

Pennsylvania Workforce System Policy Style Manual

Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry Bureau of Workforce
Development Administration

Writing Conventions & Style of State Workforce System Policy

Writing, Establishing and Maintaining State Workforce System Policy

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Writing, Establishing and Maintaining State Workforce System Policy

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Introduction

Pennsylvania's goals in writing workforce system policy are consistency, clarity, and easy readability. This manual provides instruction that will help writers accomplish that goal. Workforce system policy writing is influenced by several sources. These sources include federal plain language techniques, Associated Press Style, a governor's style manual, some of the tried-and-true construction detailed in Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*, and other publications.

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Plain Language

The Bureau of Workforce Development Administration (BWDA) Policy & Planning Coordination Services generally follows plain-language principles. This manual is strongly influenced by federal plain-language standards. Find more information about plain language and the [Plain Writing Act of 2010](#) at www.plainlanguage.gov.

Plain language should be used whenever possible. Using plain language does not mean writing to a level below the policy audience's reading ability. Instead, the writer should use language familiar to readers and be direct.

Avoid	Write Instead
Pennsylvania workforce system policy seeks to promote the increased participation of all state, regional, and local WIOA-mandated and optional partners with a presence in the statewide one-stop network.	Pennsylvania workforce system policy promotes partnership among all one-stop partners.

Short Sentences

Whenever possible, break compound and compound-complex sentences into simple, declarative sentences.

Avoid	Write Instead
Submit all applications, in writing and in-person, at your local PA CareerLink® employment services center; staff there are trained in the specific steps necessary to process these applications.	Submit written applications in-person at your local PA CareerLink®. Staff there are trained to process them.

Active Voice

Active voice is among the most effective tools for direct writing. In active voice, the sentence subject acts. In passive voice, the sentence subject is acted upon. Generally, the only exception to using active voice occurs when the actor is unknown, irrelevant, or if the law is the actor.

Avoid	Write Instead
Draft policies are reviewed and routed through the approval process by DARTs.	DARTs review and route draft polices through the approval process.
Policy managers are appointed by bureau directors.	Bureau directors appoint policy managers.

Efficient Language

Less is more where understanding and reading comprehension are concerned.

Avoid	Write Instead
In the interest of conducting timely reviews of workforce system policies, DARTs will assemble and meet when doing so is required and necessary.	DARTs meet as needed to ensure timely progress in policy development.

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Bulleted & Numbered Lists

Use bulleted lists for items where sequence doesn't matter. Use numbered lists when sequence matters. If a list contains complete sentences, then punctuate the items as they are: complete sentences. If they are not complete sentences, do not use terminal punctuation. Avoid mixing lists of complete and incomplete sentences.

Avoid	Write Instead
Acceptable forms of identification include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Passport 2. Current Driver's License 3. Military Identification Card 	Acceptable forms of identification include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passport • Current Driver's License • Military Identification Card
Before eligibility can be determined, applicants must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak with a PA CareerLink® specialist • Complete an application • Provide all supporting documentation • Sign an agreement to abide by all terms and conditions 	Before eligibility can be determined, applicants must: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Speak with a PA CareerLink® specialist. 2. Complete an application. 3. Provide all supporting documentation. 4. Sign an agreement to abide by all terms and conditions.

Charts and Tables

When possible, use a graphic to illustrate ideas; or, use a table to organize information. For example, this style manual uses tables to show contrast between side-by-side content. Flowcharts are particularly useful to illustrate processes. Basic flowchart elements are available in most word-processing programs. In Microsoft Word, tooltips will explain what each element means.

The Neutral-Gender Plural

When necessary, use neutral-gender plurals to avoid "he/she," "s/he," "(s)he," "she or he," "his/her" and other grammatically awkward constructions.

Avoid	Write Instead
A participant can use the computer resource center to complete his/her resume. (S)He can then use the printer to make a final copy.	Participants can use the computer resource center to complete their resumes. They can use the printer to make final copies.

Present Tense

Published policy is in effect and should be written in the present tense.

Avoid	Write Instead
Reports will be due to BWDA on the third Monday of the month.	Reports are due to BWDA on the third Monday of the month.
Pennsylvania workforce system policy informed program development and operations statewide.	Pennsylvania workforce system policy informs program development and operations statewide.
BWDA will respond to reports within 30 days.	BWDA responds to reports within 30 days.

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Subject-Verb Construction

The most common type of subject-verb construction error is one of number. Ensure that subject-verb number agreement is correct when writing.

Avoid	Write Instead
Either policy or guidance are necessary in this case.	Either policy or guidance is necessary in this case.
The LWDB, along with other members of the planning region, need to submit the report.	The LWDB, along with other members of the planning region, needs to submit the report.

Jargon

Avoid jargon whenever possible. It's confusing and can alienate readers.

Avoid	Write Instead
Pennsylvania's WIOA Combined State Plan is published for public comment on Landi.	Pennsylvania's WIOA Combined State Plan is published for public comment on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry website.

Acronyms

Avoid acronyms whenever possible. If acronyms must be used, write the full name or title out on first reference, present the acronym in parentheses, then continue. Each reference thereafter should be the acronym only.

Avoid	Write Instead
BWDA's P&PCS Unit reviews LWDA local and regional plans. P&PCS works to clearly communicate timelines to LWDA's to ensure accuracy and completeness.	The Bureau of Workforce Development Administration Policy & Planning Coordination Services Unit (P&PCS) reviews local workforce development area (LWDA) local and regional plans. P&PCS works to clearly communicate timelines to LWDA's to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Capitalization

Capitalize the first letter of a sentence's first word. Capitalize proper names and professionals' titles when the title precedes the name. Capitalize the first and last words of a document title, all nouns, adverbs and adjectives, pronouns, verbs and verb forms, the words "no" and "not." Prepositions in titles are only capitalized if they're used adjectivally or adverbially.

Avoid	Write Instead
Registered Nurses and Respiratory Therapists are high-demand Occupations.	Registered nurses and respiratory therapists are high-demand occupations.
Submit all Plans in writing to the Bureau resource account at RA-LI-BWDA-Policy@pa.gov .	Submit all plans in writing to the bureau resource account at RA-LI-BWDA-Policy@pa.gov .
Joanne Doe, BWDA Director	Director Joanne Doe, BWDA
Pennsylvania's WIOA combined state plan	Pennsylvania's WIOA Combined State Plan
Report To The Secretary: PA CareerLink® Processes	Report to the Secretary: PA CareerLink® Processes

Grammar, Mechanics & Usage

Be neat. Be concise. Be correct. In U.S. English, there's no "s" at the end of "forward," "backward," "downward," "upward," etc. Only use single quotation marks inside double quotation marks. Modern word processing automatically sets correct spacing after terminal punctuation; there's no longer any need for two spaces at the

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ends of sentences.

Avoid	Write Instead
The project is moving towards completion.	The project moves toward completion.
This is a long guide. It contains a lot of information.	This is a comprehensive guide.
In U.S. English, there's no 's' at the end of 'forward,' 'backward,' 'downward,' 'upward,' etc.	In U.S. English, there's no "s" at the end of "forward," "backward," "downward," "upward," etc.

Utilize & Use

"Utilize" comes from "utility," and means putting something to a task for which it wasn't designed, like a butter knife serving as a driver of slotted-head screws. Reserve it for such.

Avoid	Write Instead
Planning regions will utilize BWDA templates and guidance.	Planning regions will use BWDA templates and guidance.

Ensure vs. Insure, Shall vs. Should, Must, Might and May

Use "ensure" to express a guarantee. Use "insure" when writing about insurance coverage and hedging risk. Avoid "shall." Instead, use "must" for an immutable requirement, use "should" for a recommendation. "Might" must be used if an outcome or action is somewhat likely, and "may" must be used if an outcome or action is very likely.

Avoid	Write Instead
To insure compliance, LWDA's shall submit timely responses, or they could face sanctions.	To ensure compliance, LWDA's must submit timely responses, or they may face sanctions.

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law is an Associated Press-written resource for journalists, editors, and other professional writers. Updated annually, it is the reference standard for print and online newspapers, magazines, most public and private communications staff, and more. This resource provides excellent guidance to writers who must consistently represent professional titles, dates, government agencies, punctuation, and more across policies where consistency is crucial to readers' understanding and application of key concepts.

Strunk & White, The Elements of Style

The single greatest source of reference for English-language writers is *The Elements of Style*. It was written in 1918 by William Strunk Jr., a professor of English at Cornell University, and published privately in 1919. Macmillan and Company commissioned American author and contributor at *The New Yorker*, E. B. White (*Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and one of Strunk's Cornell students), to revise the book for a version published in 1959.

The Governor's Office Style Guide

Some Administrations publish a manual governing style for communications materials. This includes press releases, media advisories, position and policy documents, legislative briefs, and any other documents for release to the public or general distribution. If such a guide is produced, requirements therein take precedence over any other published style guide, including this one.

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