” Be as specific as possible; unless you are speaking of a much larger group, do not group everyone together. While never wanting to “other” people, communities need to see themselves represented and addressed.

U.S. federally recognized Tribes are Tribal nations with political rights that hold a unique government-to-government relationship with the United States. Acknowledge Tribes as Tribal nations given their unique status.

Avoid aggressive language.

Avoid saying “target,” “tackle,” “combat” or other terms with violent connotation when referring to people, groups or communities.

Avoid phrases such as

- Tackle a community’s health issue, or
- Target communities for interventions.

Instead, use phrases such as

- Engage
- Prioritize, or
- Consider and adjust to the needs of the population of focus.

Table 2. Current terms for select population groups and communities

Note: Terms to avoid are in the left column, and current terms to use are in the right column.

Corrections	
<p>Avoid the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inmate • Prisoner • Convict • Ex-convict • Offender • Criminal • Parolee • Detainee 	<p>Use these terms instead, as appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People affected by the carceral system • Adults in custody • Youth in custody • People or persons who are incarcerated or detained • Individuals, people or persons incarcerated or detained (often used for shorter jail stays) • Youth in detention facilities • Individuals, people or persons in pre-trial or with charge • Formerly incarcerated person • Persons on parole or probation • Non-U.S. citizens (or immigrants) in immigration detention facilities
Disability	
<p>Avoid using “vulnerable” when describing people with disabilities.</p> <p>Avoid using “handicap” and “handicapped” when describing a person.</p> <p>The terms are still widely used and generally acceptable when citing laws, regulations, places or things, such as “handicapped parking,” although many prefer the term “accessible parking.” Avoid “handicapable” because many people will not understand it. (Go to National Center on Disability and Journalism.)</p>	<p>Use empowerment as the guiding principal when making decisions about what terms to use. Go to Communicating With and About People with Disabilities.</p> <p>Refer to a person’s specific condition or use “person with a disability.”</p> <p>It is recommended the word “disability” be used to refer to an attribute of a person, and handicap to refer to the source of limitations. Sometimes a disability itself may handicap a person, as when a person with one arm is handicapped in playing the violin. However, when the limitation is societal, as in the case of attitudinal, legal and architectural barriers, the disability is not handicapping—the societal factors are. This distinction is important because society is frequently overlooked as a major source of limitation, even when it is far more limiting than the disability. Thus, prejudice handicaps people by denying access to opportunities; inaccessible buildings surrounded by steps and curbs handicap people who require the use of a ramp. (Go to APA Style Guide.)</p>

	<p>Some individuals with disabilities prefer to use identify-first terminology, which means a disability or disability status is referred to first. Identify-first language is founded upon the idea of the social model of disability. In a nutshell, the social model says that though impairments (diagnostic, medical conditions) may limit individuals in some way, it is the inaccessibility of society that actually disables and renders some persons unable to function. For the purpose of the guide, ODHS and OHA promote person-first language but also acknowledge that the way people identify may vary.</p>
<p>Avoid the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crippled • Handicapped • Mute • Special needs • Suffering from a disability • Impaired 	<p>Use these terms instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with disabilities or a disability • People, persons who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, blind or have low vision <p>Note: “DeafBlind” is the proper term for a person who is both Deaf and blind.</p>
<p>Don’t use “mentally retarded.”</p>	<p>Use “people or persons identified as having an intellectual or developmental disability” instead.</p>
<p>Avoid using “disAbled or disAbility” with the “A” capitalized.</p>	<p>Use “Disability” or “person with disability” instead.</p> <p>Note: Some people identify with their disability and might prefer “disabled person” or “disabled people.”</p>
<p>Avoid using deaf (with a lowercase d) or hearing impaired.</p>	<p>Use “Deaf” or “Hard of Hearing” instead.</p> <p>Note: Deaf and Hard of Hearing are capitalized and equate to identifying as Deaf and identifying as Hard of Hearing.</p>
<p>Avoid using “wheelchair bound.”</p>	<p>Use “people or persons who use a wheelchair” instead.</p>

Families

Avoid using “mom and dad” for all parents or guardians.	Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent. Grandparents, stepparents and nannies may not identify as parents. Not all children have a mom and dad.
Avoid the following terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster parent• Foster family• Foster child	Instead, use: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource parent• Resource family, and• Child in foster care. Note: Child Welfare changed the term from “foster parent” to “resource parent” and “foster family” to “resource family” in 2021.
Avoid using “son” or “daughter” when you are not sure of the relationship or the child’s gender identity.	Use “children” instead. Note: The children in someone’s care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, godchildren, etc. Do not assume the gender of a child.
Avoid using “extended family.”	Use “family members” instead. Note: The term is usually meant to include grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. For people of many cultures , this isn’t “extended” family but “family.” Families don’t always live together. Examples are families with divorced parents or incarcerated parents.

Health care access

Avoid the following terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Underserved people• The underserved• The uninsured• Hard to reach	Use these terms instead: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People who are underserved• People who are medically underserved• People without health insurance Note: “Underserved” relates to lack of service access, including health care. Do not use “underserved” when you mean “disproportionately affected.” Use person-first language.
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Houselessness

Avoid these terms:

- Homeless people
- The homeless
- Transient population
- Runaway youth

Use these terms instead:

- People experiencing houselessness
- Persons experiencing unstable housing or housing insecurity
- Persons who are not securely housed
- Houselessness
- Child or youth who is missing
- Child or youth in foster care who is missing or went missing

Intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD)

Avoid the following terms:

- I/DD people or folks
- DD people or folks
- Cognitively impaired
- Developmentally disabled
- Special needs

Use these terms instead:

- People or person identified as having I/DD
- People or person identified as having an intellectual or developmental disability
- The I/DD community

Don't use "mentally retarded," "mental retardation" or any variation.

Use "individuals with an intellectual disability" instead.

Note: Signed into U.S. law in October 2010 by President Barack Obama, Rosa's Law replaces the term "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" with "intellectual disability" and "individual with an intellectual disability" in federal health, education and labor statutes.

Don't use "idiot," "imbecile," "moron" or any previous descriptors of IQ.

"Profound level of intellectual disability," "severe level of intellectual disability" and "moderate level of intellectual disability" replaced previous descriptors of IQ.

Lower socioeconomic status (SES)

Avoid these terms:

- Poverty-stricken
- The poor
- Poor people
- Low income
- Low-income children

Use these terms instead:

- People with lower incomes
- People or households with incomes below the federal level
- People with self-reported income in the lowest income bracket (if income brackets are defined)
- People experiencing poverty

Note: Do not use “underserved” when meaning low SES.

Note: “People with lower levels of socioeconomic status” should only be used when SES is defined (for example, when income, education and occupation are used as a measure of SES).

Mental health

Avoid these terms:

- Afflicted with mental illness
- Suffering from a mental illness

Use these terms instead:

- Person living with or experiencing mental illness [or diagnosis]
- Person living with a mental or emotional health condition [or diagnosis]
- Person living with depression or anxiety
- Person experiencing psychosis, disorientation or hallucination

Note: Mental illness is a broad term and doesn’t reflect what a person is experiencing. A mental health condition might also be considered a disability with ADA protections or accommodations.

The Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon

When guidance in style, punctuation and grammar conflicts with the ODHS|OHA Writing Style Guide, the Tribal Affairs Writing Style Guide (to be published in spring 2023) takes precedence over it and other conventional writing standards such as Associated Press (AP) style. When we uplift and normalize Indigenous writing style and thought, we begin dismantling systems of oppression and center Tribal identity and culture.

Keep in mind the following guiding principles:

- Collaborating and partnering with Indigenous and Tribal peoples is key to working in a culturally responsive way when developing written or spoken work.
- Be very cautious when writing and editing about Indigenous and Tribal trauma. Each Tribe and Tribal person may have their own feelings, connection and trauma involving historical events that need to be acknowledged and respected.
- It is essential to reciprocate when approaching Tribes, Tribal members or their representatives for cultural guidance, information or participation.
- Choose words that are strengths-based over deficiency-based or negative when referring to American Indian and Alaska Native people. Go to “Inappropriate terms and phrases” in the “ODHS Tribal Affairs Writing Style Guide” for more information.

When writing to or about Tribal communities and people, observe these practices:

- Refer to the people we serve as American Indian and Alaska Native, but follow up by asking what term they prefer. Use these terms instead of Native American.
- Use formal language with Tribes, avoiding abbreviations, acronyms, shortcuts and slang.
- Avoid using inappropriate possessives, such as my Tribe, our Tribal children and Oregon’s Nine Tribes. Instead, say Tribe, Tribal children and the Nine Tribes of Oregon.

Note: The Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon are individual sovereign nations with a distinct political and legal status that is not based on race. Oregon has a government-to-government relationship that differs from the state’s relationship with other community partners.

- Whenever possible, refer to a Tribe’s full name without any shortcuts or abbreviations. In addition, ask the family or representatives how they like to be identified.
- When referring to Tribal groups, use the most specific description you can. For example, instead of writing “the Tribe,” name the Tribe, such as “Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.”
- Tribes are not all the same so, when in doubt, ask their preference.
- When you need to communicate with Tribal leadership or council, please contact Tribal Affairs.

Non-U.S.-born persons' immigration status

<p>Avoid these terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alien• Illegals• Illegal immigrant• Illegal alien	<p>Use these terms instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People who are undocumented• Non-status immigrants• Mixed-status households
<p>Avoid using “foreigner.”</p>	<p>Use these terms instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Non-U.S.-born persons• Foreign born persons• Naturalized citizens• Permanent residents• Non-immigrants (persons with a temporary visa)
<p>Avoid using “escapee.”</p>	<p>Use the appropriate term below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asylee – an individual who is either seeking asylum or granted asylum due to persecution in their home country. Within ODHS, asylee is only used for those granted asylee status.• International displaced person or refugee – a person forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster. ODHS has a specific definition as it relates to the ODHS Refugee Program.
<p>Avoid using “immigrant” to specifically refer to people who are undocumented.</p>	<p>Federal guidance indicates it is appropriate to use the term “immigrant” to refer only to those who are lawful permanent residents; however, the term only refers to that population.</p>

LGBTQIA2S+: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual/ aromantic, two-spirit, plus others

<p>Avoid the term “homosexual.”</p>	<p>Use “LGBTQIA2S+” or refer to the specific communities being addressed, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lesbian • gay • bisexual • transgender • queer • intersex • asexual • two-spirit • pansexual
<p>Avoid the following terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgenders • Transgendered • Transsexual 	<p>Use these terms, as appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgender • Non-binary • Genderqueer • Gender non-conforming • Gender identity • Gender expression
<p>Avoid referring to “sexual preference” and “preferred pronouns.”</p>	<p>Instead, use “sexual orientation (or just orientation)” and “pronouns.”</p>
<p>Avoid these terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biologically male or female • Genetically male or female 	<p>Use these terms instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigned male or female at birth • Designated male or female at birth
<p>Avoid using the term “hermaphrodite.”</p>	<p>“Intersex” describes people born with a variety of differences in their sex traits and reproductive anatomy. Intersex traits greatly vary, including differences in genitalia, chromosomes, gonads, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response and/or secondary sex traits.</p>
<p>Note: When referring to a specific person and their identity, please strive to respect how they identify themselves. It is important to remember, in terms of their sense of self, who they are is not a function of how anyone else may or may not identify them.</p> <p>Therefore, instead of saying, “They identify as non-binary,” you should say, “They are non-binary.” Instead of saying, “She identifies as transgender,” you can say, “She is transgender.”</p> <p>Using the language that a person prefers is not just about respecting their self-identification, but their known self. This is a key aspect of being an ally and promoting inclusiveness.</p>	

Older adults

Avoid these terms:

- Elderly
- Senior
- Senior citizen
- Frail or fragile
- Senile
- Geriatric

Use these terms instead:

- Older adults (aged ≥ 65 years)
- Numeric age groups (for example, persons aged 55–64 years)
- Aging
- Elder (In some communities, this is a term of respect.)

Note: “Senior center” refers to the building but not people. Do not refer to aging in negative terms or sayings that refer to aging as a burden; for example, “like a tsunami of baby boomers.”

Note: The term “geriatric” is part of a [medical model](#) approach and not used within ODHS unless it relates to specific medical care.

People who are at increased or higher risk

Avoid these terms:

- High-risk people
- High-risk populations
- Vulnerable population

Use these terms instead:

- People who are at increased or higher risk for trauma response
- People who are or have [life experience or life condition] are at increased or higher risk for [physical or mental health condition or diagnosis]
- People who are at increased or higher risk for [condition or diagnosis]
- People who live or work in settings that put them at increased or higher risk of becoming infected or exposed to hazards
- Populations or groups disproportionately affected by [condition or diagnosis]
- Populations or groups highly affected by [condition or diagnosis]

Note: When communicating about people who may experience a higher risk due to a life experience or circumstance, it is important to be mindful of potential activators. Health is not limited to physical but also includes mental and emotional health. Keep in mind the four Rs as a trauma-informed approach: realization about trauma and how it can affect people and groups, recognizing the signs of trauma, having a system that can respond to trauma and resisting re-traumatization.

Pregnancy

Avoid these terms:

- Pregnant women
- Mothers-to-be
- Expectant mothers
- Teen pregnancy

Use these terms instead:

- Pregnant people
- Parents-to-be
- Expectant parent
- Young adult pregnancy

Note: Use terms that include all gender identities.

Race and ethnicity

Avoid the following terms:

- Indian (to refer to American Indian)
- Eskimo
- Oriental
- Afro-American
- Negro
- Colored
- Caucasian

Avoid referring to people as:

- Their race or ethnicity (for example, Blacks, Hispanics, Latinos, whites)
- The (racial or ethnic) community (For example: the Black community)
- Non-white (used with or without specifying non-Hispanic)

Note: Depending on audience, Hispanic may carry negative connotations.

Note: Latinx by itself may not be understood or accepted by everyone in the community.

Use these current terms for specific racial or ethnic groups:

- American Indian or Alaska Native persons
- Asian or Asian American persons
- Black, African, Pan-African, African American or Foundational Black American (FBA) persons
- Hispanic or Latino, Latina or Latinx persons
- Native Hawaiian persons
- Pacific Islander persons
- white persons
- People who identify with more than one race or ethnicity
- People of more than one race or ethnicity

Note: ODHS and OHA do not capitalize “white.” This aligns with AP guidelines. For more information, go to <https://blog.ap.org/announcements/why-we-will-lowercase-white>.

Note: “American Indian or Alaska Native” should only be used to describe persons with different Tribal affiliations. Otherwise, identify persons or groups by their specific Tribal affiliation.

Note: [REALD](#) race and ethnicity categories used for specific communities are appropriate.

The Use of “BIPOC” – Black, Indigenous, people of color

Avoid putting all people of color into one category. Defaulting to umbrella terms such as BIPOC oversimplifies communities and cultures with diverse identities, world views and experiences, as follows:

- **The B** in BIPOC is potentially harmful to people who identify as Black, African, African American, Pan-African or as Foundational Black Americans (FBAs), who do not identify in the same way. Combining these identities as one diminishes multiple cultural, regional, ethnic, socioeconomic, social, political and religious beliefs. For example, referring to FBAs as Black does not tie them to their particular culture or history, nor does it represent who they are. On a similar note, all groups identified above may not universally embrace identifying as FBA.
- **The I** in BIPOC does not account for an Indigenous person’s specific identity. Many people use the word “Indigenous” to identify themselves as directly connected to a certain area – North, Central and South America, Mexico or other places around the world; for example, “My family is Indigenous to Guatemala.”

The Indigenous people of this land were here long before Oregon or the United States. Their descendants are now the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon. Using “BIPOC” deletes a specific reference to their ancestral home. BIPOC also does not capture the government-to-government relationship and trust responsibility that the state and federal governments have with U.S. Tribes. In addition, BIPOC does not recognize the legal and political relationship with these entities.

- **The POC** in BIPOC stands for “people of color.” The term is only used to collectively refer to racial and ethnic groups other than non-Hispanic white. Refer to a specific racial or ethnic group or groups instead of this collective term when the burden and experience of condition is different across groups.

Instead of using BIPOC, refer to people in the way they would like to be identified or refer to their specific group such as Black, African, African American, Pan-African, Foundational Black American, American Indian/Alaska Native or Latinx. For more information, refer to other parts of this “Race and ethnicity” section.

Note: The term “people of color” is not capitalized because it is not a proper noun. It collectively refers to all racial and ethnic groups except non-Hispanic white.

Rural

Avoid these terms:

- Rural people
- Frontier people

Use these terms instead:

- People who live in rural or frontier areas
- Residents or populations of rural areas
- Rural communities

Substance use

Avoid the term “drug users.”

Use “persons who use drugs” instead.

Avoid the terms “addicts” and “drug abusers.”

Use “persons with substance use disorder” instead.

Avoid the term “IV drug users.”

Use “people who inject drugs” instead.

Avoid the term “alcoholics.”

Use “persons with alcohol use disorder” instead.

Avoid the terms “recovering alcoholic” or “recovering addict.”

Use “persons in recovery from substance use or alcohol disorder” instead.

Avoid the term “persons taking or prescribed medication-assisted treatment (MAT).”

Use “persons taking or prescribed medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)” instead.

Avoid the term “persons who relapsed”

Use “persons who returned to use” instead.

Suicide

Avoid these terms:

- Committed suicide
- Successful suicide

Use these terms instead:

- Died by or of suicide
- Completed suicide

Note: When writing about death by suicide, recognize your audience’s cultural and religious perspective may differ from your own.

Table 3. Equity considerations for developing community guidance and communications

Encompassing values

Focusing on humanity and person-centeredness includes these values:

- Dignified and respectful treatment, services and equitable opportunities become part of the communications and outreaching process.
- Researching what is valued within a particular community and including those things as part of the language you choose when drafting communications and outreach processes. Engage with community to understand their strengths, values and priorities to effectively communicate about that community.

Images used in communications

Images for social media, websites, etc. should focus on movement toward equity, empowerment and a collective approach to resolving issues. Images of positive activities and people working together are more suitable. Additionally, image descriptions should be included wherever possible to provide access to people who are blind or have low vision.

People of color should be proportionately represented in appropriate images; however, images should avoid intentionally implying the efforts to address inequities are the sole responsibility of the people experiencing them.

Whenever possible, use empowering real-life photographs of people with disabilities in communication materials, including social media posts. Uphold the social model of disability by showing a range of images to encompass all disabilities. Use visual or written cues, such as captions or copy to help represent non-apparent disabilities. Do not equate disability with illness or chronic disease.

Images in digital materials should have alternate text descriptions and meet [WCAG/508 compliance standards](#). The standards directly relate to electronic and information technology.

- What is alt text?

Alt text must be included in all documents. It tells people what is in an image, such as text or basic essential details. If an image fails to load, alt text will display in its place. People who use assistive technology, including screen readers, can only access images* if alternate text is included in the alt text field, image description or caption. Using all these formats provides the greatest access.

The document's author or subject matter expert should include this information in the document or provide it to the document designer. Search engines also index alt text information and consider it a factor when determining search engine ratings.

*Images include photos, illustrations, graphs, charts and tables.

- What is an image description?

An image description gives more details than alt text and allows someone to learn more about what is in an image that goes beyond alt text. Alt text gives the user the most important information while image descriptions provide further detail. For example, alt text tells someone there's a puddle on the floor, and image description tells someone the puddle on the floor is in the middle of the floor and that it's orange juice.

- If an alt text field isn't available, provide an image description below the image or in the copy or caption.
- Source: <https://www.perkins.org/resource/how-write-alt-text-and-image-descriptions-visually-impaired/>

Considerations to improve cultural responsiveness

Insufficient consideration of culture in developing materials may lead to misinformation, errors, confusion or loss of credibility. Please check materials for the following:

- Are some words, phrases or images offensive?
- Do some words, phrases or images stereotype the cultural or religious traditions, practices or beliefs of the intended audience?
- Are some words, phrases or images confusing or misleading, or do they have a different meaning for the intended audience? (For example, if abstract images are used, will the audience interpret them as intended?)
- Are there images that do not reflect the look or lifestyle of the intended audience or the places where they live, work or worship?
- Are some recommendations inappropriate for the social, economic, cultural or religious context of the intended audience?
- Are toll-free numbers or referenced web pages, when applicable, included in the document in the language of the intended audience?

Review these considerations and others again after material is translated. Best practice is to develop a review process for culture and language considerations for translated material.

Disability accommodation and access

People with disabilities make up 26 percent of the U.S. adult population. Information must be made accessible for all people with disabilities. Accessible format standards include:

- Ensure it meets WCAG/508 compliance standards. The standards directly relate to electronic and information technology.
- Provide large print, braille, American Sign Language, closed captioning, audio descriptions and alt text.
- Check for plain language.

Go to the [Alternate Formats and Language Access Statements](#) page for current information on the ODHS and OHA alternate format and language access services policy.

The Auxiliary Aids, Alternate Formats and Language Access Services Policy (AAFLAS) requires that all meetings, surveys, external websites and publicly available documents contain an access statement that is “substantially similar” to the examples provided by clicking on the “Example Access Statements” button. “Substantially similar” is defined in the [AAFLAS policy](#). For more information including the policy, sample statements, definitions and guidance, please visit [Auxiliary Aids, Alternate Format and Language Access Services \(AAFLAS\)](#).

Older adults

Age and associated risk are often a continuum.

Adjust guidance to specific setting of interest within this age group. For example:

- Those living independently or in community dwellings
- Those living in multigenerational homes
- Those living in long-term care facilities or nursing homes
- Those living in retirement homes.

Urban and rural divide

Resources and inequities in rural areas are numerous and vary by region. It is important to acknowledge and recognize these differences when drafting communication.

Social determinants of health include and are not limited to food insecurities, inadequate access to transportation, housing, broadband limitations, access to reliable health care, chronic health conditions and type of occupation. These determinants contribute to the divide between those living in urban areas and rural areas.

In general, do not say the urban-rural divide as a standalone determinant. Like all else, it must be intertwined with other inequities experienced and [structural racism](#). Craft messages that avoid oversimplifying the demographic.

Table 4. Equity resources

Note: You may find contradicting information in these sources. In those cases, please use what has been stated specifically in the ODHS|OHA Writing Style Guide.

ODHS|OHA shared reference table

ODHS|OHA Alternate Format and Language Access Services

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/dhsoha010-013.pdf>

Gender Identity and Expression Policy for Employees

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/me010-021.pdf>

ODHS-specific reference table

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Manual

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/de2761.pdf>

Child Welfare

“What’s in a Word” Usage of terms in Child Welfare — not yet published; contact Kiara.Hunt@dhsoha.state.or.us.

Race, Ethnicity, Language and Disability (REALD) information

<https://dhsoha.sharepoint.com/teams/Hub-ODHS-OEMS/SitePages/REaLD-Data-Standards.aspx>

Trauma-Informed Policy

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/de010-022.pdf>

Auxiliary Aids, Alternate Formats and Language Access Services Policy (AAAFAS)

<https://sharedsystems.dhsoha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/dhsoha010-013.pdf>

Tribal Consultation and Urban Indian Health Program Confer Policy

<https://dhsoha.sharepoint.com/teams/Hub-OHA-DO/Shared%20Documents/Tribal%20Affairs/Tribal%20Consultation%20and%20Urban%20Indian%20Health%20Program%20Confer%20Policy-Signed%203.1.18.pdf>

ODHS program-specific terms for those served

These are the specific terms ODHS uses within each program.

Aging and People with Disabilities (APD):

Use “Oregonian” or “consumer.”

Child Welfare (CW)

- Use “resource parent” or “resource family” instead of former term “foster.”
- In reference to staff and offices — use “local office” or “ODHS staff” rather than “field office” and “field staff.”
- For parents — typically say “legal parent.” In some instances, use “bio parent” if necessary within the context.

Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS)

Use “individual” or “person.” Note: ODDS strongly prefers these two terms; avoid other terms.

Self-Sufficiency Programs (SSP)

- “Customer” is preference; “participant” is also used if actively engaged in a program service.
- In reference to staff and offices, — use “local office” or “ODHS staff” rather than “field office” and “field staff.”

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Use “client” or “participant.” Note: VR previously used and occasionally still uses “customer” and “consumer.”

OHA-specific reference table

Race Ethnicity Language and Disability (REALD) information

<https://dhsaha.sharepoint.com/teams/Hub-OHA-OEI/SitePages/HB-2134.aspx>

Organizational Resilience and Healing Approach

<https://sharedsystems.dhsaha.state.or.us/DHSForms/Served/le010-022.pdf>

External resources

American Medical Association (AMA)

Considerations for using and capitalizing the terms “Tribe” and “Tribal”

<https://itcaonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/TRIBES.pdf>

American Psychological Association (APA)

Bias-Free Language: Ten sections, including age, disability, gender, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language>

American Psychological Association Guidelines for Nonhandicapping Language in APA Journals

<https://apastyle.apa.org/6th-edition-resources/nonhandicapping-language>

Guidance on language related to people with disabilities

American Public Health Association: APHA health equity fact sheets

<https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity>

Asian American Journalists Association

Terms covering Asia and Asian Americans: Glossary of terms to use and avoid in reference to Asian communities, currently being revised

Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists Stylebook on LGBTQ+ Terminology

Guide on language and terminology to cover LGBTQIA2S+ subjects and issues with sensitivity and fairness, without bias or judgment

<https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/terminology/>

El Manual de Estilo Sobre La Comunidad Lesbiana, Gay, Bisexual y Transgénero: Spanish version guide on language and terminology to cover LGBTQIA2S+ subjects and issues with sensitivity and fairness, without bias or judgment

<https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook/espanol/>

Build Healthy Places; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)

Terms that Often Arise in Discussions of Health Equity: Brief to stimulate discussion and promote greater consensus about the meaning of health equity and the implications for action within the RWJF Culture of Health Action Framework

https://buildhealthyplaces.org/content/uploads/2017/05/health_equity_brief_041217.pdf

CDC Emerging Infectious Diseases Journal

Preferred usage for terms and group descriptions

<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/page/preferred-usage>

CDC National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities (NCBDDD)

Communicating With and About People with Disabilities: Preferred (person-first) terms for a person or people with a disability

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/materials/factsheets/fs-communicating-with-people.html>

CDC National Center for Injury Protection and Control (NCIPC)

Commonly Used Terms: Definition of terms related to drug and substance use; preferred terms

<https://www.cdc.gov/opioids/basics/terms.html>

Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples

Elements of Indigenous Style: Writing and style guide for anyone creating works for and about Indigenous peoples.

<https://www.brushededucation.ca/books/elements-of-indigenous-style>

GLAAD

GLAAD Media Reference Guide: Definition of LGBTQIA2S+ terminology and terms to avoid

<https://www.glaad.org/reference>

HHS 508 compliance

Accessibility @ HHS: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS') role in accessibility — includes compliance checklist, Office of the Secretary Accessibility Program and other resources

<https://www.hhs.gov/web/section-508/index.html>

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

HRC's LGBTQ Glossary of Terms: Terms and definitions for writing and conversations related to LGBTQIA2S+ communities

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms>

Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

The institute's goal is to connect individuals and communities with opportunities needed for thriving by educating the public, building the capacity of allied social justice organizations, and investing in efforts that support equity and inclusion. The Kirwan Institute does this through research, engagement and communication.

<https://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ)

NABJ Style Guide: Stylebook of terms and language usage recommendations by National Association of Black Journalists

<https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>

National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)

NAHJ Cultural Competence Handbook: NAHJ Cultural Competence Handbook (March 2021) includes a glossary on page 13.

<https://nahj.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NAHJ-Cultural-Compliance-Handbook-Revised-12-20-2.pdf>

National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ)

NCDJ Disability Language Style Guide in English

<https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

NCDJ Disability Language Style Guide in Spanish

<https://ncdj.org/manual-de-redaccion-del-ncdj/>

NCDJ Disability Language Style Guide in Romanian

<https://supereroiprintrenoi.ro/ghid/>

Native American Journalists Association

Reporting and Indigenous Terminology: Terminology guide designed to promote accurate phrasing when it comes to coverage of Indigenous people

https://najanewsroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAJA_Reporting_and_Indigenous_Terminology_Guide.pdf

Office of Management and Budget

Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity

<https://orwh.od.nih.gov/toolkit/other-relevant-federal-policies/OMB-standards>

Racial Equity Tools (RET)

Racial Equity Tools Glossary

<https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

Foundation mission is “to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in America.”

Website includes many health equity resources.

<https://www.rwjf.org/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Overcoming Stigma, Ending Discrimination: The power of perceptions and understanding. Resources to address how we talk and write about addiction. Includes a glossary of preferred terms.

https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/02_webcast_1_resources-508.pdf

TEAM Up (Tools for Entertainment and Media), a project of the Entertainment Industries Council and the TEAM Up Reporting on Mental Health Style Guide

Style guide for reporting and writing on mental health

<https://www.eiconline.org/copy-of-picture-this-publications?pgid=kffokycw-413b2ff7-679c-40d2-a66d-541974afa605>

Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education Style Guide 2021-2022

Style guidelines from the Tribal College Journal based primarily on APA and AP style

https://tribalcollegejournal.org/pdfs/TCJ_STYLE_GUIDE.pdf

University of New Hampshire – University Center on Disability

Person first Language: A partial glossary of disability terms

<https://iod.unh.edu/resource/person-first-language-partial-glossary-disability-terms>

The Writing Center University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill — Gender-Inclusive Language

Strategies and tools to avoid gendered language in writing

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/>

Government terms

Continuous improvement

Written in lowercase except when it is part of an official name.

⇒ Our work unit has embraced continuous improvement strategies.

Coordinated care organization or dental care organization

These terms are not capitalized or hyphenated. The acronym for coordinated care organization is CCO and is DCO for dental care organization.

Emergency Board

Refer to the legislative Emergency Board as “Emergency Board” with both words capitalized, and not by the term “E-Board.”

⇒ OHA presented its request to the June Emergency Board.

Fund types

Always capitalize the terms “General Fund,” “Lottery Funds,” “Other Funds” and “Federal Funds.” These are the formal names of the funding sources. Note that “General Fund” is always written as a singular item, while the other fund types are always written as plural items.

- ⇒ The program is supported by General Fund moneys.
- ⇒ Funding sources include Other Funds and Federal Funds.
- ⇒ Lottery Funds help pay for program activities.

Governors and legislatures

Always capitalize “Governor” and “Legislature” when referring to Oregon’s Governor or Legislature. Use lowercase when referring to the legislature or governor of another state. Always spell out the word “Governor” in all uses.

- ⇒ Washington’s governor advocates for plain language.
- ⇒ Governor Tina Kotek signed the proclamation.
- ⇒ The Governor, Tina Kotek, supports the climate change legislation.

Use the term “Oregon Legislature,” not “Oregon Legislative Assembly.”

- ⇒ The Oregon Legislature sent the bill to the Governor.
- ⇒ The 2011 Oregon Legislature passed the bill.

The word “legislative” is lowercase in all uses, even when referring to the Oregon Legislature. The word “session” is lowercase in all uses.

- ⇒ The 2007 legislative session ended after six months.
- ⇒ The committee was in session for two hours.

Always capitalize and abbreviate “Sen.” and “Rep.” when used before the names of legislators. Add “U.S.” or “State” before a title only if necessary to avoid confusion.

The use of a title such as Rep. or Sen. in first reference is normal in most stories. It is not mandatory, however, if an individual’s title appears later in the story.

- ⇒ Sen. Jane Doe
- ⇒ U.S. Rep. John Doe

Use the following style if you want to show a legislator’s affiliation upon first reference:

- ⇒ Sen. Jane Doe, R-Salem
- ⇒ Rep. John Doe, D-Portland

House, Senate and Congress

Always capitalize “House,” “Senate” and “Congress” when referring to the Oregon chambers or to the U.S. Congress. Lowercase “congressional” unless it is part of a proper name. Always use “Oregon” or “U.S.” before “House” and “Senate” to clarify which body you are referencing.

- ⇒ The Oregon Senate president voted in favor of the bill.
- ⇒ The U.S. House supported the bill.
- ⇒ Ask a member of Congress for assistance.
- ⇒ The congressional representatives held a public hearing.
- ⇒ Members of the Senate regularly read the Congressional Record.
- ⇒ Oregon House members supported the bill.

Lean

Capitalize only when used as a proper noun. Lean is lowercase otherwise. Lean is not an acronym.

- ⇒ We practice continuous improvement in our work unit using the Lean Daily Management System.
- ⇒ Lean Coach Pete Process will meet with us Monday.
- ⇒ The lean approach focuses on streamlining and improving work processes.

Lean Daily Management System® (LDMS®)

Upon first reference, use the full name and place the acronym in parentheses after it, if you are going to refer to the name later in the text. All subsequent references use the abbreviation. Lean Daily Management System® and LDMS® are registered trademarks of Kaufman Global.

OAR and ORS

Capitalize all references to Oregon Administrative Rules or Oregon Revised Statutes whether singular or plural. If the word “Oregon” is not used, do not capitalize the terms. Use the abbreviations “OAR” and “ORS” when listing the specific numbered reference.

- ⇒ You will find it in the Oregon Administrative Rules.
- ⇒ You will find it in OAR 137-055-1060.
- ⇒ The administrative rules are clear about this.
- ⇒ This is covered in the Oregon Revised Statutes.

Rules and statutes

When writing the full number of an Oregon Administrative Rule or Oregon Revised Statute, use the abbreviation “OAR” or “ORS” and place a space after “OAR” or “ORS,” but do not place spaces anywhere else in the reference.

- ⇒ Please go to OAR 137-055-1060(2)(a)-(4)(b) for more information.
- ⇒ ORS 468.075(1)-(3) provides the information you are seeking.

Triple aim

Term used by OHA to describe goals of better health, better care and lower costs. This term is not capitalized unless it begins a sentence.

Specialty writing for public health

Audience

Most writing in OHA is for a general audience — the public, clients, partners, employees and the media. Public Health Division materials often are written for scientists, statisticians and research analysts rather than the general public. Style guidelines for these publications also differ. Identify your audience first, then write or edit.

When a publication's audience includes legislators, however, write and edit as if writing and editing for the general public.

Adolescent health well-visit

Adolescent health well-visit is always hyphenated.

Numerals or words

In scientific writing, use Arabic numerals when the number designates a quantity.

- ⇒ 12 hypotheses
- ⇒ 4 times
- ⇒ 25 mm
- ⇒ 328 amino acids
- ⇒ The rate of infections reached a high of 4 cases per 100,000 persons.
- ⇒ 3 years

However, when two different numbers are next to each other in a sentence, spell out the number easiest to express in words and leave the other in its numbered form; or rewrite the sentence to separate the numbers. If possible, write units of measurement as numbers.

- ⇒ The sample was divided into eight 50-g aliquots.
- ⇒ The sample was divided into 8 aliquots of 50 g each.

If a number starts a sentence, spell it out or rewrite the sentence. The need to rewrite is especially true when larger numbers are used to start the sentence. You **can** use a number to start a bullet.

- ⇒ Thirteen hundred and two people attended the conference. (as a sentence in text)
- ⇒ 1,302 attended the conference (as a bullet)
- ⇒ There were 1,302 people at the conference.

Spell out “zero” and “one” in most cases. Use the figures when directly connected to a unit of measure or a specific, calculated value. Also use figures when part of a series or linked with other numbers.

- ⇒ 1-digit number
- ⇒ 1 mm
- ⇒ 0 of 4 subspecies
- ⇒ 1, 3, 5, 7

Person, people

“People” appears to lump or label human beings and not recognize them as individuals. “Persons” may imply more concern for individuals who are affected by disease:

- ⇒ The team interviewed the 29 members of the travel group and all 27 hotel staff; 38 persons without adequate evidence of immunity received MMR vaccine. They obtained passenger manifests to contact persons seated within one row of the index patient.

Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)

Always spell out and capitalize on first reference.

Taxonomy

Taxonomy is a classification of organisms in an ordered system that indicates natural relationships. For editing purposes, the names of all taxa are italicized. Capitalize and italicize the genus name; lowercase and italicize the species name.

- ⇒ Genus: *Leptospira*
- ⇒ Species: *Leptospira interrogans* (or *L. interrogans*)

Many organisms are referred to by their common rather than species names. Common names are usually not capitalized or italicized. For example: “influenza virus.”

There are exceptions to these rules. Salmonella nomenclature is one example in which serotypes alter genus-species designations. Go to <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/page/scientific-nomenclature>, or consult the author or subject matter expert when editing questions arise.

Tips for making forms

Important — When creating a form:

- Be aware of how it will be used and by whom.
- Imagine you are someone who needs to use the form but has little or no background knowledge, such as a first-time client or new employee.

Make sure you do the following every time you create a form:

1. Avoid acronyms whenever possible. If they are essential and repeated, spell out what they stand for the first time you use them.
 - ⇒ Example: Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) needs your Social Security number (SSN) to verify your identity. ODHS will not use your SSN for any other purpose.
2. Observe ODHS and OHA writing style standards for capitalization and punctuation.
3. Use plain language.
 - Make sure forms use simple words and short sentences.
 - Write so the reading grade level is eighth grade or lower for a general audience.
 - Refer to the “Plain language” section of the Writing Style Guide or the MSC 3835 “Plain Language Basics” tips sheet.
4. Use bullets to list key points and check boxes to list options.
5. Make sure there is enough space for each response. This is especially important if the form will be translated. Many languages fill more space than English.
6. Avoid potentially harmful terms and use person-first language when appropriate. Refer to the “Equity-centered communication” section of the Writing Style Guide for guidance.
7. Avoid unnecessary niceties such as “please” or “have a nice day.”
8. Write questions rather than statements; for example, “How many responders do you need?” rather than “Number of responders.”

9. Fill in help text. Help text is a line of instructions embedded in each form field. Help text tells users who use screen readers what to enter in each field. Screen readers are often used by people who are blind, have low vision or have a hard time processing text. Help text should reword the question or field label as a sentence.

Field	Help text
Phone number:	Enter phone number here
Have you lived in Oregon for at least one year?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	Yes, I have lived in Oregon for at least one year
<input type="checkbox"/> No	No, I have not lived in Oregon for one year
Provider type:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Full-time	Check here if you need a full-time provider
<input type="checkbox"/> Part-time	Check here if you need a part-time provider
<input type="checkbox"/> On-call	Check here if you need an on-call provider

Contact Publications and Creative Services (PCS) for help creating an accessible form. PCS can also place your form on the forms server so it is stored centrally and available to everyone. Learn how to submit a project request on [the PCS OWL page](#).

Figures and tables

Text style rule summary for graphics

Readers often study tables and figures before they read the text. Thus, each figure and table should be able to stand alone. Tables present numbers for comparison with other numbers or summarize or define concepts, terms or other details. Figures reveal trends or point out selected features. Data in tables should not be duplicated in figures, and vice versa.

Here is a list of the most common grammatical issues that pop up in figures and tables.

Abbreviations

If there is room, we prefer to spell out all words in figures and tables. Think about what your audience will or won't automatically understand. If there is any doubt, spell out or use a legend.

Examples:

- ⇒ "Coronary artery disease" rather than "CAD"
- ⇒ "Blood pressure" rather than "BP"

If there simply is no room, spell out the term at first mention even if you have defined the terms in the text.

Example:

- ⇒ system (first reference)
- ⇒ Diseases of circulatory sys. (after first mention)

Figure and table titles

Briefly state figure and table titles, but make sure to use enough detail to explain the data within them. Do not abbreviate or use acronyms in the title. Anyone who hasn't read the text should be able to understand the title. Include:

- The figure or title number (for example, Figure 2) Note: Consistently number figures and tables unless the document only contains one or two.
- A brief synopsis of the subject the figure or table covers
- The specific parameter the figure or table is portraying (for example, "by age and sex, Oregon, 2018")
- The source of the data (for example, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Emerging Infections Program)

Capitalization

For graphics' titles, subheads, column and row titles as well as text within graphics — capitalize only the first word except for proper names. Be careful of proper (or formal) names; for example, many diseases appear to be capitalized but are not. If in doubt, use the American Heritage Dictionary or a specialty dictionary (go to "[Introduction](#)" for resources).

- Diseases and conditions:
 - ⇒ Alzheimer's disease; Alzheimer's is capitalized because it's a person's name but disease is not capitalized.
 - ⇒ diabetes-chronic
 - ⇒ overweight or obese
- Row titles (remember that the first word in rows and titles are capitalized per our style):
 - ⇒ Live births
 - Number
 - Crude rate
 - Fertility rate
- Figure title:
 - ⇒ Number of births by race and ethnicity of mother, Oregon residents, 1995–2012

Sequence of symbols for tables, graphic footnotes

Use one or more symbols within the graphic to indicate footnotes. ODHS and OHA use footnotes for added information, whereas endnotes are for references. All footnote symbols are superscript.

Use this sequence of symbols when you have more than one footnote:
(text in parenthesis is the extended keyboard command for symbol)

- * asterisk
- † dagger (alt+0134)
- ‡ double dagger (alt+0135)
- § section (alt+21)
- || parallels
- ¶ paragraph (alt+20)
- †† two daggers (alt+0134, alt+0134)

Titles

Table, figure, graph and footnote titles should allow the reader to understand the basic topic without referring to the text. The title should be a single phrase with sentence-style capitalization and no closing period.

Consistently format the title of tables and figures in documents with several similar tables and figures.

You can use a generic initial phrase in a title, followed by a colon and a specific phrase that identifies the individual table or figure.

- ⇒ Table 1. Infectious diseases in Oregon: incidence by socioeconomic class
- ⇒ Table 2: Infectious diseases in Oregon: incidence by county

Figure examples

Title: sentence case
Spell out acronyms in legend or title

Years of potential life lost (YPLL) before age 75 and leading causes of death, Oregon, 2012, Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division, Center for Health Statistics

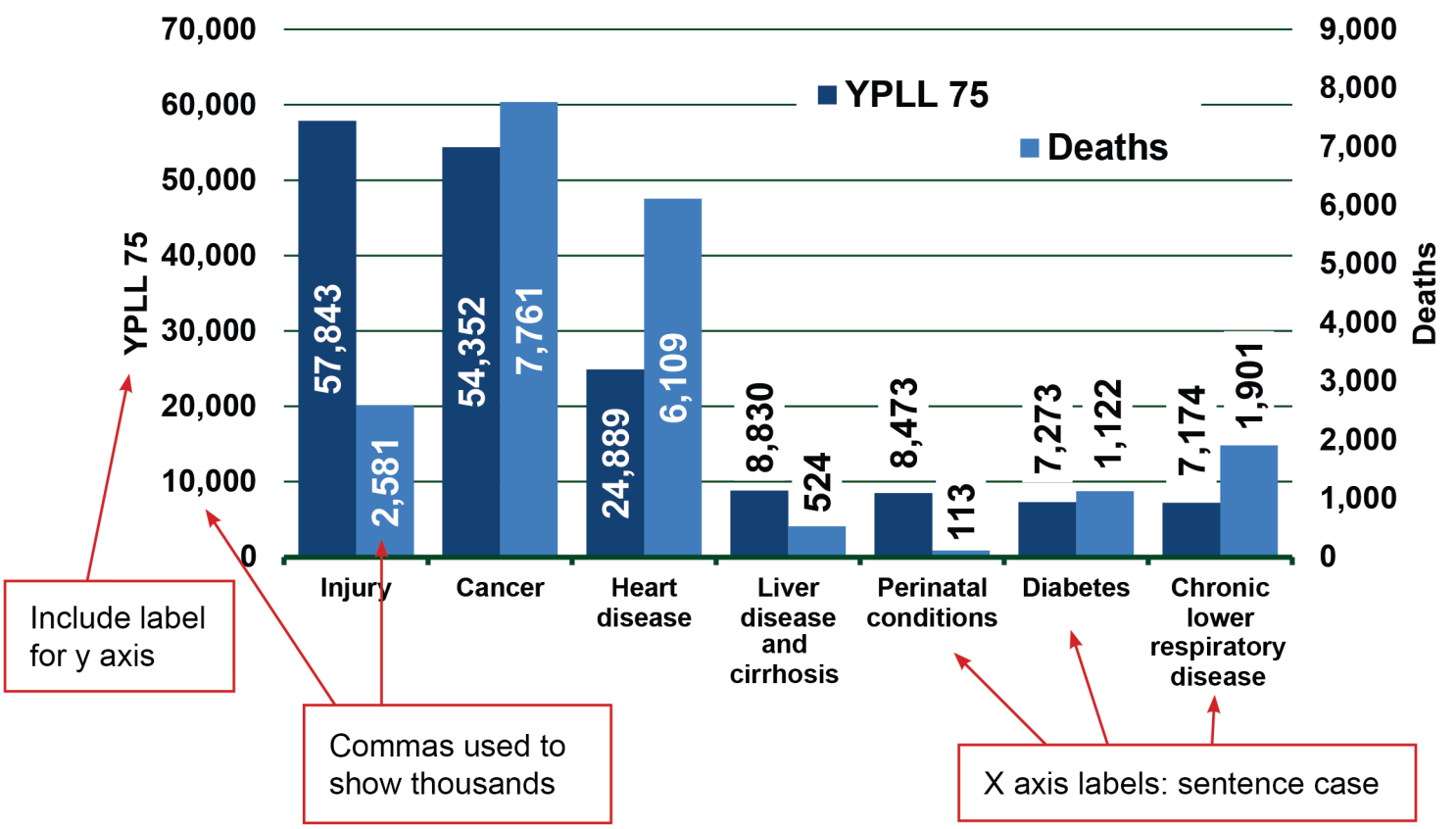


Figure 1. 2021–23 Governor’s Budget: total by fund type, Oregon Department of Human Services

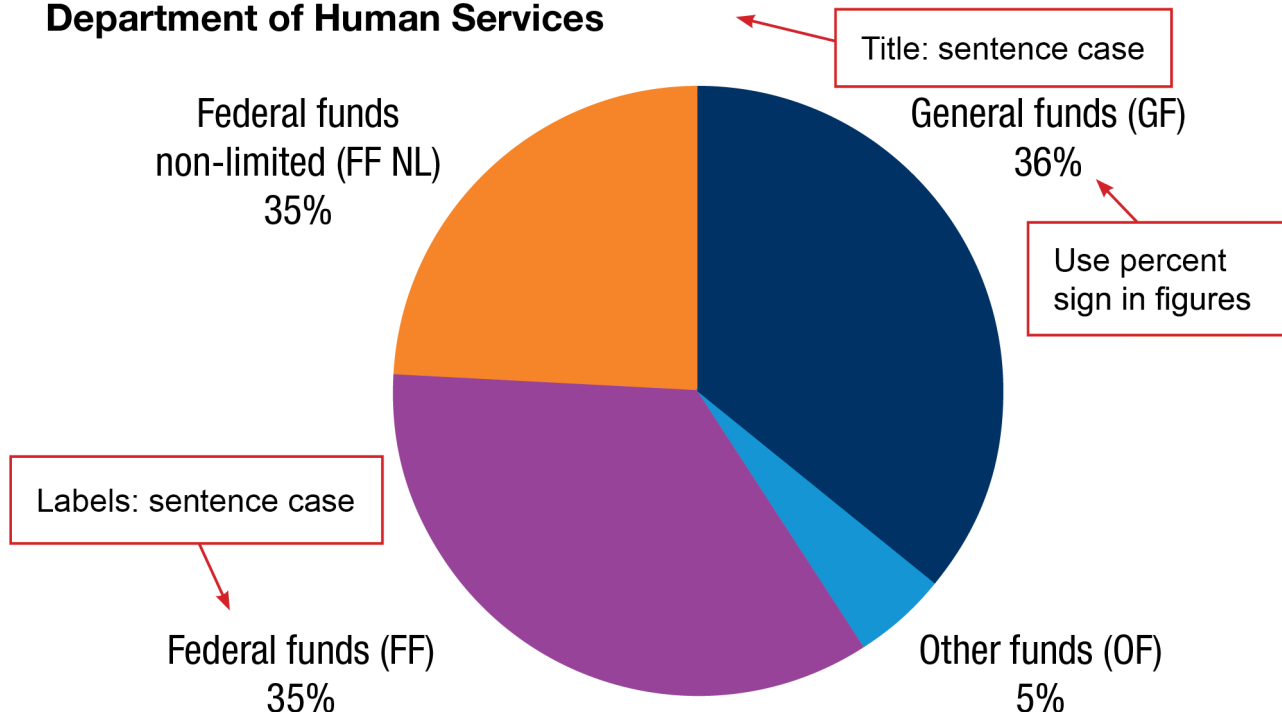


Table example

Title: sentence case

Table 1. Characteristics and end-of-life care of 1,275 Death With Dignity Act patients who have died from ingesting a lethal dose of medication, by year, Oregon, 1998–2017, Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division, Center for Health Statistics

Characteristics	2017 (N=143)	1998–2016 (N=1,132)	Total (N=1,275)
Age			
18–34 (%)	0 (0.0)	9 (0.8)	9 (0.7)
35–44 (%)	2 (1.4)	24 (2.1)	26 (2.0)
45–54 (%)	3 (2.1)	70 (6.2)	73 (5.7)
55–64 (%)	23 (16.1)	225 (19.9)	248 (19.5)
65–74 (%)	46 (32.2)	342 (30.2)	388 (30.4)
75–84 (%)	43 (30.1)	292 (25.8)	335 (26.3)
85+ (%)	26 (18.2)	170 (15.0)	196 (15.4)
Median years (range)	74 (41–99)	72 (25–102)	72 (25–102)
Marital status			
Married (including Registered Domestic Partner) (%)	75 (52.4)	514 (45.7)	589 (46.5)
Widowed (%)	26 (18.2)	258 (22.9)	284 (22.4)
Never married (%)	6 (4.2)	86 (7.6)	92 (7.3)
Divorced (%)	36 (25.2)	267 (23.7)	303 (23.9)
Unknown	0	7	7

Citations

ODHS and OHA use the Vancouver style for text and endnote citations. Our one exception to Vancouver style rules is to spell out journal names.

Here are some examples of how to format citations within the text and as endnotes.

In text

Citations are in numerical order. Note that when you repeat a source within the text, you use the source's original citation number.

⇒ The theory's originator, Jacqueline Jones, says that heart attacks are reversible. (8)

[followed by text and new citations for 9, 10, 11, followed by:]

Jones (8) has argued that ... a new definition. (13, p111–2)

Note: Use page numbers with a text citation when it is important to point to the exact place, such as in a definition. Put a space between the referenced text and the citation number and its associated parentheses.

In endnotes

Sources are listed at the back of each chapter or the entire document, depending on the author's style. They are numbered as they appeared in the text. When a citation repeats within a document, use the original citation number.

1. Shen HM, Zhang QF. Risk assessment of nickel carcinogenicity and occupational lung cancer. *Environmental Health Perspectives* 1994;102: 275-82.
2. The Cardiac Society of Australia and New Zealand. Clinical exercise stress testing. Safety and performance guidelines. *Medical Journal of Australia* 1996; 164: 282-4.
3. Ringsven MK, Bond D. *Gerontology and leadership skills for nurses*. 2nd ed. Albany (NY): Delmar Publishers; 1996.
4. Morse SS. Factors in the emergence of infectious diseases. *Emergent Infectious Disease* 1995 Jan-Mar [cited 1996 Jun 5];1(1). Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/eid.htm>.

Go to the [Introduction](#) for more detailed information about Vancouver style.

Report writing

- Use the inverted pyramid technique: Start with most important information, followed by the next most important information.
- Carefully define the purpose.
- Put an executive summary at the front of the report.
- Organize the information into sections: introduction; discussion; summary; conclusions; recommendations.
 - » Introduction: Is brief and describes the topic, who asked for the report, when it was requested, the purpose, background and method of working.
 - » Discussion: Includes main body and all details; is organized with headings and subheadings.
 - » Summary or conclusions: Describes purpose, conclusions and how they were reached; main findings.

Index

(Click on page number to go to entry)

A

A, an [12](#)
Ableism [46](#), [50](#)
About, approximately [12](#)
Academic degrees, certifications, licenses [33](#)
Access, accessible, accessibility [3](#), [46](#)
Acronyms [5](#), [28](#)
Adolescent health well-visit [79](#)
Adverse, averse [12](#)
Affect, effect [12](#)
Affect, impact [13](#)
Afterward, forward, backward and toward [13](#)
Aid, aide [13](#)
All right (not alright) [13](#)
Alternate, alternative [13](#)
Alternate (alt) text [5](#), [67](#)
Ampersands [33](#)
Apostrophes (possessives, contractions) [33](#)
Assure, ensure, insure [14](#)
Audience [2](#), [5](#), [79](#)

B

Backward, toward, forward and afterward [13](#)
Before (not prior to) [14](#)
Because, since [14](#)
Believe, think [14](#)
Between [14](#)
Between, among [14](#)
Biannual, biennial, semiannual [15](#)
Bullets [6](#), [25](#), [35](#)
Bullets (punctuation) [35](#)

C

Capital, capitol [15](#)
Capitalization of headlines, headings and document titles [6](#)
Caregiver, caretaker [15](#)
Chair, chairman, chairwoman, chairperson [15](#)
Childcare, daycare, health care and home care [6](#)
Citations [87](#)
Colonize, colonialism [47](#)
Commas [6](#), [35](#)
 Commas and addresses [36](#)
 Commas and dates [36](#)
 Commas and semicolons [35](#)
 Commas and time [35](#)
Compared to, compared with [15](#)
Compass directions and regions [25](#)
Complement, compliment [16](#)
Continual, continuous [16](#)
Continuous improvement [76](#)
Coordinated care organizations; dental care organizations [76](#)
Counsel, council [16](#)
Cultural responsiveness [68](#)
Culture [47](#)

D

Dashes [7](#), [37](#)
Data [16](#)
Dashes and colons [39](#)
Dates [2](#), [29](#), [36](#)
Dates, days [29](#)
Dimensions [29](#)
Director, director [25](#)
Disability [47](#), [49](#), [51](#), [55](#), [58](#), [69](#)

Disability accommodation and access [69](#)

Discrimination [47](#)

Diversity [47](#)

Dollar amounts [29](#)

E

Effect, affect [12](#)

E.g. and i.e. [17](#)

Ellipses [37](#)

Emergency Board [76](#)

Emigrate, emigrant; immigrate, immigrant [16](#)

Ensure [14](#)

Equity [2](#), [44](#), [48](#)

Equity resources [70](#)

Ethnicity [48](#), [64](#)

Exclamation point [37](#), [39](#)

F

Farther, further [17](#)

Federal, federal [25](#)

Fewer, less [17](#)

Fewer than, over; above, more than, under [17](#)

Figures and tables [83](#)

First, third person [17](#)

Flesch-Kinkaid Readability Test [5](#)

Fonts [2](#), [7](#)

For example and that is (not e.g. and i.e.) [17](#)

Forward, toward, backward and afterward [13](#)

Fractions [29](#)

Fund types [76](#)

G

Gender, sex [18](#)

Gender-inclusive language [44](#), [75](#)

Good, well [18](#)

Government terms [76](#)

Governors and legislatures [76](#)

Graphs, tables, figures and appendices [83](#), [85](#)

H

Headlines [6](#), [26](#)

Headlines, headings, title of the document [6](#), [26](#)

Health equity [48](#)

Health inequities, disparities [48](#)

Historic, historical [18](#)

Hopefully, hope, hoped [18](#)

House, Senate and Congress [77](#)

However, however [18](#)

Hyphens and dashes [37](#)

Dashes [38](#)

Emdash [38](#)

Endash [38](#)

Hyphens [37](#)

I

ID, I.D. [19](#)

Identity-first language [44](#), [45](#), [50](#)

I.e. and e.g. [17](#)

I, me, myself [19](#)

Immigrate, immigrant; emigrate, emigrant [16](#)

Images used in communication [67](#)

Impact, affect [13](#)

Implicit bias [48](#)

Imply, infer [19](#)

Inclusion [49](#)

In order to, to [9](#)

Institutional racism [49](#)

Insure, assure, ensure [14](#)

Internet [26](#)

In the process of [9](#)

Intersectional, intersectionality [49](#)

Intranet [26](#)

Irregardless, regardless [19](#)

Ize [11](#)

L

Land use [42](#)
Language discrimination [49](#)
Last, past [20](#)
Lead, led, lead [20](#)
Lean Daily Management System (LDMS) [78](#)
Legal language [11](#)
Legislators [76](#)
Less, fewer [17](#)
Lie, lay [20](#)
Like, such as [20](#)
Loan, lend [20](#)
Log in, login [20](#)

M

Medical versus social model of disability [49](#)
Microaggression [49](#)
Moneys, monies [21](#)
More than, under, over; above, fewer than [17](#)

N

None, no one [21](#)
Numbers [29](#)
Numerals or words [80](#)
Numerical suffixes [31](#)

O

OAR and ORS [79](#)
Of its, of the [10](#)
OK, okay [21](#)
Older adults [63](#)
On [21](#)
Online [42](#)
Only [21](#)
Orient (not orientate) [21](#)
Over, above, more than; under, fewer than [17](#)
Overused and vague words [10](#)

P

Past, last [20](#)
People-first language [50](#)
Percent, % [31](#)
Percent, percentage [31](#)
Person, people [80](#)
Plain language [9](#)
President, president [26](#)
Preventive (not preventative) [22](#)
Principal, principle [22](#)
Prior to, before [14](#)
Proved, proven [22](#)
Punctuation marks within quotations [39](#)
 Periods and commas [39](#)
 Question marks and exclamation points [39](#)
 Semicolons and colons [40](#)

R

Race [50](#)
Racism [50](#)
Recur, reoccur [22](#)
Report writing [89](#)
Rules and statutes [78](#)

S

Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) [80](#)
Semiannual, biennial, biannual [15](#)
Semicolons [35](#), [36](#), [40](#)
 Semicolons between clauses [36](#)
Service equity [50](#)
Sex, gender [18](#)
Since, because [14](#)
Single quotation marks, double quotation marks [40](#)
Slashes [40](#)
Spelling [41](#)
Spaces between sentences [3](#)

State [3](#), [27](#)
State of Oregon [3](#), [27](#)
Stationery, stationary [22](#)
Structural racism [50](#)
Systemic ableism [50](#)

T

Taxonomy [81](#)
Text [2](#)
That are, who are [10](#)
That, which, who [23](#)
That, which [23](#)
Then, than [22](#)
The reason is, because [10](#)
They, she or he, other options [23](#)
Think, believe [14](#)
Time of day [31](#)
Titles [6](#), [26](#), [27](#), [28](#), [83](#)
Titles upon first, subsequent references,
acronyms [28](#)
Toward, forward, backward and afterward [13](#)
Triple aim [78](#)

U

United States, U.S. [24](#)
Urban and rural divide [69](#)
URLs [3](#), [8](#)
Use (as a noun = “yooce”), usage [24](#)

V

Versus, vs., v [24](#)

W

Website, web [8](#)
Well, good [18](#)
Which, that [23](#)
Which, that, who [23](#)
Who, whom [24](#)
Words containing “ize” [11](#)

Y

Years [32](#)