UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

HANDBOOK STYLE GUIDE

CENTER FOR WRITING
STUDENT WRITING SUPPORT

This style guide gives an overview of the guidelines used to revise the Center for Writing's Student Writing Support (SWS) training handbooks, as well as examples and specifications for document design.

HEADINGS

Use headings to set different types of information apart and use subheadings to group fundamentally similar information. Headings are in [Raleway](#) and body text is in Garamond (available on most computers.)

HEADING 1

Raleway Medium, 22pt, Centered, Capital Letters, 1.5 space following

SUBTITLE

Raleway ExtraLight, 11pt, Centered, Capital Letters

HEADING 2

Raleway Medium, 14pt, Left-Aligned, Capital Letters

HEADING 3

Raleway ExtraLight, 14pt, Left-Aligned, Capital Letters

Heading 4

Raleway ExtraLight, 12pt, italic, 0.25" indent

Normal paragraph text
Garamond, 11pt, Left-Aligned, Single-Spaced

Caption

Garamond, 11pt, italic, Centered

LISTS

Use bulleted lists to describe non-sequential steps and chunk similar information. If there are several sentences with similar construction and verbs, consider pulling out the different terms to a bulleted list. Bulleted lists are more easily readable than block text, making for better comprehension. The preset list style in this template is bulleted, with a 0.25" indent for each bullet and a further 0.25" hanging indent for list text.

STEPS

Use numbered lists to describe a process in which there are defined steps that must follow in a sequence. The "Numbered list" preset style is the same as the "Normal" style, but with a 0.25" indent for each number and a further 0.25" hanging indent for the list text.

ABBREVIATIONS

Spell out the first instance of the term or name, followed by the abbreviation in parentheses. The abbreviation may be used in all following instances. For example, "Student Writing Support (SWS)" becomes "SWS" in following instances.

TEXT EMPHASIS

Use sidebars, text boxes, and bolding to separate and emphasize different types of information. Like sidebars, text boxes may be used to group additional information that is related but not essential to the message of the overall text. Unlike sidebars, text boxes are formatted to correspond with a particular type of recurring information. The SWS handbooks include sidebars, text boxes for consultant scripts, and text boxes for what-if scenarios/troubleshooting. Mr. Grape icons may be used in regular text and in text boxes to indicate a specific type of information: rationale, how-to, and script.

Sidebars provide additional information that is related to the text but not essential to understanding the main concept or completing the task at hand. This sidebar is formatted with square text wrap, no fill, and a 0.5 pt hex no. BFBFBF solid text box border.

For example, this textbox is intended to call out what-if scenario/troubleshooting information. It is formatted with a dashed, 1pt, hex no. BFBFBF border, and no fill. Text is wrapped square.

This textbox is intended to call out scripts that consultants can use in common scenarios. It is formatted with a double-line complex, 3.25pt, black border. Text is wrapped top and bottom. The box is filled with hex no. D6DCE5 at 70 percent opacity.

STRUCTURE

Use task-oriented grouping and headings. This means grouping and labeling information based on what the end user is trying to accomplish. For example, instead of labeling a section with questions that attendants are commonly asked as "About SWS," label it something to the effect of "Questions You May Be Asked" or "Answers to Questions About SWS Policies."

TONE

Use clear, concise language. If there are two words that accurately express the same idea, choose the simpler one. Simple yet accurate language will make for a more enjoyable reading experience, while also increasing handbook accessibility and reinforcing the friendly, colloquial tone established in the consulting and attending handbooks.

Use second-person pronouns as needed to avoid awkward constructions.

Use the singular "they" when the subject's gender is unknown or irrelevant.

Use active constructions unless there is a good reason to use the passive voice (e.g., removing the subject from the situation, avoiding placing blame, describing actions from an unknown subject).

Start sentences with the subject as much as possible. For example, "Mailboxes for each current consultant and C4W staff member are located near the entrance to 10 Nicholson," rather than "Near the entrance to 10 Nicholson, there are mailboxes for each current consultant and C4W staff member." This construction places the main idea first in the sentence, increasing reading comprehension and scannability.

Aim for no more than two clauses per sentence. More clauses are typically unnecessary and would be better off in a separate sentence.

Avoid idioms and culturally-specific metaphors.

COLOR

Use color sparingly, and only choose colors that will look distinct from one another in greyscale. SWS handbooks are printed in greyscale, though color versions are available.

GRAPHICS

Use relevant graphics (screenshots, flow charts, diagrams) to illustrate key tasks and concepts. Only use images that enhance or reinforce key messages—SWS saves paper by avoiding unnecessary white space or decoration on handbooks.