

Web Author Handbook for _____ .gov

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[Pick the date]

City of _____

The purpose of this handbook is to provide standards for Web Authors to reference and follow in updating and maintaining the _____ website at www.yourcity.gov. These standards are designed to ensure consistency across webpages in each department. Web Authors should also refer to the official **Website Policy** for additional information on roles and responsibilities regarding content on our official government website.

Click on the links below to go directly to the page containing each item.

Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	3
Dates	3
Email Addresses.....	3
Hyperlinks.....	4
Images/Graphics.....	4
Jargon.....	4
Other.....	5
Phone Numbers.....	5
Tables.....	5
Template, Design Theme	5
Terminology.....	5
Text/Formatting.....	6
Time.....	6
Training.....	6
Writing for the Web.....	7

Acronyms

The first reference to organizations or industry-specific terminology should spell out the complete title entirely, with the acronym following in parentheses. Subsequent references on the same webpage should use the acronym.

Correct Example: “The National League of Cities (NLC) visited our community in 2005. NLC is an organization...”

Dates

Calendar dates should be written in a standard manner on the website when appropriate. Use the following format:

Correct Example: Nov. 10, 2010

Other date styles are not incorrect, but using this format will promote consistency on the website.

Email Addresses

The standard on the City of _____ website is to use @____.gov for all email addresses.

When creating a hyperlink to an email address, write the entire address. Why? If you do not write the entire address, visitors cannot see the email address unless they click on the link. If the user does not use a mail service such as Outlook or GroupWise, an email window may not open. The key in the example below is that we want the email address to be visible on the page.

Correct Example: “Contact Delia Garcia at garciad@yourcity.gov for more information.”

Incorrect: “Contact [Delia Garcia](#) for more information.”

Incorrect: “Contact Delia Garcia ([email](#)) for more information.”

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Hyperlinks

An external hyperlink leads to a webpage outside of _____gov. External links will automatically generate an interim page that will inform users they are leaving the City of _____ website and will let them decide if they want to continue.

Important: Do not use “Click Here” terminology for hyperlinks. Instead, use descriptive words for hyperlinks, such as: download the “sustainability checklist”. There are two important reasons for using this technique. 1) Most users scan webpages and ‘Click Here’ does little to help them find information and 2) This technique will positively affect our search engine ranking, which makes it easier for users to find your page.

Images/Graphics

Follow these principles when selecting images to appear on the interior pages for your department or division:

- Do not add an image to the page for the sake of adding an image. An image must achieve a specific purpose – either to support the information on your webpage, provide visual separation of large amounts of text or to illustrate a complicated concept.
- Photos should consist of excellent color, focus, clarity and composition
- All images must have an Alternative, or ALT tag.
- Images should generally be no larger than 250 pixels wide.
- Image size should generally be under 40k
- Use between 5 and 10 pixels of horizontal and vertical space
- Images should not have a border to be consistent throughout the site
- Do not use “Clip Art” or animated graphics
- Contact the Web Manager with requests for a photo or web graphic

Jargon

Always attempt to explain industry-specific jargon or technical terms in common language that the general public can understand. Use appropriate procedures for acronyms. We are trying to educate the public with our site, so they need to understand what we’re saying.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Other

- “City of _____” should always be capitalized.
- Capitalize the word “City” when referring to the City of _____. Use lowercase “city” when referring to cities in general, such as, “The budget process is required for any city government.”

Phone Numbers

Phone numbers should be written in a standard manner on the website. The following style should be used for all phone numbers.

Correct Example: (775) 222-2222

Always preface phone numbers with the area code. The City of _____ website receives visitors from all over the world. Prefacing the phone number with the proper area code ensures that all users will know the appropriate number to dial.

Tables

Avoid using tables unless it is necessary to display data or other information. Tables add a significant amount of code to the webpage, which slows down load time. Tables are also difficult to understand by users with visual impairments who need to use screen reader tools. Please ask the Web Manager for assistance on how to properly format your table if you need to insert one in your webpage.

Template, Design Theme

Certain templates have been applied to designated areas of the City website. When editing or creating a page, do not change the assigned design theme template.

Terminology

- online (instead of On-Line)
- website (instead of Web Site)
- email (instead of E-mail)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Text/Formatting

Do not change the default color or font in your webpages. Besides consistency throughout the website, there are several other important reasons. A particular style has been applied to the website globally. If the look and feel of the entire website is updated in the future, the template changes will not apply to any text that has been modified. Changing the text color or font type adds code to the webpage, which slows down load time.

Use headings to highlight key content, and use bold when necessary. Avoid using italics and avoid underlining text on the webpage. Italics tend to be difficult to see on the web, and underlined text implies that it is a hyperlink.

Time

Time of day should be written in a standard manner on the website. The following style should be used when referencing time.

Correct Example: 8 p.m. or 8:30 p.m.

Incorrect: 8:00 P.M. or 8:30pm

Note that a.m. and p.m. are always lower-case, have periods and always follow a space. Do not use :00 as it is unnecessary and adds extra code to webpages.

Training

Web Authors must participate in all required training. Web Authors are assigned a unique username and password for the admin area of the website, which should not be shared with other users.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Writing for the Web

Writing content for a website is not the same as writing for print publications. In most cases, simply re-typing information directly from a brochure or other print item is not acceptable for web content. Make sure to follow these guidelines when writing for the web:

- Keep it short and simple. Use plain language to get the point across. Is a topic overly technical or confusing? Explain it better. Don't try to keep everything on one page. If your content is longer than a few paragraphs, use hyperlinks to connect related pages. End users are intimidated by pages that go on for days.
- Paragraphs should generally consist of no more than four to six lines, with a double-space in between. The more "white space", the easier to read. Pages should be scannable, so use headings to separate groups of information. Remember, most website visitors scan pages to find what they're looking for.
- Start with the conclusion. Web writing is unlike writing for print, where several paragraphs build up to the main conclusion. Because users scan webpages, start with the main point in the first sentence.
- Do not use "Click Here" terminology for hyperlinks. Instead, use descriptive words for hyperlinks, such as: download the "sustainability checklist". There are two important reasons for using this technique. 1) Most users scan webpages and 'Click Here' does little to help them find information and 2) This technique will positively affect our search engine ranking, which makes it easier for users to find your page.
- Do not assume that the website visitor has read the information on preceding webpages before reading a specific page. Websites do not read like a book. Users can choose to skip around and jump forward via hyperlinks to other webpages. Keep in mind that they may not have the background information you provided on another webpage.
- Use hyperlinks! Sites with hyperlinks get more visitors and are easier to use. For instance, if you reference the Parks & Recreation department, turn the words "Parks & Recreation" into an internal hyperlink that leads to the PRCS homepage. Hyperlinks make it easier for visitors to get around websites.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)