
Style Guide

OAC Services

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USAGE

Abbreviations, Acronyms, Initialisms, and Assigned Titles

Write out first and place abbreviation, acronym, initialism or assigned title in parentheses:

OAC Services is pleased to provide this proposal to the Seattle Biomedical Research Institute (SBRI)...

The University of Washington (UW) has requested...

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD)...

The City of Seattle (City)

References thereafter should be consistent, using the assigned moniker or full name or designation (Seattle Public Schools, SPS, the district, etc.)

Placing a moniker designation after a full title is no longer needed – readers understand that OAC or the owner’s representative, etc. stands for OAC Services. i.e. you no longer need to write,

OAC Services, Inc. (hereinafter “OAC”) or OAC Services, Inc. (“OAC”) or OAC Services, Inc. (OAC).

Abbreviating often-used terms, agencies or organizations can reduce repetitiveness.

Make sure abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms, and assigned titles make sense and will not be confused with other terms and/or organizations that could be abbreviated the same way. The design field uses numerous abbreviations, many of which share an abbreviation with other terms and/or organizations.

For instance:

The abbreviation EIS

Most commonly, it stands for “Environmental Impact Statement”; however, within the design field and business world, it can also stand for:

Environmental Information Systems
Environmental Information Service
Engineering Integrity Society
Executive Information System
Enterprise Information Systems
Education Information Systems
Economic International Supply
Electronics & Integrated Solutions

As well as any number of companies.

Be aware that most industries outside of AEC do not capitalize roles (Engineer, Architect, Client, Owner, etc.) so this can be confusing for them.

Also be aware that capitalization is supposed to indicate a proper noun (i.e. Engineer actually stands for Notkin Engineering) so if you do not yet have a contractor, architect, engineer, etc. contracted and you

capitalize it, this can confuse the reader and potentially lead to issues. They may believe you think we've hired a contractor and you are either unobservant, misunderstand, don't listen, etc.

Do not use ampersand, "&", in place of "and" unless it is a title, "Gibson & Taylor Geotechnical Engineers".

Do not place an apostrophe after acronyms:

RFIs were sent on..., *not* RFI's were sent on...

Unless possessive:

NASA's plans...

Do not put periods between letters in abbreviations, initialisms or acronyms unless the result would spell an unrelated word.

However, use periods in two letter abbreviations (U.S., U.N., U.K., etc.), unless it is a trademarked name (AP, GI, etc.).

Titles

When assigning a title, indicate name and then place assigned title in parentheses:

"ABC Engineering Company (Engineer) will provide Good Builders, Inc. (Contractor) a Fee Proposal for the 145th Avenue Improvement project (Project)..."

References thereafter should be consistent, using the title only.

Punctuation

Parentheses should be placed inside punctuation, unless the complete sentence is in parentheses:

The project consists of four buildings (including a parking structure).

(See Section 3 for a list of Figures.)

Commas should be used in lists before "and", i.e. "The project consists of roadway improvements, drainage design, water restoration and mitigation, LEED support, and landscape architecture."

We use the serial comma (Oxford comma) because it makes things clearer for the reader.

For instance,

Let's bring the engineers, Jeff and Jen.

This could mean Jeff and Jen are the engineers.

Let's bring the engineers, Jeff, and Jen.

This indicates we are bringing the engineers, and Jeff, and Jen to the meeting.

Use a semicolon to set off a series within a series: Projects are located in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Daytona Beach, Florida; Gainesville, Florida; Houston, Texas; and Austin, Texas. (see "Semicolons")

There is no reason to put a colon after the words “to” or “include” when presenting a list in paragraph form.

Incorrect:

Do not store materials potentially harmful to tree roots adjacent to protected areas. Potentially harmful materials include, but are not limited to: petroleum products, cement and concrete additives, lime, paint coatings, waterproofing agents, form coatings, detergents, acids, and cleaning agents.

Correct:

Do not store materials potentially harmful to tree roots adjacent to protected areas. Potentially harmful materials include but are not limited to petroleum products, cement and concrete additives, lime, paint coatings, waterproofing agents, form coatings, detergents, acids, and cleaning agents.

Quotations

Quotations should be placed inside of punctuation.

The project is titled “Glen Ross Condominiums”.

The Owner has instructed ABC to insert “T-30 Maritime Industrial Center Development”, rather than “T-30”, into all project documents.

If you are quoting from another source:

The Design Manual states in Chapter 3, Page 82, “all trees will remain”.

Try to be as specific as you can when using other sources. In this way, if the reader needs to review the source, it is not difficult to find the quote.

If the quote is longer than three lines, it should be indented on both sides, and the font should be reduced to a size smaller than other text (often, quoted text is “justified”).

The COS Design Manual listed several tree species applicable for this project. For instance, on Page 86, the Manual suggests:

There are a variety of native plant species that may be used in the City of Skyway’s parks and recreational facilities. Trees should be chosen based on the particular project’s soils, irrigation, and preexisting foliage. Acceptable trees include dogwoods, maples, firs, cottonwoods...

If quoting only portions of source or there is a need to reduce the length of quote, use ellipses to indicate omitted portions.

The Design Manual states in Chapter 3, Page 94, “All invasive species may be uprooted and destroyed... it is the design professional’s responsibility to ensure no plant species that are not invasive are uprooted and/or destroyed...”

The full text may have read,

All invasive species may be uprooted and destroyed based on COS Section 07-24 and the means and methods of organization performing the work. There must be a certified landscape architect and/or arborist onsite during the work; it is the design professional's responsibility to ensure no plant species that are not invasive are uprooted and/or destroyed per COS Section 08-10.

However, it may not be pertinent or needed to include all of this information. Therefore, it is common practice to abridge a quotation.

Proper Noun and Capitalization Conventions

It is standard practice for certain words to be capitalized in project documents. Generally, this is because terms stand for a particular individual or organization (are proper nouns):

Contractor	Consultant	City	Owner
Owner's Representative	Subconsultant	Engineer	
Architect	Agency	Surveyor	Landscape Architect
Project	Specifications	Plan(s)	Contract (Agreement)
Fee Proposal	Report	Bid	

Capitalize specific references:

Section 2.01, *not* section 2.01

Figure 3, *not* figure 3

Capitalize if using an acronym

Temporary Erosion and Sedimentation Control (TESC), *not* temporary erosion and sedimentation control (TESC)

We capitalize many of these terms because they become proper nouns, i.e. they stand for specific people, institutions, organizations, etc.

If we say:

ABC Architecture will prepare a report.

Or

ABC Architecture will hire a mechanical engineer.

We do not mean any specific document or firm.

However, if we say:

ABC Architecture will prepare a Conceptual Design Report for the Lincoln Parkway project.

Later, when we refer to the Report, we mean a specific document (a proper noun), and therefore, we would capitalize it.

Similarly, if we say:

ABC Architecture will contract with Rogers Mechanical Engineers, Inc.

In later references, we might write the Mechanical Engineer (meaning Rogers Mechanical Engineers, Inc.), and therefore, we would capitalize the reference.

Capitalize specific geographic regions and popularized names for those regions: Midwest, the South, the Panhandle, the Eastside.

Capitalize specific geologic regions: the Permian Basin, the Hill Country.

Do not capitalize directions.

north, south, east, west

Capitalize formal titles:

Mr. Johnson, Director Sud

Nancy Calhoun, Director of Services, Edward P. Grant, Field Supervisor

It is best to place a long title behind a name.

Do not capitalize titles that are only job descriptions: lawyer, welder, mechanic, etc.

Common Word Conventions

onsite (one word, no hyphen)

offsite (one word, no hyphen)

stormwater is one word, *not* two: storm water

rainwater is one word, *not* two: rain water

groundwater is one word, *not* two: ground water

subbase is one word, *not* two: sub base

subgrade is one word, *not* two: sub grade

healthcare is one word, *not* two: health care

right-of-way, *not* right of way, *not* Right-of-Way

master plan/master planning (generally two words, *not* one)

work session (two words, *not* one: worksession)

land use (two words, *not* one: landuse)

The phrase "state of the art" should be hyphenated when it is used as a compound adjective, e.g.:

"This machine is an example of state-of-the-art technology",

but not when used as a noun, as in the following sentence:

"The state of the art in this field is mostly related to the X technology".

Numbers

Numbers 1 through 10 should be spelled out:

One-inch... *not* 1" or 1-inch

Seven feet... *not* 7' or 7 feet

Four-level... *not* 4-level

Numbers above ten should be listed numerically:

16 acres... *not* sixteen acres

A 20-foot... *not* a twenty-foot

Fractions and decimals should *not* be spelled out.

1/2-inch

6-3/8 feet

Place commas in all figures:

1,000 square feet, *not* 1000 square feet

\$21,000, *not* \$21000

Hyphenate singular, do not hyphenate plural

One-hour, two hours

A four-foot trench; the trench is four feet

When two or more adjectives or noun modifiers express a single concept, use hyphens to link all the words in the compound:

Four-year study. 12-member council. 28-year-old woman.

Measurements

Measurements should be spelled out

11-inch, *not* 11"

Two feet, *not* two'

20-percent, *not* 20%

10 degrees, *not* 10°

Hyphenate singular, do not hyphenate plural

One-inch

Six inches

A 10,000-sf base, the facility is 22,600 sf*

Square feet and other abbreviated measurements, numerals, etc. should be spelled out first, then the abbreviation in parentheses thereafter, i.e. “10,000 square feet (sf) of floor space will be partitioned into a 4,000-sf kitchen area...”

We spell out measurements and use hyphenation to provide clarity and ensure the proper measurement is being used. It is much easier to hit a key on the keyboard incorrectly (" vs. ') than write out “inch” or “foot” incorrectly.

Dates

Spell out dates.

January 15, 2004

not 1-15-04, or 01/15/04

Do *not* abbreviate months

Jan. 15, 2004

Feb. 2, 2005

There is no need to use ordinals in dates (1st, 2nd, 14th, 23rd, etc.).

Do not abbreviate days of the week.

Thursday

not Thurs. or Th.

Seasons should not be capitalized (summer, fall, winter, spring), unless they become a part of a proper noun (Spring Planting Season).

Time

Should be written:

6:00 p.m.

3:00 a.m.

Avoid using “noon” or “midnight” since if you include other times, it will be inconsistent. Write: 12:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m.

Avoid “6 p.m.” or “3 a.m.”, include full minutes: 6:00 p.m., 2:25 a.m., etc.

Time includes hour, minutes and time of day for clarification. By writing out times in full, you will reduce confusion with other numbers.

Addresses

Addresses should not be abbreviated.

Magnuson Avenue Southwest

Northeast 56th Street

Ordinals should be used for addresses.

Hyphens

A hyphen joins two parts of a compound word (self-conscious) or the two elements of a range: (Pages 95-97).

A noun used as a compound adjective is hyphenated: *a present-tense verb, a well-educated person*, etc.

Compound adjectives

Compound adjectives are hyphenated to differentiate them from other figures of speech and signal to the reader that a word is being used to describe the noun.

The **11,000-square-foot** building is located... (The building is 11,000 square feet)

This **state-of-the-art** facility will house... (The facility is state of the art)

The **\$21-million** fund will be used for... (The fund has \$21 million for...)

Names and Affiliations

On first reference, use a person's full name, title and/or certifications, and company or agency affiliation.

Bernard P. Edwards, AIA, Project Architect, Edwards & Tyler Architects, PLLC

Bernard P. Edwards, AIA, Project Architect (Edwards & Tyler Architects, PLLC)

On second reference, use simply the name or company.

Bernard P. Edwards indicated the site line...

Edwards & Tyler will coordinate with the Project Artist...

When introducing a member of the project team in a document that follows a series of project-related correspondence, it is common to write:

Bernard P. Edwards (of Edwards & Tyler)

Bernard P. Edwards (Edwards & Tyler)

As long as Mr. Edwards' full name, title, certifications, and company or agency are well-known to the project team.

At times, members of the project team may need to be defined by their role in the project.

Bernard P. Edwards (Project Architect)
Sarah Craig (Civil Engineer)

Especially when they will be referred to by their role thereafter in the document.

The Civil Engineer will manage the site utility locate...

COMPOSITION

Active and Passive Voice

Avoid using the “passive” voice. Although correct grammatically, the passive voice often leads to awkward sentences, which can cause confusion for the reader.

Sentences in “active” voice are generally clearer and more direct than those in the passive voice.

Passive

In sentences written in passive voice, the subject *receives* the action expressed in the verb; the subject is acted upon. Passive voice results from the overuse of "be" verbs: am, is, was, were, be, being and been.

Passive is formed by: *passive subject* + (form of) *to be* + *past participle* (i.e. adding *-d* or *-ed* to the base form of a verb)

Active

In sentences written in active voice, the subject *performs* the action expressed in the verb; the subject acts.

Passive	Active
A response to the RFI <i>is being drafted</i> by the Architect.	The Architect <i>is drafting</i> a response to the RFI.
By then, the borings <i>will have been finished</i> by the Geotechnical Engineer.	By then, the Geotechnical Engineer <i>will have finished</i> the borings.

Changing passive to active

If you want to change a passive voice sentence to active voice, find the agent in a "by the..." phrase, or consider carefully who or what is performing the action expressed in the verb. Make that agent the subject of the sentence, and change the verb accordingly. Sometimes you will need to infer the agent from the surrounding sentences that provide context.

Passive Voice	Agent	Changed to Active Voice
The work <i>is being performed</i> by several subcontractors.	several subcontractors	Several subcontractors <i>are performing</i> the work.
Results <i>will be included</i> in a detailed Technical Information Report.	Agent not specified.	The Technical Information Report <i>will include</i> the results.
A revised code <i>has been implemented</i> by the City.	the City	The City <i>has implemented</i> a revised code.
Changes <i>were made</i> .	Agent not specified.	The architect <i>made</i> changes.

I vs Me

"I" is a *subject* pronoun, while "me" is an *object* pronoun. Remember that a subject is the noun/pronoun that *performs* the action of the verb to which it is linked, while an object is a noun/pronoun that *receives* the action of the subject-verb pair.

Examples:

I threw the ball to you.

You threw the ball to me.

A common mistake is to use these pronouns incorrectly when creating a compound subject or object such as "you and I" or "Tom and me".

Correct examples:

Tom and I went to see the movie.

You should come with Tom and me.

i.e. and e.g.

e.g. means: for example; for the sake of example; such as.

i.e. means: that is.

There is no need to place a comma after e.g. or i.e. (*i.e., catch basins*)

That and Which

“That” is used to introduce restrictive phrases. “That” restricts the reader's thought, directing attention to a specific bit of information to complete a message's meaning. Restrictive clauses (“that”) modify, focus and limit. Because the information they supply is essential to the intended meaning of the sentence, they are not set off by commas.

“Which” is non-restrictive and introduces subsidiary (rather than essential) information to the meaning of the sentence. Non-restrictive clauses (“which”) do not limit the words they modify. They simply add information that otherwise would not be provided. Commas set off non-restrictive clauses because the information they provide is supplementary, not essential to the meaning of the sentence. If you take out a nonrestrictive phrase, the sentence should still make sense and have the same meaning.

When “that” is a relative pronoun, it should be omitted.

A relative pronoun is a word that stands in place of a noun.

(1) This is the report. ABC Engineering developed this report.

(2) This is the report that ABC Engineering developed.

In this instance, “that” stands in place of “report” in the second phrase.

However, to avoid wordiness, we can just as easily say:

(3) This is the report ABC Engineering developed.

The sentence retains the exact same meaning and it reduces words needed to convey the idea.

Removing “that” or “which” when they are not needed also offers clearer, more concise sentences.

The pipe that is in the subgrade needs adjusting.
We have a pipe in the subgrade. The pipe needs adjusting.
The pipe, which is in the subgrade, needs adjusting.
The pipe in the subgrade needs adjusting.

The trees that are located beside the fence are specified in the Contract Documents.
A number of trees are located beside the fence. These trees are specified in the Contract Documents.
The trees, which are located beside the fence, are specified in the Contract Documents.
The Contract Documents specify the trees located beside the fence.

A, An

Use the article “an” in front of words that begin with a vowel and words that *sound* as if they begin with a vowel, regardless of how they are spelled.

Use “a” in front of words that begin with a consonant and words that sound as if they begin with a consonant, regardless of how they are spelled.

It is **an** honor to be here today.

It is **a** useless exercise.

It's, Its

“It’s” is a contraction that means “it is” or “it has”.

“Its” means “belonging to it”.

To figure out which to use, simply insert the phrase “it is” or “it has”, if it makes sense, use it’s.

Effect, Affect

Effect is a noun meaning “outcome” or “result”. Effect is rarely a verb, but in such cases, it means “to prompt” or “to cause”, as in, “the bill may effect change”.

Affect is a verb meaning “influence” or “involve”.

In most instances, you will mean “affect”. However, to determine which to use, simply replace the word with one of its equivalent words:

The wetland buffer will not **affect** habitat near the project site.

The wetland buffer will not **influence** habitat near the project site.

The **effect** of the City’s decision will cause design changes.

The **outcome** of the City’s decision will cause design changes.

Assure, Ensure, Insure

You *assure a person* that things will go right by making him or her confident. Never use *assure* in the sense of "Assure that the wording is correct"; you can only *assure somebody* that it's correct. Simply remember assure has to have a person attached.

Ensure and *insure* are technically interchangeable; however, because *insure* is used in the A/E industry to mean that an insurance company is actually providing insurance (i.e. setting aside resources in case of a loss), it is best to keep them separate. *Insuring* is the business of an insurance company. *Ensure* means *make sure*, as in "Ensure grade is two-percent".

Use of assure and ensure should be limited, since they can be construed as making a promise, i.e. a guarantee.

Collective Nouns

Nouns such as team, committee, project and group take singular verbs, such as "is". These collective nouns also take the pronoun "it" instead of "they".

The Project Team *is* meeting to discuss the schedule at 12:00 p.m.

The Bicycle Master Plan Committee *has* determined that the trail is out of *its* jurisdiction.

To determine whether a noun is collective, attempt to use "is" or "are" with it. For instance, we wouldn't say:

The team *are* winning projects.

Adjectives and Adverbs

An *adjective* is a word that modifies a *noun* or a *pronoun*: it answers *which one*, *how many*, or *what kind*. Some examples: "the *big* one"; "*seven* books"; "a *devoted* student." (Most adjectives can also go in the predicate position after the verb: "This one is *big*"; "That student is *devoted*.")

Adverbs usually modify verbs, and answer *in what manner*, *to what degree*, *when*, *how*, *how many times*, and so forth. Some examples: "He ran *quickly*"; "I'll do it *soon*"; "We went *twice*."

Sometimes adverbs modify not verbs but adjectives or other adverbs: "She finished *very* quickly" (*very* modifies the adverb *quickly*, which in turn modifies the verb *finished*); "The work was *clearly* inadequate" (*clearly* modifies the adjective *inadequate*, which in turn modifies *work*).

The easiest way to spot adverbs is to look for the telltale *-ly* suffix. However, not all adverbs end in *-ly*, and not all *-ly* words are adverbs. *Soon*, *twice*, and *never*, for instance, are adverbs (they tell when or how often); *friendly*, *ugly*, and *northerly* are adjectives (they modify nouns).

Adjectives and adverbs should be used sparingly. Too many of them can make text complicated, confusing and needlessly convoluted.

The adverb "very" should generally be removed. For instance, "quickly" indicates an accelerated pace, i.e. fast. To say, "she finished very quickly" adds an unneeded word to the phrase. The tendency to say "very quickly" or "very tall" or "very smart" is erroneous. The adjectives already sufficiently express the intent, i.e. "she finished quickly".

Semicolons

There are only a few instances when a semicolon should be used.

1. In a list in which part of the list contains commas.

Site preparation will include construction fencing, street closures, temporary erosion and sedimentation control measures, tree preservation, staking, and removal, maintenance of existing tree protection, maintenance of existing trees to remain, building foundation demolition, curb, gutter, and sidewalk demolition, utility demolition, site demolition, clearing and grubbing, mass-grading, temporary utilities, and temporary conditions.

In the above paragraph, there is a series within the list; therefore, semicolons should be used.

Site preparation will include construction fencing; street closures; temporary erosion and sedimentation control measures; tree preservation, staking, and removal; maintenance of existing tree protection; maintenance of existing trees to remain; building foundation demolition; curb, gutter; and sidewalk demolition; utility demolition; site demolition; clearing and grubbing; mass-grading; temporary utilities; and temporary conditions.

2. To separate two independent (related) clauses in one sentence:

There are four utility locations; each location is indicated on the plans.

The Architect is responding to an RFI; we will provide information to the Architect.

The two clauses joined both have to be complete sentences. They should be “related” in some way. Otherwise, use a period.

Incorrect: The project is waiting for a permit; the agency would like 100% CDs by Friday.

Correct: The project is waiting for a permit. The agency would like 100% CDs by Friday.

Prepositions

“To” is a preposition (or an adverb), not a verb:

Incorrect: “Contractor **to** construct...”

“Architect **to** design...”

Correct: “Contractor **will (shall)** construct...”

“Architect **will (shall)** design...”

Common preposition misuses

Incorrect:

Metal castings for access rings, round covers, and frames shall conform **with** Section 9-05.15.

Correct:

Metal castings for access rings, round covers, and frames shall conform **to** Section 9-05.15.

Incorrect:

The design team is waiting **on** information from...

Correct:

The design team is waiting **for** information from...

Incorrect:

We know how to achieve alignment among stakeholders who have conflicting agendas **on** highly visible, often controversial projects — a skill certain to come into play as the Port, the City, the development community, and area business owners and residents contribute to a successful outcome **on** this project.

Correct:

We know how to achieve alignment among stakeholders who have conflicting agendas **with** highly visible, often controversial projects — a skill certain to come into play as the Port, the City, the development community, and area business owners and residents contribute to a successful outcome **for** this project.

CONVENTIONS

Marketing and Proposals

Figures

Write out figures above the thousand-range:

“Since 19XX, OAC has delivered more than *20 million square feet* of buildings with a construction value of over *one and half billion dollars*.”

Express figures under millions numerically:

“With over 250,000 square feet of space...”
“The budget is \$400,000 for Phase 1...”

Round figures to at least the thousandth:

Incorrect:

Space planning, programming and interior design for three buildings totaling 365,443 sf.

Correct:

Space planning, programming and interior design for three buildings totaling [more than] 365,000 sf.

Reviewing/Editing

Use standard editing conventions, such as:

Use a colored pen/pencil (blue, red, green, etc.)

Do not attempt to ERASE edits that are to be retained (it is often too difficult to tell), use the word “Stet”

“Stet” - literally means, “let it stand” – it indicates proofreading marks calling for a change should be ignored and the text as originally written should be remain as is.

Stet should be used rather than striking out edits or attempting to erase, since it can become confusing and/or difficult to tell whether it was erased or written lightly.

^ √ - insert symbols – indicates a word or phrase should be inserted.
are

“there √ no wastewater systems...”

¶ - new paragraph

 or ~~Product~~ - delete/remove

~ - transpose or switch words or clauses

○ - no space between

○ - issue, needs review

code or code - capitalize

Ūnderground - remove capitalization

/ - add space or turn one word into two words (some use #; however, it also indicates a numeral and therefore, can be confusing in design documents)

sp√ - spell check

Using standard editing symbols reduces explanation time and develops systems to greatly expedite work.

There is no need to “double-space” after a period. Word-processing software makes this practice obsolete.

Use “Page Break” (In Word, click “Insert”, “Break”) to separate pages, not hard returns.

Do not write: “1 (one) inch” or “one (1) inch”. This is an antiquated convention used when documents were hand-written.

Place a colon (:) after the word “following” only when the word is at/near the end of the sentence. Otherwise, the sentence should end with a period.

As per your request, ABC reviewed the Project Documents and noted the *following*:

ABC noted the *following* issues in the Project Documents.

Standard Outline

PART 1 -

1.01 (or 1.1)

A.

1.

a.

1)

a)