

# City of Sunnyvale Writing Style Guidelines

When writing for the City of Sunnyvale, in general, your tone should be friendly, welcoming and jargon-free. To enhance the professionalism and consistency of City communication, you should follow these guidelines for internal and external written communication.

Our writing style guidelines include stylistic standards, such as correct use of abbreviations and punctuation, and a plain language checklist and resources.

- [Plain Language Writing Checklist](#)
- [Quick Reference Guide for Style](#)

## What is plain language?

Plain language involves focusing written communication on the needs of the intended audience. With everything you publish, your audience should be able to:

- **Find** what they need
- **Understand** what they find
- **Use** that information to meet their needs

One relatively easy way to achieve this style is to write with a specific person or group of people in mind. Typically, you want to picture your audience and write to them in a conversational tone — avoiding City-specific language or jargon — with the authority of someone who can actively help. Your goal is to connect with your readers through writing that is easy for them to understand.

## Plan your writing

It's said that good writing is rewriting, but smart planning will lay the foundation for effective copy. And quality writing takes time, so you want to plan for it.

- Identify your audience
- Focus on one topic or goal
- Anticipate reader questions
- Address the needs of the reader – lead your content with the reader's interests in mind

## Model Hemingway's four rules for writing

Ernest Hemingway was known for his sparse, dynamic writing style. Here are his four rules of writing that have become a cornerstone for clear communication:

- Use short sentences
- Use short paragraphs
- Use "vigorous" English – use strong, clear words with no wasted words
- Have a positive slant – write what something is rather than what it isn't

Use the [HemingwayApp](#), an online tool, to help make your writing clear and concise.

## **AP style – follow City’s stylistic standards**

Although rules exist for grammar and punctuation, not all questions of writing style have a right or wrong answer. Establishing a preferred style helps an organization achieve a consistent presentation throughout an array of printed and electronic communication.

The City uses the Associated Press (or AP style) as the default writing style. AP style is a writing style used by journalists worldwide to ensure consistency and clarity.

The *AP Stylebook* website provides two options for purchasing the style guide. A bound *AP Stylebook* and an annual subscription to an online version can each be purchased for a nominal cost. Both resources provide guidance for common terms, capitalization, punctuation and clarity of writing style.

For spelling, style and usage questions not covered in the *AP Stylebook*, consult *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (available online).

## **Writing Resources**

- [PlainLanguage.gov](http://PlainLanguage.gov)
- [HemingwayApp](#)
- [Grammarly app](#) – free grammar checker
- [ProWritingAid.com](http://ProWritingAid.com) – free grammar checker for new writers

## **Recent Updates**

Updates to the Style Guide since last revision.

### **New**

- in person or in-person
- templates: event and meeting formats

### **Updated**

- bulleted list
- headings

# Plain Language Writing Checklist

Before starting to write, think about the most important thing you want your reader to learn, know or do. Is there a call-to-action (subscribe, attend meeting, pay)?

Review your content with the checklist below, along with the [Quick Reference Style Guide](#).

<p><b>The most important thing is:</b></p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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## Before you start writing

### Audience

**Consider your potential readers.**

Who is your audience exactly? Are there multiple audiences? Remember, there is no “general public.”

**Evaluate the needs of your readers.**

What is the benefit to your audience – why should they care about your topic? What do they want, or need to know? How much detail do they need? What is the right tone for this audience?

**Answer their questions.**

Write down the questions most of your readers will have about your topic. In what logical order would these questions occur?

## Writing Checklist

### Organization

- Identified and written for the typical reader  
You have identified your audience and know their level of understanding of the topic. If there are multiple audiences, you have addressed them separately.
- Organized to serve the reader’s needs  
Organize your content in the order the reader needs it.
- Main point is first  
Generally, readers appreciate content that begins with the main point or message.

### Word Choice

- Uses familiar words  
Don’t use big or complicated words. Don’t use jargon. Define (and limit) acronyms and abbreviations. Instead of acronyms, after using the complete term the first time, use nicknames such as “the board,” “the agency” or “the plan.”

- Uses 'you,' 'we' and other pronouns to speak to the reader  
Using pronouns makes the content more conversational and makes directions more meaningful. Use 'you' to address the reader. Use "I" when writing from the reader's point of view, such as in a Q&A section. Use "we" for the City, department or staff. *Example: Use 'You must provide a copy of your license' NOT 'A copy of the license must be provided.'*
- Uses active voice  
Use active voice whenever possible. Active voice makes it clear who or what (the subject) is doing the action (the verb). *Example: 'The agency conducted the study' NOT 'The study was conducted by the agency.'*
- Uses base verbs, not hidden verbs  
*Example: Use 'we reported to council' NOT 'we presented a report to council.'*
- Uses the simplest tense possible – simple present tense is best  
*Example: Use 'Every year we update the report' NOT 'Every year we will update the report.'*
- Uses 'must' to express requirements  
Use 'must' not 'shall' or 'will' for requirements. 'Shall' and 'will' are ambiguous.
- Places words carefully (avoids large gaps between the subject, verb and the object; puts exceptions last; places modifiers correctly). Avoid complex, confusing sentence construction.
- Omits excess words  
Ruthlessly remove any word that is not absolutely necessary. Eliminate modifiers, such as 'absolutely.'

## Design

- Has useful headings  
On the web, users scan and often only read headings (along with link text and bulleted text). In documents, headings help readers navigate the material. The heading should apply to all content that follows. If it doesn't, add subheadings.
- Uses short sentences and paragraphs  
Try to write paragraphs of no more than 5 to 7 sentences and an average sentence length of 20 words or fewer for a document. For web content try for an average of 15 words and no longer than 25 words. Paragraphs should be no more than 1 to 3 sentences for the web. Single sentence paragraphs are fine.
- Uses lists and tables to simplify complex material  
Lists are easy for readers to skim. Use numbered lists when steps matter. Even two bullets under one sentence is easier to read. Refer to [bulleted lists](#) for more detail.
- Uses relevant, high-quality and uncluttered images or diagrams if needed  
Images and diagrams may clarify content in a document. Images in documents that will be available online must have appropriate alternative text included for users of assistive devices.

## Punctuation and Linking

- Uses periods or dashes instead of semicolons

It is better to use two shorter sentences instead of sentences joined with semicolons. It is fine to start a sentence with 'And,' 'But' or 'Or' if clear and improves brevity.

- Uses keywords for link text instead of "click here" "here" or "learn more"

Link text should inform the user as to the destination of the link. *Example: Use 'Read the draft document' NOT 'The draft document can be found here.'*

## Review

- Read the content aloud to hear whether it's understandable

When you read aloud you'll be able to hear if the meaning is unclear, or if it's written in a bureaucratic manner.

- Had someone else read content for comprehension

Having someone who is unfamiliar with the topic read your content and provide feedback will point out areas of confusion or lack of clarity.

- Checked content's Readability score

More than half of adults in the U.S. read below a sixth grade level. Aim to have your content have an appropriate Readability score.

## References

- [PlainLanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/)
- [Use simple words and phrases](#) – list of words not to use and better choices

# Writing Style Quick Reference Guide

This City of Sunnyvale writing style guide highlights some common AP style conventions as well as a few deviations from AP style (**deviations are marked “City rule”**). This guide will be updated as needed. To suggest terms be added to this guide, contact [Communications](#).

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## abbreviations and acronyms

- Avoid the alphabet soup of using acronyms and abbreviations that the reader would not quickly recognize; use sparingly.
- If using them, the first reference should use the entire term.
- Do not add an abbreviation or acronym when the first reference is the only reference.
- Subsequent references of the same organization or term may use the acronym if it is obvious what it stands for. It is preferable to use a nickname in subsequent references, such as, *the agency, the plan, the board.*

### Correct

The City and the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) implemented a new program.

### Incorrect

The City and the VTA implemented a new program.

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## addresses

- Abbreviate street, boulevard and avenue (St., Blvd., Ave.) when used with a specific address.
- Abbreviate the compass points used to indicate directional ends of a street in a numbered address.
- Spell out numbers between one and nine unless a numeral is the official name of the street (e.g., “2<sup>nd</sup> Street”)
- Use digits for numbers 10 and above.  
Street, avenue, etc. should be lowercase when referring to two streets.

### Correct

The project is located on State Street.  
The project is located at 123 State St.  
The project is located at the corner of Main and State streets.  
550 E. Remington Drive  
456 W. Olive Ave.  
The project is located at 456 Wolfe Road.

### Incorrect

The project is located on State St.  
The project is located at 123 State Street.  
The project is located at the corner of Main and State Streets.  
550 East Remington Drive  
456 West Olive Ave.  
The project is located at 456 Wolfe Rd.

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## ages (and age ranges)

- Always use figures. *The girl is 15 years old; the law is 8 years old; the 101-year-old house.* When the context does not require *years* or *years old*, the figure is presumed to be years.
- Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun. Examples: *A 5-year-old boy, but the boy is 5 years old. The boy, 7, has a sister, 10. The*



woman, 26, has a daughter 2 months old. The race is for 3-year-olds. The woman is in her 30s (no apostrophe).

### ages ranges

- Use *age* or *years* when expressing a range of ages. Example: The class is for *12- to 17-year-old* volleyball players.
- Customarily the plural *ages* is used for a range. Example: We accept children *ages 6 to 12*.
- Use “to” between age ranges. May use hyphens in tables (online and off) and in presentation and print materials in headings for space considerations.
- Specific age examples:
  - The federal health care insurance program for people *aged 65 and over...*
  - Age 55 and older
  - Age 16 and up
  - Children ages 6 to 12

#### Correct

The boy was 5 years old.  
Participants younger than age 18 must be supervised by a parent or legal guardian  
For ages 14 to 17  
For age 15 and up  
You must be at least 16 years old to use the pool.  
If you are 16- to 17-years-old your parent or guardian must be present during check-in.  
Seniors (age 55 and older) or Seniors (age 55 and up)

#### Incorrect

The boy was five years old.  
Participants younger than 18 must be supervised by a parent or legal guardian  
For ages 14 to 17 years  
For age 15+ years  
You must be at least 16 to use the pool.  
If you are 16 to 17 your parent or guardian must be present during check-in.  
Seniors (55+)

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### ampersand (&)

- Use only when part of a formal name; not a replacement for “and.”
- May use in tables and headings in presentation and printed materials for space considerations. (City rule)

#### Correct

Baltimore & Ohio Railroad  
Sunnyvale and Mountain View  
Previous meetings and materials

#### Incorrect

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad  
Sunnyvale & Mountain View  
Previous meetings & materials

---

### bulleted lists

- Series - Order by importance or priority; otherwise order short to long.

- Sequence - Order by what the reader should know or do first, second, third, etc.
- Capitalize the first word following the bullet or number.
- Match bullet formats for each item in a list: same sentence type, verb tense, voice (active or passive), starting with same part of speech (such as a verb), etc.
- Use numbers instead of bullets for sequential steps or actions.
- Avoid articles as the first word in a list item (a, the).
- Introduce the list with a short phrase or sentence.
- Use periods when your list items are full sentences.
- Do not use punctuation when your list items are phrases or fragment sentences, even if they complete the introductory stem. (City rule)

## Chinese

- Referring to the spoken language, use “Mandarin” (e.g., The meeting will have translation in Mandarin and Spanish)
- Referring to the written language, use “Chinese, Simplified”
- For formatting and details, see the [Translation References and Formatting](#) document on Sunspot, in the Communications section.

## citizen

- Only countries can confer citizenship.
- “Citizen” is often used to refer to someone’s immigration status.
- It is preferred to refer to city constituents as members of the public, residents, community members or another similar term, not citizens.

## city

- Capitalize when used as a proper name (e.g., New York City).
- Lowercase city in all other uses.
- When referring to Sunnyvale as the geographic city, use either *city of Sunnyvale* or *Sunnyvale*.
- When referring to the municipal organization, use either the *City of Sunnyvale* or the *City*. Do not shorten *City of Sunnyvale* to *Sunnyvale*. (City rule)

### Correct

City of Sunnyvale  
 The City will hold a public meeting.  
 The boundaries of Sunnyvale extend to...  
 The boundaries of the city of Sunnyvale extend to...  
 City of Sunnyvale website

### Incorrect

city of Sunnyvale  
 The city will hold a public meeting.  
 The boundaries of the City extend to...  
 The boundaries of the City of Sunnyvale extend to...  
 Sunnyvale website

---

## city council

- Capitalize when part of a proper name.
- Retain capitalization if reference is to a specific council.
- Use lowercase in other uses and for plural references.  
See “councilmember”

### Correct

Sunnyvale City Council  
The Council meets weekly  
Sunnyvale and Cupertino city councils  
A city council

### Incorrect

The city council of Sunnyvale  
The council meets weekly  
Sunnyvale and Cupertino City Councils  
A City Council

---

## city departments and facilities

- The reference to a department is in lowercase unless it is the department’s complete proper name.
- When referencing multiple departments, the word “departments” is lowercase.
- When referencing a City department in external documents, City of Sunnyvale should precede the department name.
- The word “department” should never be abbreviated.

### Correct

The department will hold a workshop.  
E-OneStop  
One-Stop Permit Center  
Department of Public Safety

### Incorrect

The Department will hold a workshop.  
e-One Stop  
One Stop Permit Center  
department of Public Safety

The Public Works and Environmental  
Services departments

The Public Works and Environmental  
Services Departments

City of Sunnyvale Finance Department

Sunnyvale Finance Department

Sunnyvale Public Library  
Sunnyvale Theatre  
SMaRT Station® (Registered  
trademark on first reference)

Sunnyvale Library  
Sunnyvale Theater  
Sunnyvale SMaRT Station, SMART  
Station

---

## commas

- Do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series.

- Do use a comma before the conjunction in a complex series.

**Correct**

The flag is red, white and blue.

**Incorrect**

The flag is red, white, and blue.

He likes turkey, peanut butter and jelly, and ham sandwiches.

He likes turkey, peanut butter and jelly and ham sandwiches.

---

**composition titles**

- Use italics without quotes for composition heads, e.g., books, plays, news articles, lectures, speeches and works of art. (City rule)
- Capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters.
- Capitalize articles or words of fewer than four letters if they are the first or last word in a title.

**Correct**

*American Idol*

*The Associated Press Stylebook*

*Of Mice and Men*

**Incorrect**

American idol

*"The Associated Press Stylebook"*

*Of Mice and men*

---

**coronavirus, COVID-19**

- COVID-19 is the name of the disease caused by the new coronavirus.
- When referring specifically to the virus, *the COVID-19 virus* and *the virus that causes COVID-19* are acceptable.
- Do not refer to *coronavirus* without the article *the*. Omitting *the* is acceptable in headlines.
- Do not shorten to COVID, even in headlines, unless part of a quotation or proper name.

**Correct**

She worries about catching the coronavirus.

**Incorrect**

She worries about catching COVID-19.

She is concerned about the coronavirus.  
COVID-19 is creating havoc.

She is concerned about coronavirus.  
COVID is creating havoc.

---

**councilmember**

- One word.
- Use uppercase when used as a person's title.
- Use lowercase when used collectively.

**Correct**

Councilmember Mary Jones  
 Mary Jones, Sunnyvale City  
 Councilmember  
 Sunnyvale city councilmembers

**Incorrect**

councilmember Mary Jones  
 Mary Jones, Sunnyvale city  
 councilmember  
 Sunnyvale City Councilmembers

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**dates**

- When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. Spell out all other months. **Tip:** Abbreviate any month longer than five letters.
- Do not abbreviate the month unless used with a specific date.
- Do not use “th,” “nd,” “st,” or “rd” after a date, e.g., 10th, 22nd
- In lists and tables, this format is acceptable: 10/25/16, 03/02/16
- Use commas before and after the year when used with an exact date.
- When a phrase refers to a month and day within the current year, do not include the year: *The meeting is scheduled for July 18.*

**Correct**

Jan. 2, 2008, was the coldest day of the month.

Oct. 3 to 10, 2017

January 2007 was a cold month.

Jan. 2

03/02/09

**Incorrect**

January 2, 2008, was the coldest day of the month.

October 3, 2017 to October 10, 2017

Jan. 2007 was a cold month.

Jan. 2nd

3/2/9, 03-02-09

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**days of the week**

- Capitalize days of the week.
- Do not abbreviate unless in tabular format (set up in rows or columns): Sun, Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat (three letters without periods).

**Correct**

The Sunnyvale City Council meeting will be held on Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2016.

**Incorrect**

The Sunnyvale City Council meeting will be held on Tue., Jan. 5, 2016.

---

**district**

- The geographic areas of the city defined for electing councilmembers.
- Always spell it out.
- Use a number and capitalize *district* when forming a proper name.

**Correct**

District 2  
 District 2  
 Residents from her district  
 complained.  
 Sunnyvale moved to district-based  
 elections.

**Incorrect**

district 2  
 Dist. 2, D2  
 Residents from her District  
 complained.  
 Sunnyvale moved to District-based  
 elections.

**fiscal year**

- In text, spell out fiscal year and do not capitalize.
- Use this format for one fiscal year: “fiscal year 2014/15”
- For multiple fiscal years: “fiscal years 2009/10 to 2013/14”
- Abbreviating fiscal years is acceptable. Use this format: FY 2015/16

**Correct**

The City’s budget covers fiscal year  
 2006/07.

**Incorrect**

The City’s budget covers Fiscal Year  
 2006-07.

The report includes FY 2006/07.

The report includes fy 2006-07.

**General Fund**

- General Fund refers to a specific City fund and may be capitalized in internal documents, or externally when referenced with the municipal organization name, e.g., “The City’s General Fund.”

**hashtag**

- One word, capitalize first letter.
- For multiple words in a hashtag, capitalize as needed for clarity.

**Correct**

#WalkBike  
 #Sunnyvale  
 #Sustainability

**Incorrect**

#walkbike

**headings**

- Use “title” case, i.e., upper and lowercase. Sometimes sentence-case headings are okay to use, for example when the heading is in the form of a question.
- Capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters.

- Headings should not include colons.

**Correct**

Doing Business in Sunnyvale

**Incorrect**

Doing business in Sunnyvale

Doing Business In Sunnyvale

DOING BUSINESS IN SUNNYVALE

Current Status

Upcoming Meetings

Current Status:

Upcoming Meetings:

**hyphens**

- In general, the fewer hyphens the better. Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words.
- Words ending in *ly* never use a hyphen, for example: *an easily remembered rule*
- Use a hyphen when using a compound modifier preceding a noun if it's needed to make the meaning clear and avoid unintended meanings. For example: *small-business owner, little-known song, self-driving car*. No hyphen is needed when such terms are clear and unambiguous: *chocolate chip cookie, third grade teacher, parking lot entrance*.
- For *up-to-date, up to date*, hyphenate as a compound modifier before a noun: This is the most up-to-date information. Otherwise, no hyphen: Stay up to date by subscribing to the newsletter. The mayor's calendar is up to date.
- Use of "pre-" and "re-"  
In general use both without hyphens. Do not hyphenate double-e combinations. Examples: preempt; preexisting. For "re-" the sense is the governing factor: recover (regain); re-cover (cover again); resign (quit); re-sign (sign again).
- Use of hyphens with some words depends on their parts of speech:

<u>Noun</u>	<u>Adjective</u>	<u>Verb</u>
check-in	check-in	check in
cleanup	cleanup	clean up
drop-off	drop-off	drop off
full time	full-time	---
kickoff	kickoff	kick off
login	login	log in
logoff	logoff	log off
logon	logon	log on
long term	long-term	---
nonresident	nonresident	---
nonprofit	nonprofit	---
off-site	off-site	---
on-site	on-site	---
part time	part-time	---

pickup	pickup	pick up
preheat	---	preheat
short term	short-term	---
sign-in	sign-in	sign in
sign-up	sign-up	sign up

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### in person or in-person

- In person is an adverb. Adverbs usually modify verbs, so use if you are describing how something was or will be done. For example:
    - You have to apply in person for the license.
    - They attended the class in person for the first time in months.
    - She was looking forward to meeting her hero in person.
  - In-person is an adjective. Adjectives modify nouns, so use if you are describing the noun. For example:
    - It was an in-person interview.
    - In-person classes were canceled for the year.
    - They counted the in-person ballots and then the mail-in ballots.
- 

### internet terms

- The AP Stylebook is transitioning toward removing hyphens from Internet terms, however in some instances changes are still pending; our standard will be not to use hyphens to be current with the industry.

#### Correct

Wi-Fi  
 website  
 webcast, webmaster  
 webpage  
 email  
 online  
 internet  
 homepage  
 eBook (City rule)  
 ePublish (City rule)  
 e-newsletter

#### Incorrect

WiFi, wifi, wi-fi  
 web site, Web site  
 Web cast, Web master  
 Web page, web page  
 e-mail  
 on-line  
 Internet  
 home page, Homepage  
 e-book  
 e-publish  
 enewsletter

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### links

- URLs should not include “www” if the link will function without it; test it to be sure.



- Print: Links in printed documents (both URLs and email addresses) should be italicized without underlining.
- Online: Links on the City’s website will be formatted automatically by the cascading style sheets in the content management system and should not be modified. Online link and email style formatting may differ from print documents (e.g., not italicized, not underlined).

**Correct**  
Sunnyvale.ca.gov

**Incorrect**  
www.Sunnyvale.ca.gov

### numbers, dollars and dimensions

- Spell out numbers under 10, except for the ages of people and animals (see *ages*).
- Spell out a number at the beginning of the sentence, unless it identifies a calendar year.
- Use digits for 10 and over.
- For millions, billions, etc., use a figure followed by the word (13 million, 3 billion).
- Exception: May use abbreviations in finance documents with a multiplicity of figures, e.g., \$3.5M, \$1.5K
- Use numbers for terms of measurement and spell out *inches, feet, yards*, etc. (3 feet).
- Only use apostrophes to indicate feet and quote marks to indicate inches in tables and other areas where space is constrained (8.5’ by 11”); spell out *feet* and *inches* in all other cases. Use figures for numbers up to six digits (e.g., \$650,000). For amounts of \$1 million or more, use figures for up to two decimal places and spell out “million,” “billion,” etc. (e.g., \$1.53 million, \$2 billion)
- Use a hyphen for a dimension used as an adjective (e.g., 25-foot buffer zone).
- Writing numbers twice is unnecessary. It’s legalese, hard to read and more likely to cause a mistake. Follow the standard guidelines for use of numbers, and do not write numbers twice.

**Correct**  
There were four people at the meeting.  
Forty-five people attended the meeting.  
The workshop had more than 75 attendees.  
The street was flooded with 8 inches of water.  
15 vehicles

**Incorrect**  
There were 4 people at the meeting.  
45 people attended the meeting.  
The workshop had more than seventy-five attendees.  
The street was flooded with 8” of water.  
fifteen (15) vehicles

### other jurisdictions and geographies

**Correct**  
state

**Incorrect**  
State

federal

Federal

North County

north county

Northern California

northern California

County of Santa Clara

county of Santa Clara

Bay Area, Bay Area-wide

bay area, bay area wide

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## percent and percentage

- Use the % sign when paired with a numeral, with no space.
- For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero: *The cost of living rose 0.6%.*
- Use decimals, not fractions, in percentages: *Her mortgage rate is 4.5%.*
- Percent is one word.
- Use *percentage*, rather than *percent*, when not paired with a number: *The percentage of people agreeing is small.*
- When expressing a range, use “to” instead of “-”
- Spell out the percent when used at the beginning of a sentence, but try to avoid this construction.
- Be careful not to confuse *percent* with *percentage point*. A change from 10% to 13% is a rise of 3 percentage points. This is not equal to a 3% change; rather, it’s a 30% increase.

### Correct

5%

percent

He said 10% to 30% of the electorate might not vote.

Forty percent of land will be used as open space.

### Incorrect

5 percent

per cent

He said 10 – 30% of the electorate might not vote.

40% of land will be used as open space.

---

## periods

- Use one space after periods. Period.

---

## phone numbers

Always use the area code with phone numbers. Set off area code and number with dashes.

### Correct

760-434-8537

### Incorrect

(760) 434-8537, 434-8537 or 760.434.8537

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## quotation marks

- The period and comma always go within the quotation marks.
- The dash, semicolon, colon, question mark and exclamation point go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence: *Did the dog bark every time he heard Jim say "I'm bringing dinner"?*

### Correct

"I love Sunnyvale," she replied.  
"I love Sunnyvale."

### Incorrect

"I love Sunnyvale, she replied."  
"I love Sunnyvale".

---

## school grades

- Grade, grader: no hyphens. Examples: *first grader, seventh grader, 10th grader*; also, *first grade student, 11th grade classes; she is in the fifth grade*.
  - Acceptable: kindergarten, kindergartners, prekindergarten, pre-K
  - Examples: *grades 3 to 8* (may use hyphens in tables -- online and off -- and in presentation and print materials in headings for space considerations); *kindergarten through eighth grade*
- 

## seasons

- Use lowercase for spring, summer, fall, winter and derivatives such as springtime unless part of a formal name (Summer Olympics, Horizon Spring 2019 Issue)
- 

## slash (/)

- Per Plain Language guidelines, avoid using a slash between words. Use *and* or *or* as appropriate.
- Exceptions:
  - N/A - a common abbreviation for "not applicable" or "not available." Use N/A only in tables and charts.
  - See *fiscal year*

### Correct

Parks and trails

### Incorrect

Parks/trails

---

## staff

- Nouns that denote a unit take singular verbs and pronouns. In external documents, avoid using *staff* and instead use *City of Sunnyvale* or a program name as applicable.

- When referring to discrete individuals, refer to them as *staff member* or *staff members*.

**Correct**

Staff is meeting to set its agenda.  
A staff member is responsible.

**Incorrect**

Staff are meeting to set their agenda.  
A member of staff is responsible.

---

**time**

- Spell out “to” or “through” when mentioning a timeframe in a sentence.
  - Exception: Use an en-dash to replace “to” or “through” in timeframes that are presented in event listings or on calendars, posters, rack cards and other graphics.
- Use “noon” to indicate 12 p.m.
- No additional period is needed when a.m. or p.m. ends the sentence.

**Correct**

8 p.m.  
8:30 a.m., 8:30 p.m.  
8 to 9:15 a.m.  
8 a.m. to 9:15 p.m.  
8 a.m. to noon

**Incorrect**

8:00 p.m. or 8 pm  
8:30 am, 8:30 pm  
8 a.m. to 9:15 a.m.  
8 a.m. - 9:15 p.m.  
8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

---

**titles**

- Lowercase unless immediately preceding a person’s name.
  - Capitalize in signature blocks: *Jane Smith, City Manager*
- 

**writing style**

- First- or second-person writing style is preferred.
  - Active voice is preferred.
    - Active voice example: The City began inspections in 1985.
    - Passive voice example: Inspections were begun by the City in 1985.
-

## Inclusive Language

The City of Sunnyvale works to use language that is inclusive, accessible and respectful.

See both the AP Stylebook and [18F Inclusive Language](#) for more specifics, including how to reference nationality, race, ethnicity, mental illness, etc.

### Gender-neutral

- Use gender-inclusive language using neutral terms instead of gendered alternatives.

#### Correct

business executive, manager  
camera operator  
people, humanity  
to staff, to run, to operate  
workforce, employees

#### Incorrect

businesswoman  
cameraman  
mankind  
to man  
manpower

### Gender and Sexuality

- Use *different sex* instead of *opposite sex* (because this recognizes gender as a spectrum, rather than binary).
- Use *spouse* or *partner* instead of husband or wife; use *parent* instead of *mother* and *father*.
- You may use *they* or *theirs* as singular pronouns.

#### Correct

Residents should take out their  
garbage.

#### Incorrect

A resident should take out his or her  
garbage.

### Age

- Avoid referring to someone's age unless it's relevant to what you're writing about (for example, when referring to benefits that are available to people of certain ages).

### Ability and Disability

- Only reference a person's disability when it is relevant to what you're writing. If you must mention it, always emphasize the person before the disability. When writing about a person with disabilities, don't use the words *suffer*, *victim* or *handicapped*.

#### Correct

She has a disability.  
people with disabilities  
wheelchair user

#### Incorrect

She is disabled.  
disabled people  
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-  
bound

## **Spelling**

This list contains the City’s preferred spelling for commonly used words.

**bird-safe**

**canceled, canceling, cancellation**

**child care**

**CityLine Sunnyvale**

**citywide**

**energy-efficient**

**e-bike, e-scooter** - for the first reference, spell them out as *electronic bike* and *electronic scooter*

**flyer** – for handbill, person flying in an aircraft

**foodware (City rule)**

**graywater**

**greenhouse gases**

**high-density**

**Moffett**

**reroof**

**sandbag**

**stormwater**

**wastewater**

**water-efficient**

**year-round**

**YouTube**

**Zoom**

## Templates: Events and Meetings

### Overall Formatting Standards

The City follows AP Stylebook and uses “online.” Avoid using "virtual." Do not use "hybrid" for online and in-person meetings.

### Event Details:

- Describe the event succinctly. Your goal is to connect with your readers through writing that is easy for them to understand. Use the [Hemingway App](#) to improve your content.
- If the event has any admission or cost to attend, include it.
- For digital communications, do not expose URLs, use embedded links.

Reminder: See *headings* entry for meeting and event title formatting.

### Standard Event and Meeting Formats

Use these fields for anywhere besides the City’s website calendar.

#### Standard Format for In-Person Meetings

**Title of Meeting**

[brief description: why attend]

**When:** [day, month, date] at [time] {example: Tuesday, Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.}

**Where:** [physical address]

#### Standard Format for Online and In-Person Meetings

**Title of Meeting**

[brief description: why attend]

**When:** [day, month, date] at [time] {example: Tuesday, Dec. 11 at 7 p.m.}

**Where:** Online and [physical address\*]

- Join on Zoom
- Call-in: XXX-XXX-XXXX | Meeting ID: ### #### #####
- Watch on YouTube

\*Note: For locations in Sunnyvale typically only street address is needed, plus any room notations.

**Example:** Where: Online and Community Center, 550 East Remington Drive, Ballroom

**Option:** For a web entry you may use a facility name linked to a map, example:

Where: Online and Community Center Ballroom

## Meeting Example

### Community Meeting Entry on Webpage

#### Upcoming Meetings

Join the meeting to give your input on the proposed trail.

#### City Council

**When:** Tuesday, March 21 at 7 p.m.

**Where:** Online and Washington Swim Center Conference Room, 255 S. Pastoria Ave. There will be no television broadcast.

- [Join on Zoom](#)
- Call-in: 833-548-0276 | Meeting ID: 961 1158 0540
- [Watch on YouTube](#)

### Event Entry for Website Calendar

There is some variation in our standard event and meeting fields to accommodate our City-website's calendar module. The City's website platform doesn't allow conformance to City's style for some fields.

Along with the Event Details, provide the following information when submitting a calendar entry request.

**Event Date and Time:** Include start and end times.

**Event Location:** Provide building name, room, and address if not a City building.

**Event Contact:** Provide at least one form of contact, such as AP email, phone number, name.

Note: Event contact typically is not needed for bulletin/newsletter or webpage notices. Contact information is already included as part of the page or bulletin template.

## Website Calendar Event Examples

### Event Entry on Website Calendar

#### Overcoming Bigotry: A Sunnyvale Unity Event

**Date:** 03/16/2023 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

**Location:** Lakewood Elementary School, Multipurpose Room  
750 Lakechime Drive

[Add to my Calendar](#)

Join us to examine bigotry, explore solutions and strengthen our diverse community.  
Featuring: Intercultural Panel Discussion, Small Group Dialogues, Call to Action

Event Partners: City of Sunnyvale, Lakewood Neighborhood Association, Sunnyvale School District, Fremont Union High School District, Santa Clara County Supervisor Otto Lee, State Assemblymember Evan Low, Islamic Networks Group (ING)

[Register for this event.](#)

Sunnyvale Unity events promote a culture of belonging in Sunnyvale where all members of our diverse community feel welcome, safe and respected.



## Community Meeting Entry on Website Calendar

[Print](#) [Share & Bookmark](#) Font Size: [+](#) |

### Stevens Creek Trail Extension Project

**Date:** 01/18/2023 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

[Add to my Calendar](#)

Learn about the proposed new trail segment. We are preparing to build a new segment of the Stevens Creek Trail between Remington Drive and Fremont Avenue.

Learn how the trail is currently proposed to run along the creek and connect to Fremont Avenue. Come to the meeting to give your opinion.

**Where:**

- [Join on Zoom](#)
- Call-in: 833-548-0276 | Meeting ID: 862 5927 3812
- [Watch on YouTube](#)

**Contact:** [Angela Obeso](#), Principal Transportation Engineer, 408-730-7557