

THE ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE
Correspondence Council of Ontario



Correspondence
Style Guide

Third Edition, 2006



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Produced by the Correspondence Council of Ontario
c/o 99 Wellesley Street West, Room 4620, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1A1.

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Introduction

The Ontario Public Service Correspondence Style Guide enters its third edition with a new look and new information.

The development of the third edition of the Ontario Public Service *Correspondence Style Guide* is a reflection of the discussion about correspondence style that has taken place since the second edition was published in 2001.

This updated and expanded third edition seeks to address many of the questions that arose out of that exchange of ideas within the correspondence community. It builds on the accomplishments of the first and second editions, and strives to further encourage consistency in the way correspondence is written throughout the Ontario Public Service (OPS).

Producing a style guide that will be used across the OPS is very much a collaborative effort. The project was managed by Anthony Gullone, managing editor of the Correspondence Services Unit (CSU), Cabinet Office, and chair of the Correspondence Council of Ontario Style Guide Subcommittee.

Steven Baker from CSU served as subcommittee vice chair and had primary responsibility for drafting the guide and redesigning its layout and format. Special thanks go to Steven for his invaluable work and creativity.



For more information — or to order more copies of this guide — please contact Áine Scully, chair of the Correspondence Council of Ontario. She can be reached at 416-325-3736 and at aine.scully@cab.gov.on.ca.

Style Guide Subcommittee

The nine people below comprised the *Correspondence Style Guide* subcommittee. These individuals gave generously of their time to the project and were instrumental in the preparation of this edition.

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Acknowledgements

The style guide subcommittee would like to thank the following people for their technical advice and support.

Lorna Hawrysh (proofreading)

Richard Horenblas (proofreading)

Paul Amo (PDFs)

Phil Brideaux (photo page 31)

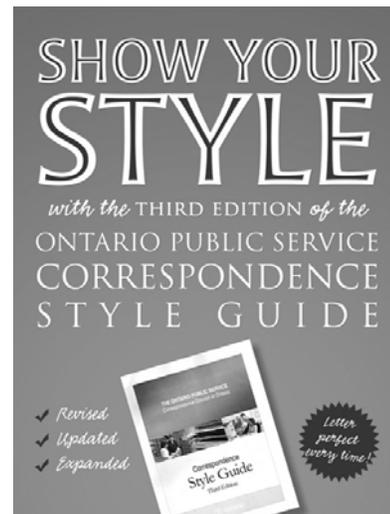
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Melanie Robert (photo library)

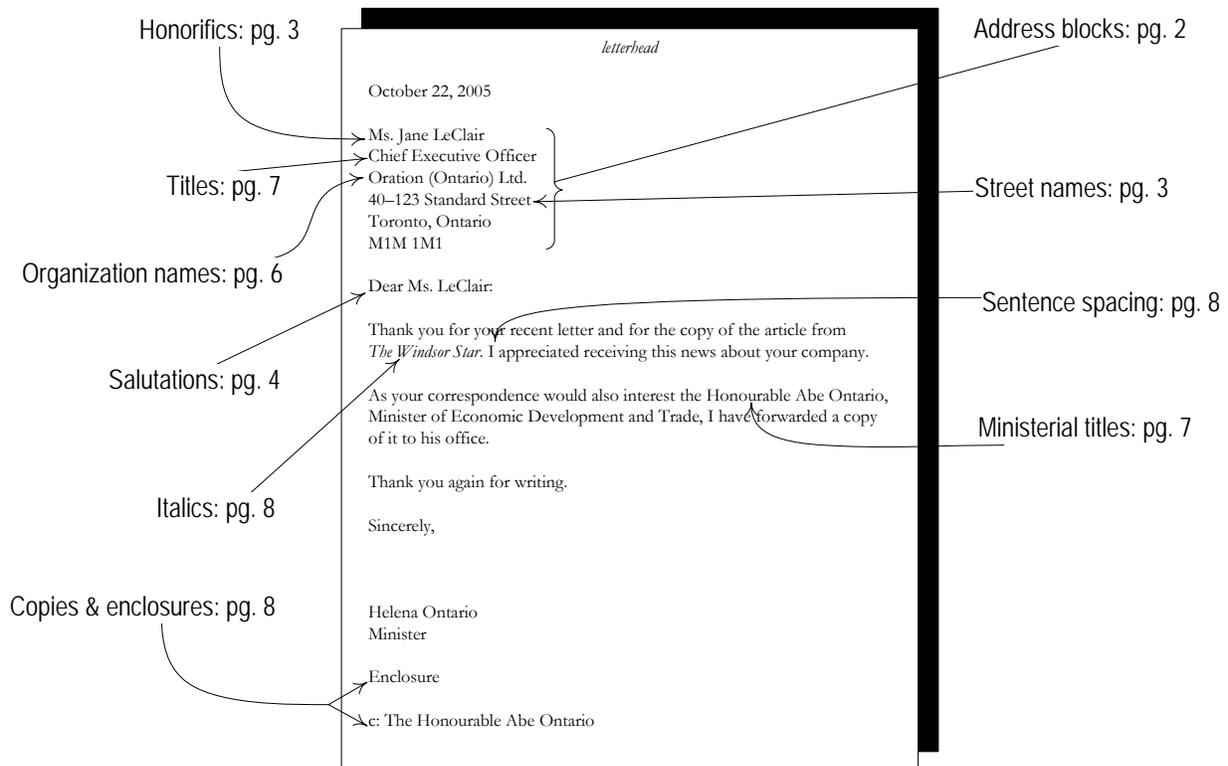


Many people showed their style producing the guide

The Shape of the Letter

You only get one chance to make a first impression: A properly formatted letter helps ensure it will be a good one.

Section one covers formatting fundamentals. The guidelines we provide will help you produce letters that have a consistent and polished look. See the sample letter below for where in this section to find the various letter elements.



The address block (Canadian)

Appearing at the top of the letter and below the date, the inside address block consists of the name, title (if applicable), company (if applicable) and address of the correspondent.

Mr. John Ontario
Director
ABC Company
40–123 Anywhere Street
Toronto, Ontario
M1M 1M1

Envelope address blocks — which must conform to Canada Post standards — differ from inside addresses. On the envelope the postal code appears on the same line as the (abbreviated) province. Two spaces separate the province and the postal code.

Ms. Helena Ontario
40–123 Anywhere Street
Toronto ON M1M 1M1



For more information on formatting Canadian address blocks — both on letters and envelopes — consult the *Canadian Postal Guide* or the Postal Standards guides published by Canada Post. They can be found at www.canadapost.ca.

The address block (foreign)

Many foreign address blocks differ from Canadian ones in how information is formatted. If foreign correspondents have provided addresses, then follow the format they use in the incoming letter.

Below is an example of a typical American address block. Two spaces separate the state name and the zip code. The acronym of the country (*USA*) is used without periods separating the letters.

Ms. Joan Reed
Director
ABC Company
40–123 Anywhere Street
Chicago, Illinois 60309
USA

Street names

Do not abbreviate street names or other address elements (highway, expressway, crescent, place, square, block, building). These address elements should be spelled in full in both the address block and in the body of the letter.

Algonquin Avenue

Essa Road

Highway 588

Third Street

Langevin Block

Frost Building South

Wellington Square

Colonel By Drive

For rural routes or postal boxes, write RR or PO Box with no punctuation or numerical sign (#).

PO Box 63

RR 6

Honorifics

Use the following abbreviations for honorifics with personal names:

Mr. Ms. Mrs.

Other honorifics may follow the name:

Jr. Sr.

Follow the preference of the author of the incoming correspondence in the use of a comma preceding *Jr.* and *Sr.*

Dr., an abbreviation for *doctor*, is used only for licensed practitioners of medicine, including veterinarians, dentists and chiropractors.

Correspondents with doctorates (*PhDs*) may indicate that they wish to be addressed as *Dr.* If that is the case, then use the *Dr.* honorific.



How do I address VIPs?

Unique titles are used by a range of VIPs — from Cabinet ministers to clergy, judges to generals, senators to sovereigns. See Section 7, “Styles of Address,” for help with titles.

Salutations

In the salutation, use *Dear*, followed by the honorific, the name and a colon.

Dear Ms. Stellato:

Thank you for your letter regarding Highway 69.

Unsure of the gender of the person to whom you are writing? Use the full name in the address block and in the salutation.

Dear Lee Stubbs:

Thank you for your letter regarding Highway 69.

When replying to a child aged 13 or under, use the child’s first name in the salutation, followed by a comma (or colon).

Dear Sally,

Thanks for writing to tell me about what you’ve been doing in your class. I really liked the story behind the pictures you drew.

This practice of addressing children by their first names should be used unless children indicate in their letters that they wish to be addressed as *Miss*, *Ms.* or *Mr.* Never address children with antiquated forms of address, such as *Master*.

As can be seen in the examples above, colons complete the salutation.

Dear Ms. Chin:

When using a first name — whether writing to a child or to an adult — a comma is preferable.

Dear Florian,

Thank you for your thoughtful card.



Children may write on their own initiative or as part of a class project

Multiple correspondents

Writers have several salutation options when addressing multiple correspondents. Use the following table as a guideline.

<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Groups</i>
Messrs.	Mesdames	Colleagues
		Associates
		Friends
		Family

When writing to multiple correspondents, address the letter to the first sender, adding *and Colleagues, Friends, Family, etc.*

Ms. Maria Ontario
Mr. Giles Ontario
Address

Mesdames Doe and Stubbs
Address

Mr. Terry Chin and Colleagues
Address

Organizations and official names

Write an organization's name as it appears in the incoming letter.

Oration Corporation

Oration Canada Ltd.

Oration (Ontario) Ltd.

Oration Union Local 42

Oration First Grace Church

Oration Cubs 1st Fort Group

Exceptions to this rule are noted below.

Organizations and familiar names

Many organizations, such as multinational companies, are referred to by familiar corporate names.

Unless referring to an organization as a legal entity, it is best to choose the familiar, rather than the official, name.

- The minister met with Ford executives, plant workers and the community.
- The minister met with Ford Motor Company of Canada Limited executives, plant workers and the community.

Referring to municipalities

Cities, towns, townships and municipalities are usually written using their familiar, rather than their legal, name.

- I was pleased to read the submission that was prepared by council for the City of Guelph.
- I was pleased to read the submission that was prepared by council for the Corporation of the City of Guelph.

Organization titles

In the line following the name in the address block, spell out titles such as *President*, *Executive Director* or *Chief Executive Officer*.

If addressing two or more people, write the name and title of each person. Follow the names and titles with the name of the organization.

Ms. Maria Stellato
President
Mr. Giles LeClair
Chief Executive Officer
Oration (Ontario) Ltd.

Ministerial titles

When referring for the first time to a Cabinet minister, the minister's name should be preceded by *the Honourable*.

I see that you have sent a copy of your letter regarding jury duty to the Honourable Ina Ontario, Attorney General.

However, when referring to a Cabinet minister in his or her capacity as an MPP, do not use *the Honourable*.

Your MPP, Ina Ontario, sent me a copy of your letter regarding school boards in your region.

Note that restrictive appositives that fall between a name and a title (or other restricting information) are not separated from the title by a comma. In the following example *my colleague* is a restrictive appositive. It specifies (restricts) one particular person (the Attorney General) in a group of many (colleagues).

- I see that you have sent a copy of your letter regarding jury duty to my colleague the Honourable Ina Ontario, Attorney General.
- I see that you have sent a copy of your letter regarding jury duty to my colleague, the Honourable Ina Ontario, Attorney General.



Multi-portfolio ministers

Referring to ministers who have more than one portfolio? Then choose their most relevant ministry as determined by the subject of the incoming letter.

Spacing between sentences

Today's word processing software automatically inserts the necessary spacing after periods. Therefore, it is not necessary to double space between sentences. The practice of single spacing between sentences is common.

Italics

Italicize the titles of publications — books, magazines and newspapers — as well as plays, movies, paintings and songs. If a definite or indefinite article is part of the title, remember to italicize it as well.

A national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* is widely read.

The AGO owns Tom Thomson's painting *The West Wind*.

The Premier quoted from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Copies and enclosures

When sending copies of a letter, leave one blank line between the signature block and the copy indicator [c:]. Also leave one blank line between the copy [c:] and blind copy [bc:] indicators.

If the full title of the person being copied has been specified in the body of the letter, it need not be repeated in the copy line. In the example below, we are copying *the Honourable Sasha Ontario, Minister of X*, whose full title appeared in the body of the letter.

c: The Honourable Sasha Ontario
 Iris Ontario, MPP, Lower Lakes

To ensure that the blind copy indication is only included on the copies sent to the people whose names appear after [bc:], we recommend that you list the names of blind copy recipients on a separate page.

When sending enclosures, follow the format below, with one space between the signature and *Enclosure*, and one space between *Enclosure* and [c:].

Name

Enclosure

c: The Honourable Rudy Ontario

Capitalization

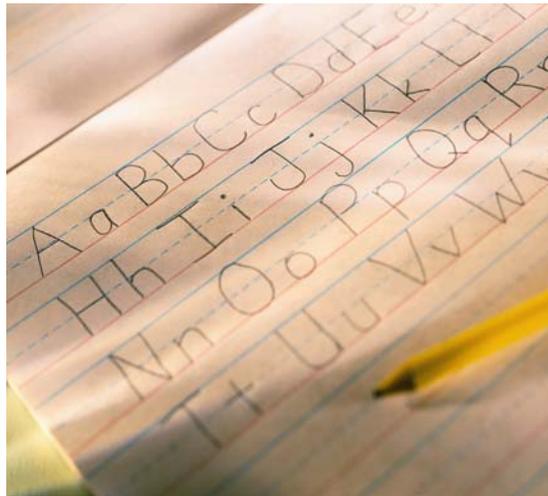
Writers throughout the OPS are capitalizing fewer words than in previous years.

As *The Communications Style Guide* (2004) of the OPS puts it, “Government writing often contains excessive capitalization.” Chances are that you see such excessive capitalization daily — in job titles, program names, business terminology or departmental jargon.

We agree with our colleagues who prepared *The Communications Style Guide*, as well as with the authors of *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and *Caps and Spelling*, that writers should choose the lower case over the upper case where a reasonable choice exists.

This section discusses this subject in greater detail.

It also gives examples of government terms that are written in lower case letters if used as common nouns.



Still an elementary matter?

Finally, you may want to keep these three principles in mind:

1. Excessive capitalization can affect the flow of a letter.
2. Less capitalization means less formality.
3. The trend throughout the OPS is less capitalization.

Organization names

Capitalize all proper names, including those of organizations.

Ombudsman Ontario
 Belleville Chamber of Commerce
 TD Bank Financial Group
 Rotary Club of Timmins
 Sarnia Sting Hockey Club

Informal references

Many organization names can be put in lower case when used as a general reference — or when using a shortened version of the name of an organization.

- The bank credited its record profits to the hard work of the board.
- The Bank credited its record profits to the hard work of the Board.

Capitalizing articles

Articles (*a, the*) are usually not part of an organization's proper name; therefore, they are not capitalized.

If you are sure that an article is part of an organization's proper name, then capitalize the article. If in doubt about the organization's preference in this regard, consult the group's letterhead or website.

Thank you for your letter about The Hospital for Sick Children.

Many organizations, including The Change Foundation, are working to help improve health care delivery in our province.

Government terms

Capitalize official names (proper names) of all levels of governments and their departments, agencies, commissions, boards, acts, bills and the like.

Do not capitalize when using a shortened version of the name or when making an informal reference (common nouns).

<i>Proper name</i>	<i>Common noun</i>
The Government of Ontario	The Ontario government
The Legislative Assembly of Ontario	The Ontario legislature
The Ontario Labour Relations Board	The board
The Standing Committee on Estimates	The committee
The council of the City of Sarnia	The members of city council
The Minister of Finance	The minister
The Highway Traffic Act	The act

Legislative terms are proper names and are therefore capitalized.

Premier	First Reading
Cabinet	Second Reading
Executive Council	Third Reading
Royal Assent	

The Smoke-Free Ontario Act received Third Reading in June 2005 . . . upon receiving Royal Assent, the act will ban smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces.

Lower case descriptive or generic names

- The ministers of Education and Transportation met with the premiers of Ontario and Alberta.
- The Ministers of Education and Transportation met with the Premiers of Ontario and Alberta.

Geographic areas

In general, use capitals to refer to specific geographic place names or regions.

Sault Ste. Marie

National Capital Region

Georgian Bay

South America

Lanark County

British Isles

Use lower case for adjectives, such as *eastern* or *western*, when they do not refer to a specific geographic region.

eastern Canada

southwestern Ontario

If in doubt about the spelling of geographic areas or place names, please consult *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* or visit the website of the Secretariat of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names, www.geonames.nrcan.gc.ca/info/gnbc_e.php.



Northern Ontario or *northern Ontario*

The trend throughout the OPS is to write northern Ontario with a lower case *n*.

Groups of people

Use capitals to refer to a group of people (even if used idiomatically).

Ontarians

Maritimers

Melanesians

Aboriginal peoples

When referring to Canada's Aboriginal peoples, use discretion and be sensitive to current usage. For instance, the Canadian *Constitution Act, 1982* indicated three groups as the original peoples of Canada: Indians, Inuit and Métis.

Although the term *First Nations* has displaced *Indians*, we still use the latter word when referring to the *Indian Act*, Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, Treaty Indians and Registered Indians.

On the other hand, the current trend for collective noun usage suggests that the terms *natives* and *native people* are being displaced by *Aboriginals* and *Aboriginal peoples*. Not all Aboriginal groups across Canada agree with this trend, however. For correspondence purposes, use the term indicated in the incoming letter.

Acronyms

An **acronym** is “a word usu[ally] pronounced as such, formed from the initial letters of other words” (*The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*). Acronyms are common and are capitalized without periods between the letters.

DART (Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment)

FRO (Family Responsibility Office)

OSAP (Ontario Student Assistance Program)

WIN (Workforce Information Network)

Initialisms

An **initialism** is formed in the same manner as an acronym. It differs from an acronym, however, in that it is not usually pronounced as a word. Rather, a reader pronounces each letter in the initialism. Initialisms are also capitalized and written without periods.

OPS (Ontario Public Service)

ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program)

FOI (Freedom of Information)

Acronyms and articles

An acronym is typically preceded by the definite article only when the acronym is used adjectivally.

The OSAP-related announcement got wide media coverage.

When used as proper nouns, initialisms are usually preceded by the definite article *the*.

To apply for the ODSP, the following guides are available.

When an abbreviation or acronym is preceded by an indefinite article (*a* or *an*), base your choice of article on the way the abbreviation or acronym is read aloud.

To register for an RST vendor permit, contact your local office.

You can take a GO train to Union Station.

First references to acronyms

Your reader may not know the meaning of an initialism or acronym, so spell or define it the first time it is used and follow with the short form in brackets. Keep in mind that many of the terms commonly used in government are not known to an average reader.

The Family Responsibility Office (FRO) receives every support order made by a court in Ontario.

Further references to the term in the letter can use the acronym already cited.

The FRO works under the authority of the *Family Responsibility and Support Arrears Enforcement Act, 1996* (FRSAEA).

Some acronyms or initialisms are widely understood. Below are examples you can use without a first reference or definition.

MP

TVO

MPP

LCBO

CBC

GST

Abbreviations

Abbreviations are shortened forms of words or phrases. They are used with periods.

Mr. (abbreviation of mister)

Mrs. (abbreviation of mistress)

reg. (abbreviation of regulation)

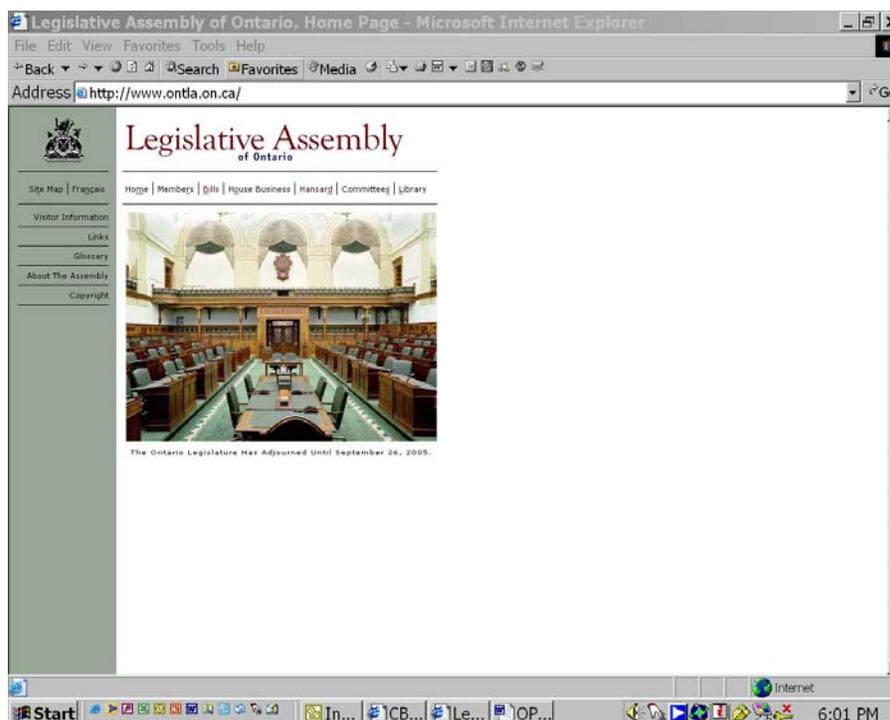
mgmt. (abbreviation of management)

With the exception of their use in salutations (e.g., *Mr.*), abbreviations rarely appear in correspondence.

Legislative and Legal References

Ignorance of the law is no excuse — nor is ignorance of correct legal and legislative style.

References to federal and provincial legislation and regulations, municipal bylaws and legal citations are subject to strict style guidelines. Keep in mind that the style changes as a bill receives Royal Assent and becomes law. When making reference to a bill or an act, it is always a good idea to check its correct name and, in the case of a bill, current status on the website of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, www.ontla.on.ca. Also see page 11 of this guide for capitalization of government terms.



A good bookmark

Acts and statutes

Italicize names of acts but not the article preceding them. Bear in mind that, in most cases, the date of the legislation is included as part of the act's name.

The *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996*

Certain statutes should be treated as acts and cited accordingly.

The *Criminal Code of Canada*

Bills

Names of bills are **not** italicized.

Bill 3, Safe Drinking Water Act

But italicize the name of an act within the name of a bill.

Bill 352, An Act to Amend the *Highway Traffic Act*

Second references to acts and bills

While the first reference to an act or bill must use its name in full, a second reference can use the common, lower case reference to the legislation.

Thank you for writing regarding the *Public Service Act*. I was pleased to hear your thoughts about the act [**not Act**].

Regulations, bylaws and legal citations

To ensure clarity, refer to regulations as follows:

O. Reg. [number] of [legislation]

For municipal bylaws, provide the full title, including the bylaw number.

City of Toronto, Bylaw No. 5156, Bylaw on Amusement Machines and Halls

For legal citations, italicize the name of the case.

As cited in *Smith v. Smith* . . .

Numerical Expressions

A careful letter writer knows how to present numbers and measures clearly — and when to use numerals and not words.

Typographical appearance, ease of reading and stylistic convention have all had an influence on the way we style numbers in OPS correspondence. While people generally comprehend numerals more readily than the words and phrases that represent numbers, there are instances where numbers should be written out in words.

Numbers less than 10

Use words for cardinal and ordinal numbers less than 10.

There will be seven members on the commission.

On the second day, the minister spoke first.

Numbers greater than 10

Use numerals for cardinal and ordinal numbers greater than or equal to 10.

The annex, signed in 2001 by the same 10 parties, reinforced the principles of the Great Lakes Charter.

The minister remarked that this was the 11th time she had spoken in support of the legislation.

When starting a sentence with a number, hyphenate numbers 21 through 99.

Twenty-five community colleges and 10 universities in the region provide opportunities for career development.

Numbers and sentence formatting

When using an expression consisting of both numbers and measures, the whole expression should appear on the same line.

- The Government of Ontario will invest \$520 million in a new fund to boost ethanol production.
- The Government of Ontario will invest \$520 million in a new fund to boost ethanol production.

Numbers and sentence position

Avoid starting sentences with numerals. If you need to start a sentence with a number, spell it out in full.

Three hundred stakeholder groups were consulted.
Fifteen million dollars were saved by the new policy.

Never begin a sentence with a year. Instead, rewrite the sentence so that the year reference appears in a different location.

- Ontario's municipalities will receive more than \$223 million in 2005–06, the first year of the five-year agreement.
- 2005–06, the first year of the five-year agreement, will see Ontario's municipalities receiving more than \$223 million.

Telephone numbers

Telephone area codes may be expressed in brackets; however, for areas with mandatory 10-digit dialing, the brackets are omitted.

Note that telephone numbers — as well as street numbers and names in addresses — should also appear on one line.

416-535-8501
(519) 622-7543

Measures

For the first reference in a letter, spell the unit of measure in full, followed by its abbreviated form in brackets.

The speed limit is 100 kilometres per hour (km/h).

In subsequent references, you can use the abbreviated form.

You could receive a ticket for travelling faster than 100 km/h.

Metric system

The metric system is Canada's official system of measurement. Use metric measures unless they pose a barrier to communication, as they may with a person who was taught imperial measurement, or with a correspondent from the USA.

In these instances, you will prove yourself to be a helpful and courteous writer by offering the numeric information in metric, followed by the imperial measurement.



Not everyone has gone metric

The imperial equivalent can be included in brackets, or offset with an em dash.

Thanks for asking about the price of peaches in southern Ontario. A recent market survey found the fruit averaged \$2.20 per kilogram — or \$1.49 per pound.

Money

References to sums of money should be expressed in numerals to ensure clarity.

\$500 million

\$1.6 billion

Hyphenate sums of money when used as a compound modifier before a noun.

A \$500-million fund was announced by the minister.

For monetary units preceded by a symbol, a decimal point and zeros are not required.

\$2

\$2.00

For monetary units that require a reference to the country of origin, use the following guidelines:

The government spent \$2 billion Cdn on the program.

The government spent \$2 billion US on the program.

The government spent €2 billion on the program.

Percentages

Per cent (not *percent*) is usually spelled out. The “one to nine” and “10 and higher” rule applies to numbers preceding *per cent*. Use the following format:

Reports indicate that four per cent of Ontarians believe . . .

Over 55 per cent of Ontarians polled believe . . .

Use the percentage symbol (%) sparingly, as when presenting statistical data.

Ontario Economy Grows in 2004

	2004	2003
Ontario's real GDP growth	2.4%	1.6%
Final domestic demand	3.2%	3.9%

Time

On the hour, times are written — without zeros and with numerals — as follows:

The meeting began at 8 a.m.

Times not on the hour are written with numerals and with colons separating the hour indicators from the minute indicators:

The meeting scheduled for 8 a.m. will now begin at 8:30 a.m.

Dates

Do not use ordinal numbers in the date. And when the date is listed as month, day, year, separate the day from the year by a comma and the year from the text by a comma.

Thank you for your letter of June 30, 2005, regarding tuition.

Thank you for your letter of June 30th, 2005 regarding tuition.

Years (fiscal)

References to a fiscal year are written in the form yyyy–yy. The year ranges are separated by an en dash. To insert an en dash in Microsoft Word, type Ctrl + – (the minus sign on the numeric keypad).

This year's budget, which contains no new taxes, forecasts program expenditures to the 2008–09 fiscal year.

Numbered or bulleted lists

Want to start a healthy debate among writers? Ask them how to format numbered and bulleted lists. Since one of the aims of the *Correspondence Style Guide* is to settle such issues, we offer the following guidelines on punctuating and formatting vertical lists.

Start vertical lists with a statement and a colon

Lists are introduced with a statement followed by a colon. Typically, the statement is a full sentence. However, the statement can also be a sentence fragment — particularly if the items in the list complete the thought or instruction of the sentence.

The things most frequently requested by people visiting Government Information Centres are:

1. answers to questions about government services
2. referrals to government staff
3. access to free government publications.

Punctuate and capitalize vertical lists consistently

How writers punctuate or capitalize items after the colon depends on a number of factors in the vertical list.

If the items in the numbered or bulleted list are not sentences (as in the example above), then do not capitalize each item that begins a list or close each item with a period. A period is necessary only in the final item.

If the items in the numbered or bulleted list are complete sentences, then capitalize each item that begins a list and complete each item with a period.

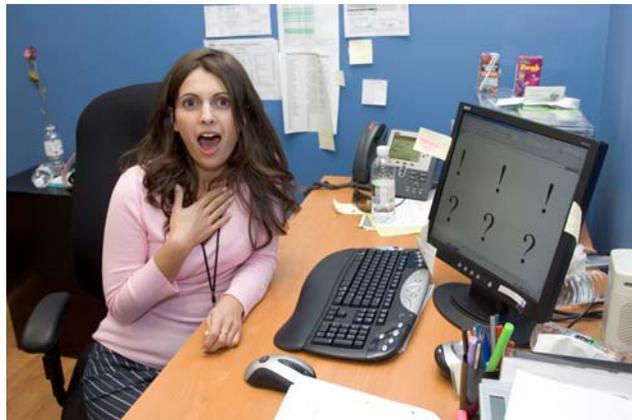
Have you visited a Government Information Centre lately? You will be pleased to find the following:

- Centre staff can provide you with a range of government information.
- Centre staff can offer a workstation with access to the Internet to search government programs and services.
- Centre staff can locate the free government publications you need.

Punctuation

Just as a facial expression or gesture adds emphasis to the spoken word, a well-placed punctuation mark can aid in communicating your message.

Punctuation has evolved over the years into a fairly standard set of rules that tend to make the written language more readily understandable. We use terminal marks such as the period, the question mark and the exclamation mark to end sentences; we use commas, semicolons and dashes to separate elements within a sentence; and we insert pairs of commas, dashes, quotation marks and brackets to enclose parts of a sentence. For consistency across the OPS and to ensure that your intended meaning is conveyed by



Punctuation gets your reader's attention

your writing, use the following rules of punctuation in your correspondence.

Vertical lists

Vertical lists — i.e., numbered or bulleted lists — can be punctuated in a number of ways. We recommend letter writers use punctuation such as periods at the end of items in vertical lists only when the items are full sentences. Otherwise, listed items should begin with lower case letters and have no punctuation at the end of the item. See the previous page for more information on such lists.

The comma

Commas usually travel in pairs.

Minister Ina Ontario, joined by Minister Seth Ontario, today announced funding for the new program.

Do not insert a comma before the final *and* or *or* in a sequence unless the sequence is complex and a comma would provide clarity.

The summit included speakers from Canada, the United States, England, Wales, Ireland and South Africa.

Use a comma preceding and following a parenthetical phrase.

The commission, having met with community groups across the province, will submit its report later this year.

To separate two independent clauses, use a comma before *and*.

The task force completed the report, and then the committee began its work.

Use a comma to separate an introductory dependent clause from the independent clause that follows.

As you stated in your letter, the minister is reviewing the recommendations.

Commas are used to offset the year when the format of a date is month/day/year.

The minister announced on February 17, 2005, that our government would introduce the bill.

If only the month and year are used, commas are not necessary.

The government announced in May 2004 that it would start receiving applications.

The colon

As noted in Section 1, the primary use of the colon in letters is to complete the salutation. Colons can also serve other purposes, however, such as introducing vertical lists.

In order to effectively convey government messaging, each news release should do the following:

- state the action
- identify the priority
- give the motive
- note the difference
- include a tag line.

Colons can also be used to stress the main point of a statement: in other words, for effect.

“Education has failed in a very serious way to convey the most important lesson science can teach: scepticism.”
— David Suzuki

In addition, colons can be used to precede the restatement of an idea or a thought, or to introduce an extended explanation.

The minister mentioned several things Ontarians could do to help their province succeed: from reading to their kids, to conserving energy, to volunteering in the community.

The semicolon

Often associated with formal writing, the semicolon is principally used to join two closely related independent clauses.

“A cautious people learns from its past; a sensible people can face its future. Canadians, on the whole, are both.”
— Desmond Morton

Care should be exercised to ensure the semicolon is used properly in correspondence. For more information about its usage, we refer you to the semicolon sections of *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The hyphen

Do not hyphenate a compound adjective if its meaning is clear and commonly understood. But use a hyphen when it is necessary to group words or to join adjectives to ensure the sentence's meaning is clear.

The government-financed programs were well received by Ontarians.

The government financed programs were well received by Ontarians.

Hyphenate compound words that precede a noun.

The school's third-grade teachers approved the curriculum.

Do not hyphenate compound words that follow a noun.

The school's teachers of the third grade approved the curriculum.

Do not hyphenate adverbs ending in *ly* that modify adjectives or participles.

The hastily assembled news conference started late.

The hastily-assembled news conference started late.

Use a hyphen to attach prefixes to nouns when there are two possible meanings.

re-cover recover

A hyphen should be used if the combination of prefix and noun results in a double vowel.

re-elect re-examine

Avoid hyphenating titles (unless so indicated in the incoming letter).

The Governor General met with Ontario's Lieutenant Governor.



Co-ordinate or coordinate?

Co-operate or cooperate?

We recommend retaining the hyphen in *co-ordinate* and *co-operate*. The Canadian Press supports these spellings.

The (non) hyphen in compound words

Certain compound words used throughout the OPS are commonly written as one word without a hyphen.

interministerial

postsecondary

intergovernmental

provincewide

The apostrophe and possessive forms

Particular attention must be paid to the use of an apostrophe to indicate the possessive case when a noun ends in *s*. For example, the possessive of **plural nouns** ending in *s* is formed by adding an apostrophe.

the boys' school

The possessive of **singular nouns** ending in an *s* or a *z* sound is usually formed by adding an apostrophe and an *s*. This extra 's, as can be seen in the examples below, indicates a *siz* or *siz* sound that also occurs when saying the word.

The press's reaction to the announcement was enthusiastic.

The Premier quoted from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Marge Simpson once worked in Lionel Hutz's realty office.

As *The Canadian Press Stylebook* explains, however, there are times when adding the extra *s* will make a word "hard to say or grate on the ear." We concur with CP and provide these examples to illustrate when not to add the 's. Again, the punctuation reflects pronunciation.

Minister Jones' announcement surprised the press.

The Premier quoted from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Homer Simpson once landed a boat on top of Ned Flanders' car.

Other apostrophe dos and don'ts

Remember to use an apostrophe in such nouns as the following:

arm's-length agency

Hudson's Bay Co.

driver's licence

New Year's Day

Do not use the apostrophe to indicate a plural.

Several MPPs attended the news conference.

Several MPP's attended the news conference.

Do not use apostrophes to indicate the possessive case of pronouns. And never confuse *its* (possessive pronoun) with *it's* (contraction of it is).

“It’s no longer Bay Street’s worst-kept secret,” said one analyst after the company confirmed it is buying back all of its shares.

Quotation marks

Use quotation marks when quoting from legislation or speeches. Avoid using quotation marks when highlighting words or phrases from incoming correspondence.

Thank you for letting me know about the “parliament” that you and your friends are staging next month.

Em dashes

Em dashes are used to precede and follow parenthetical information in a sentence (often in place of commas or parentheses). Like commas, em dashes typically come in pairs — unless the parenthetical information comes at the end of a sentence. While an em dash can be used without spacing, the most common practice is to space before and after it.

Many writers find stylistic advantages to using em dashes. They can add a conversational touch to a sentence — or reinforce key information. Other writers — and readers — may be distracted by the halting rhythms — and the abrupt stylistic shift — forced upon them by this form of punctuation.



How do I insert an em dash?

In Microsoft Word, an em dash can be inserted into your document by typing Ctrl + Alt + - (the minus sign on the numeric keypad).

Style and Usage

Writers must use clear and concise language when communicating with those who write to the provincial government.

The Government of Ontario receives letters from people with wide differences in their ability to read and write. Many do not speak English as a first language. That is why it is important for responses to contain plain language.

In some cases it may be difficult to write plainly — as when discussing legal information. Always keep your audience in mind. Judge your readers’ knowledge about an issue. Provide information that will benefit correspondents and that they will understand, or refer them to resources (e.g., a 1-800 number) where additional explanations can be given.

In this section we offer some other general suggestions and ideas that will help you to successfully — and simply — connect with your reader.

Keep it simple

Use short, concise sentences and paragraphs. Be direct and to the point. Avoid bureaucratic terms, jargon and “buzz phrases” such as *going forward*. Delete unnecessary adjectives, adverbs and intensifiers.



Thank you for sending me resolutions from the 6/70 Area Economic Diversification Committee.



I appreciate your providing me with copies of the official resolution from the 6/70 Area Economic Diversification Committee clarifying the intent of its suggested amendments.

Choose the active voice

Whenever possible, write in the active voice rather than the passive voice. In the active voice, the word order is subject–verb–object.

- The committee will review all applications for new licences in early April.
- In early April, all applications for new licences will be reviewed by the committee.

Emphasize the positive

People are generally more receptive to positive messages.

- You must pass the examination to qualify for admission.
- If you fail to pass the examination, you will not qualify for admission.

Avoid restating negative comments that may be contained in an incoming letter.

- Thank you for your letter about funding.
- Thank you for your letter about funding cuts.

You or your?

Possessive pronouns are used with a gerund — a word ending in *ing* that functions as a noun — to indicate ownership.

- I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention.
- I appreciate you bringing this matter to my attention.



Style agreement keeps letters consistent

Avoid biased language

In today's workplace, few jobs or professions are the exclusive domain of men or women. To reflect this reality, the language we use to describe someone's profession should be gender neutral.

The examples below illustrate this point.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Use</i>
businessman, businesswoman	business person, executive
chairman	chair
fireman	firefighter
fisherman	angler, commercial fisher
layman	layperson
manpower	workforce, staff, personnel
middle man	intermediary
policeman	police officer
spokesman	spokesperson, representative
workman	worker, employee

Use plain words and phrases

The table below is a selection of common words that can replace more complex ones. For a more wide-ranging list, see the “Plain Words” section of *Caps and Spelling*.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
accomplish	do
activate	begin
allocate	give
approximately	about
ascertain	find out
attempt	try
disseminate	send out, distribute
endeavour	try
facilitate	ease, help, make easier
going forward	from now on, in the future (or delete)
hopefully	I am hopeful
impact (verb)	have an effect
(have an) impact on	affect, influence
in lieu of	instead of
indicate	show, suggest, hint, imply
input/feedback	advice, ideas, comments, suggestions
inquire	ask
linkages	links
objective	goal
obtain	get, gain, come by
optimum	best, greatest, most
necessitate	need, require
regarding	about
request	ask
strategize	plan
sufficient	enough, plenty
utilize	use

Delete unnecessary words

You can cut out many words and phrases without any loss to your intended meaning. The table below illustrates how such words or phrases can be replaced with simple words. For a more extensive list of plain language terms, refer to the “Plain Words” section of *Caps and Spelling*.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Try</i>
adequate number of	enough
at the present time	now
by means of	by
during such time	when
has the capacity	can, is able
in respect of	for
in the absence of	without
in the event that	if
in order to	to
in view of the fact	because
on the part of	by
subsequent to	after
until such time	until
with a view to	to
with reference to	about
with respect to	on, for, from, about, as for
with the exception of	except

Use *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*

Writers throughout the OPS use *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, as their authority for spelling Canadian English. The editors of *Caps and Spelling* also cite this dictionary as their primary reference.

You may want to compile a list of words frequently misspelled in your ministry — or preferred spellings that are exceptions to those noted in *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* or *Caps and Spelling*. The table on the next page includes examples of both categories.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Use</i>
ageing	aging
benefitted	benefited
centered	centred
defense	defence
enquiry	inquiry
fulfill	fulfil
honourary	honorary
license (noun)	licence (noun)
licence (verb)	license (verb)
judgement	judgment
Medicare (US program)	medicare (Canadian system)
practise (noun)	practice (noun)
practice (verb)	practise (verb)

Use preferred terms for disability issues

The lexicon of words and phrases that the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario includes on the “Word Choices” page of its website¹ is designed to help writers choose language “that is neither demeaning nor hurtful, and terms that are preferred by people with disabilities.”

We have included some of this lexicon in the table below.

<i>Instead of</i>	<i>Use</i>
Aged / elderly	Seniors, older adults
Differently abled	Person with a disability
Disabled (the)	People with disabilities
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability

¹ www.mcass.gov.on.ca/accessibility/en/main/preferredterms.htm

Styles of Address

Correct titles are more than a matter of courtesy; they are a part of protocol and must be used.



Formal occasions demand formal titles

Finding the right style of address is something you may do every day — or once a year. Fortunately, there are experts within the OPS to help you sort out VIPs.

Start with the Office of International Relations and Protocol. You can put your

question to a protocol co-ordinator there by calling 416-325-8535.

You can also check the online advice of the federal Department of Canadian Heritage at its “Styles of address” website (see page 48 for the link). Much of the information in this section is courtesy of that site.

The monarch

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
The Queen	Her Majesty The ² Queen	Your Majesty:

Federal dignitaries

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
The Governor General of Canada	His/Her Excellency the Right Honourable <name> ³	Excellency:
Former Governor General	The Right Honourable <name>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Prime Minister of Canada	The Right Honourable <name> ⁴	Dear Prime Minister: ⁵
Former Prime Minister	The Right Honourable <name>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Speaker of the House of Commons	The Honourable <name>	Dear Mr. Speaker: Dear Madam Speaker:
Cabinet minister (House of Commons)	The Honourable <name> ⁶ Minister of <department>	Dear Minister:
Former Cabinet minister	The Honourable <name> ⁷	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Senator	The Honourable <name> Senator	Dear Senator:
	Senator the Honourable <name> (if also a federal Cabinet member)	
Former Senator	The Honourable <name> ⁸	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
MP (not a minister)	Mr./Ms. <name>, MP <name of riding>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:

² Articles are always capitalized in titles used with The Royal Family.

³ The Governor General may have other titles, such as CC, CMM, COM, CD, PC, QC.

⁴ The Prime Minister may have other titles, such as MP, PC, QC.

⁵ Never write *Mr. Prime Minister* or *Madam Prime Minister*.

⁶ The minister may have other titles, such as MP, PC, QC.

⁷ Federal Cabinet ministers retain the title “Honourable” for life. As members of the Privy Council, they may also take the postnominal title PC.

⁸ Senators retain the title “Honourable” for life.

Provincial / Territorial dignitaries

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Lieutenant Governor	His/Her Honour the Honourable <name> Lieutenant Governor of < >	Your Honour:
Former Lieutenant Governor	The Honourable <name> ⁹	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Premier of a province or territory	The Honourable ¹⁰ <name> Premier of < >	Dear Premier:
Speaker of a provincial / territorial legislature	The Honourable <name> Speaker <legislative body> ¹¹	Dear Mr. Speaker: Dear Madam Speaker:
Provincial / territorial Cabinet minister	The Honourable ¹⁰ <name> Minister of <ministry>	Dear Minister:
Leader of the Official Opposition	Mr./Ms. <name>, MPP ¹² Leader, Official Opposition	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Leader, opposition party, (not Official Opposition)	Mr./Ms. <name>, MPP ¹² Leader, _____ Party	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Parliamentary Assistant	Mr./Ms. <name> Parliamentary Assistant to . . .	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Member of a provincial / territorial legislature	Mr./Ms. <name>, MPP ¹² <riding>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:

Aboriginal leaders

<i>Leader</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Grand Chief	Grand Chief <name>	Dear Grand Chief <surname>:
Chief	Chief <name>	Dear Chief <surname>:

⁹ Lieutenant governors retain the title *Honourable* for life.

¹⁰ A premier or provincial Cabinet minister retains the *Honourable* for life only if a member of the Privy Council.

¹¹ In Ontario the Speaker's title is: Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. The Speaker has the title the *Honourable* only while in office.

¹² or MNA, MHA, MLA.

Diplomatic dignitaries

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Ambassador to Canada	His/Her Excellency <name> Ambassador of < >	Dear Ambassador:
High Commissioner of a country to Canada	His/Her Excellency <name> High Commissioner for < > to Canada	Dear High Commissioner:
Canadian ambassador abroad	Mr./Ms. <name> Ambassador of Canada to < >	Dear Ambassador:
Canadian high commissioner abroad	Mr./Ms. <name> High Commissioner for Canada to < >	Dear High Commissioner:
Consul General	Mr./Ms. <name> Consul General	Dear Consul General:

Municipal dignitaries

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Mayor	His/Her Worship <name> Mayor <city/town name>	Dear Mayor <surname>:
Reeve or Warden	Mr./Ms. <name>: Reeve/Warden	Dear Reeve <surname>: Dear Warden <surname>:

Judiciary

Ontario Court of Justice

<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Chief Justice	The Honourable <name> Chief Justice Ontario Court of Justice	Dear Chief Justice <surname>:
Regional senior judges	The Honourable <name> Regional Senior Judge for the Region Ontario Court of Justice	Dear Regional Senior Judge <surname>:
Provincially appointed judges	The Honourable Mr./Madam Justice <name> Ontario Court of Justice	Your Honour: Dear Mr./Madam Justice <surname>:
Justices of the peace	His/Her Worship <name> Justice of the Peace Ontario Court of Justice	Your Worship:

*Superior Court of Justice or Court of Appeal for Ontario*¹³

<i>Judiciary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Chief Justice	The Honourable <name> Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Justice The Honourable <name> Chief Justice of Ontario	Dear Chief Justice <surname> :
Regional senior judges	The Honourable Mr./Madam Justice <name> Regional Senior Judge for the Region Superior Court of Justice	Dear Regional Senior Judge <surname>:
Federally appointed judges (Superior Court of Justice)	The Honourable Mr./Madam Justice <name> Superior Court of Justice	Your Honour or Dear Mr./Madam Justice <surname>:
Federally appointed judges (Court of Appeal for Ontario)	The Honourable Justice <name> Court of Appeal for Ontario	Dear Justice <surname>:

¹³ Upon retirement, judges from the Superior Court of Justice and the Court of Appeal for Ontario take the honorific *The Honourable* [name]

Religious dignitaries (Protestant)

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Present Moderator (United Church of Canada and Presbyterian Church in Canada)	The Right Reverend <name> Moderator of <church>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Past Moderator (United Church of Canada and Presbyterian Church in Canada)	The Very Reverend <name> Moderator of <church>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:
Minister	The Reverend <name>	Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:

Religious dignitaries (Anglican)

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Archbishop	The Most Reverend <name> Archbishop of <diocese>	Dear Archbishop <surname>:
Bishop	The Right Reverend <name> Bishop of <diocese>	Dear Bishop <surname>:
Archdeacon	The Venerable <name> Archdeacon	Dear Archdeacon <surname>:
Canon	The Reverend Canon <name>	Dear Canon <surname>:
Minister	The Reverend <name>	Dear Father <surname>: Dear Mr./Ms. <surname>:

Religious dignitaries (Roman Catholic)

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
The Pope	His Holiness Pope <name>	Your Holiness:
Cardinal	His Eminence <name>	Your Eminence:
Archbishop	The Most Reverend <name> Archbishop of <diocese>	Your Grace:
Bishop	The Most Reverend <name> Bishop of <diocese>	Dear Bishop <surname>:
Priest	The Reverend <name>	Dear Father <surname>:
Nun	The Reverend Sister <name>	Dear Sister <surname>:

Religious dignitaries (Jewish)

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Rabbi	Rabbi <name>	Dear Rabbi <surname>:

Religious dignitaries (Muslim)

<i>Dignitary</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Imam	Imam <name>	Dear Imam <surname>:

Canadian Forces

<i>Officer</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
General	General <name>	Dear General:
Captain	Captain <name>	Dear Captain:
Colonel	Colonel <name>	Dear Colonel:
Sergeant	Sergeant <name>	Dear Sergeant <surname>:
Private	Private <name>	Dear Private <surname>:

Police officers

<i>Officer</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Chief	Chief <name> <name of police service>	Dear Chief <surname>:
Staff Superintendent	Staff Superintendent <name>	Dear Staff Superintendent <surname>:
Constable	Constable <name>	Dear Constable <surname>:

Medical doctors

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Address reference</i>	<i>Salutation</i>
Licensed practitioners of medicine, including veterinarians and dentists	Dr. <name>	Dear Dr. <surname>:

E-Words

The computer lexicon is filled with jargon and technical terms. Over the next several pages we provide some consistency for the use of terms used in information technology and technical communications.

@

A symbol pronounced *at sign* or *at*. Separates the user name from the domain name in e-mail addresses.

blog

n. & *v.* • *n.* Slang term for *weblog*. • *v.* The act of writing or maintaining a weblog.

bookmark

n. & *v.* • *n.* A saved website address. • *v.* Method of saving useful website addresses in a browser.

browse

v. Manual activity of finding websites. When using a search engine, use terms *find* or *search*. Avoid using the term *surf*.

browser

n. A program that downloads and views webpages, e.g., Microsoft Explorer, Netscape Navigator.

CD-ROM

n. Acronym for *Compact Disc – Read-Only Memory*. *CD-ROM disc* is redundant.

check box

n. A type of interface that displays a selection choice with a check mark. Possible actions are *select* and *clear*.

click

v. An action using the buttons of the computer mouse or other input device. Do not use *click in* or *click on*.

compact disc

n. An optical disc for digitally encoding data. Acronym is *CD*.

database

n. A collection of data arranged for search and retrieval.

double-click

v. An action using the buttons of the computer mouse or other input device.

download

v. The process of transferring data, a file or a program to a local computer.

drop-down menu

n. Type of menu that appears when a pointer is placed on it.

e-

adj. Prefix abbreviation for *electronic*. Hyphenate all e-words (*e-form*, *e-government*, *e-mail*, *e-etc.*)

e-mail

n. A message sent over a computer network. Singular is *e-mail*; plural is *e-mail messages* (not *e-mails*). Do not use as a verb (e.g., thanks for e-mailing me). Proper use: Thank you for your e-mail (one e-mail). Thank you for your e-mail messages (more than one e-mail).

field

n. Location in a window reserved for a specified piece of information.

file name

n. & *adj.* *File name* can be used as an adjective or a noun.

firewall

n. Hardware, software or combination of the two that provides security against unauthorized access to a computer network.

hard copy

n. A paper version of an electronic file. Avoid using as an adjective.

hardware

n. The physical equipment of the computer and network.

home page

n. The main page of any website. Do not use *start page*.

HTML

n. Acronym for *Hypertext Markup Language*. Used to structure text and multimedia images and to set up links between documents.

incoming

adj. Refers to e-mail messages that are being downloaded.

Internet

n. The system of networks that connect computers around the world using the TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol).



Correspondence technology helps process incoming and outgoing mail

intranet

n. A privately maintained computer network that can be accessed by authorized people.

keyword

n. Word used as reference point for finding information.

link

n. A text or graphic users click to go to an Internet/intranet site, page or file.

log on / log off

v. To create or end a session. Preferable to *log in / log out*.

online / offline

adv. Connected to/not connected to a system or network.

plug-in

n. Software that adds features or functions to another piece of software, e.g., Shockwave, RealAudio, etc.

program

n. & v. • n. A sequence of coded instructions that enables a computer to perform particular actions. Do not use the term *application* unless referring to software development.
• v. Creating such instructions.

pull-down menu

n. Similar to *drop-down menu* but requires user to click before information in menu is revealed.

scroll

v. To cause displayed text or graphics to move up, down or across a window.

search

v. Use *search* as a verb, not a noun. Avoid *search your document*; use *search through your document* instead.

*scroll bar*

n. The interface tool to scroll within a window frame.

tab

n. Do not use as a verb. Avoid *Tab through the dialog box*; write *Use the TAB key to move through a dialog box*.

text box

n. Box where text may be added.

URL

n. Acronym for *Uniform Resource Locator*, or website address (e.g.,

www.gov.ca). Keep the entire URL on one line. If a URL is too long to fit on one line, provide the home page address along with direction on how to locate the desired page or location. Use plain text. Do not underline, bold or italicize the URL. Begin the string with *www* (no need to start with *http*).

user-friendly

adj. Designed to make the user's task as easy as possible.

user name

n. Name used to obtain access to a computer system.

(the) Web

n. Shortened form for the World Wide Web.

webmaster

n. Person responsible for the maintenance of a website.

webpage

n. A document on the World Wide Web, often hyperlinked to other documents.

website

n. Collection or grouping of webpages (e.g., Government of Ontario website).

World Wide Web (WWW)

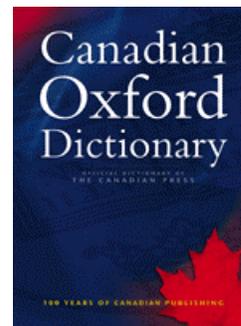
n. The complete set of documents residing on all Internet servers that use the HTTP protocol.

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The one to own

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Styles of address

“Styles of address” of the Protocol section of the Department of Canadian Heritage website. www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/pe/address1_e.cfm

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Styles of address - Microsoft Internet Explorer". The address bar displays "http://www.pch.gc.ca/progs/cpsc-ccsp/pe/address2_e.cfm". The page content includes a header with the Canadian flag and "Canada" logo, a navigation menu with "Francais", "Contact Us", "Help", "Search", and "Canada Site", and a "Ceremonial and Canadian Symbols Promotion" banner. A sidebar on the left lists "Subjects" (A-Z Index, Arts and Culture, Citizenship and Identity, Diversity and Multiculturalism, Internationalism, Sport, Youth) and "The Department" (About us, What's new, Proactive Disclosure, Application Forms, Funding Programs, Legislation, Organizational View, Publications, Regional Offices). The main content area is titled "Styles of address" and features a photograph of a group of people in formal attire. Below the photo is a bulleted list of dignitary categories: The Royal Family, Federal dignitaries, Provincial/territorial dignitaries, Foreign dignitaries, Religious dignitaries, and Others. A section titled "Federal dignitaries" contains a table with the following data:

Dignitary	Salutation	Final Salutation	In conversation
Governor General of Canada	Excellency:	Yours truly,	"Your Excellency" or "Excellency" first, then "Sir" or "Ma'am"
His/Her Excellency the Right			

E-Words

Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, Third Edition. Microsoft Press, 2004.