LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DEPARTMENTAL STYLE GUIDE

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DEPARTMENTAL STYLE GUIDE

Introduction

To ensure that publications created by the various offices and divisions throughout the Department of Health are both consistent in their language and of a quality reflecting the integrity of the Department, the Department's Bureau of Media and Communications (BMAC) has produced this style guide. By using this guide, employees of the Department will be able to best represent the Department to the public or other stakeholders.

Examples of publications for the general public include, but are not limited to, informational pamphlets, newsletters, legislative reports, annual reports, social media postings and other content with a general audience in mind.

Examples of publications for the media include, but are not limited to, news releases, talking points, media advisories or statements intended for publication in a newsletter.

The Departmental Style Guide draws upon *The Associated Press Stylebook* for guidance on documents directed toward the general public and the media. If the Departmental Style Guide fails to provide adequate guidance on a question you have for these audiences, please consult *The Associated Press Stylebook* or BMAC.

Referring to the Louisiana Department of Health

When referring to the Louisiana Department of Health for the first time in a document, refer to it by its full name. Note that the word "the" in the name of the Department is capitalized only if it begins a sentence. Refrain from use of the old title of Department of Health and Hospitals or its acronym, DHH.

➤ The Louisiana Department of Health will release the report.
➤ The report was released by the Louisiana Department of Health last week.

Once the Department has been named in a document, it can be referred to in one of two ways:

➤ the Department
  ▪ Note that *Department* is capitalized when referring to the Louisiana Department of Health as a specific entity.
➤ LDH
  ▪ Note that, despite being an initialism, the *the* is omitted when referring to LDH (see: *Acronyms and Initialisms*).

As an additional note, to make the Department's full name possessive, one simply adds an apostrophe. However, the abbreviated forms take on an apostrophe and an *s*.

➤ The Louisiana Department of Health's spokesman is Mr. John Doe.
➤ Mr. John Doe is the Department's spokesman.
➤ Mr. John Doe is LDH's spokesman.

Note that many styles use health care as a noun and healthcare as an adjective. The Department always uses the one-word version *healthcare* for both uses.

Acronyms and Initialisms

Many people working in or with large organizations are all too familiar with the alphabet soup of

abbreviated terms for groups, programs or offices with which they work.

Avoid using acronyms and initialisms as often as possible in external documents and communication.

When writing such terms, it is important to remember to always identify the full name for the abbreviated term first and to reference the abbreviation that will be used in its place in parentheses. In longer documents or documents with several abbreviations, it may be necessary to restate the full term and reprint the abbreviation in parentheses again to refresh the reader on the term's meaning when starting a new section or bringing the term up again after a lengthy absence.

➤ The pilot program report will be written by the Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD will be responsible for providing quarterly updates to the pilot program report for the next two fiscal years.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the two types of abbreviated terms and to understand the different ways they are used.

➤ Acronym: an abbreviation formed from the initial letters of other words and pronounced as a word rather than the separate letters forming the abbreviation. Examples include GOHSEP, NASA and NATO.
  ▪ Acronyms do not contain a definite article (the) even if their full names have them. Thus, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is referred to as "NATO" and not "the NATO."
➤ Initialism: an abbreviation consisting of intitial letters pronounced separately rather than as a word. Examples include the U.N., the WTO and the DOD.
  ▪ Initialisms retain the definite article if their full names have them.
  ▪ Exceptions can be made depending on the branding of an individual organization. Thus, the
  ▪ Department of Health is referred to as "LDH" and not as "the LDH."

Periods are not used in either acronyms or initialisms except where tradition dictates.

➤ U.S. interests were protected by the WTO agreement.
➤ He works at the U.N. High Commission but often deals with NATO issues as well.

Note that it's often considered improper to use an abbreviated name as a noun when referencing nations or international bodies.

➤ The United States appointed U.S. Ambassador Doe to represent its interest to the United Nations. She is now working on U.N. issues.

Acronyms and initialisms that are commonly used by the Department include:

➤ BMAC: Bureau of Media and Communications
➤ LDH: Louisiana Department of Health
➤ OAAS: Office of Aging and Adult Services
➤ OBH: Office of Behavioral Health
➤ OCDD: Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities
➤ OPH: Office of Public Health
➤ OS: Office of the Secretary

Ages
Ages are always written as numerals unless they begin a sentence. This is one of many exceptions to the

general rule stating that numbers less than 10 are spelled out (see: *Numerals*).

When the context does not explicitly state which units are being used, the figure is presumed to be years. You must indicate if the age stated is in units other than years.

❯ The boy is 3, but his sister is only 9 months old.

Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun, but not after, or as substitutes for a noun.

❯ A 6-month-old boy crawled away.
❯ The boy is 6 months old.
❯ Thirty-five-year-olds who are a natural-born citizen can become president.
❯ If you are only 21 years old, you cannot run for the office.

Bullets

When using a bulleted list, the list will be punctuated differently depending on how they are used.

The simplest bulleted lists are comprised of incomplete sentences that are not part of the preceding sentence. This form is highly informal, and best suited for times when the amount of text must be kept to a minimum, such as on fliers or billboards. When using this form, capitalize the first word of each line item.

❯ LDH Holiday Party!
  ▪ December 15
  ▪ 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
  ▪ Potluck
  ▪ White elephant gift exchange
  ▪ RSVP at email@la.gov

Another form of a bulleted list contains a complete sentence, or even multiple complete sentences, in each bullet. These are formatted and punctuated as normal.

❯ Thank you for reserving for the LDH holiday party. The party will be held at the Shaw Center for the Arts. Directions to the Shaw Center from the Bienville Building are listed below.
  ▪ Travel down North Street to Lafayette Street and turn left at the stoplight there.
  ▪ Continue on Lafayette Street and, upon crossing Convention Street, the Shaw Center will be on your left.
  ▪ Attendees are encouraged to park on the street nearby. They can also use the parking garage on Convention Street near the intersection with Third Street.

The final form that a bulleted list may take is both the most complicated and the most common in formal writing. In this form, items within a bulleted list are formatted and punctuated as part of the sentence preceding the list as though it were not bulleted at all.

❯ Traditional holiday entrees and beverages will be provided, but guests are encouraged to dress festively and to bring a potluck food item, such as:
  ▪ appetizers, including chips, dips, meatballs or fruit trays;
  ▪ side dishes, including beans, potatoes and carrots;
  ▪ novelty beverages, such as hot chocolate or spiced cider; and
  ▪ desserts, such as cakes, pies or cookies.

Note that the final conjunction is included in the second-to-last item in the list and that the list is separated by either commas or semicolons. In this example, both semicolons and a final punctuation mark before the final item are used due to the complicated nature of this list (see: *Commas*).

Commas

The most common confusion over when to use a comma occurs when listing items in a series. For documents intended for a general audience or the media, do not use the serial comma, a comma placed between the second-to-last item on a list and the conjunction introducing the last item on a list.

❯ Martha, Joe and Sue all participated in the training.
❯ The training was quick, meaningful and fun.
❯ I bought milk, flour, sugar, salt and eggs at the store.

An exception to this rule is applied when lists become more complicated than they are above. Generally, a list is considered complicated if individual items within the list are overly long; contain multiple clauses, phrases or conjunctions within them; or are themselves punctuated with commas. In lists that have individual items punctuated with commas, use semicolons to delineate the list.

❯ We gave our nephew a toy fire truck with a working ladder and doors that opened, a hand-carved rocking horse that we ordered from a website, a pair of shoes featuring his favorite book characters, and a set of matching cards that will help him learn antonyms.
❯ The clinic will administer vaccinations for flu; measles, mumps and rubella; diphtheria, tetanus and acelleular pertussis; and HPV.

Dates

Use numerals for the year and the day of the month. Do not express dates as ordinals, such as June 2nd, February fourth, etc. When writing the year alone, numerals are used, even when beginning a sentence.

❯ The party is on June 5.
❯ The last time a man walked on the moon was December 14, 1972.
❯ LSU's football team won the 2003 national championship.
❯ 1969 was the year the United States first put a man on the moon.

When a phrase lists only a month and year, do not separate the year with commas.

❯ August 2005 was the best month in terms of the business's revenue.

When a phrase lists the month, date and year together, set off the year with commas.

❯ The date of June 6, 1944, will always be remembered as D-Day.

Abbreviated months are optional, but not necessary, in any cases other than when the month is being used alone or when the month and the year are being stated alone. Note that March, April, May, June and July are not abbreviated. The allowable abbreviations for the other months are Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.

❯ This year's fall gala will be held on Oct. 3.
❯ The first fall gala was held on Oct. 17, 2004.

❯ We don't yet have a specific date for the gala that will be held in October 2015.
❯ The fall gala is always held in October.

Numerical dates should only be used in sets of data, tables or graphs and should be written in mm/dd/yyyy format. Including the year with the date is optional if it does not add any clarity to the data.

DATE	EVENT
Sept. 20, 1995	Board Meeting
Oct. 3, 1995	Fall Gala

DATE	EVENT
09/20/1995	Board Meeting
10/03/1995	Fall Gala

When referring to decades, do not use an apostrophe before the s at the end of the term.

❯ The American Civil War took place during the 1860s.

When abbreviating years or decades, use an opening apostrophe to note that you've left out the century.

❯ The gangsters of the Roaring '20s are often romanticized in films about that era.
❯ John graduated with the class of '94.

Days of the Week

Do not abbreviate days of the week. If an event occurs more than seven days before or after the date of publication, use the month and date of the day. Avoid terms like "yesterday" or "tomorrow" when identifying specific dates that may be important for readers to identify quickly.

Degrees

Generally speaking, only the highest degree attained by an individual is listed for the author of a work. If an author has two degrees of equal stature, either or both may be used according to the author's preference. Degrees of lower stature than the highest degree of an author should not be listed unless they are relevant, specialized degrees in fields other than the author's highest degree. Degrees lower than a master's degree are generally omitted unless they are for specialized professional certifications or licenses.

Periods are used in the abbreviations of degrees.

❯ John Doe, M.D.
❯ Jane Doe, M.D.
❯ Janet Doe, M.P.H., R.N.
❯ James Doe, P.A.

Disabilities, Illness and Mental Illness

Generally, always speak of individuals with disabilities in manners which define and respect them first as

individuals. Avoid descriptions that define them by their disability. For additional guidance on how to refer to individuals with disabilities, please review the Department's official person-first policy.

Avoid descriptions that incite pity:

❯ John Doe suffers from cerebral palsy.
❯ Doe, who is confined to a wheelchair, spoke about challenges commonly faced by the mobility-impaired.

Rather, use a factual description:

❯ John Doe has cerebral palsy.
❯ Doe, who uses a wheelchair, also spoke about challenges commonly faced by people with impaired mobility.

In general, do not describe an individual as disabled unless it is specifically relevant to what is being said, otherwise there is no need to mention the disability.

❯ John Doe, who has cerebral palsy, spoke to the support group about how the disease affected his life.
❯ John Doe, an accountant for MegaCorp, spoke to a group of shareholders regarding the company's assets.

Avoid phrasing that could be seen as defining someone by their disability:

❯ The organization is dedicated to serving disabled people.

Rather, use people-first language (e.g., using the terms "person" or "people" before a condition:

❯ The organization is dedicated to serving people with disabilities.

Use "wheelchair user" rather than "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair-bound." If known/when possible, say why a wheelchair is used.

Do not use the terms "mentally retarded" or "retarded." Instead, use terms such as:

❯ people with mental disabilities,
❯ individuals with developmental disabilities or
❯ people with intellectual disabilities.

For further guidelines, refer to the National Center on Disability and Journalism's style guide and the Research and Training Center on Independent Living's Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities.

Internet and Web Styles

The terms below should be styled as follows. Note capitalization and hyphenation or lack thereof. Italics are added here for emphasis and should not be used when publishing these terms.

❯ The Department's *website* is www.ldh.la.gov.
❯ The Department's *webpage* is www.ldh.la.gov.
❯ The Department's *email* address is ldhinfo@la.gov.
❯ The *internet* has revolutionized the way people exchange information.
❯ If a business does not have a presence on the *World Wide Web*, it is behind the times.

❯ The advent of *e-commerce* has allowed businesses like eBay to become successful.

Numerals

Generally, use numerals for numbers 10 or greater, but spell out one through nine. Apply the same logic for ordinals (e.g. third, 12th, etc.).

❯ The girl has three cats.
❯ The city has 11 stoplights.

If beginning a sentence with a number, always use the spelled-out number unless the number is designating a year (see: *Dates*).

❯ One hundred and eleven volunteers are needed for the event.
❯ Twenty-nine people attended the party.
❯ 2001 was the first year of the third millennium of the Common Era.

Percentages, decimals, dates, phone numbers, monetary denominations, votes, citations and other specific uses generally use numerals, even if they are lower than 10.

❯ The rates increased by 9%.
❯ The book costs $5.
❯ Clark defeated Dale in a vote of 9 to 4.
❯ Earth's gravitational acceleration is about 9.8 meters per second.
❯ In Act 1, Scene 2, the main character delivers a monologue.

Fractions can be used for values less than one. When using fractions, they are spelled out and hyphenated. Values greater than one should be converted to decimals and written as numerals.

❯ According to the study, three-quarters of all men are at risk.
❯ The map states that the treasure is buried 1.75 meters east of the tree.

When using proper names or other sources in which numbers are used in titles, defer to their owners when choosing between numerals or spelling out a number.

When using numbers in unusually long lists, in tables and in any context where an abundance of numbers makes spelling them out awkward, using numerals is appropriate.

Percentages

Use the % sign when paired with a numeral, with no space, in most cases. For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero.

❯ The poll shows that 67% of voters plan to vote no on the ballot initiative.
❯ The cost of living rose 0.6% from a year ago.

Spell out the number and percent when beginning a sentence.

❯ Twenty percent of men are at risk for the disease.

When using percentages to communicate about changes in the rate of something, it is important to distinguish between an outright percentage and percentage points. It is easy to understate the actual change in rates if only the percentage point change is mentioned. This issue is magnified in smaller numbers.

❯ Moving from 10% to 5% may only look like a 5-point reduction, but it is actually a much more significant 50% reduction in the rate.
❯ Moving from 95% to 90% is a 5.3% reduction.

Possessives

Possessives of names ending in *s* receive only an apostrophe, not an apostrophe and an *s*.

❯ Chris' computer is being fixed.
❯ Have you seen John Jones' new car?

Plural possessives ending in *s* simply have an apostrophe added at the end.

❯ The Joneses' new home is wonderful
❯ The dogs' bones were moldy, so we had to buy them more.

Possessives of irregular plurals (words that change their spelling to become plural, such as mouse to mice) not ending in *s* also have an apostrophe and an *s* added, rather than just an apostrophe.

❯ The children's classroom was bright and colorful.
❯ We visited the geese's pond.

Possessives of other singular nouns ending in *s* are given an apostrophe and an *s* unless the word following it begins with an *s*.

❯ The witness's answer satisfied the jury.
❯ The witness' story didn't give the police any leads.

The possessive form of proper names that end in a plural word ending in *s* defers to the plural ending and only adds an apostrophe.

❯ The Office of Aging and Adult Services' new program launches today.

Joint possessives are when two or more distinct entities share ownership of something. Sometimes such entities are commonly used as a combined unit, such as Lewis and Clark, who are different individuals but also function in common knowledge as a single unit. Whether items are owned jointly or separately by Lewis and/or Clark can be confusing. Depending on how joint possession is expressed, a phrase can indicate either joint or separate ownership.

❯ Lewis and Clark's canoes were wooden.
  ▪ Here Lewis and Clark are a combined unit, and the canoes are owned jointly by both as individuals.
❯ Lewis' and Clark's canoes were made of maple and birch, respectively.
  ▪ Here Lewis and Clark are identified individually, and separately own their respective types of canoes.
❯ Lewis' canoes were maple and Clark's canoes were birch.
  ▪ This would be a less confusing way of expressing the distinct possession.

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Joint possessives using possessive pronouns (my, his, her, hers, our, ours, their and theirs) become even more confusing and should be avoided altogether in good writing.

States and Cities

When the name of a state stands alone in a sentence, spell it out.

➤ We're from Louisiana.

When the name of a city and state are used together, the name of the state should be abbreviated (except for Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah).

➤ We're from Baton Rouge, La.
➤ He's from Austin, Texas.

State abbreviations in AP style differ from the two-letter, capitalized postal abbreviations, which should not be used. Here is how each state may be abbreviated in AP style:

Alabama	Ala.	Nebraska	Neb.
Arizona	Ariz.	Nevada	Nev.
Arkansas	Ark.	New Hampshire	N.H.
California	Calif.	New Jersey	N.J.
Colorado	Colo.	New Mexico	N.M.
Connecticut	Conn.	New York	N.Y.
Delaware	Del.	North Carolina	N.C.
Florida	Fla.	North Dakota	N.D.
Georgia	Ga.	Oklahoma	Okla.
Illinois	Ill.	Oregon	Ore.
Indiana	Ind.	Pennsylvania	Pa.
Kansas	Kan.	Rhode Island	R.I.
Kentucky	Ky.	South Carolina	S.C.
Louisiana	La.	South Dakota	S.D.
Maryland	Md.	Tennessee	Tenn.
Massachusetts	Mass.	Vermont	Vt.
Michigan	Mich.	Virginia	Va.
Minnesota	Minn.	Washington	Wash.
Mississippi	Miss.	West Virginia	W.Va.
Missouri	Mo.	Wisconsin	Wis.
Montana	Mont.	Wyoming	Wyo.

Time

Time is expressed using numerals and using the common 12-hour style with a colon and periods when describing the half of the day. Do not use double zeroes when stating a time that occurs on the hour.

The single digit is enough.

➤ I get up at 6:30 a.m. and go to bed at 9 p.m.
➤ The meeting lasted from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

When writing about something that occurred at either 12 a.m. or 12 p.m., use the terms midnight or noon rather than the numeric times.

Titles

Professional titles are capitalized when they precede a personal name.

➤ The new program was approved by Department of Health Secretary of State Jane Doe.
➤ It is widely believed that Governor Smith worked behind the scenes to get the legislation passed.

Titles are also capitalized when listing them in formal contexts, such as when signing a letter or when listing members of a panel or agenda.

➤ Sincerely,
 Jane Doe
 Jane Doe
 Secretary for the Louisiana Department of Health
➤ Those being honored at the event include:
 ▪ James Smith, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public Health
 ▪ John Doe, State Senator for District 3

Titles are capitalized then used formally with a name.

➤ President George Washington was America's first executive under the current Constitution.
➤ Even though the title was not coined until after her death, we still refer to his wife as First Lady Martha Washington.
➤ I received an email from James Smith, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public Health.

Titles are not capitalized when used in place of a name.

➤ The governor issued the proclamation.
➤ I asked the secretary what his thoughts were.
➤ The president offered a toast at the state dinner.

Titles are not capitalized during other uses.
➤ Jane Doe is the secretary for the Louisiana Department of Health.
➤ John Doe was the state senator who sponsored the bill.
➤ Washington was once president.
➤ James Smith, the assistant secretary for the Office of Public Health, sent me the email.