



Communicating Effectively in Writing

Agenda

▶ Writing with Purpose

- Determining your message
- Pre-writing – planning, outlining, starting – creating the frame

▶ Keeping a Reader-centric Focus

- 5 Ws, plain language
- Public sector standards, reading ease, grade level

▶ Effective Writing

- Eight characteristics of effective written communication
- Proofreading versus editing, self-editing checklist

POWER

- ▶ **P**lan/**P**rewrite – determine purpose, audience, message. Jot down all of your ideas on the topic.
- ▶ **O**rganize – outline the document, plan the structure, key topics, order of importance.
- ▶ **W**rite – always begin with a rough draft based on your outline created in the steps above.
- ▶ **E**dit/**E**valuate – edit, don't just proofread. Evaluate by reviewing against your original plan.
- ▶ **R**evise – make the changes identified in the editing and evaluation phase.

Plan and Prewrite

**“The essence of communication is intention.”
— Werner Erhard**

- ▶ **Focus first on the intended outcome or intention of your document.**
- ▶ **Get organized – Think of the reader when you write. Use the good practice of outlining what you want to say before writing the first draft.**
- ▶ **Begin with an intention statement.**

Plan and Organize

- ▶ Who are you writing for?
- ▶ Why would they be interested in your topic?
- ▶ What do your readers already know about your topic?
- ▶ What do your readers need to know about this topic?
- ▶ What do you hope the readers will learn or what do you want the reader to take from your document?



Reader-Centric Focus

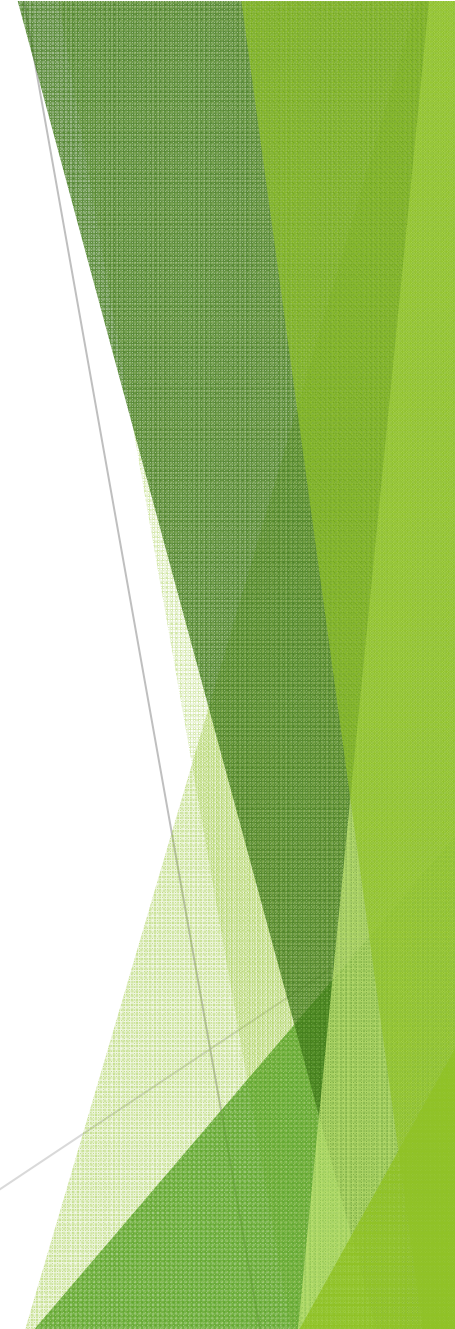
Use the 5 Ws Tool

- ▶ **Who** is the decision/issue considering?
- ▶ **What** is the issue and the recommendation/decision?
- ▶ What do you recommend for operational/policy steps?
- ▶ What is the benefit to them/branch/dept/gov/citizens?
- ▶ **When** does this need to occur to avoid risk?
- ▶ **Where** will the potential changes occur (e.g. in one branch)
- ▶ **Why** are these the recommendations, what are the advantages, what risk does it mitigate, how does it benefit/resolve the issue?



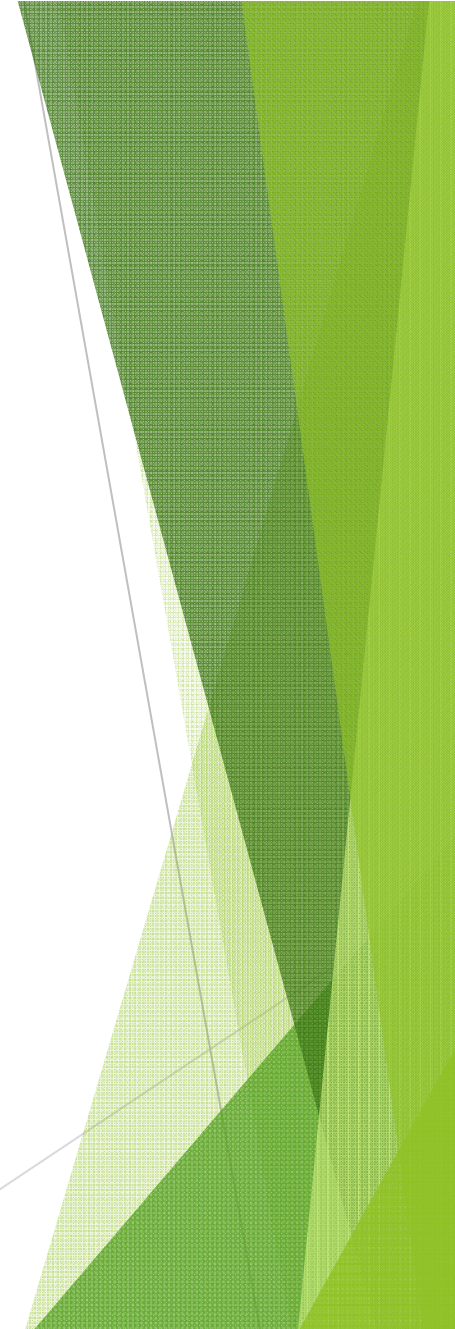
Frame Your Message

- ▶ Create an outline of your document in terms of what you want to convey and the key topics covered.
- ▶ Rate the topics you want to cover by importance. Start with the most important item first.



Intention Statement Example

- ▶ My goal is to achieve a minimum 30 per cent response rate to my survey.
- ▶ I will achieve this by focusing on the benefits the responders can gain. I will communicate how the information will be used to achieve this benefit to them.
- ▶ I will highlight the progress that has been made to date thanks to their previous feedback.



lo,

Thanks to your input, our MI FORMS team was able to streamline how forms are managed on the new [MI intranet site](#). Our next step is to gather the data to see if this is an improvement for staff. That's where we need your help. Please complete the attached survey, save your responses and email it back to my attention by March 31.

Completion of the survey will ensure your name is entered into the prize draw. Congratulations to Ian Boughton for winning the first survey prize!

I've attached a few photos and information so you can see how your input has helped move the project along. If you are interested in seeing the full PowerPoint presentation, let me know and I'd be happy to share it with you.

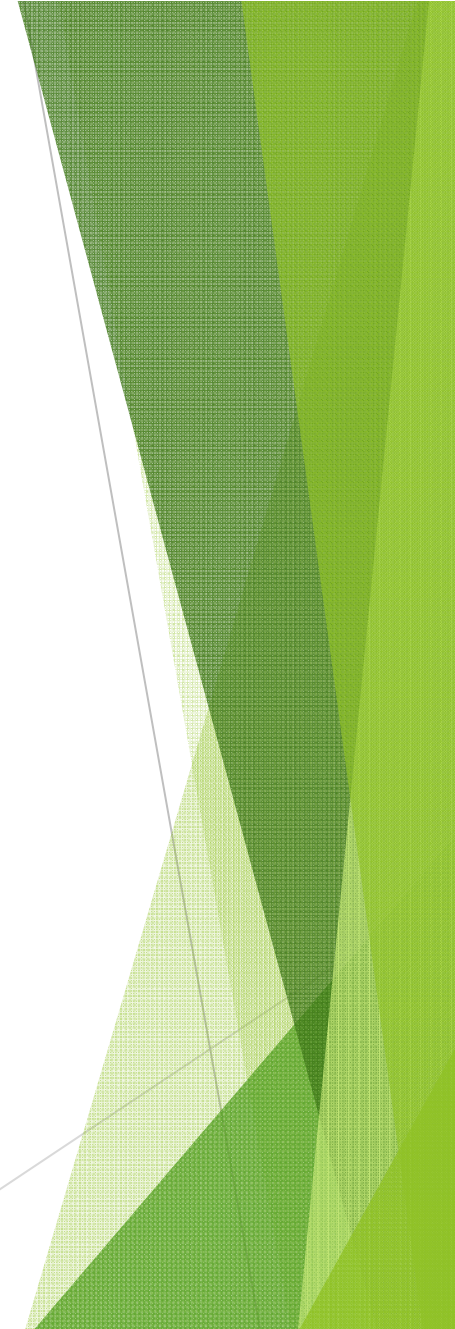
There is a link to [highlights of the new MI intranet](#) if you have not yet had a chance to view it.

If you have any questions about the survey, the project, or comments about the [new intranet](#) site in general, please contact me at stefanie.borowski@gov.mb.ca or 204-250-9985.

Thank you for your assistance.

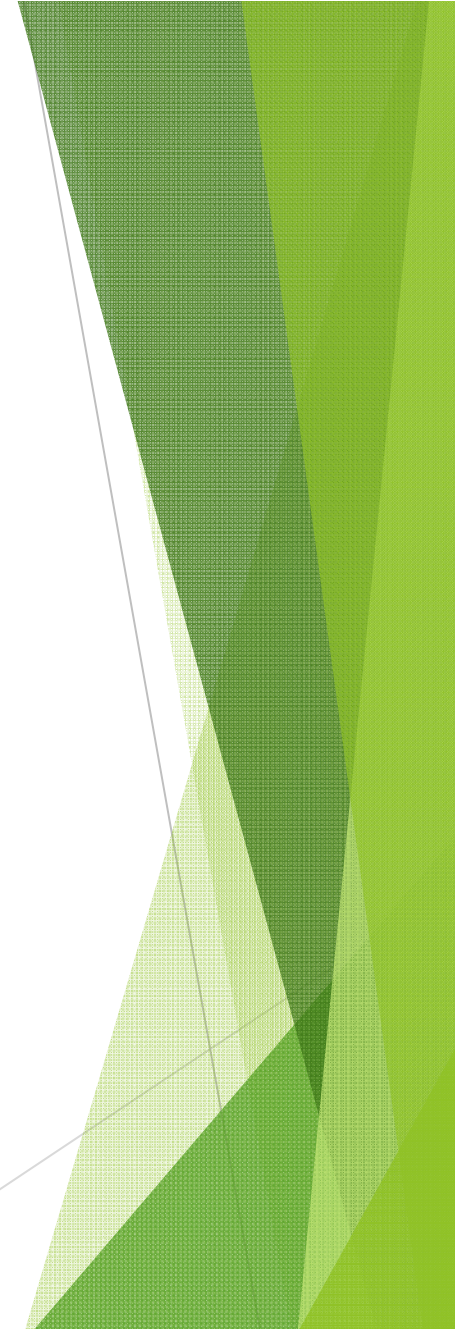
Public Sector Standards

- ▶ Know your style guide. In Manitoba, its *Communications Services Manitoba Writing Style Guide*
 - All public sector style guides are based on the *Canadian Press Stylebook*
- ▶ Goal is for government to have a consistent voice
- ▶ Applies to anyone who writes documents (e.g. formal briefing note, advisory or request documents, letters, memos, informal documents within branches or divisions: emails).



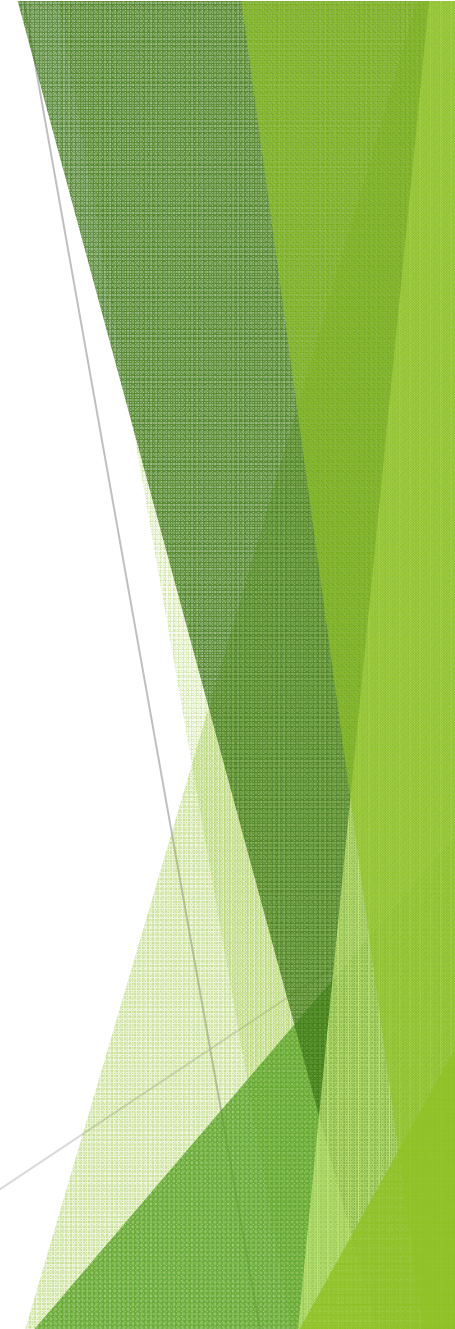
Public Sector Standards – Plain Language

- ▶ Focus should always be on message clarity. Easy understanding for the reader.
- ▶ Plain language is not “dumbing it down.”
- ▶ People are bombarded by information. Make your documents easy to read.
- ▶ It will save you time doing follow-ups, clarifying miscommunications, and correcting mistaken assumptions months later.



Public Sector Standards – Plain Language

- ▶ **Aligning your writing to a target grade level allows for faster reading where people can learn and remember the content more easily.**
- ▶ **Target reading level is grade 8-10. Aim for a Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score of 50 and above.**



Plain Language

Which of the following sentences is easier to read and understand quickly?

As necessitated by unexpected blue box recycling expenditure increases, combined with municipal road-infrastructure improvement expenditures resulting from repairs necessary to meet prior mandated infrastructure maintenance levels, property taxes payable will be increased for the coming fiscal year.”

Or

Property taxes will increase two per cent on April 1, 2018. This will cover the increased costs of blue box recycling and required repairs to several local roads.”

Many people associate the first example with government and other bureaucracies. This writing is sometimes called bureaucratese.”



Plain Language

Because of its greater cost-effectiveness, and on the basis of other criteria developed by the testing team, the storage-pumping method is recommended.”

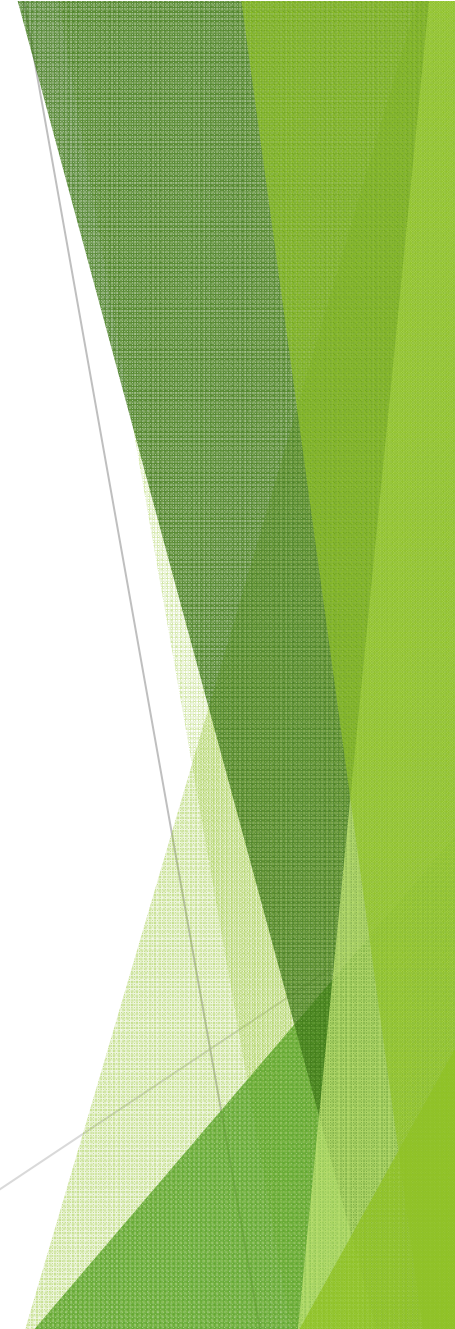
Or,

We recommend the storage pumping method. This method is preferred due to a greater cost-effectiveness and on the basis of several other criteria developed by the testing team.”



Plain Language – Active Voice

- ▶ **Using the active rather than the passive voice leads to an immediate improvement in your writing.**
- ▶ **Active voice is when the subject comes before the action stated by the verb.**
- ▶ **Passive voice is when the subject is acted upon by the verb.**



Active Voice

► How To Form an Active Sentence:

- Start with a subject.
- Add a verb after the subject.
- Add the object.

Active

Janis Brown wrote the policy.

Passive

The policy was written by Janis Brown.



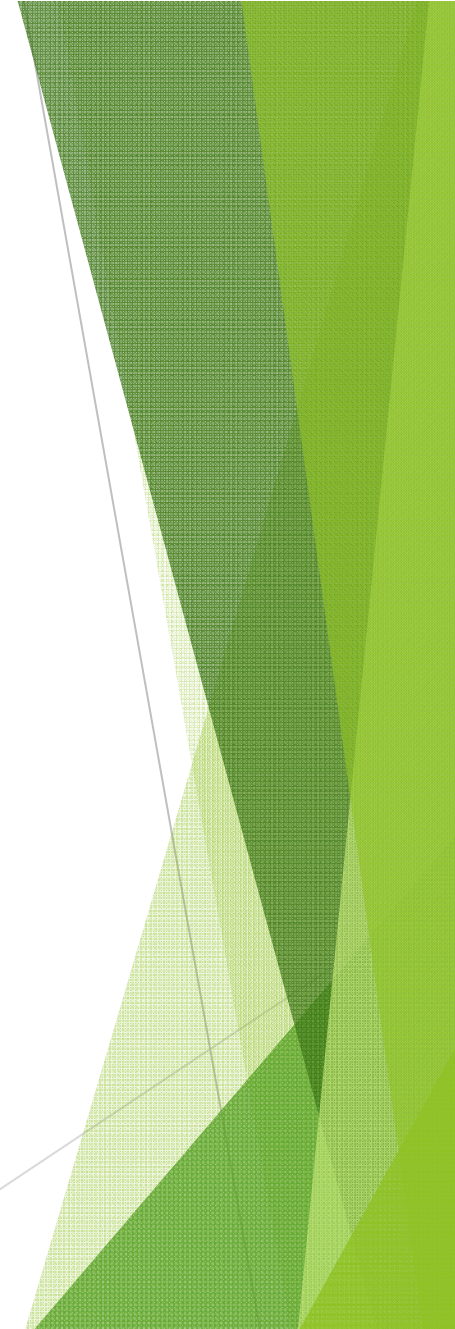
Active Voice

Active

Premier Smith cut more than \$1.5 million from the budget approved by the Legislature.

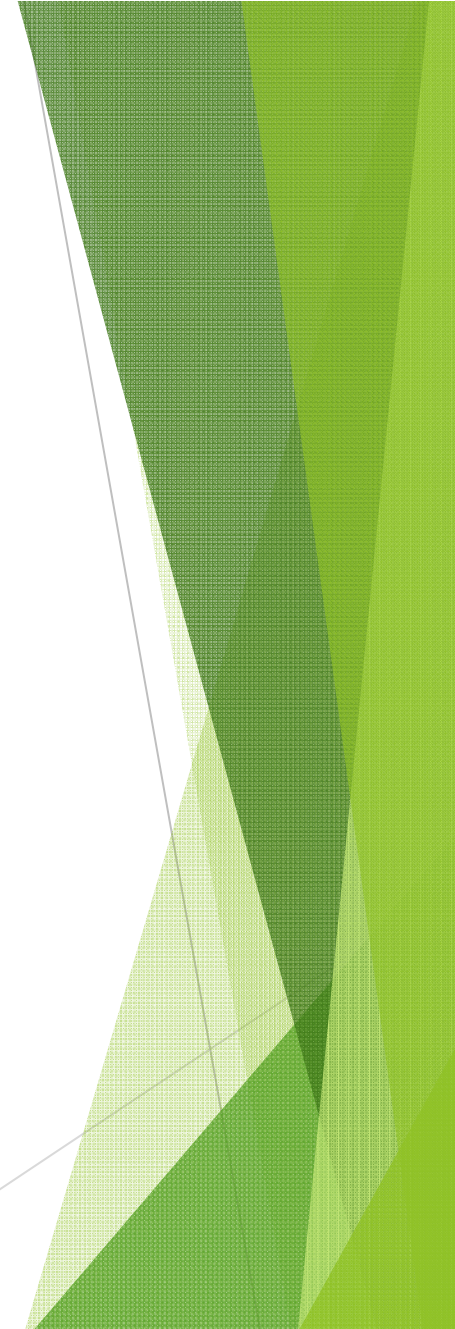
Passive

More than \$1.5 million was cut by Premier Smith from the budget, which was approved by the legislature.



Public Sector Standards – Government Names

- ▶ Manitoba government – correct
 - Avoid using Government of Manitoba, government of Manitoba, the Province, the province, or the provincial government.
 - Department of Finance. In document, refer to as Finance or, the department (not the Department)
- ▶ Legislation
 - Italics no longer used for legislation.
 - Correct – The Highway Traffic Act



Public Sector Standards – Money

- ▶ Show money as \$100 million (not capitalized, full word for million, billion, etc.).
- ▶ Use a dash if the amount is a "compound modifier" (when you join together two or more adjectives to describe the word that follows).


Correct – The project cost is \$250 million.

Correct – It is a \$250-million project. (Compound modifier before noun.)

Incorrect – It was planned as a \$250M project, but came in at about \$200 – 215 mill.

Important! Numbers should be displayed consistently throughout the document.

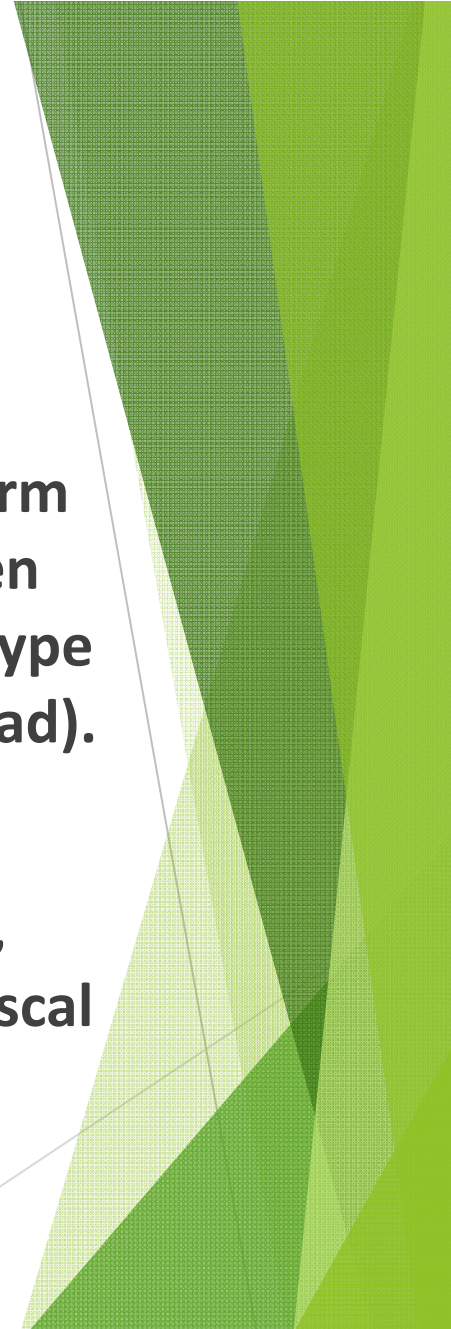
Public Sector Standards – Numbers

- ▶ **Spell out whole numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and above. Use commas in larger numbers where appropriate, such as 1,500.**
 - ▶ **Numbers at the start of a sentence should be spelled out or the sentence rewritten.**
 - ▶ **Use numerals with any measurement and for percentages. Not %, spell out per cent.**
- 

Public Sector Standards – Numbers

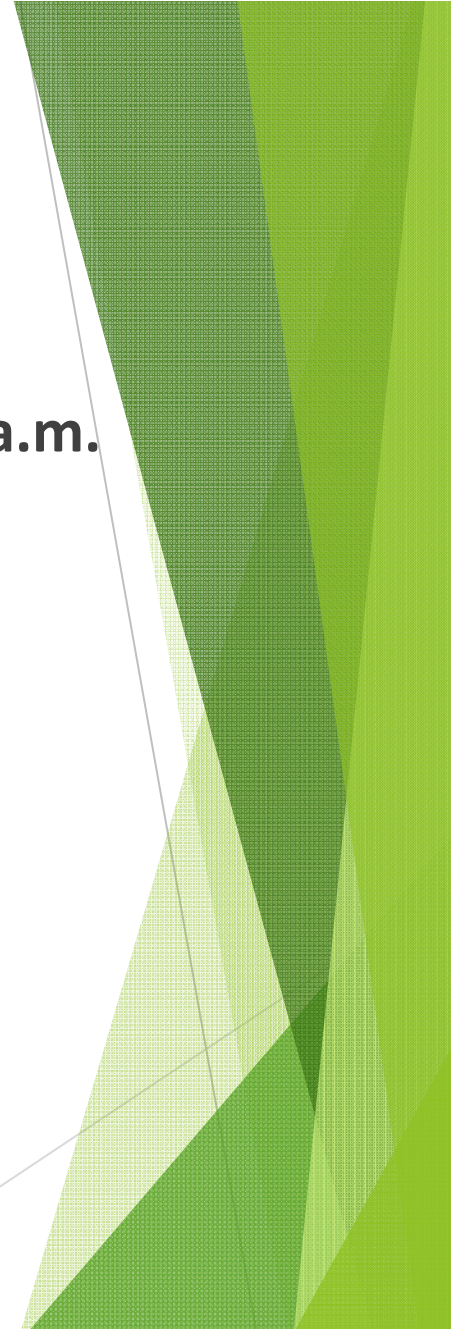
- ▶ References to a fiscal year are written in the form yyyy–yy. The year ranges are separated by an en dash. To insert an en dash in Microsoft Word, type Ctrl and – (the minus sign on the numeric keypad).

This year’s budget, which contains no new taxes, forecasts program expenditures to the 2018–19 fiscal year.”



Public Sector Standards – Time

- ▶ Lowercase references to the time of day, as in a.m. and p.m.
- ▶ Write noon or midnight (not 12 noon, Noon, or 12 midnight).
- ▶ Write 5 a.m. (not 5:00 a.m.)
Write 10–11 a.m.



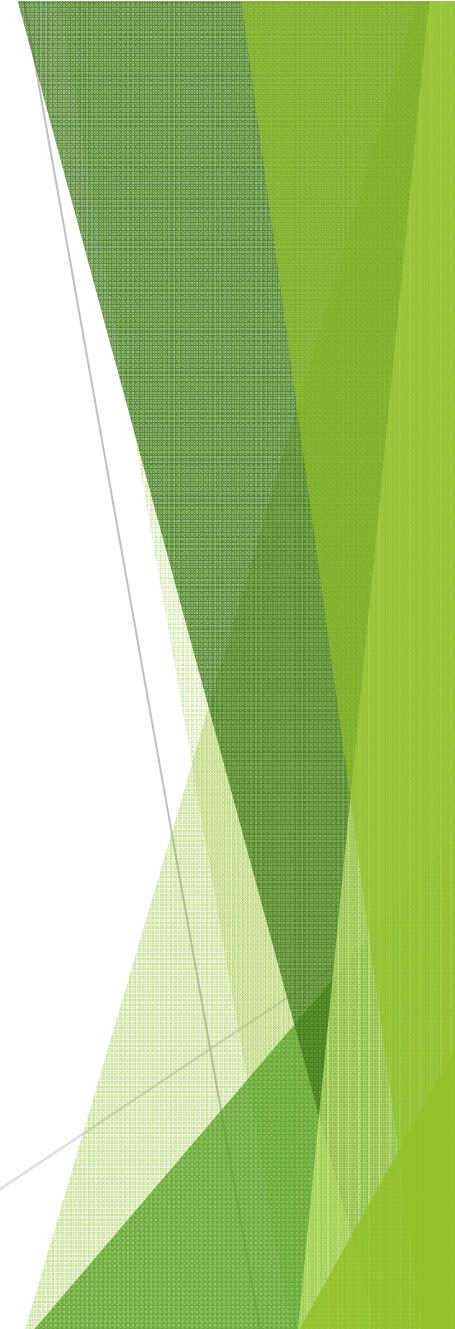
Public Sector Standards— Capitals

- ▶ Proper names
- ▶ Trade names
- ▶ Official government departments
- ▶ Agencies of national and provincial governments
- ▶ Names of associations
- ▶ Companies
- ▶ Languages
- ▶ Places
- ▶ Occupational titles when they refer to a specific individual (e.g. Minister Friesen)



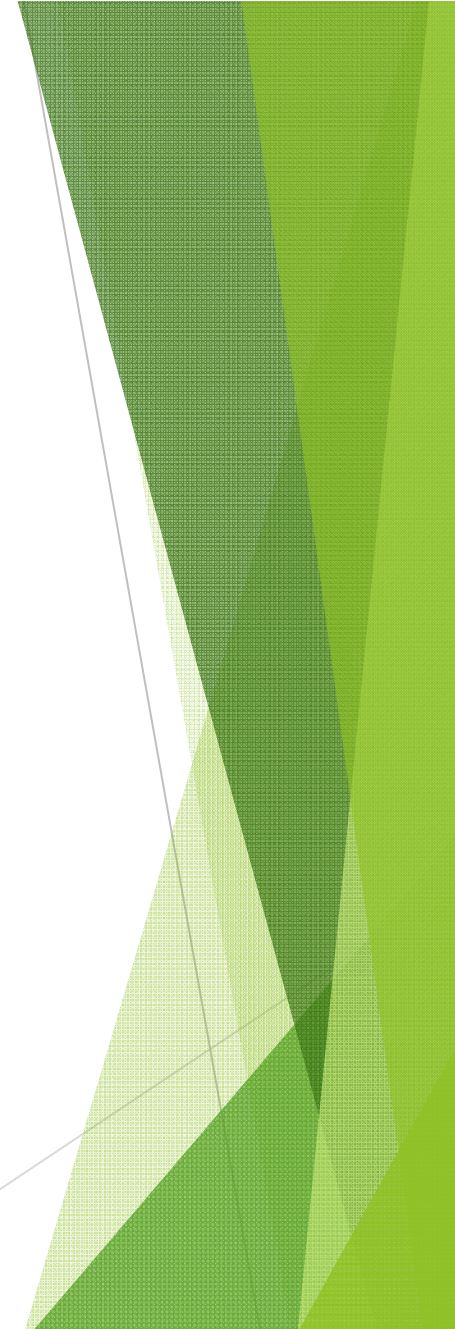
Public Sector Standards— Capitals

- ▶ Use caps for First Nation(s), Métis, Inuit, Elders, Senators and Chiefs.
- ▶ Use lower case for generic terms standing alone: the union; constituencies.
- ▶ **AVOID BLOCK CAPITALS. THIS INDICATES SHOUTING IN COMMON ONLINE USAGE.**
“We are government. We shouldn’t be shouting.” – Saskatchewan.ca Style Guide



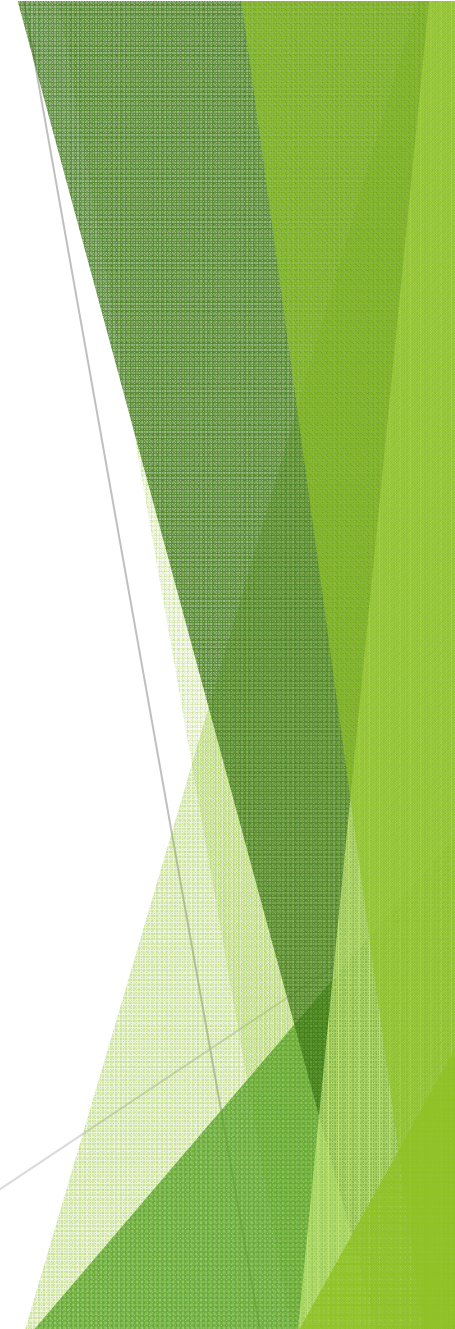
Public Sector Standards— Language

- ▶ **Avoid the use of gender-biased terms. Often these terms are dated, jargon or not appropriate.**
For example: “funding was eliminated for these types of projects but the legislation allows for grandfathering current projects until complete.” The same message could be conveyed without a gender reference by writing, “the funding was eliminated for these types of projects but allows for an exemption for projects started before January 1, 2017.”



Public Sector Standards— Language

- ▶ **Avoid opinions. Everything in the document should be objective and fact based.**
- ▶ **Facts should be backed up by data, examples, research, etc.**
- ▶ **Nonpartisan and neutral language.**



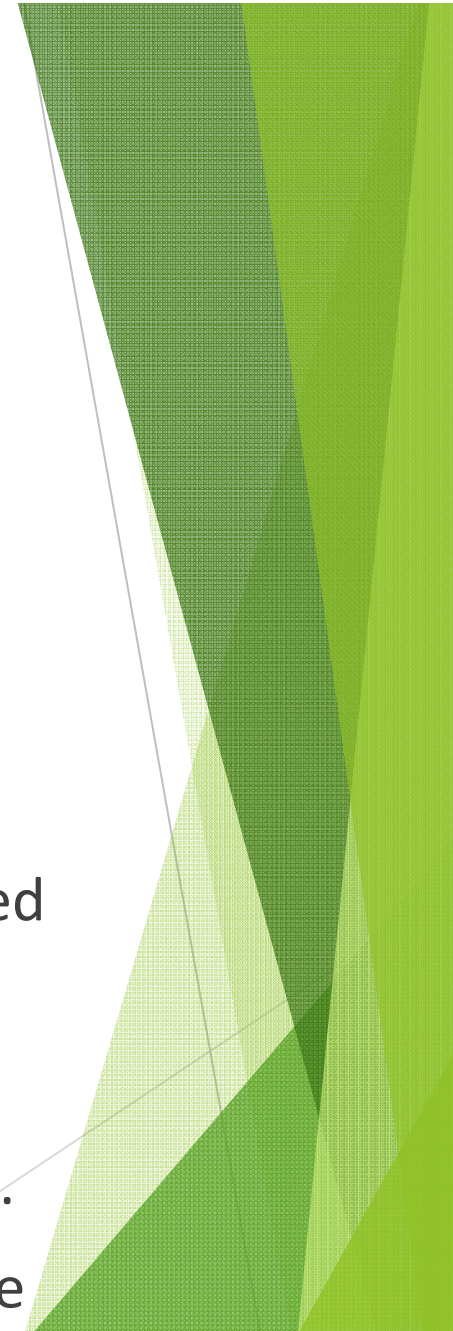
Consistency is Key

- ▶ There are some specific topics that vary on how to apply the guide to your writing.
- ▶ If you love the “Oxford comma debate” you will be happy to know that there is no consensus in the style guides.
- ▶ What is critical is to ensure that you follow one style and use it consistently in your document. This is especially important if you are compiling several documents into one.
- ▶ Edit the final document conscientiously to ensure the writing is consistent throughout.



Eight Characteristics (8 Cs) of Effective Written Communication

- . **Clear** – plain language
- . **Concise** – language to the point
- . **Complete** – keep reader focused, 5Ws
- . **Conversational** – natural, read it out loud, use everyday language
- . **Compelling** – use verbs as key words, controlled sentences, varied sentence length
- . **Considerate** – Emotional impact
- . **Confident** – Be direct and honest. Active voice.
- . **Correct** – Research and fact check from reliable



Proofreading Versus Editing

Proofreading

Spelling, grammar and typing mistakes eliminated

Consistent language and formatting

Perfects already good writing

Ensures a publication-ready document

Editing

- ✓ Overall quality of writing improved
- ✓ Language-use enhanced (e.g. stronger verbs, active voice)
- ✓ Expression clearer
- ✓ Errors and inconsistencies removed
- ✓ Ensures writing has maximum impact

Self-Editing

- ▶ **Create a personal editorial checklist.**
- ▶ **Each person has an ingrained style of writing.**
- ▶ **A personal checklist allows you to edit for your specific habits and improve your writing.**
- ▶ **Determine the difference between your style and the government style.**
- ▶ **These factors will form your editorial checklist.**



Remember

- ▶ **Be mindful that in everything you write, you are representing government.**

One should not aim at being possible to understand but at being impossible to misunderstand.” – Quintilian



Resources

Canadian Press Stylebook and Caps and Spelling

www.thecanadianpress.com/products_and_services.aspx?id=86

Your government's style guide (based off of the *Canadian Press Stylebook*.)

Saskatchewan.ca Style Guide

www.saskatchewan.ca/government/visual-identity-and-protocol/digital-standards-and-framework/writing-for-the-web/style-guide

**Strunk, William Jr. and White, E.B. *The Elements of Style*.
Macmillan Publishing Co. New York, 1979.**



To Do

- Create a brief intention statement focusing on your reader before writing your next email. Do you notice a difference?
- Practice writing in the active voice.
- Create a personalized self-editing checklist.
- Look up your government's style guide (and follow it).

Thank you

Contact

stefanie.borowski@gov.mb.ca