

CSREES Editorial Style Guide

(Last updated 7/1/04)

In the interest of improving accuracy and consistency in CSREES materials intended for the public, this guide addresses commonly encountered style matters—many of which are unique to our agency. In some cases, it departs from the guidance in the GPO Style Manual, but GPO should be used for matters *not* addressed in this guide.

It was prepared by the CSREES Communications Staff and will be updated periodically. Please submit suggestions for future updates to Terry Meisenbach (tmeisenbach@csrees.usda.gov) at any time.

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WORDS AND PHRASES (spelling, cap style, hyphenation, usage)

("clc" means use a caps-and-lower-case cap style)

adviser—not advisor

agency—lower case (even in direct reference to CSREES)

AgrAbility—a CSREES program

agribusiness

Baby Boomers

bachelor's degree

benefited, benefiting

between—use when just *two* things are mentioned; use **among** with *three or more* ("choose *between* chocolate and vanilla" but "choose *among* chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry"); avoid using **between** with **each** (between stations, not between each station) since **each** is singular

biobased—words beginning with "bio" do not use a hyphen unless the next letter is a vowel

bipartisan

buildup (n.)

byproduct—no hyphen

center—lower case, except when part of a formal name (but Waterfront Centre)

child care (n. or adj.)—never childcare

county—lower case, except when part of a formal name

college—lower case, except when part of a formal name

conference call—a telephone conference connecting three or more phones; do not confuse with **teleconference** (see below)

Congressional—capped when it refers to the U.S. Congress (e.g., Congressional action)

Cooperative Extension or **Cooperative Extension System**—clc (but see “extension”)

cropland

cross-contamination or **cross-contaminated**

CYFAR—refers to CSREES’ Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Program (but there is no such thing as CYFARnet—see next item)

CYFERnet—refers to CSREES’ Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network

data is plural and uses a plural verb (“The data show that...”)

decisionmaker or **decisionmaking**

department—lower case, except when part of a formal name; but capitalize in a direct reference to USDA

“**digital divide**”—lower case, in quotes

e meaning electronic is used *with* a hyphen in almost all cases (e-mail, e-grants, e-commerce, e-Extension) but *without* a hyphen in certain formal usages that are equivalent to a proper noun (USDA’s or CSREES’ eGovernment Initiative). If an “e” word is the first word of the sentence, capitalize the “e” (“E-mail is a quick way to communicate.” or “E-Government Initiative rules are under development in USDA.”). Use a hyphen to separate two capitalized components (see last example).

EDEN—full reference is Extension Disaster Education Network

EFNEP—full reference is Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

end user—but hyphenate when used as a preceding adjective (“Include end-user instructions.”)

ensure—don’t substitute for **ensure that** (“This will ensure that the project will succeed.”)

ensure means to guarantee; **insure** refers only to a financial insurance transaction

experiment station—lower case, except when part of a formal name

extension—lower case, except when part of a formal name (an extension specialist, but the University of Minnesota Extension Service)

fact sheet—never factsheet

Farm*A*Syst—an extension program

federal—lower case, except when part of a formal name

Fellow—cap in reference to someone in a formal fellowship program (e.g., Fred Burrell is CSREES’ NACo Fellow for 2003-04. CSREES brought in five HSI Fellows last summer.)

firsthand (adj.)

follow up (n. or v.)—but hyphenate when used as a preceding adjective

Food Guide Pyramid

foodborne

forestland

grantwriter or **grantwriting**

groundwater

HACCP—full reference is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (don’t forget the “and”)

health care (n. or adj.)—never healthcare

Home*A*Syst—an extension program

home page

if—use “whether” instead, when there is more than one option implied, with “or not” stated or implied (“If you go, you’ll need directions,” but “He couldn’t decide whether he should go.”)

IFAFS—full reference is Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems

“information age”—lower case in quotes

Internet—*but* lower case **intranet**

land-grant—lower case, except when part of a formal name (e.g., Land-Grant University System)

land-use—hyphenate when used as a preceding adjective

life-threatening

limited-resource—hyphenate when used as a preceding adjective

master’s degree

media is plural and uses a plural verb (“The media are relentless.”); **medium** is singular and uses a singular verb (“Paint is her preferred medium.”)

multi with any ending is one word, but use a hyphen when the ending starts with a vowel (multicultural, multidimensional, multi-ethnic, multi-industrial, etc.)

nation or **national**—lower case, except when part of a formal name

nonprofit

office—lower case, except when part of a formal name (e.g., International Programs Office)

ongoing (adj.)

online

partnership or **partners**—lower case, even in reference to CSREES’ partnership

policymaking or **policymaker**

postharvest

preharvest

program—lower case unless part of a formal program (e.g., Risk Avoidance and Mitigation Program)

recordkeeping or **recordkeeper**

research, education, and economics—lower case unless part of a formal name

research, education, and extension—lower case unless part of a formal name

set up (v.) or **setup** (n. or adj.)

so—don’t substitute for **so that** (“Call us, so that we can add your name.”)

start up (v.) **startup** (n. or adj.)

state—lower case, except when part of a formal name

systemwide

task force

teambuilding

teleconference—a conference involving visual transmissions, such as a satellite

teleconference—use **conference call** to refer to a group telephone conversation with no visuals

timeframe

turfgrass

underserved (adj.)

under way—two words when used as an adverb meaning “in progress,” “in motion,” or “afoot”

university—lower case, except when part of a formal name
up-to-date—only when used as a preceding adjective; otherwise, **up to date**
video—use only as an adjective, never as a noun (“video footage” or “a video program”)
videoconference
video magazine
videotape

Web—if in reference to the World Wide Web
Web site—2 words, never Website or website
well-being
World Wide Web
write-up

PUNCTUATION

Apostrophe

- Do not use an apostrophe in: farmers market, the 1960s, BTUs, ARMs, CDs, FAQs, etc.
- Use an apostrophe in “4-H’ers” (n.); possessive would be “4-H’er’s” or “4-H’ers”.
- Distinguish between:
its (a possessive) and **it’s** (a contraction for “it is”)
your (a possessive) and **you’re** (a contraction for “you are”)
whose (a possessive) and **who’s** (a contraction for “who is”)
theirs (a possessive) and **there’s** (a contraction for “there is”)
- The possessive of CSREES is CSREES’—not CSREES’s.

Colon

- A word following a colon is lower case: this is an example.

Comma

- Use a comma before **and** or **or** in a series (three or more items).
- Use a comma after an introductory clause (“When you leave, shut the door.”)
- Do not use a comma between a month and year with no day (March 2003).
- Use a comma before phrases beginning with “including,” “because,” and “then.” (“Her degree made her an expert in many subjects, including economics, history, and agriculture.” “He refused help, because he felt that he was a burden.” “He’ll milk the cows, then feed the chickens.”)

Dash

- Use an em dash (—), with no space on either side, for a dash.

Parentheses

- Do not put telephone area codes in parentheses: e.g., 202-846-2950, not (202) 846-2950.

Period

- Use periods in 2-letter all-cap abbreviations (U.S.) but not in 3 letters or more (USA, USDA), nor after 2-letter state abbreviations (DC, MD, VA)

Quote marks

- Commas and periods go *before* a closing quote mark. However, question marks and exclamation points should be placed outside the closing quote to avoid changing the meaning of the quoted material, unless such a mark is part of the quote:
I heard the official say, “Will the voters reject the proposal?”
Did you hear the official say, “The voters rejected the proposal”?
The farmer said, “Government crop subsidies are unnecessary!” (the farmer exclaimed)
The farmer said, “Government crop subsidies are unnecessary”! (the writer is exclaiming)
- Use single quotes in headings or for material within a quote: “I heard her say, ‘I’m leaving.’”

Slash

- A slash mark (/) between two words should not have a space before or after it (e.g., “and/or” or “a CSREES/partnership effort”).

MISCELLANEOUS

CSREES and its partners

- When necessary to distinguish among them, refer to land-grant institutions as:
1862 land-grant institutions, thereafter 1862s
1890 historically black land-grant institutions, thereafter 1890s
1994 Native American land-grant institutions, thereafter 1994s
Hispanic-serving institutions, thereafter HSIs
- When spelling out “COP” (as part of ESCOP, ECOP, ACOP, etc.), write “Committee on Organization and Policy,” not “Committee on Policy”).
- Capitalize names of formal units and subunits within CSREES (e.g., Plant and Animal Systems, Communications Staff, Civil Rights Office, Budget Office, Plants Section, Animals Section, Funds Management Branch).

Titles

- In general, titles are capitalized only when they *precede* a name without intervening punctuation (“Program Specialist John Doe” but “John Doe, program specialist”). Exceptions are made for singular titles or titles of high-ranking persons: e.g., John Doe, President of the United States or Jane Smith, Secretary of Agriculture. In CSREES, use upper-case titles for administrators and other individuals on the CSREES Executive Council: e.g., Colien Hefferan, CSREES Administrator; George Cooper, CSREES Deputy Administrator; Terry Meisenbach, Communications Director. Do not capitalize “national program leader” or “program specialist” or other more generic titles that follow a name.
- An exception is the word “Fellow,” as in CSREES summer Fellows, which should be capitalized to avoid confusion with the common noun “fellow.”

Abbreviations

- Don’t abbreviate the names of months: January 15, 2005; March 1987.
- Spell out **building**, whether part of a formal name or not (Whitten Building, never Bldg.).
- Use **FY** for fiscal year only when it precedes a date: FY 2004 or FY ‘04, *but* this fiscal year.
- Spell out the name of an entity and use its acronym in first reference; use only the acronym in subsequent references: Agricultural Research Service (ARS); subsequently ARS.
- Use 2-letter postal abbreviations for state names following a city or town name, but the full name of the state when mentioned alone: e.g., Arlington, VA *but* Virginia.

Numbers

- In general references, spell out single-digit numbers (one to nine), and use digits for 10 or more. However, if they are mixed within a sentence, use digits for all: e.g. “I saw seven horses and three cows.” *but* “He had 7 horses, 3 cows, and 12 sheep.”
- Use numerals for single digits in reference to measurements and time: e.g., “This process usually requires submitting three to seven forms, each of which takes only 1 or 2 minutes to fill out.” “One extension educator, five farmers, and two equipment dealers will present a 1-hour demonstration.” “She is 6 years and 5 months old.” “The program will begin at 9 this morning.”

Common errors

- Use **a** rather than **an** before an aspirated “h”—as in “historic” (adj.).
- Don't substitute **all** for **all of**. (Rather than “All the pigs won ribbons,” write “All of the pigs won ribbons.”)
- Avoid using **and then** when you mean **then** (“He went first to the grocery store, then to the gas station.”)
- Write **could have**, not **could of** (“She could have won if she had entered the contest.”)—also, **should have** not **should of**, **must have** not **must of**, **would have** not **would of**, etc.
- Write **different from**, not **different than**. (“Yams are different from sweet potatoes.”)
- If something happens **every day** (2 words), it's an **everyday** (1 word) occurrence.
- Use **its** as a possessive, but **it's** as a contraction for “it is.”
- Use **less** for singular references and **fewer** for plural references (“less talk” but “fewer words”).
- Use **more than** rather than **over** before a number (“Save more than 50 percent.” “More than 200 people attended.”). Use **fewer than** rather than **under** before a number. (“Fewer than 1 percent were surprised.”)
- Write “the **past** 10 years” rather than “the **last** 10 years” (unless it refers to the end of something).
- Write **per**, never **as per**. (“There is an upward trend in stocks, per most Wall Street experts.”)
- Write **reason that**, not **reason why** (“The reason that cows are starving is that there's been no rain.”)
- Use **that** instead of **which** if the phrase it contains is *essential* to the sentence. Use **which** instead of **that** if the phrase it contains is *non-essential* and could be cut without changing the meaning of the sentence. Phrases containing **which** are usually set off with commas. Phrases containing **that** are not. (“The remark that Senator Lott made at the birthday party for Senator Thurmond cost Lott his job.” “The remark, which Senator Lott made at the birthday party for Senator Thurmond, cost Lott his job.”)
- Use **that** or **which** in reference to *things*. Use **who** or **whom** in reference to *people*.
“The book in the glass case is the one that disappeared.”
“The book, which is very rare, is worth thousands.”
“Julie's supervisor was the one who hired her.”
“John is the one to whom she sent the roses.”
- Use **their** as a possessive, but **they're** as a contraction for “they are”—but use **there are** for plural items (“There's much to be learned, but there are many ways to go about it.”)
- Do not use **they** and **their** for singular references (instead of “A person likes their water clean,” write “People like their water clean” or “A person likes his or her water clean”).
- Use *italics* rather than underlining for emphasis or for publication or movie titles.
- Write “**where it is**” not “**where it's at**.”
- Use **whose** as a possessive, but **who's** as a contraction for “who is.”
- Use **your** as a possessive, but **you're** as a contraction for “you are.”

Other

- Always follow **said** with **that**, unless a direct quote follows. (“He said that she is the victim of an enemy conspiracy.” OR “He said, ‘She is a victim of an enemy conspiracy.’”)
- Do not use a combination of phrases and sentences in a bulleted list—items should be parallel. Do not use a period after items in a bulleted list unless they are full, stand-alone sentences.
- Use bullets rather than numbers in a list, unless the list contains sequential steps to follow.
- Include **http://** (or equivalent, such as **https://**) in all URLs. Include **www** when it’s part of the full URL.
- Do not include “1” before a toll-free number: e.g., 800-445-2233. If it’s important to point out that the number is toll free, write “Call toll free 800-445-2233.”