

# VOICE, TONE, AND WRITING STYLE GUIDE

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

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## Introduction

This guide has been developed to help set cross-organizational standards for communications best practices within United Way of the Alberta Capital Region.

The goal of this undertaking is to create more consistency in how we communicate about our work, from elements of style like grammar and syntax, to the tone we adopt when communicating about our initiatives.

This guide will provide you with tips to help make your writing more inclusive and reflective of the audiences we're seeking to connect with, and a general outline of our brand attributes, voice, and tone that should be reflected in all our communications.

Creativity is still encouraged – we're always seeking new and innovative ways to connect with our audiences. Consider this guide to be the launch pad for your creativity; ensure these basic standards are met, and the sky's the limit.





## Our Voice

**Voice is what we sound like.** Think of voice as a constant, a personality that doesn't change.

It may be helpful to think of voice as a person. How do they talk? How do they make people feel? Are they outgoing, or perhaps more reserved? By understanding United Way's brand personality, we can remain true to our voice in our communications.

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region is a community connector and platform for social impact. How we speak about our work, our accomplishments, and our community is just as important as what we have to say.

Our brand personification is **Unity**. In all communications, we seek to emphasize that we are one community – donors, program participants, funded agency partners, volunteers, staff, and public are united in a shared goal of a stronger and more inclusive community.

This characteristic is fundamentally about recognizing our shared humanity, that we share our challenges and our successes, and build solutions together rather than from the top down.





## Applying our brand attributes to our writing



### **We are kind:**

We manifest this value in our communications through empathetic language and storytelling, seeking to help our audiences identify with challenges experienced in our community, and by using person-first language.

Consider words like compassionate, friendly, humane, loving, empathetic, and empowering.



### **We are trustworthy:**

We follow this value in our communications by providing reliable and consistent information, providing clear reporting and outcomes to our stakeholders, and by owning our mistakes clearly and honestly.

Consider words like credible, honest, reliable, authentic, and sincere.



### **We are inclusive:**

We carry this value into our communications by always seeking to stay up to date with communications standards for inclusivity and accessibility, by listening to the communities we serve, and by seeking out stories and examples show the diversity of the communities we serve and are a part of.

Consider words like diverse, considerate, respectful, welcoming, and safe.



### **We are inspiring:**

We activate this value in our communications through clear calls to action, powerful and succinct storytelling, and consistent encouragement and recognition of our donors, volunteers, and community members.

Consider words like encouraging, uplifting, motivating, and emboldening.



### **We are connectors:**

We embody this value in our communications through inclusive language, collective framing, and respectful sharing practices when it comes to the subjects of our storytelling.

Consider words like bridge, provide, share, purposeful, and supportive.





## Our Tone

**Tone is how we sound in varying situations.** Think of tone as a mood, or how we express ourselves in different contexts.

United Way of the Alberta Capital Region's voice and brand attributes are consistent across materials, but the tone can vary more depending on the context.

In general, United Way of the Alberta Capital Region's tone is:

- Conversational and inviting.
- Positive and solutions focused.
- Action-oriented.

These characteristics help us to create communications material that is correctly calibrated to the intended audience, while meeting their specific needs. Tone is fundamentally about the attitude the author adopts and seeks to convey about the subject matter at hand.

Because our tone takes its cue from our voice, our tone should also embody our Brand Attributes of **kindness, trustworthiness, inclusivity, inspiration, and connection.**

**For example:** If we are applying the brand value 'We are kind', our voice is empathetic, and therefore our tone is soft and compassionate.

**For example:** If we are applying the brand value 'We are trustworthy', our voice is authentic, and therefore our tone is confident and sincere.

That said, some topics will require a more forthright or urgent tone than others: for example, updates on an emergency evacuation will require a different tone than reporting on the attendance of a community barbeque. But the brand attributes and voice of the organization needs to carry through consistently in both types of messages.

It is never appropriate to make light of the nature of our work, or the important impact it has on people's lives. However, there are opportunities to use bold, light, and/or fun tones in some of our content.

Some areas where it is appropriate to adopt a light or bold tone include Women United, GenNEXT, Period Promise and in promotion of customer-engagement events such as Kickoff or Red Tie Gala.





# Writing Style

## Use of name and abbreviations

- Always introduce the organization with our full name: United Way of the Alberta Capital Region.
  - Avoid the use of 'The' before United Way of the Alberta Capital Region. 'The' is not part of our official name.
- For external communications, we use the full name at first reference, every time.
  - Subsequent references should be 'United Way' or 'our United Way'.
  - We do not use an acronym to refer to ourselves in external communications.
- **Using United Way:** because United Way is a national and international brand, it's important to make careful use of United Way when addressing Alberta Capital Region specifically. United Way can be used in contexts where:
  - It is implied it is coming from United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, preferably on second reference.
  - It is referring to more than one United Way.
    - | **For example:** There are eight United Ways in Alberta.
  - The local, national, and international United Way movement.
- When referencing other United Way organizations, we use their full name. Note that in French, both in Quebec and across Canada, our organization is known as Centraide.
  - United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC)
  - United Way Worldwide (UWW)
- Use "we" and "our" when writing on behalf of United Way to provide information from the perspective of the organization, while emphasizing the collective spirit of United Way.
  - In situations or contexts where our organization may be less familiar, default to using United Way of the Alberta Capital Region to ensure clarity around any subject or call-to-action.
- Add "United Way's" in front of all program names, or otherwise explain United Way's role.
  - | **For example:** United Way's Tools for School
  - | **For example:** Empower U, a United Way program that is delivered by local agencies.





## United Way sub-brand names and abbreviations

Use	Subsequent References	Do Not Use	Exceptions/Notes
United Way of the Alberta Capital Region	United Way Our United Way	United Way Alberta Capital Region  United Way Alberta  The United Way  UWACR	UW or UWACR may be used internally.
211 Alberta	211 Alberta	Alberta 211  211	We do not spell out 211 when it begins a sentence. 211 can be used when referring to the national network.
All in for Youth	All in for Youth  AIFY	All In For Youth	
Empower U		EmpowerU	
Each One, Teach One	EOTO	Each One Teach One	
Coats for Kids & Families  Coats for Kids and Families	CFKF	Koats for Kids	“Coats” may be used internally, usually during informal conversations.
GenNEXT		GENnext  GenNext	







Use	Subsequent References	Do Not Use	Exceptions/Notes
InKind Exchange	IKE	In-Kind Exchange In Kind Exchange Inkind Exchange	
Kickoff		Kick Off Kick-Off	
The Kid Kit®	The Kid Kit may be used without the trademark symbol on subsequent references.	Kid Kits Kid Kit	Writing “The Kid Kit” can be awkward. One work around is to talk about the kits themselves rather than the program.
Make Your Mark	MYM	Dentons’ Make your Mark Make your Mark Make Your Mark on Poverty	As of May 2024, Denton’s is no longer the presenting sponsorship of the program and recognition is no longer required.
Tools for School	TFS	Tools for Schools	“Tools” may be used internally, usually during informal conversations.





## Writing about United Way of the Alberta Capital Region

At United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, we follow [The Canadian Press Stylebook](#) and [Elements of Indigenous Style](#). These style guides provide grammatical and syntax standards for a variety of writing questions, along with style recommendations and culturally appropriate writing and editing practices. It is recommended that communications staff at United Way obtain copies (digital or print) of these guides and familiarize themselves with the key principles of each guide.

For elements of writing style pertaining to Indigenous peoples, communities, or language where there are differences between *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and *Elements of Indigenous Style*, defer to *Elements of Indigenous Style*.

### Exceptions

United Way has adopted a few key practices that differ from those outlined in *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and *Elements of Indigenous Style*:

- *The Canadian Press Stylebook* recommends against the use of the Oxford Comma. United Way uses the Oxford Comma before the final 'and', 'or', or 'nor' in a series.
  - **For example:** You can support United Way by donating your time, money, or in-kind items.
- *The Canadian Press Stylebook (15th edition)* recommends the capitalization of proper names of nationalities, peoples, and races, but not of commonly used racial categories such as indigenous or black. United Way capitalizes the names of racial categories in all cases, in addition to nationalities, peoples, and races.
  - **For example:** "As a member of the Black community, my experience..."
  - **For example:** "Indigenous peoples have been the stewards of this land for thousands of years."
- *Elements of Indigenous Style* recommends capitalizing the names of specific First Nations (such as Cree, Blackfoot). Where possible, defer to preferred grammatical and syntactical standards set by the specific communities in question rather than this single overarching rule, as they are experts on their unique cultural and linguistic context.

When in doubt, seek out guidance from Brand and External Relations staff.





# Inclusive Language & Accessibility

## Introduction

At United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, each of us has a role to play in uplifting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our workplace and the greater Alberta Capital Region community.

As an organization that works to ensure no one is left behind, we must recognize that discrimination due to race, age, religion, gender identity, sexuality, and disability creates barriers that may result in people experiencing barriers to full participation in society.

We will not be successful in addressing challenges that face our region if we do not work to break down those barriers.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a rapidly changing landscape. This section of the style guide is not the final word on how to refer to an individual; the best rule is to respect your subject's identity by using the same terms an individual uses to self-identify.

**For example:** if you are writing about someone who self-identifies as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, ask if they are okay with the acronym 2SLGBTQ+ being used in the piece. They may prefer to self-identify as gay, lesbian, or queer, but approve of being referred to as 2SLGBTQ+ in the content.

## Intersectionality

[Intersectionality](#) is the understanding that people are multi-faceted and may face more than one barrier due to race, disability, sexuality, gender identity, religion.

From Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term: "It's basically a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality, or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts."





## Trigger and Content Warnings

A trigger warning is a message presented to an audience about the contents of a book or other media, to warn them that it contains potentially distressing content.

When including a trigger or content warning, include a clear but brief description of the subject matter so people can know if they should avoid the content if it is a difficult topic for them.

**For example:** Content Warning: the following article contains a first-person account of sexual and domestic violence against women and children.

## Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Oftentimes, acronyms are used to identify those who are gender or sexual minorities, even though gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

The acronym United Way uses is **2SLGBTQ+**: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning. The + represents the wide range of sexual orientations that fall outside of these definitions.

### Gender Identity

- **Pronouns:** at the beginning of interviews, ask the subject what their pronouns are and use the pronouns they share to refer to them. Do not use the term 'preferred' when asking. Only include information relating to sexual orientation or gender identity if relevant to the subject matter.  
**For example:** if writing a story about a family who received a laptop through United Way, it is unnecessary to note that one of the children is trans, unless it adds significant context to the story.
- **Gender identity:** a person's personal and internal sense of their own gender. Gender identity is not visible to others. Gender identity may include, but is not limited to: woman, man, nonbinary, and agender.
- **Gender expression:** A person's gender is expressed outwardly through their name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, or body characteristics.
- **Two-Spirit:** Two-Spirit (2S) is a cultural term used by some Indigenous people to mean a person who has a male and female spirit, which may include concepts of spirituality, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
- **Transgender/Trans:** use only if the person self-identifies as transgender. They may prefer to use their gender without a qualifier (for example: man, not trans man). Use the term "assigned male/female at birth" (AMAB or AFAB), not "biologically male/female". Always use a subject's chosen name, not their legal name (also known as a deadname).





## Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation describes a person's emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to others. For many people, sexual orientation may change over time. Sexual orientation may not always reflect sexual behaviours.

- **Lesbian:** a woman who is attracted to a woman
- **Gay:** a man who is attracted to a man
- **Bisexual:** a person who is attracted to the same sex and different sexes.
- **Queer:** once a slur, queer has been reclaimed by the 2SLGBTQ+ community. As an umbrella term, it has many meanings, including but not limited to:
  - attracted to people of many genders
  - not fitting cultural norms around sexuality and/or gender identity/expression
  - non-heterosexual
- **Asexual:** someone who does not experience sexual attraction

## Race

When talking about race and the challenges United Way works to solve, it is important to contextualize the issue and make the clear distinction that race does not cause barriers; [racism, bias, and discrimination against racialized people is the cause.](#)

Ask your subjects how they identify during an interview (only if it is important to the story). When speaking in general terms, use:

- **Equity-deserving:** communities that experience significant collective barriers to participating in society. This could include attitudinal, historic, social, and environmental barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, gender identity and expression, nationality, race, sexual orientation, etc.
- **Racialized / Racialization:** we use racialized instead of terms like 'people of colour', 'visible minorities', etc. in recognition of race as a socially constructed differences among people.
- **Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC)** is often used as an umbrella term when speaking about non-white, racialized people. However, the use of this term [may also lead to erasure](#). Being specific is always preferable.
- **Black (with a capital B):** By capitalizing Black, we acknowledge the distinctiveness of shared Black history and Black culture.





- **Indigenous:** an umbrella term for First Nations (status and non-status), Métis, and Inuit. Indigenous refers to all these groups, either collectively or separately.
  - Do not refer to Indigenous people as “Canada’s,” “our”, or in another way that indicates Indigenous people belong to Canada.
  - We use Indigenous instead of outdated terms such as “Aboriginal”, “Native”, and “Indian”.
  - In Canada, “Indian” is still used in legal contexts, such as in reference to the Indian Act, or Status Indian. In the United States, Native American, American Indian and Native Indian are still commonly used. As always, defer to an individual’s self-identification.
- **First Nations:** can be applied to individuals, but technically refers only to those who are Status Indians under Canadian law as part of a recognized community. Many Indigenous people in Canada do not have this formal connection, and those who are Métis or Inuit should never be referred to as ‘First Nations.’ To be more specific, ask how the individual would prefer to be identified.
- **Métis:** a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Indigenous peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation. The Métis developed their own customs, way of life, and recognizable group identity separate from their Indigenous or Inuit and European forebears.
- **Inuit:** Indigenous people historically located in the Arctic, who are distinct from First Nations and Métis.
  - The singular of ‘Inuit’ is ‘Inuk’. Inuit means ‘the people,’ so it is unnecessary to add ‘people’ after it.

## Black Vernacular English (BVE)

BVE and digital blackface are often used in attempts to be hip and connect with younger audiences. But when used by people who are not Black, this is a commodification of black culture. Terms include but are not limited to:

- Woke
- Lit
- Bae
- Yasss
- Basic
- Slay





Also known as African-American Vernacular English (AAVE) or Black English, Black Vernacular English (BVE) is rooted in the history of slavery and the need for enslaved people to have a way to communicate without interference from their enslavers. Like digital blackface, using BVE (including through emojis) is co-opting and erasing Black culture. This appropriation causes harm by perpetuating stereotypes and turns culture into a commodity.

## Ableist language and writing about people with disabilities

Ask the subject how they would like to be described if their disability is relevant to the story. Some people prefer person-first language (such as people with disabilities) and some people prefer identity-first language (such as disabled people).

Use the term “accessible” instead of “disabled” or “handicapped” when defining spaces and technology that increases accessibility. For example: an accessible bathroom, an accessible parking stall

Avoid using [ableist language](#), including but not limited to:

- Tone deaf
- Blindly
- Stand up
- Reach out
- Lamé
- Crazy
- Paralyzed (with fear, etc)
- Derp
- Differently abled
- Handicapped
- Victim
- The disabled
- Normal or healthy, when referring to people without disabilities

For more information, visit People With Disability Australia’s [Language Guide](#).

## Accessibility

Improving accessibility is not only important for people with disabilities, but it also often provides a better experience for those without disabilities too.

It is becoming clear that the Internet is not a luxury, but a vital resource that needs to be accessible to all. By ensuring communications, website content, videos, and images are accessible, United Way will offer a better experience for all customers and audience members.

## Reading Level

External communications should be written at a 6th Grade reading level, so it is easy to understand, for those with varying reading levels, and for people whose first language is not English.





## Accessible PDFs

When converting a document to PDF, [incorporate these workflow tips from Adobe Acrobat](#) on how to make your document more accessible by adding fillable form fields, setting the tab order, and adding tags.

Tags are used to guide assistive software, such as screen readers, to read the document in the appropriate and intended order.

## Captions

People who have sensory processing challenges, are hard of hearing, or deaf rely on captions to understand video content, as well provide context for users watching your video on mute. Captions should be used (versus subtitles) as they convey other sounds and background noises.

All videos, regardless of platform, should have captions. This includes videos shown at in-person events such as Red Tie Gala.

Because some platforms do not allow captions to be added after the fact, captions should be added during production. This also prevents subtitles covering over text in the video, such as titles, and allows for greater creative control over the look of the captions.

## Alt Text and Image/Video Descriptions

All social media, PDF graphics, and website images should have alt text descriptions. This allows users using screen-readers to understand what the image is, as well as improve search engine optimization.

Alt text should be descriptive and written in full sentences but should not be more than 125 characters. Starting your alt text with “picture of” is redundant, as screen readers will identify it as an image.

You can also add image and video descriptions directly into the copy for Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook.







# Writing Styles

## Writing about and for different audiences

The principles outlined in the preceding sections are generally applicable to all use cases, but there are unique considerations when writing for different audiences within United Way of the Alberta Capital Region's ecosystem.

### Supporters

Consider how the needs of the community are being framed, and how the supporters' relationship to community is being presented. Unity is at the core of our brand promise, so communications should avoid framing supporters as one group and program participants as an 'other'.

Ensure there is a clear and consistent call to action in the communications. For longer form pieces (such as newsletters and brochures), communicate the call to action at both the beginning and end of the piece where possible.

### Program participants

Ensure the dignity of program participants and celebrate their wins. In storytelling and other cases, use language that empowers the individual or group, rather than presenting them as solely reliant on United Way for their success.

Ask how people would like their relationship to a social agency to be described. For example, many agencies use the term 'participants' instead of 'clients'.

For program materials, use positive and uplifting visuals. For example, when communicating about Tools for School, ensure there is a picture of children with school supplies, or a graphic with a backpack, to help communicate the purpose of the program clearly for those who may have low literacy skills or have less familiarity with written English.

### Agency partners

United Way doesn't work in isolation. When communicating our work, consider how agency partners, the social sector, and other supporting organizations are framed in comparison to United Way. Do not write partners out of the story to advance United Way's prominence. Use terms such as in partnership, collaboration, support, etc.





## Government relations and correspondence

United Way, like any other charity, is nonpartisan. Our communications must be unbiased and impartial regarding ideologies, religion, and political issues. We maintain a collaborative and welcoming tone, even when raising awareness about systemic challenges and barriers facing our community.

Our United Way has close working relationships with all levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) collaborating on several programs, initiatives, and engagement opportunities. These successful partnerships have deepened our impact and relationships with government officials, including members of all political parties.

Our Government Relations team leads the work to engage the provincial government and inform public policy as a collaborative effort of our United Way Alberta Network. On the municipal level, this work is led by Brand and External Relations, as well as on federal level under the guidance of United Way Centraide Canada.

In government correspondence, our approach on reading level and technical language can be softened, but clarity and readability should remain a priority. Include clear and consistent calls to action or requests throughout. A reader should be able to understand the purpose of the correspondence after reading the first paragraph, and that purpose should be reinforced in the last paragraph.

## Writing for different channels

### Web and Social Media

- Attention spans in online media are short; keep that front of mind when writing material captions and web content.
- Visuals for social media should have minimal text, and what text is included should be large.
- When crafting captions for social media content, consider where the caption will be cut off on the specific platform in question. Ensure that the hook of the caption is before the cut off to entice the audience to click or tap to continue reading.
- When creating pathways for web content, ensure that links and headings have a strong information scent; that is, a clear connection between what the user sees on the heading and the contents of the page.





- When writing articles for the website (blogs), we refer to someone by their full name on first reference, then by their first name on subsequent references. This differs from CP standards. Using a first name builds a stronger emotional connection with the reader.
  - As well, United Way may use only first names to provide discretion to storytellers.
  - When complete anonymity is preferred, United Way will create a pseudonym in collaboration with the storyteller.

## Mass Email Campaigns

- Emails should include:
  - From name
  - Subject line
  - Preheader text
  - Body copy
  - A single call to action (repeat throughout the content if possible).
  - An option to unsubscribe to follow CAN-SPAM rules.
- Ensure the most important information in the email is the first content a reader sees.
- Avoid excessive hyperlinks or unclear headings, as these can detract from readability. Test all links prior to distribution or posting.
- Use alt text on all images to describe what's being shown.
- Test your email and web content across different devices prior to distribution. An email may look great on a desktop computer but may not display well on a mobile device.

## Audio Communication

A few specific considerations to keep in mind when drafting communications material that will be delivered in an audio format (such as radio ads, YouTube videos, Instagram audio, etc.)

- Have I added 'United Way' to the beginning of the program name?
  - **For example:** "We are fundraising for United Way's Tools for School"
  - **Not:** "We are fundraising for Tools for School"
- For radio advertising, have I included one of the two following bylines?
  - An initiative by United Way of the Alberta Capital Region
  - A message from United Way of the Alberta Capital Region





# Copy Style

## Typography and Hierarchy

Typography rules come from [United Way Centraide's brand identity guidelines](#) and should be used when developing any content for United Way.

Our primary font is Avenir. We use this consistently in our communications. Our secondary font is Arial, but we only use this font if Avenir is not available.

To preserve consistency throughout United Way of the Alberta Capital Region's brand, the following font sizes are recommended for the outlined hierarchy. It is good practice to use no more than four different sizes when designing a document and laying out content, to keep the design structured and clear.

Font sizes are at the designer's discretion.

**Avenir LT Std 65 Medium  
is our heading weight 24/28**

---

**Avenir LT Std 55 Heavy  
is our sub-heading weight 16/20**

---

Avenir LT Std 45 Book  
is our paragraph title weight 11/13

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## Capitalization

- As per *The Canadian Press Stylebook*, capitalize all proper names, trade names, government departments and agencies of government, names of associations, companies, clubs, religions, languages, nations, races, places, addresses. Otherwise, lowercase is favoured where a reasonable option exists.
- Headlines should be written in title case, with all words in the headlines (except articles) capitalized. Title case is also used when the headline is not a complete sentence.
  - | **For example:** 2023/24 Annual Report
- Headlines and subheads should be written in sentence case when using a complete sentence, such as for blog or newsletter headlines, email subjects, etc.
  - | **For example:** Workplaces are advancing menstrual equity, one Period Promise at a time

## Grammar and Punctuation

- Always place periods and commas inside quotation marks.
- Punctuation should always be included at the end of complete sentences and fragments, except for headlines and subheads.
- To shy away from appearing disingenuous, we avoid exclamation points, only using them very sparingly and never in headlines.
  - **Except** when creative direction or otherwise calls for use in headlines, quotes, emails, and Calls to Action.
- For additional rules on grammar and punctuation, refer to *The Canadian Press Stylebook*.





# Numbers

## General

- Write out numbers between zero and nine, except for grade levels.
  - | **For example:** Iris, who is six, is in Grade 1.
- Use numerals for numbers 10 and larger, except for:
  - at the beginning of the sentence,
    - | **For example:** Eight United Ways support local communities in Alberta.
  - in proper names,
  - or figurative expressions.
- We do not spell out years, or 211. This includes when the used to start a sentence; however starting a sentence with a year or 211 should be avoided.
- When numbers between 21 and 99 are written out (such as for clarity in a script) use a hyphen.
  - | **For example:** United Way has supported the region for eighty-five years.
- Keep Roman numerals when used in proper names.
  - | **For example:** Part II
- Place a non-breaking space between all numeral and word combinations.
  - | **For example:** \$5 million, 20 years
- Write first, second, third, and so on, up to and including ninth.
- Use the ordinal indicator in the same text size (not in superscript) for numbers 10 and above.
  - | **For example:** 10th, 50th, 150th
- Use "to" instead of an em dash in number ranges.
  - | **For example:** \$4,000 to \$10,000, four to 10 years
- For ages, only use a hyphen when the age is used to describe someone.
  - | **For example:** People 30 to 65 years old.
  - | **For example:** A 10-year-old child.





## Dates and Time

- Abbreviate the month for Jan., Feb, Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. when the day is included.  
| **For example:** Jan. 8, 2021.
- Spell out the remaining months: March, April, May, June, July when the day is included.  
| **For example:** July 8, 2021.
- Put a comma after the year in a sentence.  
| **For example:** Alberta joined confederation on Sept. 1, 1905, as did Saskatchewan.
- For dates with a month and year only, spell out the month. Don't use a comma after the date.  
| **For example:** She was born in September 1905 in Edmonton.
- For time, use periods in a.m. and p.m. and write hours without the zero.  
| **For example:** 3 p.m., not 3:00 p.m. or 3 o'clock.
- To separate start and end times, use a hyphen separated by spaces.  
| **For example:** 1 - 2 p.m.

## Phone Numbers

- Use non-breaking hyphens (Ctrl+Shift+Hyphen) in phone numbers.  
| **For example:** If you need help, call 1-800-555-5555
- When referring to 211 Alberta, do not use hyphens, except in cases where the number is meant to be read aloud by someone unfamiliar with the name.  
| **For example:** copy for a radio ad or voiceover would read "Alberta 2-1-1"





## Symbols and Figures

Some symbols make content more difficult to read while others improve readability. Research whether they're understood by a wide audience before using them. Consider how the symbols and emojis will be read by screen-reading software.

### Ampersand

- Spell out the word "and" instead of using an ampersand (&), except to save space in graphic design and social media copy.
- Use the ampersand only for proper names when it is part of a company name or specific to a program, and in certain abbreviations, including:
  - R&D (research and development)
  - O&M (operating and maintenance)

### Figures and Fractions

- We do not follow The Canadian Press standard of 'per cent.' We use the symbol (%) or 'percent'.
  - | **For example:** 20% or 20 percent
- Use figures for decimals, fractions larger than one, uncommon fractions, and scores.
  - | **For example:** 0.15 of a percentage point, 1¾ days, 3½-year-old, a 6-3 ruling.
- Spell out and hyphenate common fractions used alone.
  - | **For example:** three-quarters.
- When referring to a period spanning two calendar years (such as an academic or fiscal year), use the full year of the first year and the last two numbers of the second year, with a forward slash.
  - | **For example:** United Way of the Alberta Capital Region 2022/23 Annual Report.
- For more, see Fractions in *The Canadian Press Stylebook*.







## Quotation Marks

- Use a single quotation mark (') for quotations in a headline.
  - | **For example:** 'Let's change lives together.' United Way launches new campaign
- For a single quote mark within a double quotation ("), the period or comma goes inside both with a thin space between them.
  - | **For example:** "She said 'let's change lives together'," he confirmed.
- Periods and commas go inside closing quote marks; colons and semicolons go outside.
- Question marks go inside the quotation marks when they apply to the quote, and outside when they apply to the whole sentence.
- Pull quotes versus display copy:
  - A pull quote is a quotation in the true sense (such as it quotes a speaker) and should exactly or very closely reflect what the speaker said in the body copy. Do use quotation marks in this case.
  - Display copy echoes or sums up a phrase in the body copy, so it needn't exactly replicate what appears in the text. Don't use quote marks in this case.

## Lists

- Items in a list should follow parallel structure whenever possible, especially in a short list. Use either complete or incomplete sentences, not both.
  - | **For example:** if the first item begins with a verb, subsequent items should also begin with a verb.
- The line that introduces a list can end with a period or colon.
- If the list is introduced by a partial sentence, make sure each point finishes the sentence.
  - | **For example:**
    - Donor funding will help:
      - improve the program.
      - pay for meals.
      - bring in outside speakers.
- If the individual items in a bulleted list or vertical numbered list are complete sentences, use periods.
- Capitalize the first letter if the list item is a complete sentence; use lowercase if not.





- It isn't necessary to format the list like a sentence using commas or semicolons after bullet points or to add "and" before the final point, especially in designed documents. It impedes readability.

## Abbreviations

### Other

- Do not use -nd, -rd, -st or -th on numbers in dates.
- Spell out months when used without a date:
  - | **For example:** January 2023.
- Metric symbols are not abbreviations and don't have periods. They are not pluralized with an "s."
  - | **For example:** Fort Saskatchewan is about 30 km from Edmonton.
- Avoid using e.g. and i.e. Use clearer alternatives instead, such as "for example" or "such as". You may use these abbreviations when space is limited, such as in a table or a figure, but be certain that you are using them correctly. Both abbreviations must be followed by a comma in a sentence.
  - e.g., = for example
  - i.e., = that is to say.





## Quick Tips

### Dos and Don'ts

- ✓ **Do:** Use active voice.
- ✓ **Do:** Write in present tense unless the specific context calls for another tense.
- ✓ **Do:** Ask for people's pronouns when including them in a story or materials.
- ✓ **Do:** Clearly identify United Way of the Alberta Capital Region as the deliverer of the message, either through words, visuals, or both.
- ✓ **Do:** Use Canadian spelling.
- ✓ **Do:** Include United Way of the Alberta Capital Region's general visual branding alongside program-specific branding (Example: Tools for School) to make it clear who is operating the program.
- ✓ **Do:** Ensure the piece is accessible.
- ✓ **Do:** Ensure the content aligns with the interests and reading level of your intended audience.
- ✓ **Do:** Ask for clarification from the person or group being referenced if you are unsure about appropriate terminology.
- ✓ **Do:** Alert the Brand team if a customer, program participant, or other contact raises concerns about inclusivity in our content.
  
- ✗ **Don't:** Use jargon, academic/technical language, or acronyms, initialisms, or abbreviations.
- ✗ **Don't:** Use 'The' or our acronym (UWACR) when writing about United Way.
- ✗ **Don't:** Craft long or complex sentences with multiple clauses.
- ✗ **Don't:** Assemble pieces without visual breaks or spacing in the content.





## Phrases to use and avoid

Use	Avoid	Exceptions and notes
Financial barriers Living with low income	Poverty	"Poverty" is still encouraged when referring to period poverty, poverty simulations, and Peace Out Poverty Podcast.
Equity-deserving	Equity-seeking	"Equity-seeking" suggests that people who experience historic or systemic barriers must actively seek out equity, while "equity-deserving" emphasizes that those with power must dismantle barriers.
Financial security	Financial stability	"Financial stability" means you have little to no debt and your expenses do not exceed your income.  "Financial security" is a step beyond stability; you have enough money to cover emergencies without stress, and can meet long-term financial goals.
Houseless Houselessness	Homeless Homelessness	Using "houseless" acknowledges that while someone may lack a socially accepted physical structure to live in (house), they still have a social connection with the wider community (home).
Supporters Volunteers Donors	Customers	We use the word "customers" internally to refer to the entire group of donors, volunteers, cabinets, boards, etc. However, this language should not be used in external communications.





Use	Avoid	Exceptions and notes
How we fund Funding Front-Line Agency Funding	Unrestricted funding Core funding	“Unrestricted funding” is an industry jargon, which essentially refers to how United Way distributes funding to sector agencies.
Volunteer opportunities Giving opportunities	Product	Internally, we use the word “products” in our job titles, and to refer to donation and volunteer opportunities. However, this language should be avoided in external communications.

## Further Resources

[A shorthand version of The Canadian Press Stylebook](#)

[The Canadian Press Caps and Spelling book](#)

[Flesch-Kincaid Reading level calculator](#)





**United Way**  
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