

BCCC Writing Style Guidelines

Contents

Introduction	2
Word Processing Software.....	2
Document-naming Convention.....	2
Font Characteristics	3
Page Setup	3
Heading Styles.....	4
Spacing	5
Bullets	5
Outlines.....	5
Point of View	5
Verb Tense	6
Word Choice	6
Content	6
Phrasing.....	7
Spelling	8
Contractions.....	8
Capitalization	8
Numbers	9
Dates and Times.....	10
Percentages.....	10
Abbreviations	11
Italics.....	11
Possessives	11
Hyperlinks	12
Split Infinitives	13
Appendix A1 – Exceptions to BCCC Writing Style Guidelines	13
Appendix A2 – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Writing Style Compliance.....	13

BCCC Writing Style Guidelines

Introduction

The BCCC SACSCOC Leadership Team Committee originally developed the *Writing Style Guidelines* in June 2013 for use by all BCCC faculty and staff involved in the SACSCOC Compliance Certification process. In 2015, the guidelines were updated to include the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance – see [Appendix A2](#) of this document.

In recognition of the need to enhance the quality of, maintain consistency in all College documents and publications, and follow ADA compliance, the College's SACSCOC Leadership Team Committee adopted these guidelines as the standard to be followed in the preparation and publishing of all College documents. This document will be housed on the [BCCC Handbooks and Manuals webpage](#). These guidelines are intended to promote the proper use of business English while, at the same time, ensure a continuity of expression to result in clear, concise writing. Its adoption and use are not intended to restrict or inhibit creative expression.

These guidelines are a work in progress. The editors invite all who use it to correspond with them directly should any contents be confusing or misleading or if revisions (including additions and deletions) need to be made. It is anticipated that this document will be republished (electronically) to reflect such revisions. It is the responsibility of each BCCC employee to follow ADA compliance.

Word Processing Software

Microsoft Word

Document-naming Convention

A naming convention allows useful information to be deduced from the names based on regularities.

When naming the document, first type BCCC, then underscore, then OwnerName (use committee, department, or functional area title with no spaces between words), then underscore, then SACSCOC standard, then date (four-digit year, followed by two-digit month, followed by two-digit day, with no spaces between numbers). If Document Name must contain numbers that would ordinarily be separated by periods or dashes, use underscore instead.

Examples (generic, followed by specific):

(Generic Example) BCCC_OwnerName_Standard_Date

(Specific Example) BCCC_SACSCOCLeadershipTeam_Standard_200
80624

Font Characteristics

1. Use Arial, plain.
2. Use 12 pt except within headers and footers (8 pt).
3. Avoid bolding unless where appropriate (such as with headings).
4. Avoid use of colored fonts (except for links, which will be in blue ink).

Page Setup

1. Set page orientation to portrait (8.5" by 11").
2. Set the margins on top, bottom, and right at one inch. Set the left margin to 1.5 inches (to accommodate binding of hard copies).
3. Use full justification (no paragraph indentions) for most documents. Indentions were used within these guidelines to promote ease of reading.
4. Insert document name in footer (to appear on each page). In the footer, set the font to Arial and the font size to 8.
5. Insert the page number on the bottom right of each page. Use the "Page X of Y" format. Set the font to Arial and the font size to 8.
6. Avoid having one line of text carried over to the next page. Carry over at least two lines of text to the next page within a paragraph. Keep a heading and at least two lines of text beneath the heading within a page to avoid splitting the heading and following text on two separate pages. Pagination features within Microsoft Word software are helpful for maintaining these guidelines.

Heading Styles

1. For primary headings, use centered, bold font, upper and lower case lettering and followed by two blank lines.
2. For secondary headings, use flush left, bold font, upper and lower case lettering and followed by one blank line.
3. For tertiary headings, indent using tab, use italicized font, and use upper and lower case letters followed by period and text.

Examples of Heading Styles:

The History of Beaufort County Community College (Primary Heading)

Introduction (Secondary Heading)

Beaufort County Community College serves the citizens of Beaufort, Hyde, Tyrrell and Washington counties. The beautiful BCCC campus features 12 buildings and is located about five miles east of Washington, N.C. on U.S. 264. However, with the development of online classes, BCCC has the ability to serve students well beyond its physical boundaries. BCCC celebrated the 40th Anniversary of its charter as a technical institute in 2007 but its roots in the community run deeper than that.

When It All Began. (Tertiary Heading) Industrial and technical education was offered in Beaufort County in 1962 through an Industrial Education Center...

Spacing

1. Single space within a paragraph.
2. Single space between paragraphs—no indentation of first line of paragraphs.
3. Double space between primary and secondary headings and text.
4. Avoid using page breaks and section breaks unless absolutely necessary.

Bullets

When making a bulleted list, use the circle/dot/ball (●) option.

Example:

- Mercury
- Venus
- Earth
- Mars

Outlines

When making an outline, use the formal outline option in the multilevel list menu.

Point of View

1. Use third person.
2. Use active voice.

In formal report writing, first person (I, we, us) and second person (you) are not used. Third person (he, they, it, she, one, everyone, the committee, the college, the administration, etc.) is appropriate. Furthermore, individuals should not be referred to by name. Writers should refer to specific employees by title, position, or function. The performance and effective functioning of offices are of interest in the report, not the names of those employed by the offices.

Avoid using passive voice. Passive voice uses helping verbs and places the object of the action as the subject of the sentence ("three objectives were identified... a report was completed"). Passive voice frequently omits altogether any mention of who performed the action, and this fails to communicate thoroughly. To avoid passive voice, state as clearly as possible the acting agent in each sentence ("The committee finds...The library staff discovered... the president notes").

Verb Tense

1. Use present tense for current description.
2. Use past tense in reporting past history and future tense for future descriptions or projections.
3. Do not shift between past, present, and future unless transition justifies the shift.

Word Choice

1. Keep words as short as possible while still being accurate and specific.
2. Be correct and consistent.
3. Use concrete and specific words that provoke images about real people, objects, and situations.
4. Avoid using *there* and *it* as subjects of sentences. Doing so makes the meaning of the sentence vague. Also avoid using *there* and *it* at the beginning of sentences.
Example: "There is not enough financial support for the library." is less clear than "Financial support for the library is inadequate."
5. To promote clear reports, avoid professional jargon. Typical educational jargon might include words like *utilization* and *facilitate*. Words like these may be used if they are indeed the most descriptive words available, but they should be used sparingly, if at all.

Instead of	Substitute
Utilize	use
for the purpose	for
in the event	if
in order that	to
because of the fact	because
not unlike	like

Content

1. Findings should be reported in a simple, straightforward manner. Eliminate phrases when a word will suffice.
2. Narrative should be factual.

Example: Of 253 individuals receiving questionnaires, 45 responded favorably.

3. Narratives should be analytical and should avoid exaggerated statements. For example, rather than stating that the College offers excellent counseling services to the students, the report should be specific and outline the ways in which the College serves the students through counseling.

Phrasing

1. Committees should report findings in an impersonal manner. Avoid the use of personal pronouns and the names of individuals.

Example: the Office of Vice President Academics *not Crystal's* office.

2. If pronouns are used in the report, they should have a clearly defined antecedent, and the two must agree in number, gender, and person. The pronoun *who* refers to people. *Which* introduces nonessential clauses; *that* introduces essential clauses.
3. Specialized language, acronyms, and abbreviations should be minimized; use language that the reader can understand.
4. If abbreviations are used, they should be spelled out and the abbreviation placed in parentheses, for example, Beaufort County Community College (BCCC).
5. Sexist language should be avoided.
Example: chairperson *not* chairman
6. Reports should have smooth transitions from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph.
7. Write in complete sentences unless you are listing something. Vary the structure of the sentences so that they do not sound repetitive.
8. Write in third person (he, she, it, they, etc.), but it is best to choose plural antecedents whenever possible to avoid awkward he/she constructions or sexist language. **Awkward:** Each student pays his/her tuition at registration, or he/she is dropped from the roll. **Better:** Students pay their tuition at registration, or they are dropped from the roll. **Incorrect:** Each student pays their tuition.

Spelling

1. Correct spelling is mandatory. Consult MS Word Spell Check.
2. If two variant spellings are given and the spellings are joined by the word *or*, use the first spelling.
3. Use the word *appendices*, not *appendixes*.
4. Treat the word *data* as plural.
5. Use the spelling *catalog* rather than *catalogue*.
6. Refer to degrees as doctors, master's, bachelors, and associate's.

Contractions

Avoid using contractions.

Example: cannot (rather than can't)

Capitalization

1. Capitalize titles before names; do not capitalize titles that follow or replace names.
Example: President Tansey; Dr. Barbara Tansey, president of the college; the president of the college
2. Capitalize the word *college* when it replaces Beaufort County Community College.
Example: The College offers classes in Cumberland County to prepare students to pass the GED exam.
3. Capitalize the word "compliance" when it refers to the name of the report, not when it refers to the process.
Example: The Compliance Report includes facts, recommendations, suggestions, and projects. During the course of the compliance process, 20 instructors revised syllabi to include writing assignments.
4. Capitalize the names of curriculum programs, degrees, specific courses, and the names of committees within the College.
Example: Office Systems Technology, Associate in Arts degree, Word Processing I, and Introductory Biology

5. Capitalize organizational terms when they refer to units within the College.
Example: Instructional Services, Board of Trustees
6. Do not capitalize the names of semesters within the school year.
Example: fall semester 2012
7. Capitalize the names of buildings and specific rooms.
Example: Building 1, Room 109
8. Capitalize all important words in titles of published materials.
Example: *The Brief Wadsworth Handbook*
9. Capitalize the first word of each item in a numbered list.
Example:
Task Functions of Leaders in Groups
 1. Initiating structuring
 2. Stimulating conversation
 3. Clarifying communication
10. Do not capitalize the word federal unless it is a name. Do not capitalize federal government.
Example: The Federal Reserve Board does not dispense federal funds.
11. Capitalize a noun that precedes a number or a letter.
Example: Chapter 5, Illustration 12, Figure 6, Exhibit A. Exceptions include line, note, page, and paragraph.
12. Do not capitalize or italicize the initial definite article in titles unless it is part of the name.
Example: *The New England Review*, *The Gregg Reference Manual*, the *Beaufort County Community College Catalog*

Numbers

1. Spell out indefinite numbers.
Example: several thousand
2. Do not begin a sentence with a number.
Example: "Counselors and advisors registered 215 students during registration." not "215 students were registered by counselors."
3. Spell numbers from one through ten; write figures for numbers above ten. However, if a statement contains several items with figures above ten and below ten, write all the amounts in figures.
Example: The bookstore returned ten texts during fall semester 2011. The ASC houses 55 Dell computers. The College applied for 10 federal grants, 4 state grants, and 11 local grants.

4. Express exact or approximate amounts of money in figures; round amounts over a million and express related amounts the same way.
Example: \$120, \$15.50, nearly \$75,000, \$5 million *but* \$300,000 to \$3,000,000
5. Put commas between two numbers that come together in a sentence.
Example: On page 76, 15 names are listed.
6. When adjacent numbers are part of a compound modifier, spell the first and use a figure for the second.
Example: Two 3-hour classes
7. Avoid beginning a new line of narrative with a number.
Example: The information for calculating total square feet can be found on page 25. *Not:* The information for calculating total square feet is on page 25.

Dates and Times

1. Spell the month in dates and place the day after the month.
Example: April 27, 2013; April 2013 *not* 27 April 2013
2. Use the abbreviations *a.m.* and *p.m.* in expressions of time; these abbreviations should appear in lower case and should be expressed in 12-hour and 60-minute increments.
Example: To place an order, call our office between 7:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. (**not** 7:00 AM, **not** 7 AM, **not** 7 a.m., **not** 6:30 PM, **not** 1700 hours)

Percentages

1. Type percentages in figures.
2. Always spell the word "percent" in sentences.
Example: 80 percent
3. When giving percentages, be sure they add up to 100 or explain why they do not.

Abbreviations

1. Use abbreviations sparingly. Before abbreviating the name of an organization, first state the name in full followed by the abbreviation in parentheses.
Example: North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS)
2. Always spell out the name of a country, state, organization, department (or any other entity) for which abbreviations are not normally used in formal writing or when an abbreviation is not readily recognized or understood.
Example: North Carolina
3. Use the course prefix and title when identifying courses.
Example: ENG 111, Expository Writing
4. Omit periods in the abbreviations of names or organizations like SACSCOC and ACA.

Italics

1. Use italics for foreign words.
Example: Students are taught fallacies of argument such as *ad hominem* attack.
2. Italicize words and letters that are referred to as words and letters.
Example: Shaw spelled *Shakespeare* without the final *e*.
3. Do not use italics for emphasis.
4. Because many documents are shared electronically, use italics (instead of the underscore) to show titles of published books, newsletters, pamphlets, and journals. Put titles of short published works in quotation marks. Examples: *Foundations of Argument* by John Reinard was published in 1991. "The Minister's Black Veil" is a famous short story.

Possessives

1. Use the possessive forms of nouns and pronouns to precede a gerund. A gerund is an -ing verb form acting as a noun.
Examples: Because of the student government's winning faculty support, several changes in policies were effected last year

Because of their winning.....

2. Add the apostrophe and s to make singular nouns possessive.
Examples: the director's duties, Roderick Bower's report
3. Add only the apostrophe to make plural nouns ending in s possessive.
Example: The students' scores
4. There are no apostrophes in possessive pronouns.
Examples: its collar, their books
5. Add an apostrophe to possessive nouns ending in 's.'
Examples: Charles' book, James' desk

Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should be written to reflect the name of the supporting document (an actual document, a Website, or some other resource which can be linked to the Web).

Example:

For a complete listing of criteria, go to [College Catalog](#).

[In the above example, rather than write out the long URL address of <http://www.beaufortccc.edu/gneral/catalog.htm>, which should appear in blue text within electronic copies), the source document (Strategic Plan) has been listed and has been established as a hyperlink to the Web to take the user to the information site. Notice the text color of Strategic Plan has changed to purple.

When addressing a specific Compliance item/Comprehensive Standard, and in preparing a Compliance Certification worksheet, each hyperlinked document shown in the Summary and/or Narrative sections will then be listed in the Supporting Documentation section of that particular worksheet. The hyperlink will be shown in the left column in the same order in which it is found within the Summary and/or Narrative sections, and its respective URL will be shown in the right column.

Example:

Supporting Documentation	
Personnel Evaluation Systems Committee Minutes	Personnel Evaluation Systems Committee Minutes

Split Infinitives

Avoid splitting an infinitive (inserting an adverb between *to* and the verb) when it produces an awkward construction and the adverb functions more effectively in another location.

Examples:

(Weak construction): It was impossible to even see a foot ahead.

(Better construction): It was impossible to see even a foot ahead.

(Weak construction): Marie always tries to carefully do her work.

(Better construction): Marie always tries to do her work carefully.

Appendix A1 – Exceptions to BCCC Writing Style Guidelines

As stated in the Introduction, the BCCC Writing Style Guidelines has been developed and is intended to serve as a *guideline* for college staff and faculty responsible for preparing official college documents, and especially those which will be distributed externally. As such, those charged with writing or editing such documents should make every effort to follow the specific guidance and examples contained therein.

There will, of course, be times when these guidelines will need to be adjusted, adapted, or even, ignored. One might compare following these guidelines to the well-known concept in which the "spirit of the law" rather than "the letter of the law" takes precedence.

Example: When incorporating a graph, chart, or table into a document, it may be necessary to adjust margins, font size, and even color in order for the information contained therein to be easily or better understood.

Example: Certain documents (such as certification forms or applications required by other agencies/organizations) may have a required or standardized format.

Example: College advertising/marketing materials and such items as college graduation programs will need to incorporate stylistic and graphic elements in order to be effective.

Example: Newsletters may include graphics, charts, word art, color, and fonts and font sizes different from what has been suggested in the BCCC Writing Style Guidelines.

Appendix A2 – Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Writing Style Compliance

It is the responsibility of each BCCC employee to follow ADA compliance as outlined in the articles found on the following webpages.

[Accessible Writing Guide](#)

[Create an accessible ACM submission using Microsoft Word](#)

[Create an accessible ACM submission using Adobe Acrobat Pro XI](#)