

4Culture Communications

Editorial Style Guide

PURPOSE

The purpose of this style guide is to serve our constituents. Making our content accessible and easy to understand is our responsibility as a public agency. In all of our public-facing communications, we have an opportunity to establish trust and confidence with our audiences by providing clean, compelling, well-organized content.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide serves as a record of strategy decisions made by the Communications team—it articulates how we have chosen to shape content and why.

If you create public-facing content on behalf of 4Culture, keeping this guide at hand will help your users successfully get the information they need. If you don't often create public-facing materials, this guide can help you work with the Communications team. If you find yourself wondering why we've worded something in a certain way or organized a document in another, referencing this guide can help.

It's divided into two main sections: [Voice and Tone](#) and [Grammar and Conventions](#). Trying to choose between two different words that mean the same thing? Think some language we used is too formal? Look through Voice and

Tone. Wondering if you should use an em dash or an en dash? Deciding between PDT and PST? Check Grammar and Conventions. If you're not finding what you need, the Communications team is always available to answer your questions—start by [emailing Lauren](#).

QUICK REFERENCE

Jump straight to some of the things we get asked about most often:

[Dates](#)

[Time](#)

[Image credits](#)

[Links](#)

VOICE AND TONE

4Culture’s institutional voice is an expression of who we are as an organization. *As a public agency, we strive to speak with an approachable, knowledgeable, and human voice.* We affirm our role as advocates for culture by using an active voice in all of our communications. That voice shifts depending on a given situation—this is what we refer to as our tone. It’s comprised of elements like point of view, level of formality, purpose, and word choice, all supporting our goal of making our content accessible to readers.

Following are different situations where we deploy our voice, and how we modulate tone within each of them to communicate effectively:

Website

The main purpose of 4culture.org is to educate and motivate: to make 4Culture and its programs understandable and to empower users to make use of our resources. We generally use the 1st person point of view (see more about point of view in the Grammar and Conventions section of this guide) throughout, to support a human voice. Formality modulates slightly based on the page: top-level (ie, Homepage) content is friendly and straightforward, while grant and artist call guidelines pages are more formal and often incorporate the more direct 2nd person point of view. As a best practice, we follow [federal standards of plain language](#) across the site.

Print Materials

4Culture print materials serve a wide range of purposes and appear in a variety of contexts, but have in common, of course, the fact that they are printed—this sets up an expectation in the reader of a certain level of permanence and slightly more formality than in digital spaces. We frequently use the direct and informative 2nd person point of view in print pieces, rarely use slang, and almost always direct readers to our website for full details.

Social Media

This is where we most strongly support our goal of speaking with a human voice. Across our three main platforms—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—we are friendly and informal in tone, always use 1st person, and frequently use slang, emojis, and gifs (never swear words or slurs). We’re able to interact directly with users, and as such can and should speak as people, not an institution. All language for social media must be evaluated in the context of a newsfeed: users are scanning extremely rapidly and reading very little of what is present on the page. Text in these spaces must be short, concise, action-oriented, and almost always supported with strong visuals and direct links.

Email

4Culture uses email for two broad main categories: official communication with applicants about their application and award, and to promote our programs. Since the first category deals with funds, contracts, and invoices, it is fairly

formal and is one of the only places where we use the 3rd person point of view. Plain language is critical here, however, since it is important for users to understand the grant process after they've applied and/or been awarded funds or a project. Promotional email is more motivational in purpose—it provides top-level grant, call, and event information in a straightforward, friendly way and surfaces available resources for assistance.

Press

4Culture press releases follow AP style and are written for King County journalists as the main audience, with influential members of the cultural community as a frequent secondary audience. The goal of the release is to provide journalists with the information they need to decide whether to cover the story. The tone of the release is formal and the content factual. It helps if the lead sentence stands out—projects that have strong images or relate to current affairs have a better chance of being picked up. Press releases are sent out to two lists we update and maintain, as well as 4Culture staff, board, and advisory committees, and King County elected officials and their staff.

GRAMMAR AND CONVENTIONS

Here, we've compiled many of the formatting issues that frequently come up at 4Culture in regards to our content and how we've decided to present our information. This is not an exhaustive guide to punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

These entries are organized alphabetically by topic. Where applicable, we've included examples of how *not* to format something followed by how it *should be* formatted.

Active Voice

This is a core component of our brand voice—it grammatically positions 4Culture as an organization of human people, as opposed to a faceless institution. Using an active voice in all of our copy works to make us more approachable to the public. When we use the active voice instead of a passive voice, 4Culture is the subject performing an action in a sentence.

Examples:

Passive voice:

All applications will be reviewed by 4Culture.

Active voice:

We will review all applications.

All-Caps

This should be avoided as much as possible. Instead, use bolding, italics, or a header to indicate important messaging.

Ampersands

Avoid. The only exception is if it is a part of an organization's brand, ie, the Museum of History & Industry.

Bold

Bold formatting should be used to call attention to specific actions or information that is essential to the applicant's success. Please be judicious when using bold so that it remains an effective way of getting the reader's attention.

Bullets

Bullets should be used to delineate lists, or call attention to items within a specific group. Two main formats can be used:

1. Topic sentence or phrase, followed by bulleted items that are complete in the information they contain.

Example:

Quality and significance

- *There is long-range, sustainable vision for stewardship and use of the landmark.*

2. A topic sentence or concept, followed by a bulleted list of items formatted as a header for an explanatory sentence or two.

Example:

You are required to submit the following:

- *Multi-year organizational operating budget*
You may use 4Culture's form provided here in PDF format, or upload your own.

All items in a bulleted list should be consistent in tense and sentence structure.

Dates

Where space is available, dates should be written according to the following formats:

For an event:
Wednesday, October 25

For a grant deadline:
Wednesday, October 25, 2017 at 5:00 pm PDT (for more information of time formatting, see the [Time](#) entry)

If necessary due to space constraints, dates can be shortened in this format:

Wed, Oct 25

Email Addresses

Email addresses should be written out using all lowercase—no capital letters should appear anywhere.

Example:
Do not use:
Jim.Kelly@4Culture.org

Should be:
jim.kelly@4culture.org

Italics

Italics should be used in place of quotation marks, unless a statement is actually being quoted from a person or document.

Example:
Do not use:

Submit these documents in the “Upload” section of the application.

Should be:
Submit these documents in the *Upload* section of the application.

Em Dash

Em dash is a long dash (—), and can frequently be used in place of commas, parentheses, and colons. There should be no space between the em dash and the words preceding and following it. Do not use the em dash more than twice per sentence. The em dash should not be confused with the en dash or the even narrower hyphen. Those marks serve different purposes.

En Dash

The en dash (–) is used to represent a range of numbers, dates, or time. Depending on the context, the en dash is read as “to” or “through.” There should be no space between the en dash and the words or numbers.

Hyphen

Hyphens (-) are used to create compound words and phrases, and should not be used in place of en or em dashes.

Hyperlinks

See [Links](#).

Image Credits

For photos:
Short description, © Year taken, photo owner, and/or photo by photographer name.

Examples:

Creative Justice Mentor Artist Otieno Terry, © 2015
Timothy Aguero Photography.

Humaira Abid, © 2014 KCTS9, photo by Laila Kazmi.

For artworks:

Artist Name. *Title of Piece*, year made. Medium, dimensions.

Examples:

Sadie Wechsler. *Eruption*, 2012. Inkjet print, 64 x 84 inches.

Matthew Whitney, *Movement Must Also Move*, 2015.
Graphite and pastel on paper, 34 x 60 inches.

Links

When used in text, hyperlinks should always include [www](#). — this is necessary for users using e-readers. They should not, however, use [https://](#). This includes bit.ly links. They should not include capital letters.

Example:

Do not use:

<https://www.4Culture.org>

[4Culture.org](#)

<http://bit.ly/lndmrkscap>

Should be:

[www.4culture.org](#)

[bit.ly/lndmrkscap](#)

Numbers

Numbers should be spelled out when the spelled out version of the number is one word. Any numbers that require more than one word to be spelled out may be shown numerically. Exceptions may be made for dates and when the accepted standard for a particular item is to display it numerically. For example, *2 MB* may be shown using a *2*.

Oxford Comma

This is the comma that appears after the second-to-last item before the “and” in a list. It should always be used.

Example:

Do not use:

We collaborate with artists, communities and organizations to produce immersive experiences.

Should be:

We collaborate with artists, communities, and organizations to produce immersive experiences.

Parentheses

Avoid using parentheses wherever possible. Much of the time, a phrase inside parentheses can be integrated into the sentence itself.

Example:

Do not use:

Submit these documents in the *Upload* section of the application (PDF or Word format only).

Should be:

Submit these documents in the *Upload* section of the application, in PDF or Word format only.

Phone Numbers

Format phone numbers with two hyphens and no parentheses.

Example:

206-263-1234

Photo Credits

See [Image Credits](#)

Point of View

First person: I, we, our, us

Second person: you, yours

Third person: he, she, him, her, it, they, their

As much as possible, we use the first person point of view. This, combined with an [active voice \(see above\)](#), helps us speak with a human voice.

Example:

Do not use:

4Culture funding comes from the State Lodging Tax and the 1% for Art Ordinance.

Should be:

Our funding comes from the State Lodging Tax and the 1% for Art Ordinance.

We often use the second person in grant guidelines--it is direct and positions the reader as a real person.

Time

Where space is available, dates should be written according to the following formats:

For an event:

Wednesday, October 25, 6:00–8:00 pm

Wednesday, October 25, 11:00 am–3:00 pm

For a grant deadline:

Wednesday, October 25, 2017 at 5:00 pm PDT

If necessary due to space constraints, dates can be shortened in this format:

Wed, Oct 25, 6–8 pm

Wed, Oct 25, 11 am–3 pm

Note that when the start and end time are both am or both pm, that marker only needs to be used once, at the end. If an event starts in the am and ends in the pm, both markers need to be used with their respective times.

PDT denotes Pacific Daylight Time and should be used roughly mid-March through early November. PST denotes Pacific Standard Time and should be used roughly early November through mid-March.

Do not capitalize or insert periods when noting am and/or pm. For more information of date formatting, see [Dates](#).

Wondering about something that's not here?
[Let Lauren know.](#)