



# Client Name Confidential | Writing Style Guide

Prepared by Alchemy | 03.05.20 Update

WGI follows writing, grammar, and punctuation style set forth in The Associated Press Stylebook, the Chicago Manual of Style, and The Elements of Style by Strunk & White.

# CLIENT STYLE

- As CLIENT grows organically, and enters new markets via acquisitions, we communicate with a wider spectrum of people and potential clients that are not professional engineers – think DDAs, CRAs, taxpayers, city/county commissioners, and other groups/committees comprised of a variety of professional backgrounds. As a result, we must consider expressing ourselves in more colloquial terms when the audience requires. The key to all CLIENT communications is consistency -- direct, succinct, friendly, confident, and approachable language. We must be adept at speaking clearly to the audience at hand, yet still using industry jargon when specifically appropriate and necessary. You will write differently when communicating with the state’s DOT than with a city’s street beautification committee.
- CLIENT follows writing, grammar, and punctuation styles set forth in *The Associated Press Stylebook*, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, and *The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White. The online resource we reference is [www.grammarbook.com](http://www.grammarbook.com), which compiles from these materials and answers frequent questions of use, spelling, punctuation, and other issues.
- In addition to the CLIENT Style Guide, you have access to addenda that address commonly questioned words, and phrases and banned/liability words. These are “living” documents that will be updated as necessary, and your input is welcome through appropriate channels.

# 1. The basic elements of CLIENT style

- A. Eliminate excess words**
- B. Pick a set of rules and stick with them**
- C. Use concrete, rather than vague, language**
- D. Use an active, not passive, voice**
- E. Make sure your subject and verb agree**
- F. Use the right word**
- G. Take the time to check reference books**
- H. Refer to the Style Guide**

# 1. Eliminate excess words

**There is a tendency to “wordiness” that we’re going to review in greater detail, and work on a few examples together.**

**For many writers, using more words = expressing more important thoughts.**

**However, 50+ word sentences aren’t so much deeply important as they are potentially confusing.**

# 1. Eliminate excess words

## A. Between your subject and verb

- Example (26 words, two sentences): *Regulatory **processes** relating to our environment continue to **become** more complex. Clients want knowledgeable professionals who understand environmental regulations and how these regulations affect permitting success.*
- Better (17 words, single sentence): *Complex environmental regulatory **processes require** knowledgeable professionals who understand the regulations, and how they affect permitting success.*

# 1. Eliminate excess words

*continued*

## **B. As a general guideline**

- Example (12 words): *With the latest technology at their fingertips, coupled with superior innovative thinking...*
- Better: (8 words) *Coupling the latest technology with superior innovative thinking...*

C. Microsoft Word has a robust thesaurus. When you use the same word multiple times in a paragraph, utilize it to expand the expressiveness of your writing.

## **2. Pick a set of rules**

- A. Be consistent in your punctuation, capitalizations, numbers, abbreviations, acronyms, and so on**
  
- B. Random style changes are the most common edit I make to CLIENT materials**

## 3. Use concrete over vague language

- A. Example: *The weather was of an unusual nature on the west coast.*
- B. Better: *Naples had unusually cold weather last week.*
- C. CLIENT example: *The underground utilities are of extreme difficulty to locate when you get to the southern part of Florida.*
- D. Better: *Miami-Dade's underground utilities are difficult to locate.*
- E. Write it, then read it. Is it clear? Does it get to the point right away? Are there words you can eliminate? Can you break your thoughts into shorter, more concise sentences?

## 4. When you can, use active verbs

- A. Example: *It has been breaking down.*
- B. Better: *It **broke** down.*
- C. Example: ***Input from stakeholders will be important throughout the design development process.***
- D. Better: ***Stakeholders' input is important throughout the design development process.***

## 5. Make sure your subject and verb agree

A. Singular subject, singular verb

- *The **list** of items **is** on the desk.*

B. Two singular subjects connected with *or, either/or, neither/nor* require a singular verb

- ***Neither** I-95 nor I-395 **is** a straight route to your destination.*

C. Two subjects connected by *and* take a plural verb

- ***I-95 and I-395 are** main arterial roadways*

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## 5. Make sure your subject and verb agree

*continued*

D. The subject gets separated from the verb by additional words that are not part of the subject: *as well as, as long as, along with*

- *The **roadway**, along with the medians and shoulders, **runs** north/south.*

E. The Complicating “Of”

- The word *of* is involved in most subject/verb mistakes
- *A **bridge** of multiple express lanes, interchanges, and overpasses **conveys** cars and trucks through Miami traffic.*

## **6. Use the right word**

- A. Look it up; the English language is contradictory and confusing, even for experienced writers**
- B. We all have words we consistently get wrong**
- C. Many words sound or look alike: there, their, they're**
- D. There are words and phrases we want to avoid, too: ensure, insure, assure, best efforts, guarantee, partnership, partner. These become binding legal terms if a proposal is used as a contract. Please refer to the Liabilities & Qualifiers addendum.**

## 7. Take the time to check the references

- A. ***The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White** is the definitive style book many of us studied (or didn't) in high school. It still holds up.
  
- B. ***Grammarbook.com*** is a free, easy, and comprehensive online resource; it compiles its rules from ***The Elements of Style***, ***The Associated Press Stylebook***, and ***Chicago Manual of Style***, among others.
  
- C. If you have the physical book(s), keep it/them within reaching distance when you are writing – if you have to get up, you probably won't.

## 8. Refer to the Style Guide

- A. *The CLIENT Style Guide* is comprised of an outline of our style rules, with appendices of Common Terms and Liabilities & Qualifiers.**
- B. They are living documents, so that new submissions can be made.**
- C. If you have a word, phrase, term, or abbreviation/acronym to add to the list, please submit it to CLIENT NAME and Kelly Owens for review.**



And now, let's focus on the  
Style Guide...

WGI follows writing grammar,  
and punctuation style set forth  
in The Associated Press Stylebook  
, the Chicago Manual of Style,  
and The Elements of Style by  
Strunk & White.

**Our goal is to maintain effective communication and a high level of dedicated service by technical competence with specialty in parking structure design to achieve the project objectives.**

1. What is the main premise? Achieving project objectives – and it's at the end of the sentence. Shouldn't it be at the beginning?
2. How do we achieve them? Maintaining and providing the necessary communication, service, and technical competence.
3. Who will provide them? This answer came from a later sentence -- our parking structure design specialists.

Our goal is to maintain effective communication and a high level of dedicated service by technical competence with specialty in parking structure design to achieve the project objectives. (28 words)

**FINAL VERSION: To achieve project objectives, our parking structure design specialists maintain effective communication and provide a high level of dedicated service and technical competence. (23 words)**

**Our dedicated restoration specialists are structural engineers and architects, with advanced degrees and professional licenses; have expertise and experience to understand any repair need relative to parking and other structures; focus on restoration projects full-time, differentiating us from firms that use general structural engineers to complete new building and restoration projects; and have developed standard details and specifications that contain time-proven techniques and materials. (64-word sentence)**

There is no reason for 64-word sentences. You will not lose impact or meaning by breaking it up.

**FINAL VERSION: Our dedicated restoration specialists are structural engineers and architects, with advanced degrees and professional licenses. Focusing on restoration projects full-time, they possess the expertise and experience to understand any parking and other structure repair needs. Our specialists developed standard details and specifications that contain time-proven techniques and materials. This approach differentiates WGI from firms that use general structural engineers to complete new building and restoration projects. (4 sentences, 15/20/13/18 words)**

Have we lost any impact or meaning? Have we made it easier to read this passage?

**As parking consultants, one of our strengths is an extensive background in planning and designing parking structures for virtually every use and every type of client; and in each case, intelligently balancing aesthetics, functionality, durability, and cost for maximum benefit to the owner, user, and environment. (46-word sentence)**

There is no reason for 46-word sentences, either. You will not lose impact or meaning by breaking it up.

**FINAL VERSION: As parking consultants, we have extensive background in planning and designing parking structures for virtually every use and every type of client. In every case, our strength is intelligently balancing aesthetics, functionality, durability, and cost for maximum benefit to the owner, user, and environment. (2 sentences, 22 words each)**

Have we lost any impact or meaning? Have we made it easier to read this passage?