NDDOT STYLE GUIDE

The NDDOT Style Guide is provided to help writers and editors working for the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) provide clear and consistent information. Adopting a consistent style reinforces our agency brand and makes it easier for our customers to understand and use the information we provide.

It is a reference and a guide, not a strict set of rules for all writing. The style guide was developed collaboratively and will be updated as needed.

Does the NDDOT Style Guide replace the Associated Press Stylebook?

No. The NDDOT Style Guide augments the Associate Press Stylebook and the dictionary with terms commonly used by NDDOT. In some cases, entries are unique to NDDOT. For formal letters, refer to The Gregg Reference Manual.

Have suggestions?

The NDDOT Style Guide is an evolving document. Contact David Finley with ideas for entries, comments, and suggestions.

NDDOT STYLE GUIDE INDEX

These standards apply to a wide variety of documents, ranging from press releases to technical reports. This guide is not comprehensive, rather it includes style standards that are specific to NDDOT or that address the most common writing errors. If you don't find what you need in the NDDOT Style Guide, refer to the Associated Press Stylebook for guidance or reach out to the Communications Division.

A

abbreviations and acronyms
In general, avoid the use of abbreviations and acronyms. If you choose to use them, spell out on first reference. When spelling out the first reference, only capitalize proper nouns: North Dakota Department of Transpiration (NDDOT).

Abbreviations and acronyms are acceptable in a headline. See the AP Stylebook for more information.

absolutes

The occasion is rare when a writer can predict, for instance, that a project will start or end on a specific day. Use words to provide flexibility. Examples "scheduled to" "expected to" "may." Similarly, be careful with the use of most and first when describing an event so you do not make an unsubstantiated claim.

accident
NDDOT uses collision or crash, not accident. An accident is defined as anything that happens by chance without an apparent cause, or a mishap, especially one causing injury or death. Highway collisions usually have an underlying cause. As a result, words such as collision and crash are more accurate. Use people first language when describing a collision – "The person driving the car hit the ____."

active transportation
This includes any mode of transportation that is non-motorized, including walking, bicycling, roller blading, and wheelchairs.

addresses
Follow AP style. Spell out and capitalize first through ninth when used as street names: Fourth Avenue, Ninth Street. Use figures for 10th and above: West 10th Street. Do not write as 10th.

When a street stands alone, spell it out: West Boren Avenue. When a number is included, abbreviate: 401 W. Boren Ave. Always spell out road, lane, alley, drive, and terrace. Capitalize when part of a formal address.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Spell out on first reference; ADA is acceptable on second reference.

affect, effect
Affect, as a verb, means to influence: The project will affect traffic. Avoid using affect as a noun.

Effect, as a verb, means to cause: The director will effect many changes in the organization. Effect, as a noun, means result: The effect was overwhelming.

B

back up, backup
back up (v.) Closing the lane will back up traffic. Back up the car to get out of the driveway.

backup (n. and adj.) Noun: The backup extended for 10 miles. Adjective: We need a backup plan.

border

Only capitalize when part of a formal name. Capitalize U.S. Customs and Border Protection, but lowercase North Dakota border.

brand name
Avoid, if possible. Also see trademark.

bridge
Only capitalize when part of a formal name. Capitalize Long X Bridge, but lowercase on second reference without full name: the bridge.

bulleted lists
Use bulleted lists to improve a document's readability. Use a colon to introduce lists. Capitalize the first letter of each item in the list and end each section of the list with a period, unless the items are single words. Also, reference lists intended as a menu of options require no punctuation.

Keep all items parallel by using the same language structure throughout the list. For example:

> Make sure you bring:
> * Boots
> * Hats
> * Gloves
> * Jackets

> To prepare for winter travel across mountain passes, consider:
> * Checking pass condition reports before you depart.
> * Packing a winter emergency kit in your car.
> * Telling family or friends about your route and schedule.
> * Updating your first aid training.

C

capital, capitol
Capital is the city where the seat of government is located. Do not capitalize. It also is used in a financial sense to mean wealth in money, equipment, or property.

Capitol refers to the building in which the state legislature meets. It is always capitalized: The meeting is at the Capitol in Bismarck.

Caterpillar
Capitalize when referring to the trademark name. See also trademark.

city
Capitalize city if part of a proper name, an integral part of an official name, or a regularly used nickname. Kansas City, New York City, Windy City, City of Light.

Lowercase elsewhere, including all city of phrases: a Texas city, the city government, the city Board of Education, the city of Bismarck.

Capitalize when part of a formal title before a name: City Manager Joe Gavinski. Lowercase when not part of the formal title: city Health Commissioner Frank Smith.

county line
Lowercase, no hyphen. If referring to a specific county, line remains lowercase: The Stark County line.

D

data
A plural noun, it normally takes plural verbs and pronouns.

dateline
When writing a press release, start the body of the release written out in all capital letters followed by a dash. If the news story is taking place in Fargo, use FARGO, N.D, otherwise for all other locations, use BISMARCK, N.D.

dates
Always follow the format of time, date, place. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone.

Always use Arabic figures, without st, nd, rd or th: Oct. 9, not Oct. 9th.

When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas: November 2004.

When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas: Please join us Jan. 24, 2007, at our open house.

Listing the year generally is unnecessary if an event occurs during the same year as publication. The present year is assumed.

Avoid using between when listing events of known duration. Instead, use to: The open house will be from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

daylight saving time
It's saving, not savings; not capitalized and no hyphen

de-icer, de-icing
Hyphenate.

design-build
Only capitalize the first letter if it is the first word in a sentence. Do not use the term, design-builder, but instead use design-build contractor. If using the term, design-build in a news release, you should include a brief definition of the term. For example, "Design-build is a type of contract that combines project design and construction into a single contract." Use the term only if it is important to the news story.

dimension
Use figures and spell out inches, feet, yards, etc. to indicate depth, height, length and width. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns. See the AP Stylebook for examples.

directions
Lowercase when referring to compass direction: east, western, northwest, southbound, etc. Capitalize when referring to a region: The storm hit the Northwest hard.

distances
Always use figures: Crews will pave 4 miles of Interstate 5.

diverging diamond interchange
Do not abbreviate on second reference as DDI, but instead simply refer to it as "the new interchange" or by the interchange's location - Marvin Road Interchange, for example.

driver license
Driver license should be used in reference to the service. When referring to the division, capitalize Driver License Division. Driver's license or Driver's License Division should only be used in news releases to follow AP style.

drone/UAS/UAV
In NDDOT releases, spell out "unmanned aircraft system," followed by, "commonly known as a drone." On second reference, use the term "drone."

E

easy to use, easy-to-use
Hyphenate as an adjective phrase preceding a noun: This easy-to-use map will show you the way. Otherwise, do not hyphenate: This map is easy to use.

effect, affect
See affect, effect

elected officials
Elected officials are listed by title, first and last name. Example: Sen. John Doe, Rep. Jane Smith. Add U.S. or state before a title only if necessary to avoid confusion. NDDOT style is to not list district or party affiliation after the official's name.

email

One word, do not hyphenate.

ensure, insure
Use ensure to mean guarantee: Steps were taken to ensure accuracy.

Use insure for references to insurance: The policy insures his life.

F

federal
Lowercase when used as an adjective to distinguish something from state, county, city or town: federal funding, federal court, federal government. Use a capital letter for government bodies that use the word as part of their formal name: Federal Highway Administration.

flier, flyer
Flier refers to a circular. Flyer is the proper name of some trains and buses: The Western Flyer.

front-end loader, back-end loader (n.)

fundraising, fundraiser
One word in all cases.

G

gas tax
Lowercase when referring to the 2015 gas tax or the gas tax. Capitalize only when part of a formal name.

H

head-to-head
Refers to two-way traffic on connected roadway.

headlines
Use sentence case. Capitalize only the first word and proper nouns. Headlines must include a place name (Fargo, Bismarck, north of Minot) and, if appropriate, a highway name. Always include an active verb in headlines. Use numerals for all figures and single quotes for quotation marks.

highway designations
North Dakota Highway 1, U.S. Highway 1 or Interstate 1 is preferred when referring to highways. Don't capitalize highway or interstate on second reference without a specified highway number: the interstate remains open or the highway remains closed.

Spell out "North Dakota Highway 1", "U.S. Highway 1", and "Interstate 1" on first reference, then abbreviate with "ND 1", "U.S. 1" or "I-1" on second reference, even if new highway names are introduced in the sentence.

Abbreviations are okay in a headline. Use periods in the abbreviation, U.S. within texts. In headlines, it's US (no periods).

host
Use only as a noun. In this headline example, instead of "NDDOT will host open house" try "Possible solutions displayed at open house" or "NDDOT invites you to an open house."

hotline
One word. A telephone line for use in an emergency or a crisis. Also: tip line.

I

internet, intranet
Lowercase.

interstate
See highway designations.

J

junction
Spell out. Use lower case unless part of an official title.

job descriptions
Always lowercase. See titles.

K

kickoff (n.), kick off (v.)

L

Legislature
Capitalize in all references to both houses of North Dakota state government, even when the state name is dropped: North Dakota Legislature. Both houses of the Legislature adjourned today.

Also capitalize in such constructions as: the 100th Legislature, the state Legislature.

Lowercase legislature when used generically: No legislature has approved the amendment.

Use legislature in lowercase for all plural references: The Arkansas and Colorado legislatures are considering the amendment.

See the AP Stylebook for more details.

login (n.), log in (v.)

M

milepost
Milepost is one word, not two.

mph
Acceptable in all references for miles per hour or miles an hour. Do not capitalize.

multimodal
one word, no hyphen

N

NDDOT
Spell out on first reference. See abbreviations and acronyms.
On the web, our style assumes that readers visiting our site know they are on the NDDOT site, so spelling out NDDOT is unnecessary.

numbers
Spell out numbers under 10. Use figures when referring to a person's age or dimensions. See distances.

Spell out a numeral at the start of a sentence, except for years, or rephrase the sentence. Shorten long figures by using million or billion: $5 million, $5 billion. Use decimals when appropriate and round up: $5.4 million. Numbers less than one million should be written out numerically: $530,000, $4,000, $200.

O

off-ramp, on-ramp
NDDOT style is always to hyphenate.

ongoing
One word. Never hyphenated.

online
One word. Never hyphenated.

over
Over and more than are both acceptable in all uses to indicate a greater numerical value: Over $5 million was raised. More than $5 million was raised.

P

partnering
Avoid use of this term. Use of "partner" as a noun is preferred. Also, partnering as a verb implies equality where often the contributions or responsibilities aren't equal. Suggested substitute: working with.

percent
Use figures and the symbol: 1%, 2.5% (use decimals, not fractions). For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero: The rate of accidents increased 0.8%. Repeat percent with every figure: NDDOT expects traffic in the area to increase 20% to 50% in the next 10 years.

phone numbers
No parentheses around area codes, hyphenate. NDDOT style is to always use area codes: 701-328-1111. The format for toll-free numbers: 800-111-1000. If extension numbers are needed, use a comma to separate the main number from the extension: 701-328-1111, ext. 1.

project
Only capitalize when part of a formal name. Capitalize I-94 Exit 161 Project, but lowercase on second reference without full name: the project.

Take care when claiming that a project is going to do something. A project can't close lanes of a highway during construction, but crews or engineers can. A project can, however, enhance safety or alleviate congestion.

pronouns
Maintain subject-pronoun agreement. Avoid referring to an inanimate subject as they.

Incorrect: Microsoft unveils their new product this week.
Correct: Microsoft unveils its new product this week.
Another option is to insert a responsible human "doer": Microsoft executives unveil their new product this week.

Problems maintaining gender neutrality with pronouns usually can be resolved by rewriting the sentence. Do not resort to nontraditional gimmicks such as s/he or he/she.

One method of writing around the problem is to rewrite the sentence in a plural form. Instead of: A staff member can access the data by logging in to his or her account. Rewrite as plural: Staff members can access the data by logging in to their accounts.

Punctuation
• Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in most simple series.
• Include a final comma in a simple series if omitting it could make the meaning unclear.
• Use a comma also before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases.
• Use only one space after periods and colons.

Q

Quotes
Quotes give our agency a voice to tell readers why our news is important and puts a human face to government.

When using a quote, consider these tips:
- Don't use a quote to repeat a fact - a good quote provides new information, compelling imagery and a human perspective or opinion.
- Avoid using quotes for factual data - numbers and statistics should be written as fact or paraphrased.
- Write quotes as a conversation - contractions can make a sentence more personable and believable.
- Use quotes to explain complex topics with analogies or metaphors.
- Be brief - a quote is a way to drive a key message home or segue into another aspect of the work taking place.

R

rainstorm, rainwater
Both are one word.

rear-end
Always hyphenate.

right of way, rights of way

S

seasons
Lowercase spring, summer, fall, winter, and derivatives such as springtime unless part of a formal name.

semitruck
One word, no hyphen.

shared-use path
Infrastructure that supports multiple recreation and transportation opportunities, such as walking, bicycling, inline skating, and wheelchair use.

sideswipe
One word.

snowplow (n.)

snowblower (n.)

snow event
Avoid using this term. Use snow or snowstorm.

state
Do not capitalize unless part of a formal name.

Do not capitalize state when used simply as an adjective to specify a level of jurisdiction: state Rep. William Smith, the state Transportation Department, state funds.

state names
Spell out all state names in the body of the release. State name abbreviations are acceptable in the dateline. Follow AP style for state abbreviations, do not use postal code abbreviations: Always use N.D. not ND.

stormwater (n.)

storms
Snowstorm, rainstorm, windstorm are all one word. Never a "snow event."

T

time
Use figures except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m. Avoid redundancies such as 10 a.m. this morning, instead: 10 a.m. today.

timeline
One word.

time span
Two words.

titles
Job titles are capitalized if they are formal, rather than occupational, and immediately precede the name: President Joe McDonald, Sheriff Bill Elfo. Engineer, attorney, farmer, spokesman – all occupations. If there's any doubt, flip the sentence around so

the name comes first and the title is offset by commas: Katie Skipper, a NDDOT spokeswoman, offered tips for traveling on icy roads.

trademark
In general, use a generic equivalent unless the trademark name is an essential part of the story. When a trademark is used, capitalize it.

U

UAS/drone
In NDDOT releases, spell out "unmanned aircraft system," followed by, "commonly known as a drone". On second reference, use the term "drone."

underway
One word in all uses.

W

web (n.)
Lowercase in all instances

webpage, website
One word, not capitalized.

When writing a web address, omit http:// and www:. Use dot.nd.gov. When directing online readers to a website, link directly to the correct page. If writing for print, ensure the web address is clear by writing all letters as lowercase: dot.nd.gov/projects/bismarck. In the case of a very long web address, first direct the reader to a home page or portal page and provide directions to links that lead to the desired page or request a quick link.

who or that
If referring to an action by a person, use who. If referring to a thing, use that.

who, whom
Refer to AP Stylebook. Whom receives an action. Tip: If you can change the sentence so there is an action to her, him or them, you usually will use whom. "She gave the ticket to the man with whom she was riding" could be changed to "She gave the ticket to him."

windstorm

work
Refer to AP Stylebook or Webster's, but we will give you a few examples here. One word: workbench, workout, workplace, workstation, workweek. Two words: work zone, work sheet, work force. Hyphenated: work-release, work-study, work-up.