Developing a House Style Guide

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What we started with

- We had a set style
  - *AP Stylebook* (primary) and *Chicago Manual of Style* (secondary)
    - Why two?
  - *Merriam-Webster Collegiate* or online
- In-house style sheet
  - Listed our references and had glossary of terms

How copyediting works at NCRA

- Proofreader/copyeditor (me)
- Editor of the magazine (*JCR: Journal of Court Reporting*)
- Others who write copy
  - Communications and marketing staff
  - Professional development staff

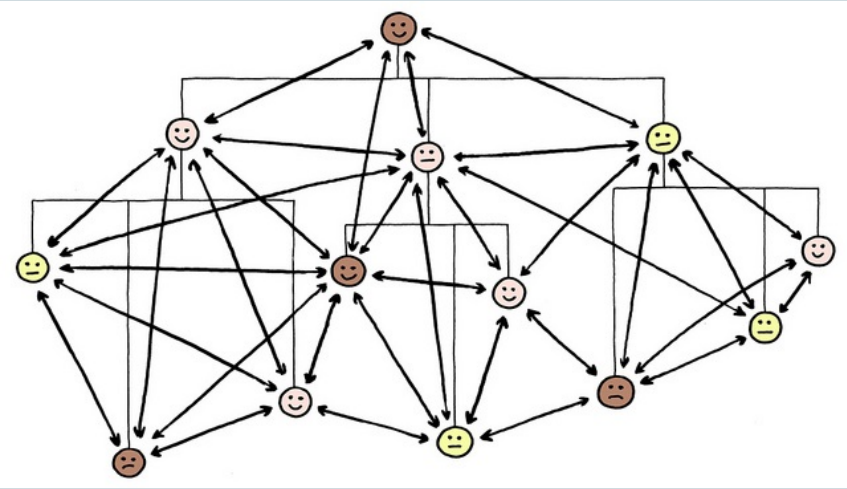


Photo © Jurgen Appelo

What our house guide covers

- Industry and association–specific terms
- Questions not addressed by our style references
- Deviations from our style references
- Unusual or hard-to-remember rules
- Extra material (guidelines, checklists)

Sample style guides: MailChimp

MailChimp Content Style Guide

Search

GO TO SECTION

Writing Goals and Principles

Voice and Tone

Writing About People

Grammar and Mechanics

Content Types

Web Elements

Writing Blog Posts

Writing Technical Content

Writing Legal Content

Writing Email Newsletters

Writing for Social Media

Writing for Accessibility

Writing for Translation

Creating Structured Content

Copyright and Trademarks

Welcome to the MailChimp Content Style Guide

This style guide was created for MailChimp employees, but we hope it's helpful for other content and communications teams too.

If you work at MailChimp

This is our company style guide. It helps us write clear and consistent content across teams and channels. Please use it as a reference when you're writing for MailChimp.

This guide goes beyond basic grammar and style points. It's not traditional in format or content. We break a number of grammar rules for clarity, practicality, or preference.

We've divided the guide by topic based on the types of content we publish, so you can reference it as needed or browse in order. The entire guide is searchable, so you can go straight to the item you're looking for.

styleguide.mailchimp.com/

Sample style guides: VICE

VICE: THE STYLE GUIDE

1. Basics
2. Abbreviations & Acronyms
3. Colons, Commas, & Semicolons
4. Slashes & Dashes
5. Numbers
6. Punctuation Not Already Covered: Ellipses & Quotation Marks
7. Titles of Things
8. When Words & Letters Are Used as Words & Shapes
9. The World Wide Web
10. Tips for Grammar & for Life
11. Because I Said So

1. BASICS

—What's in a name?
VICE is normally all caps and roman: VICE magazine, VICE Media, VICE.com, *VICE Meets* (italicized because it's part of a show title). The exception is *VICE*, our HBO show.

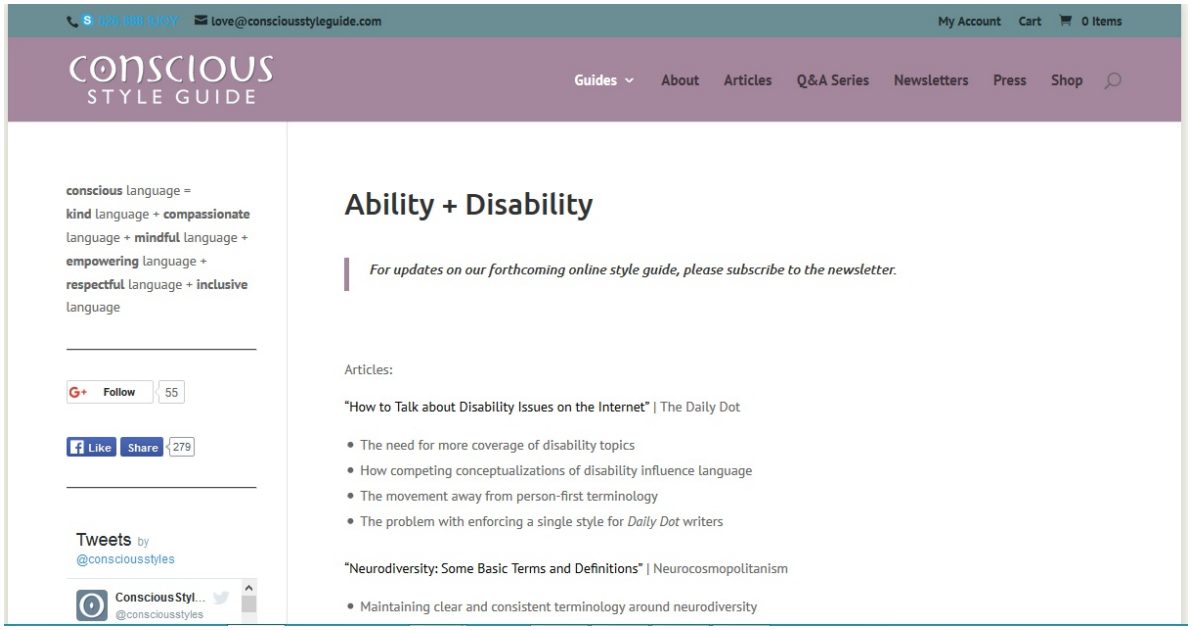
—Headlines and subheads
Make sure the country, subject, person, or band written about or interviewed is mentioned in the title or subheading.

gawker.com/here-is-the-vice-style-guide-1638739250

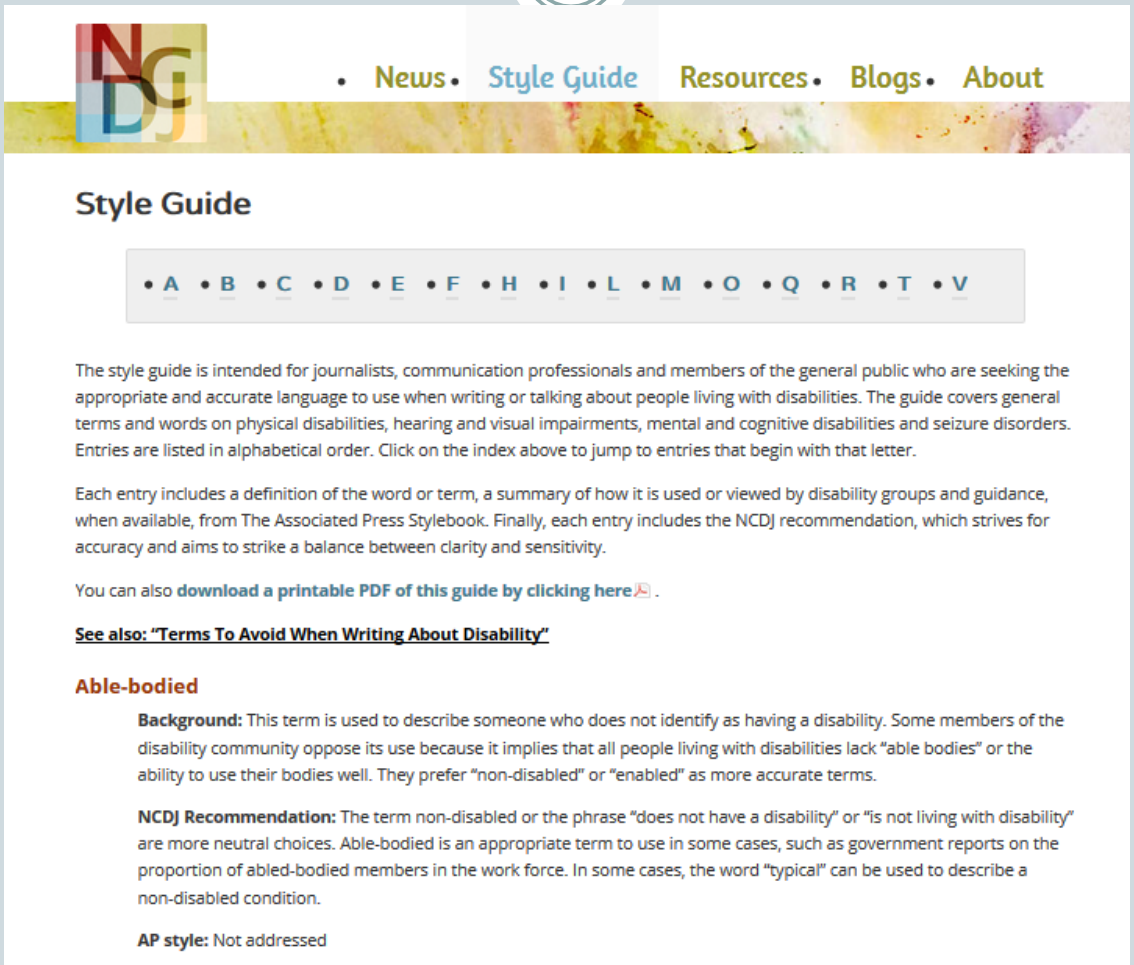
Sample style guides: Conscious Style Guide

This also led me to the *Disability Style Guide* by the National Center on Disability Journalism

consciousstyleguide.com/ability-disability/



Sample style guide: Disability Style Guide



News • Style Guide • Resources • Blogs • About

Style Guide

• A • B • C • D • E • F • H • I • L • M • O • Q • R • T • V

The style guide is intended for journalists, communication professionals and members of the general public who are seeking the appropriate and accurate language to use when writing or talking about people living with disabilities. The guide covers general terms and words on physical disabilities, hearing and visual impairments, mental and cognitive disabilities and seizure disorders. Entries are listed in alphabetical order. Click on the index above to jump to entries that begin with that letter.

Each entry includes a definition of the word or term, a summary of how it is used or viewed by disability groups and guidance, when available, from The Associated Press Stylebook. Finally, each entry includes the NCDJ recommendation, which strives for accuracy and aims to strike a balance between clarity and sensitivity.

You can also **download a printable PDF of this guide by clicking here** .

See also: "Terms To Avoid When Writing About Disability"

Able-bodied

Background: This term is used to describe someone who does not identify as having a disability. Some members of the disability community oppose its use because it implies that all people living with disabilities lack "able bodies" or the ability to use their bodies well. They prefer "non-disabled" or "enabled" as more accurate terms.

NCDJ Recommendation: The term non-disabled or the phrase "does not have a disability" or "is not living with disability" are more neutral choices. Able-bodied is an appropriate term to use in some cases, such as government reports on the proportion of abled-bodied members in the work force. In some cases, the word "typical" can be used to describe a non-disabled condition.

AP style: Not addressed

ncdj.org/style-guide/

Who's in charge?

Photo © tlparadis

Sections in house style guide: References

References

NCRA uses the following sources for spelling, hyphenation, punctuation, and other general style guidelines. Please use the most current available version.

- *The Associated Press Stylebook* (primary reference for style)
- *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (online or collegiate)
- *Chicago Manual of Style* (secondary reference for style)

The NCRA style guide:

1) highlights key rules from the above references, especially AP style,
2) explains any instances when NCRA style deviates from the above references, and
3) offers a rule for words and situations that are industry specific or are otherwise ignored by the above references.

Any questions about NCRA style should be directed to the editorial staff, including the editor of the *JCR* and/or the copyeditor/proofreader.

Sections in house style guide: Voice and tone

Voice and tone

NCRA's voice is:

- professional but not stuffy
- accessible but not casual
- positive but not zealous
- informative but not long-winded

Keep the tone more formal when speaking as NCRA. Writing from members can remain slightly more informal, although it should not be too conversational.

Contractions

Consider the medium and audience when using contractions. Social media posts and marketing emails, for example, are appropriate places to use contractions for brevity and accessibility whereas a *JCR* article written by NCRA staff is not unless using the full term sounds stilted and stuffy (in which case, consider rewriting the sentence). Keep contractions in articles and quotations written by members. In general, be consistent throughout the piece.

Pronouns

I/we/it

Staff would generally not have a reason to use *I* in copy unless being quoted directly. Members often use *I* in articles they submit, which is appropriate.

Sections in house style guide: Genres

Genres

Writing for the Web

Remember that, since Web copy is scanned or glanced, it should be concise, to the point, easy to find and navigate, and up to date. Also keep in mind that Web content is most likely being read on either a computer or a mobile device. Simple language is especially important for the Web, and the content should use key words and phrases. Use bullet points and numbered lists for easy scanning. Organize the content using headings and sub headings from largest to smallest as necessary. State the most important information first and then add details as necessary. Use short paragraphs, headings, sentences, and bulleted lists to organize information. Each page should have a call to action telling the reader for to do next — some call to action terms include *register now*, *download*, *learn more*, and *contact us*. Use italics only for composition titles, use bold only for headings, and use underlines only for hyperlinks.

Please consult the Web manager to ensure that content on *NCRA.org* is easy for a user to find, has appropriate cross-references, has a short link if necessary, and isn't already present elsewhere on the website.

Headings

Make headings a meaningful summary of key points. As an alternative to the bold feature used for headings, insert HTML heading tags into copy using the formatting feature that is included with most WYSIWYG Web editors.

Hyperlinks

Embed hyperlinks and email addresses within the text rather than referring the reader to another part of the page, and link to all relevant information. Avoid using URLs as link text unless the user is likely to print that page; in that case, spell out the URL or use a custom short link.

Sections in house style guide: Using images

Using images

Be certain that the image either belongs to NCRA or NCRF or that the image is fair use. If an image is fair use, always credit the photographer and include any required information, e.g. a legal code or if the image had been altered in any way.

Use alt text so members who cannot download images or who have low vision will have access to the subject of the image.

Sections in house style guide: Grammar and mechanics

Grammar and mechanics

Acronyms

In general, use the full name on first reference and an acronym on second reference. The acronym should follow the full term in parenthesis, e.g. Registered Professional Reporter (RPR), unless the acronym is defined elsewhere on the page, such as in a sidebar. NCRA can be abbreviated on first reference, but please spell out National Court Reporters Foundation on first reference. Use the glossary for any other acronyms that can be used on first reference.

If an acronym is part of a proper name, e.g. CASE Award of Excellence, make sure the acronym is clarified somewhere on the page.

Most acronyms do not use periods or slashes; check the *AP Stylebook*, *Merriam-Webster*, and the glossary for any exceptions.

States

In *JCR* materials, use the full name of a state if used alone and the abbreviations in the table below if used in conjunction with a city. Postal codes are used for lists and event/marketing materials.

Ala.	Fla.	Md.	Neb.	N.D.	Tenn.
Ariz.	Ga.	Mass.	Nev.	Okla.	Vt.
Ark.	Ill.	Mich.	N.H.	Ore.	Va.
Calif.	Ind.	Minn.	N.J.	Pa.	Wash.
Colo.	Kan.	Miss.	N.M.	R.I.	W.Va.

Sections in house style guide: Writing about people

Writing about people

As a general guideline, keep in mind that NCRA is a professional organization, and specific details about a person – including age, nationality, religion, (dis)ability, etc. – should be included only when relevant to the story. While NCRA does not use singular *they*, use gender neutral language unless talking about a specific person.

Member information

On first reference, follow a person's first and last name with their NCRA credentials and, usually, their job category (captioner, freelancer, official, etc.) and city and state. This is especially true in *JCR* copy. On second reference, use last names only. Use first names on second reference if there is more than one person with the same last name who are related (e.g. a husband and wife or siblings) or if a member wrote the article and using last names would make the article overly formal. In interviews, identify speakers by last name, but it is okay to use first names in-text (e.g. "Smith: What did Bob think about the project?")

Certifications

NCRA certifications are listed in the following order: RPR, RMR, RDR, CRR, CRC, CMRS, CLVS, CRI, CPE. Since the RPR, RMR, and RDR are serial certifications, use only the highest

Sections in house style guide: Glossary

Glossary

#

A

Angels program/Angel donor/Angels Drive

Annual Business Meeting

audiocassettes; audiotapes

B

back up (v.); backup (n., adj.)

Bluetooth

Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, Board Meeting, board

broadcast captioner

C

CART (Communication Access Realtime Translation)

CART captioner

CASE Award of Excellence

Sections in house style guide: Editing checklists

Editing Checklist

- ☐ Step 1: Housekeeping
  - Do a Save As and rename file to mark it as proofed (e.g. "_proofedMR")
  - Replace:
    - two spaces → one space
    - straight quote → curly quote
    - apostrophe → curly apostrophe
    - en dash → em dash (as appropriate)
    - spaces around em dashes
      - not for dates
- ☐ Step 2: Copyediting
  - Run spellcheck
  - Make your first copyediting pass (see *Copyediting checklist*)
  - Record any queries using Comments
  - Make a second quick pass, looking for errors that were missed or accidentally introduced
  - Review Comments; remove or resolve any you can
- ☐ Step 3: Finishing up

It’s only helpful if it’s accessible.

Image from: The Cruise of the Make Believes (1918)

The guide should be a living document.

Image from: Young Frankenstein (1974)

Recap

- Determine what you're starting with
- House guide covers: unique specifics, deviations or missing pieces from primary guides, hard-to-remember rules
- Figure out who's in charge
- Involve the people who are involved in writing and editing
- Find samples as a guide
- Easily available and regularly reevaluated

Questions and comments?

&

KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING:
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@MEGAN_STOLZ