

STC Canada West Coast Style Guide

Scope

Use this style guide for all written communications you create for STC Canada West Coast, such as the chapter website, correspondence, brochures, handouts, bookmarks, and signs.

Note that this is a work in progress. The guide will expand and evolve in consultation with chapter leaders and volunteers. This work is currently coordinated by Heather Sommerville, volunteer@stcwestcoast.ca. Please notify her of any additions or changes you'd like to suggest.

Purpose

Our written communications are the face of our chapter. They demonstrate our members' skills, so the quality must be exceptionally high. The smallest error will reflect badly on all of us and diminish our credibility with potential employers and members. This guide will help us to use a consistent writing style that presents a polished image to our community.

Authorities

Follow the latest editions of these published authorities, unless this guide specifies otherwise.

- Spelling: Canadian Oxford Dictionary (COD).
- Punctuation and format: Chicago Manual of Style (CMS); Microsoft Manual of Style (MMS).

Style

Abbreviations, Acronyms, Initialisms

Spell out on first use. Give the full name, followed by the short version in parentheses.

Example: We belong to the Society for Technical Communication (STC). They worked for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

See also: *Latin*

Chapter Name

Our brand is important and it must be consistent and correct. Our chapter is incorporated under the name “Society for Technical Communication, Canada West Coast chapter,” not “the West Coast chapter” or “STC West Coast” or “Canada Westcoast.” The form “stcwestcoast” appears in some email and web addresses for brevity only. Never use it to refer to the chapter itself.

See also: *Society name*

In informal use, you can abbreviate the chapter name to “CWC” or “STC CWC” or “STC Canada West Coast.” If you use the abbreviation, don’t use “STCCWC” or “STC-CWC.” They’re either hard to read or hard to type.

Comprise, Compose

“Comprise” means “to contain” or “to consist of” but it’s often mistakenly substituted for “compose.” Compose means “to make up” or “to combine to form a whole.” (Tip: The whole comprises the parts, but the parts compose the whole.) To avoid confusion, avoid “comprise.”

Incorrect: Canada is comprised of ten provinces and three territories.

Correct, but avoid: Canada comprises ten provinces and three territories.

Correct: Canada is composed of ten provinces and three territories.

Correct: Canada includes ten provinces and three territories.

Correct: Canada is made up of ten provinces and three territories.

Email

STC CWC follows COD, CMS 17, MMS, and generally accepted common usage in dropping the hyphen.

When you write an email on behalf of the chapter, or in your capacity as a chapter volunteer, use the following standard signature format:

Your first and last name
Your volunteer title
Chapter name
Your email address
Your phone number (optional)

Example:

Chris Brown
Events Coordinator
STC Canada West Coast chapter

address@stcwestcoast.ca
604-111-1111

Gender

Use gender-neutral language whenever possible. Rewrite or switch to plural to avoid references to he or she. Use “they” as neutral singular.

Example: Instead of “A new STC member can expand his or her professional network,” write “New STC members can expand their professional networks.”

Headings

In articles, use sentence case, not title case.

Example: “Meet Mark Matsuno, our latest Spotlight subject” — not “Meet Mark Matsuno, Our Latest Spotlight Subject”

Latin

Generally, don’t use Latin words or abbreviations. Substitute as follows:

e.g.: for example

i.e.: that is

etc.: and so on

Numbers

Use digits for numbers 10 and higher; use words for numbers 0 to 9.

Passive Voice

Avoid it.

Products and Brand Names

Be careful not to endorse a particular product, person, or institution, or to diminish others by omitting them. For example, when discussing technical writing classes, give examples from several colleges, not just one. In an article about a new technical tool, name several brands. If a company has sponsored an event or subsidized an article, say so, but avoid the appearance of helping them sell their product.

Punctuation

- **Bulleted lists:** According to CMS, a vertical (bulleted) list is best introduced by a complete sentence, and items in such a list should *not* use closing punctuation unless they consist of complete sentences.

Example 1. No punctuation is needed because the items are *not* complete sentences:

The chapter will offer six workshops this year:

- Introduction to web design
- Job-hunting for career-changers
- Intermediate Flare
- Tips for new managers
- Working with a translator
- Medical writing

Example 2. Punctuation is needed because the bulleted points *are* complete sentences:

Volunteers have access to the following benefits:

- Network with other qualified industry professionals.
 - Learn and develop leadership skills.
 - Expand career options.
 - Expand a résumé.
 - Increase exposure in the profession.
 - Gain satisfaction from teaching others.
- **Comma:** Always use the serial comma.

Example: Our members come from British Columbia, Brazil, and France.

If you don't use the serial comma, statements might be unclear: "I would like to thank my parents, the Queen and David Suzuki."

- **Dash:** Use an em dash (Alt 0151 on some keyboards) or en dash (Alt 0150), not a single or double hyphen, to connect phrases or clauses. Type a space before and after the dash.

Example: Good design helps your content look polished, professional, and consistent — and learning design skills is a great addition to your professional toolkit.

- **Exclamation point:** Use sparingly. If you need to create a chatty conversational tone, try to use words, not punctuation.
- **Hyphen:** Use a hyphen in compound adjectives.

Example: The author is a first-year student. NOT: The author is a first year student.

Sentences

Always write in complete sentences.

Society Name

Our parent association is called the Society for Technical Communication, not the Society of Technical Communicators or the Society for Technical Communications or any other variant.

Spelling

Use Canadian spelling. Follow the Canadian Oxford Dictionary (COD) unless this style guide says otherwise.

résumé, not resume

webcam, webcast, weblog, webmaster, website: no space. But: web page (COD).

Time

Include the time zone in event announcements and other documents that refer to time, as a convenience to people in other time zones who might want to attend a presentation remotely or travel to Vancouver for a special event.

Use “Pacific Time,” not “PDT” or “PST.” This is clearer for distant readers outside our time zone. It also avoids errors when copying and pasting blurbs from older announcements (in case we’ve switched to or from Daylight Saving Time since the last announcement).

Use a.m. and p.m., as cited in COD and CMS, not AM, PM, am, pm, or other variations.

Tone

Use a positive, upbeat style, without being overly perky. Our audience includes potential employers, work colleagues, and newcomers to our field. We want to show that the chapter is a fun and rewarding place to learn, network, volunteer, share job leads, and socialize with professional peers.

Avoid slang, colloquialisms, and overly informal terms, especially if our audience might not understand them or might consider them inappropriate for a professional group. For example, do not use “killer” or “sick” to mean “excellent.”

Avoid social-media shorthand such as OMG, TMI, emojis, and emoticons in business and professional writing. Use sparingly in informal emails.