

# Plain Language

Everything you were afraid to ask and more!

## DMS Style Tips

### Best Practices

#### Active Voice

- Get right to the subject at hand.
- Show the people responsible for actions and events whenever possible.
- Use strong verbs for a strong, active message.
- Avoid adverbs (words that end in -ly).
- Avoid the -ing form of verbs.
- Say "this plan was approved" instead of "this was approved."

#### Apostrophe Use

- The department's resources are available online. (singular)
- All the employees' resources are available online. (plural)
- The Mahoney's resources are available online. (singular entity)
- The Jones' resources are available online. (singular entity ending in 's')

#### Dash (-)

Use sparingly for emphasis.

#### Jargon and Cliches

Avoid government-speak (jargon) and cliches like, "writing is easy as pie."

#### Numbers

- Spell out zero through nine (0-9).
- Use numerals for 10 and up.
- For dates, always use figures without st, nd, rd or th.

#### Proofread

- written and electronic correspondence
- run the spell and grammar check
- have someone else proofread your work
- put the document aside to proof later

#### Quotation Marks

Periods and commas always go inside quotes.

**an** – Use before a word beginning with a vowel sound (an egg, an umbrella) or an h if, and only if, the h is silent (an honorary degree).

#### between or among

Between introduces two items; among introduces more than two items. The money was divided *between* Jack and Jill. The money was divided *among* Jack, Jill and Jerome.

#### branches of

**government** – General terms, not specific enough to require capitalization.

#### capitalize only proper nouns and proper names

– Hurston Building is a proper noun; building is not. Secretary South is a proper name; secretary is not.

**capital vs. capitol** – The state capital is Tallahassee. The capitol is the actual building.

#### Department of

#### Management Services

– Spell out first in a document then use DMS, the department or agency (be consistent to use only one way to refer to us throughout a document).

**e-mail** – Hyphenated, stands for electronic-mail (e-commerce, e-book).

**Internet** – A proper noun and should be capitalized.

**money** – Use numerals: \$2, \$20, \$20,000, \$2 million.

**online** – One word, no hyphen.

#### "over" vs. "more than"

– Over refers to spatial relationships (over six feet tall). More than is preferred with numerals (more than 10 million customers).

**procurement** – Use "purchasing" when possible.

**percent (%)** – Spell out except when used in graphics or Excel files (15 percent).

**state** – Lowercase, even when referring to the "state" or state employees, airplanes, and buildings. Capitalize it when the word takes the place of "State of Florida."

**time** – 3 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. (use colon to separate hours from minutes).

**website** – Effective April 16, 2010, website is lowercase and one word. We still capitalize World Wide Web and Web page.

**"who" vs. "that"** – Use "who" for people, "that" for animals and inanimate objects.

#### Need examples?

See the Agency Style Guide at  
[www.dms.MyFlorida.com/PlainLanguage](http://www.dms.MyFlorida.com/PlainLanguage)

#### Want more? Have questions?

Contact your friendly communications team  
(850) 921-5266 or  
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