



Communications Style Guide

This document gives an overview of style conventions and editorial guidelines for internal and external communications from all Aplin Martin offices.

This document is maintained by [].

Editorial Guidelines

Professional

Communications should be respectful and demonstrate effort and expertise. Consider the audience and honour readers' expectations and preferences.

Plain

Choose simpler words, shorter sentences, and more direct sentence structure. Aim to write the way you would speak.

Consistent

Strive for consistency throughout documents. Formatting, style, presentation, capitalization, and terms should be as uniform as possible.

Modern

Favor styles that reflect a current approach to language, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Use language that expresses equality and inclusiveness.

High quality

Emphasize technical integrity over style issues, i.e. a spelling error wouldn't usually damage the functional integrity of a document but a missing figure or inaccurate word could have serious impact.

Punctuation and Usage

Except in special cases described in this style guide, follow the style and usage rules in the most recent *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.



If these reference books give conflicting rules, follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* for questions of usage.

Some of these styles are adapted from the [*AEC Grammar and Style Guide for Champion Proposals*](#)[®] by Anna M. Bremmer.

bolding

Use bold for emphasis when needed, but don't overuse.

capitalization – proper nouns

Capitalize only proper nouns. Initial capitals, once used to lend importance to certain words, are now mainly used ironically.

Capitalization of owner, architect, engineer, contractor, etc. should be done only in legal or contract documents and legal or contract-related correspondence, not in general correspondence, reports, proposals, or marketing materials.

Capitalize the names of documents only when the full name of the document, including a proper name, is used.

Services are not proper nouns.

Correct usage:

- architect, architecture
- client
- city
- cities of Vancouver and Burnaby
- comprehensive plan, City of Vancouver Comprehensive Plan, the City of Vancouver's comprehensive plan
- construction manual
- construction
- contractor
- engineer, engineering
- federal
- owner
- province, province of BC



capitalization - roles and titles

Do not capitalize job titles within paragraphs when they stand alone, except within internal procedures manuals and internal documents.

Civil, military, religious, and professional titles are capitalized when they immediately precede a personal name and are thus used as part of the name (typically replacing the title holder's first name), e.g., Prime Minister Trudeau, Premier Clark. In the engineering industry, the person's first name is almost never replaced by his or her title, e.g. Project Manager Barker.

Titles of company officials, e.g. president, or occupational titles, e.g. project engineer, should not be capitalized when they follow or replace a personal name. A title used alone, in place of a personal name, is capitalized only in context of a toast or formal introduction, e.g., in a quotation such as "Ladies and Gentlement, the Prime Minister."

Some companies choose to capitalize these titles in all their communications because of the great respect the officials command within the company. However, this practice is old-fashioned and confers excessive importance on people who are neither public officials nor eminent dignitaries and it should be avoided.

Correct usage:

- project manager
- project manager Cory Barker
- Cory Barker, project manager
- The project manager will verify that ...

commas in a series

Use a comma before "and" or "or" in a series. Also called the oxford comma or serial comma, this comma is preferred in modern technical documentation for clarity and accuracy.

Correct usage:

- Our firm includes civil engineers, urban planners, architects, and land surveyers.
- This proposal does not include surveying, architecture, or planning services.

compound adjectives and modifiers



A compound modifier (also called a phrasal adjective) is a phrase that functions as a unit to modify a noun.

A compound adjective consists of two words that function as a unit and express a single thought.

Use hyphens to link all words in a compound modifier or adjective except the adverb “very” and all adverbs ending in “ly.” Hyphenating compounds is important for clarity and accuracy.

Correct usage:

- a seven-building 460-unit multiuse site (note that “multiuse” does not require a hyphen because it is listed as a single word in the dictionary)
- in-depth knowledge
- from a ground-oriented motel to a multi-tower mixed-use development

formal language

Avoid overly formal words and phrases, which are associated with outdated government or business writing. Strive to write the way you would talk.

Examples of words and phrases to avoid:

- ascertain
- assist
- as requested
- as of yet
- foremost
- it is our understanding
- prior to
- the above noted
- the following
- utilize
- unforeseen
- warranted



numbers

Spell out numbers from 1 through 10; use figures for numbers above 10. For example, “I would like ten copies of this article.” This rule applies to both exact and approximate numbers.

Use all figures—even for numbers 1 through 10—when they have technical significance or need to stand out for quick comprehension.

Always write decimals in figures. When a decimal stands alone (without a whole number preceding the decimal point), insert a zero before the decimal point.

Use words for numbers that begin a sentence, for most ordinals (our twenty-fifth anniversary), and for fractions (one-third of sales).

Compound numbers under 10 should alternate between spelling out and using numerals for clarity. For example, two 5-story buildings.

Correct usage:

- one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten
- 11, 12, 13
- 6 sf
- 10,000
- 1,000
- 82,513.14
- Twenty-three people attended the meeting.
- two 5-story buildings
- sixty \$5 bills, 150 five-dollar bills
- 500 four-page leaflets
- 40-plus age group

passive voice

Whenever possible, use active voice; don't use passive voice. Passive voice is harder to read, it can leave out important information about who or what is performing an action, and it can sound overly formal and old-fashioned.



Passive voice is sometimes appropriate and necessary—for example, when active voice would require a highly convoluted sentence structure or excessive anthropomorphism—but rewrite to avoid passive voice if you can.

vague references

Avoid using “it,” “this,” “that,” and “which” without making it clear what the word is referring to. Either add a noun (i.e. this approach) or replace the pronoun with a noun.

For example, “This includes new road frontages and a new east-west road” could be rewritten as “The conceptual servicing stage includes new road frontages and a new east-west road.”

Terminology and Spelling

Aplin Martin

The legal name of the company is Aplin & Martin Consultants Ltd. Note the ampersand. This legal name is to be used only in legal clauses where the full company name is required.

In all other instances, use Aplin Martin. Do not use A&M, AM, or Aplin & Martin.

Do not use the possessive form of the company name, e.g. Aplin Martin’s history. Using the possessive form undermines the integrity of the brand name. Rewrite around the possessive form or drop the possessive, e.g. the history of Aplin Martin; Aplin Martin history.

Style Elements

Revision History

Date	Name	Description of Changes
September 2017	Alison Gresik	Created first version of style guide.