

October 7, 2019

Chief Administrative Officer

Updated Branding and Writing Style Guide

To: All Staff

From: Jahantab Siddiqui,  
Chief Administrative Officer

The Communications office has updated the HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide to include a new section, **Use of Diversity in System Communications** (see page 6 of attached). The Style Guide is part of our effort to ensure consistency of message and branding and improve accessibility.

All employees should follow the guidelines for preparing communications and for using HCPSS logos. Please contact Anna Gable, Communications, at 410-313-7496 or via email, with any questions.

Resources

The following items/tools may be downloaded from the Staff Hub. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on [Communications Resources](#).

- Logos: in the standard blue, black (for photocopying), blue reverse (for use on a dark color background), black reverse (for use on a black/graytone background), as well as variations of the flame in a circle, which can be used if the school system name is prominent elsewhere on the page.
- Letterhead for schools/buildings (blue logo, black logo for photocopying)
- HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide: guidelines on proper logo use, HCPSS terminology, document and Powerpoint formatting, correct punctuation and terminology, and more.
- Quick Reference Guide to Logos, HCPSS Terms, Templates
- Templates: memo, fax cover sheet.
- Board report templates: Board meeting agenda item procedures, Board report cover template, Board PowerPoint presentation template, Board presentation checklist, proclamation guidelines.

Attachment

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide



# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## About this Guide

The HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide is designed for staff use to ensure consistency and high-quality communication throughout the school system. This guide is based on correct usage, print standards, and conscious choices.

### Sources and References

*The Associated Press Stylebook*  
*The Associated Press Guide to Punctuation*  
*The Gregg Reference Manual* (formal business correspondence)  
Dictionaries

**Note:** [Guidelines for business correspondence are noted in brackets throughout this manual.]

Please consult the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496 if you have any questions or suggestions for future issues of this handbook.

## Need Help?

The Communications Office provides writing, editing, graphic design and photography services for systemwide brochures and other materials, as appropriate. Please contact the appropriate staff person with your request.

### Writing, editing, graphic design

Joan R. Fox, Coordinator, Public Information  
410-313-6658

### Logo requests and usage questions

Anna Gable, Communication Specialist/Publications  
410-313-7496

### Photography

Emily Bahhar, Coordinator, Multimedia Communications  
410-313-1570

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

## HCPSS Information and Usage of Often-Used Terms

### **Vision**

Every student and staff member embraces diversity and possesses the skills, knowledge and confidence to positively influence the larger community.

### **Mission**

HCPSS ensures academic success and social-emotional well-being for each student in an inclusive and nurturing environment that closes opportunity gaps.

### **Four Overarching Commitments**

#### **VALUE**

Every HCPSS stakeholder feels happy and rewarded in their roles and takes pride in cultivating the learning community.

#### **ACHIEVE**

An individualized focus supports every person in reaching milestones for success.

#### **CONNECT**

Students and staff thrive in a safe, nurturing and inclusive culture that embraces diversity.

#### **EMPOWER**

Schools, families and the community are mutually invested in student achievement and well-being.

## **SCHOOL SYSTEM NAMES**

**Howard County Public School System** is the official name of the school system. Each word should be capitalized. Use “the” before the full school system name. Do not use “the” before HCPSS.

**HCPSS** can be used with external audiences only after spelling it out first. Do not use periods between letters.

**Howard County public schools** is used to refer to the schools and not the system as a whole. Because this is not the official name, capitalize only the Howard County portion.

**Board of Education** refers to the eight-member elected body only. “Board” and “Education” are capitalized when referring to the Board of Education of Howard County (official name). The Board of Education name may be abbreviated as “Board,” but not “BOE.”

### **Board members**

Check the Board of Education webpage for a list of the most recent Board members, Chair, Vice Chair and spelling: [www.hcpss.org/board/](http://www.hcpss.org/board/)

**central office** – lowercase. For internal use only. The official title is the Department of Education.

**Department of Education** refers to the collective administrative staff of the school system; can also refer to the main administrative offices of the school system. Informally, the department is sometimes referred to as “central office”; however, this should not be used in formal communications.

### **Superintendent**

Proper title:

Michael J. Martirano, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

Capitalize “Superintendent” when referring to the HCPSS Superintendent, even if it is not used with a name. Other roles are lower case. (See “names and titles” under Correct Usages of Terms.)

## **IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS**

(See page 5 for information to include on a flyer.) Two-sided and longer informational publications created for external use should include the following:

- School system logo (See directions on logo use.)
- Name of office/school, address, telephone number and web URL. May include social media information, as well.
- If including an individual office name/address is not appropriate, include system information:  
Howard County Public School System  
10910 Clarksville Pike  
Ellicott City, MD 21042  
410-313-6600
- Month/year of publication on back, lower right corner
- Non-discrimination clause – This clause is included in publications that are widely distributed:  
The Howard County Public School System does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age in its programs and activities, and provides equal access to the Boy/Girl Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Manager of Equity Assurance, Howard County Public School System, 10910 Clarksville Pike, Ellicott City, MD 21042, 410-313-6654 (phone), 410-313-1645 (fax). For further information on notice of non-discrimination, visit <http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OCR/contactus.cfm> for the address and phone number of the office that serves your area, or call 1-800-421-3481.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Logo Guidelines

The Howard County Public School System logo consists of a “flame of knowledge” and the school system name logotype. The logo provides the means for the school system to brand itself and promote a consistent image to the community.

The logo should be used on the front cover of all materials published by the HCPSS. The logo should also be used on school system vehicles and promotional items. The logo should not be used on any non-school system communications unless the school system is co-sponsoring an event.

It is the responsibility of each department to promote the use of the logo by incorporating it into department materials, in its correct form and placement.

Individual departments should not create or use other logos because they compete with the overall HCPSS identity. Schools may use images of their mascots on their website and other communications.

Please contact the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496 with any questions regarding the use of the HCPSS logo.

### OBTAINING THE LOGO

The HCPSS logo is available to staff in various forms and sizes on the Staff Hub. Click on [Sitemap>Hub Docs](#); under Document Library, click on [Communication Resources \(logos, letterhead\)](#).

Types of files needed:

- png – for use in Microsoft Word, Powerpoint, websites
- eps – for use in Adobe InDesign

To obtain a logo for specialty merchandise or other specialty use, contact the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496.

### PROPORTION

Never squish or stretch the logo to fit a space or for any other reason. In most cases, holding down the shift key while changing the size will keep a graphic in proportion. **Do not increase or decrease just the width or length of the logo to fit your space.**

You may decrease the original size of a logo, but never try to increase it, or the quality will be compromised. Instead, download a larger logo to use. If you need

a logo larger than what is available on the Staff Hub, please contact the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496.

### LOGO COLOR

If you want to match the HCPSS logo color, use the appropriate color matching system below:

PMS 300  
RGB: 0, 109, 182  
CMYK: 92, 55, 1, 0

**Light blue** (center of flame) is 40% of the blue.

### PLACEMENT/POSITION

The logo may be placed over a color as long as the entire logo can be easily seen. The reverse logos (text in white) work best when placed over dark colors.

Do not place any text or graphic elements inside or behind the imaginary rectangular area bordering the logo. This includes stripes, boxes, text, etc.



# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

## Logo Choices

The HCPSS logo is available to staff in various formats and sizes on the Staff Hub. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources (logos, letterhead). If none of the logos provided fit your needs, please contact the Public Information Office.

Use for electronic or print communications in color



Blue logo

Use on a dark background when printing in color



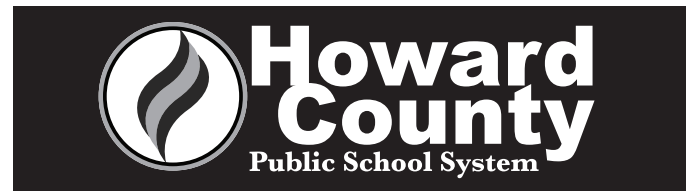
Blue/white "reverse" logo

Use when photocopying or printing in black



Black logo

Use on a black background when printing in black



Black/white "reverse" logo



Use for internal documents, or when the school system name is used on the page, such as in the title. Also, one of these options may be used if the standard logo will not fit on the page, as long as it is accompanied by the full school system name (see example at right).

## HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM DIGITAL EDUCATION

The Howard County Public School System offers selected high school courses in a variety of digital formats. Digital education is designed to provide supplemental access to courses and does not provide a full-time virtual school option.

All digital education courses are facilitated and taught by highly qualified teachers. Digital Education courses are not designed to be "stand-alone" or independent study. The current digital education option formats are:

- **Synchronous video course instruction** – Students access real-time instruction with a teacher using synchronous video technology. A video camera is set up in the primary classroom to allow for real-time video streaming of instruction to remote sites.
- **Blended course instruction** – Students work with an online teacher and access instructional materials through both online coursework and face-to-face instruction. The number of face-to-face meetings will vary depending on the course.
- **Fully online course instruction** – Students work with an online teacher and access the majority of instructional materials through online coursework. There are no face-to-face meetings but the student may meet with the online teacher through phone, web or video conference as needed.

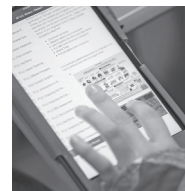
HCPSS will use the following parameters to help determine whether or not a student is eligible to enroll in an online course:

- The school does not offer the course.
- The student has a schedule conflict that prevents taking a course when it is offered at the school.
- The student is pursuing early graduation or early college access (must verify through 4-year plan).
- The student is in home/hospital instruction or alternative education for an extended period of time.

A student requesting permission to take an online course should complete the following steps:

1. Schedule a formal meeting with a school counselor to discuss the appropriateness of taking a digital education course and the appropriateness of the specific course to be taken.
2. Work with the school counselor to complete the Digital Education Enrollment Request form.
3. Within three school days, the student will receive notification from the school counselor or Digital Education Program with the status of the request. If the request is approved, the student will receive an email with course access information. If the request is not approved, the school will notify the student in writing with an explanation of why the request was denied.

For more information, please contact your school counselor or the Digital Education Program office at [dep@hcps.org](mailto:dep@hcps.org) or 410-313-5334.



Example of use: If the flame in a circle logo is used for external documents due to lack of space, the full school system name must be displayed, as well.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

## Position of Logo

Below are several examples of appropriate logo placement.

**Howard County**  
Public School System  
MARYLAND

Want to be part of the HCPSS success story?  
Come join us.

Seeking Teachers certified in the following areas:  
Math • Science • Technology Education • Reading Specialist  
Media Specialist • OT/PT/SLP • World Language • ESOL • English  
Special Education • Vision/Hearing Teachers • Family and Consumer Sciences  
\*All certification areas are encouraged to apply.

In the Howard County Public School System, new teachers can earn nearly \$50,000. Benefits can add as much as \$36,000 in additional compensation. But for educators at HCPSS, it's about more than great pay and a generous compensation package.

It's about belonging to a community that ranked #1 for "Best School Districts in Maryland," #1 for "Districts with the Best Teachers," #1 for "Best Places to Teach in Maryland," #1 for "Safest School District in the Baltimore Metro," among Maryland's 24 public school systems by Niche.com, an education and community analysis firm.

The HCPSS values DIVERSITY and is committed to EQUITABLE and INCLUSIVE schools and work environments.

- Great pay and benefits.
- HCPSS students outperform their peers statewide.
- A great community.

Connect with us!  
www.hcps.org @hcps\_tv HCPSSradio

Read or hear the stories of HCPSS students and teachers.  
Apply www.hcps.org/employment/ Learn more www.HCPSS.org

Top, left

**Howard County**  
Public School System

Bridge to Excellence  
2015 Master Plan and Race to the Top  
Annual Update

November 18, 2015

Top, center

Now Hiring... **Howard County**  
Public School System

Certified Teachers  
for Fall 2016  
Black Student Achievement Program  
Saturday Math Academy

Staff Orientation: October 1  
Instruction dates: October 8, 15, 29; November 5, 12, 19  
8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Professional Stipend: \$30/hr. – Teaching; \$20/hr. – Planning

Current Needs:

- Elementary (Grades 3, 4 and 5)
- Middle & High: Pre-Algebra, Geometry, Algebra I & II
- Math Analysis, Pre-Cal GT, Calculus
- SAT English

The BSAP Saturday Math Academy is committed to:

- Providing a nurturing and supportive environment.
- Teaching mathematics through real-world applications and rich mathematical tasks.
- Providing challenging activities that are rigorous and demonstrate mathematical reasoning.

Please apply by August 26, 2016  
HCPSS Employees must submit a letter of interest and a current resume by email to montez\_miller@hcps.org

Top, right

For Grade 8-12 Students and their Parents:  
**BLACK STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM  
College & Career Opportunity Night**

Empowerment Through Entrepreneurship  
Wednesday, October 25, 2017  
5:30-9:00 p.m.  
Long Reach High School  
9100 Judds Run Road, Columbia, 21045

Keynote Speaker  
Omar S. Muhammad  
Entrepreneur & Author of *Unleash Your Inner Millionaire*  
Major Saleswoman

Highlights:

- College, Career, and Entrepreneur Representatives
- School Counselor One-to-One 20-minute Sessions
- Marching Band
- Focused Information Sessions

For updates, please visit: www.hcps.org/schools/bsap/ Follow us on Twitter @HCPSS\_BSAP

**Howard County**  
Public School System

Bottom, left

2016  
HCPSS Cultural Proficiency Conference

STUDENT VOICE  
An Instrument for Inclusion and Equity

Wednesday & Thursday, June 29-30  
Athalton High School

**Howard County**  
Public School System

Bottom, center

Keep in Touch with HCPSS

There are many ways HCPSS delivers relevant, timely, and accessible news and information to families and the community. All of these communication vehicles are easy to access and use.

**School Emergency Closing Information Sources**  
In times of emergencies/school closings, information will be shared with the community via:

- The HCPSS homepage: www.hcps.org
- HCPSS News email and text message alerts: www.hcps.org/hcps-news
- Twitter: twitter.com/HCPSS or twitter.com/mjmsuper
- Facebook: www.facebook.com/HCPSSchools
- HCPSS Information Hotline: 410-313-6666
- HCPSS cable TV: Comcast 95/Verizon 42

Download the **HCPSS Mobile App** to stay in touch with news, calendar events, and notifications through your smartphone. The app is available on iTunes and Google Play.

Using email and text alerts, **HCPSS News**—powered by SchoolMessenger—keeps parents/guardians up to date on school news and events, and delivers real-time information on bus schedule changes, weather-related closings, and emergency information. Parents/guardians of HCPSS students are automatically signed up for SchoolMessenger through the data provided in HCPSS Connect. Community members and HCPSS staff can also sign up to receive messages. Visit www.hcps.org/hcps-news for more information and delivery options.

Follow HCPSS on social media to get the latest updates:

- HCPSS Twitter: twitter.com/HCPSS
- HCPSS Superintendent Twitter: twitter.com/mjmsuper
- HCPSS Facebook page: www.facebook.com/HoCoSchools
- Flickr: www.flickr.com/photos/hcps
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/hcpschools
- Vimeo: www.vimeo.com/hcps

**Howard County**  
Public School System

Bottom, right

HCPSS Strategic Call to Action  
**Learning and Leading with Equity**  
The Fierce Urgency of Now

**Vision**  
Every student and staff member embraces diversity and possesses the skills, knowledge and confidence to positively influence the larger community.

**Mission**  
HCPSS ensures academic success and socio-emotional well-being for each student in an inclusive and nurturing environment that closes opportunity gaps.

**Four Overarching Commitments**

- ACHIEVE**  
An individual focus on meeting individual learning objectives for success.
- CONNECT**  
Students and staff thrive as a team, nurturing and inclusive cultures that mutually involved in student achievement and well-being.
- EMPOWER**  
The community and community members lead in the strength of the school system and an active and valued partner.

**Desired Outcomes**

- Equity and relationships are at the heart of all decisions and actions.
- Students' academic/learning is nurtured through the skills development and collaborative dialogue, such as necessary practice to solve problems.
- Graduation rates among all high schools and each demographic group are at essential levels.
- Students graduate with the skills, attributes and resources to acquire, strengthen and exercising employment in a dynamic, innovative workplace.
- All students have equitable opportunities to earn college credit or industry certification.
- Through collaboration with families and the greater community, all students enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- Each and every student receives a high-quality education through individualized instruction, challenge, supports and opportunities.
- High quality special education services are delivered in a consistent and collaborative manner.

**HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**  
Schools • Services • ESD • Support Services

The flame in a circle is typically placed at the top. If the document is for external distribution, the school system name must also be included on the page.

**HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM**

**DIGITAL EDUCATION**

The Howard County Public School System offers advanced high school courses in a variety of digital formats. Digital education is designed to provide supplemental access to courses and does not provide a full-time virtual school option.

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2. Work with the school counselor to complete the Digital Education Enrollment Request form.
3. Within one school day, the student will receive notification from the school counselor on Digital Education Program with the status of the request. If the request is approved, the student will receive an email with course access information. If the request is not approved, the school will notify the student in writing with an explanation of why the request was denied.

For more information, please contact your school counselor or the Digital Education Program office at dep@hcps.org or 410-313-5334.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

## Document/Publication Standards

### COLOR SPECIFICATIONS

Body text, for the most part, should be in black. If you prefer to use color for boldface headings, choose high contrast colors that are easier to read, even by someone who may have a visual disability such as color blindness or low vision. White type on a dark background may be used sparingly for headings or other large type, for emphasis.

The school system primarily uses blues and greens in HCPSS publications.

**Blue:** (used in logo – for headings, design elements)  
PMS 300

RGB: 0, 109, 182

CMYK: 92, 55, 1, 0

**Green:** (for headings, design elements)

RGB: 65, 173, 73

CMYK: 75, 5, 100, 0

**Light Green** (for highlighting, accents):

PMS 366

RGB: 169, 219, 125

CMYK: 36, 0 67, 0

When choosing any document colors, consider the connotations that certain colors evoke.

### TEMPLATES AND GUIDELINES AVAILABLE

Letterhead and envelopes are provided to all schools and non-school offices by Print Services. Unless correspondence is confidential, use printed envelopes for external use only.

**The templates and guidelines below may be downloaded from the Staff Hub. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources** (logos, letterhead).

- Letterhead (school and non-school) – available with standard blue logo or black logo for photocopying
- Memo
- Fax cover sheet
- Quick Reference Guide – HCPSS Logo Use, HCPSS Terms, Templates
- HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide
- Board Report Template (folder)
  - Board Meeting Agenda Item Procedures
  - Board Report Cover Template
  - Board PowerPoint Presentation Template
  - Board Powerpoint Presentation Checklist
  - Proclamation Guidelines

### INFORMATION TO INCLUDE ON A FLYER:

- HCPSS or school logo
- Title of event – should be the most prominent information on the page
- Date (Thursday, January 1, 2020) – do not use 1st, 2nd, etc. Should be prominent, but not as large as the title
- Time (e.g., 9–10:30 a.m.) lower case letters with periods; use an en dash (–) with no space surrounding it. (See page 8–9 for information on dashes.)
- Location name and address
- Brief description of event – should be succinct, easy to read quickly
- Contact information – may be a phone number, email address, URL or QR code. May also include social media address

### POWERPOINT FORMATTING GUIDELINES:

- Use a consistent background and layout for all slides. Avoid really bright backgrounds or cluttered layouts.
- For optimal legibility, use dark text on a light background.
- Use standard, sans serif fonts, such as Arial or Helvetica. These fonts read well when projected and can be found on most computers. If you use an uncommon font, you may have issues showing your presentation on another computer.
- Text should be 20–24 point size or larger.
- Align text to left or right. Centered text is harder to read.
- Limit the number of images on a slide to 1–3. Do not distort images to fit a space. Avoid clip art. Use good quality photos – nothing out of focus, too dark or pixelated.
- Remember, less is more. Minimize the number of words on a slide. Each slide should anchor or reinforce your message and be grasped in a few moments, not studied at length.

**A PowerPoint template for Board presentations, which may be adapted for other uses, is available on the Staff Hub. See directions for downloading at left, under TEMPLATES.**

If you need advice on a PowerPoint presentation, please call the Public Information Office.



# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Use of Diversity in System Communications

HCPSS staff should use appropriate language and photographs in their communications with students, families, community members and each other, so that all feel respected and included. HCPSS Division of Communications, Community and Workforce Engagement follows Associated Press style guidelines. Contact the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496 with any questions.

### Personal Pronouns

They/them/their is now acceptable in limited cases as a singular and/or gender-neutral pronoun, when alternative wording is awkward or clumsy. However, rewording (e.g., using “the student” instead of “he,” “she” or a singular “they”) is usually preferable, because gender-neutral use of a singular “they” is unfamiliar to many readers. Clarity for the reader is always a top priority.

### Student Descriptions

Use “person first” language when identifying disabilities or conditions. Examples:

- Use “student with a disability,” not “disabled student”
- Use “students needing special education services,” not “special education students”
- Use “students experiencing homelessness,” not “homeless student”
- Use “students experiencing poverty,” not “poor student”

Avoid language that may have a negative connotation. For example, use “youthful” rather than “childlike.”

### Gender

Use gender-neutral words/phrases in your language, e.g. firefighter or mail carrier.

The Board of Education of Howard County now officially uses the titles “Chair” and “Vice Chair,” without the “man” suffix.

### Photographs\*

Attempts should always be made to convey diversity in HCPSS digital and print media, so that students, staff and community members see themselves represented. When possible, and if appropriate, photos should show variety in ways including:

- Gender
- Age
- Race/ethnicity
- Grade level
- Dress that reflects different religions/countries of origin

In addition, consider including photos of students and staff in non-stereotypical roles, or who use assistive devices, etc., when appropriate.

Use sensitivity in terms of how viewers might perceive the subjects, placement and facial expressions in photos.

\* Note: Photographs of HCPSS students may only be used for a public audience if the parent/guardian has not denied permission in the Family File.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Text Standards

### ACCURATE AND JARGON-FREE TEXT

A very basic but important practice is to check text for grammatical, spelling and typographical errors. Use spell check and grammar check to catch obvious mistakes, but realize they catch only about 70 percent of errors. Spell-check cannot replace careful editing because it accepts homonyms, synonyms and inadvertent typographical errors.

Remove jargon, clichés and colloquialisms. Avoid the use of “educationese” when writing for non-educators.

Always spell out an acronym/initialism the first time it is used unless the writer is very sure that every reader is already familiar with it.

Note: If a spelled-out acronym/initialism is used only one time, you may still want to include the abbreviation along with the phrase to help readers learn the meaning, especially if the acronym/initialism is widely used.

### STYLE

**Use an active voice**, when possible. Avoid the word “be,” which often indicates a passive voice. Also, avoid gerunds (verbal nouns that end in “ing”) when you can.

*Example:*

She will be attending the meeting. (passive)

She will attend the meeting. (active)

**Make sure the antecedent and pronoun in a sentence agree.**

*Incorrect:* A person should see their dentist twice a year.

*Correct:* A person should see his or her dentist twice a year.

*Incorrect:* Each of the companies had their books audited.

*Correct:* Each of the companies had its books audited.

### FONT OPTIONS

If you choose to use more than one font in a document, resist the temptation to show off your whole font repertoire. Typically, one font should be used for headings and another used for the body copy, although one font throughout is fine, too. Italics and bold fonts within the same families may also be used, sparingly.

If you plan to share your document electronically, you should use standard fonts, such as Times Roman, Arial or Helvetica. For body copy, 10 or 11 point size is usually appropriate.

### FORMAT

Text should be single spaced and aligned to the left, with a ragged right margin. Do not use justified type (flush left and right), which may create “rivers” of white space between words. Double space between paragraphs.

### Boldface/Quotation Marks

Using bold on all your type is the equivalent of not using any. Bold may be used for headings, or sparingly in body text, to make them stand out.

Enclose in quotation marks composition titles such as books, plays, long poems, collections of shorter works (e.g., anthologies, albums), newspapers, magazines, films and television programs, titles of articles, essays, short stories and poems, book chapters and television episodes. (See Punctuation section for rules on “Quotation Mark Use With Other Punctuation.”)

### Underline

For the most part, reserve underlining for electronic links.

### Capitalization

Use all capitals (“all caps”) sparingly, such as for headings and titles. Avoid using all caps in body copy. It is difficult to read and is the textual equivalent of shouting.

DO capitalize:

- Both parts of a hyphenated word in a title (where title case is used), if the two words can stand on their own.
- “Office” when referring to a particular office, e.g., “Human Resources Office.”
- “Grade” when it precedes the number; otherwise, leave it lower case.

*Examples:* Grade 4  
4th grade

Do NOT capitalize:

- School subjects, except for English, Spanish and any other languages.
- Names of seasons.
- The word “state” unless it is part of a proper name. The same applies to the words federal, national and country.
- The names of schools, when listing them together in a sentence, e.g., “Marriotts Ridge and Reservoir high schools...”

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Punctuation

### Page Numbers

Even numbered pages are always on the left; odd pages are always on the right. Page 1 does not have to be labeled as such if it is obviously the opening page. You may start labeling a booklet with page two or later.

### Bullets

Use numbers when the order of a list is important, e.g., directions that must be performed in a sequence; otherwise, use bullets. Capitalize the first word after a bullet. Make indentations uniform. More often than not, bullets are followed by a period. Use periods after independent clauses, dependent clauses, or long phrases that are displayed on separate lines in a list. Use periods after short phrases that are essential for the completeness of the statement introducing the list. End with a period if one bullet in the group contains a full sentence. It's not necessary to use periods after short phrases or single words in a list if the introductory statement is grammatically complete or if the listed items are like those on an inventory sheet or a shopping list.

#### *Examples:*

The software in this price range offers many features:

- Windows 9x and up
- Audio pronunciations
- Rebate
- Tutorial

The features included in this software are:

- Windows 9x and up.
- Audio pronunciations.
- Rebate.
- Tutorial.

All bulleted lists within a document should be formatted the same: with or without periods. If one bullet requires a period at the end, all bullets must end with a period.

Make bullet points parallel in structure. For example, use all sentences or fragments or questions. However, if you have two sets of bullet points in a document, you don't need to make them consistent with each other, just within themselves.

Avoid making bullet points so long that they look like paragraphs. Three lines is a reasonable maximum length.

Do not end bulleted words or phrases with a semicolon. If you want to use semicolons, delete the bullets and create a sentence.

### Colon

Use a colon at the end of a sentence to introduce lists, texts, etc. Use only one space after a colon. Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the beginning of a complete sentence.

### Comma

Use commas to separate the elements of a simple series. However, no comma goes before the final conjunction, as in "red, white and blue."

If the absence of a serial comma compromises clarity, use the comma—even though it has not been used throughout.

#### *Example:*

The menu included soup, salad, cheese, and veggie pizza.

[Business correspondence includes a comma before the final conjunction in a series.]

Place a comma after all dates that include the year: "According to your April 15, 2019, letter ...." Commas do not separate seasons and months from their years: "The report will be released in spring 2020." "She expected the letter in May 2020." (Note: Seasons—fall, winter, spring and summer—are lowercased.)

Place a comma after all cities when followed by their states: "She talked to the Baltimore, Maryland, reporter."

### Dashes/Hyphen

There are three types of dashed lines that serve different purposes in punctuation: the hyphen (the shortest), the en dash (medium length) and the em dash (the longest). The following guidelines should help to distinguish between the three.

**hyphen (-)** – Use a hyphen to join two or more words expressing a single concept.

#### *Examples:*

African-American  
well-being  
end-of-quarter event  
after-school activities

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Punctuation, *continued*

**en dash (–)** – Use an en dash to show range. Do not insert a space on either side of the en dash

*Examples:*

6–10 years

3–9 p.m.

April–September

2012–2013

*Tip: On a Mac, you can create an en dash by holding down the option key and the hyphen key.*

*Tip: On a PC, an en dash can be manually inserted by using the Insert tab in Word (Insert – Symbol – More Symbols – Special Characters – En dash – Insert – Close).*

**em dash (—)** – Use an em dash (longest) to convey an abrupt change in thought or an emphatic pause.

*Example:*

John Smith noticed some students—quite a few, in fact—were not paying attention.

In print, do not insert a space on either side of the em dash. Online, a space may be inserted on both sides to alleviate awkward text wraps. If you know em dashes to be corrupted online, double hyphens with a space on either side may be used in their place.

*Example:*

John Smith noticed some students -- quite a few, in fact -- were not paying attention.

*Tip: In Microsoft Word, when you type text followed by two hyphens ( -- ) followed by more text, an em dash is automatically inserted. Do not type any spaces on either side of the hyphens.*

### **Exclamation Point**

This is often overused to add emphasis or excitement. Consider using more lively adjectives to convey your enthusiasm. Do not use multiple exclamation points.

### **Period Spacing**

Only one space is necessary after a period.

### **Quotation Mark Use With Other Punctuation**

Always place a period or comma inside the quotation mark.

*Examples:*

The teacher said that her students “are extremely bright.”

“My students,” said the teacher, “are extremely bright.”

Place a dash, semicolon, question mark, or exclamation point inside the quotation marks when it applies to the quoted matter only.

*Example:*

Eric asked, “Have we made our reservations yet?”

Place it outside when it applies to the whole sentence.

*Example:*

Didn’t you say you were “too busy to get involved”?

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

## Correct Usage of Terms

**affect, effect** – The use of these two words can be confusing because each can be used as a verb and a noun. Most commonly, “affect” is used as a verb and “effect” is used as a noun.

**affect** (verb) – means to influence  
*The game will affect the standings.*

**effect** (noun) – means result  
*The game will have no effect on the standings.*

**assure, ensure, insure** – These three words are often used interchangeably, but each has a distinct and different meaning.

**insure** – Use only if you are referring to insurance. It means “to protect against loss.”

**assure** – This means “to give someone confidence.” The object of this verb should always refer to a person.

**ensure** – This means “to make certain” or “guarantee.”

**ampersand** – Use the & symbol only when it is part of an official name (Barnes & Noble) or as a design element. Otherwise, always spell out “and.”

**Board of Education** – See page 1.

**Board members** – See page 1.

**central office** – See page 1.

**collective nouns** – Words such as “faculty” and “staff” may take singular or plural verbs and pronouns. If, in context, the group functions as a unit, treat the noun as singular; if its members function individually, treat the noun as plural.

*Examples:*

Staff in the Communications Office are working on...  
(plural – working together as individuals)

The faculty has been apprised of...(singular - the group functions as one unit)

**compose/comprise** –

**Compose** means to create or put together.

**Comprise** means to contain, to include all or embrace.

*Example:* The BOE comprises eight elected members.

**co-teaching** – with hyphen.

**countywide** – one word, no hyphen.

**data** – A plural noun, it normally takes plural verbs and pronouns. See “collective nouns.”

**dates**

Always use Arabic figures without st, nd, rd, or th. This is the case for dates in a sentence or listed alone, such as on a flyer or program.

*correct:* The meeting will be held on May 30.

*incorrect:* The meeting will be held on May 30th.

*correct on a flyer:* Saturday, May 30, 2017

*incorrect on a flyer:* Saturday, May 30th, 2017

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. [Spell out months in business correspondence; do not use abbreviations.] When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate them with a comma.

**degrees**

College degrees are lowercase when spelled out, e.g., “associate in arts,” “bachelor of science,” “master of arts.” Degrees are capitalized and take periods when abbreviated, e.g., “B.A. in business administration,” “M.S. in education.” The associate in arts degree (note: “in,” not “of”) is never abbreviated. In general, avoid using abbreviations for all degrees in a sentence. Use an apostrophe in “bachelor’s degree” and “master’s degree.” DO NOT use an apostrophe (or an “s”) in “associate degree.” A doctorate is a “Ph.D.” “Ph.D.s” is its plural form. When possible, use “doctorate” over “Ph.D.,” e.g., “She holds a doctorate in biomechanics.”

**Department of Education** – See page 1.

**e.g. versus i.e.**

**e.g.** means “for example.” (Memory tip: “eg” sounds like egg sample/example.)

**i.e.** means “that is.” (Memory tip: “i” stands for “in other words.”)

Both e.g. and i.e. are lowercase with no space between the periods or letters and should be set off by commas. Neither are italicized.

*Examples:*

Capitalize the first word following a colon when it begins a new sentence, e.g., “He was right about one thing: The business was thriving.”

I’m going to the place where I work best, i.e., the coffee shop.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Correct Usage of Terms, *continued*

**EL** – English Learners – replaces ELL; no longer use LEP.

**elected officials** – use rather than “government representative.”

**email** – lowercase, no hyphen.

**FARMS/FARMS** – If possible, do not use the acronym in a sentence. Instead, use “students receiving free or reduced-priced meals.” If an acronym is necessary, such as in a table, use: “FARMS” for Free And Reduced-priced Meals, or “FARMS” to mean Free And Reduced-priced Meal Services.

**fax** – lowercase; it is not an acronym.

**fiscal year** – FY 2017 stretches from July 1, 2016, to June 30, 2017, and is referred to as: fiscal year 2017, FY 2017 or FY17 unless used in a title, e.g., Fiscal Year 2017 Capital Budget.

**flier/flyer** – The preferred spelling is “flyer” not “flier.”

### **foreword/forward**

A “foreword” is an introductory remark or preparatory note. Do not confuse it with “forward,” the adjective that means toward the front, in the direction that one is facing or traveling; bold or presumptuous.

### **grade/Grade**

“Grade” is capitalized when preceding the number:

*Example:*  
Grade 4  
4th grade

**HCPSS, Howard County public schools, Howard County Public School System** – See page 1.

**internet/ intranet** – Do not capitalize.

**it’s/its** - “It’s” with an apostrophe is the contraction for “it is.” Without the apostrophe, “its” is possessive.

*Examples:*  
It’s the thought that counts.  
The group lost its way.

**kid** – Avoid using this colloquialism. Use *child* or *student*.

**Mt. Hebron** – not Mount Hebron

**names and titles** – Refer to both men and women by first and last name, without courtesy titles, on first reference. Refer to both men and women by last name

without courtesy titles, in subsequent references. Courtesy titles, such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss and Dr., are not typically used, with a few exceptions: for Board members or the Superintendent. After the first reference, courtesy titles may be used with the last name of a Board member or the Superintendent. Check the following bios on the HCPSS website to determine the courtesy title preferred by each:

[www.hcpss.org/board/](http://www.hcpss.org/board/)  
[www.hcpss.org/superintendent/](http://www.hcpss.org/superintendent/)

Honorifics, such as Sen., Rep., Hon. and Gen., are used on first reference. On second reference, use the last name only. [Use courtesy titles in business correspondence.]

Capitalize a title immediately preceding a name, but lowercase the title if it follows the name or stands by itself.

*Examples:*

Principal John A. Smith

John A. Smith, principal of Howard Elementary School

Exception: When referring to the HCPSS Superintendent, capitalize “Superintendent” at all times, even if it is not used with a name.

**numbers** – Spell out the word for numbers one through nine. For numbers 10 and above, use the numeral. Use a comma for 1,000 and above. This does not apply to times or dates. If a number begins a sentence, spell it out. This rule may be broken in special circumstances. For instance, numbers under 10 may be used for lists to grab attention.

*Example:*

3 great years  
2 state championships  
1 super class!

Another exception: When two numbers appear together with one modifying the other, the first is usually spelled out.

*Example:* ...twenty 15-student groups.

When referring to millions of dollars, use the following format: \$7.2M or \$7.2 million.

When expressing numbers in words, hyphenate all compound numbers between 21 and 99, whether they stand alone or are part of a number over 100.

*Examples:*

twenty-one, twenty-one hundred

**online** – one word, not hyphenated.

# HCPSS Branding and Writing Style Guide

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## Correct Usage of Terms, *continued*

**percent** – one word. AP style change, 2019: The % sign may be used when paired with a numeral (no space between). For amounts less than 1%, precede the decimal with a zero (e.g., 0.7%).

**phone, fax, and TTY numbers** – Include the area code as part of the phone number without parentheses.

**policies** – Board policies are referred to by the word “Policy,” followed by the number and the title. “Policy” is capitalized. There are no commas or # signs.

*Example:* Policy 9210 Dress Code

### **prekindergarten/Pre-K**

According to the HCPSS Early Childhood Programs, “prekindergarten” and “Pre-K” have two different definitions and should not be used interchangeably.

**Prekindergarten** is the grade prior to kindergarten. The HCPSS programs that serve prekindergarten children include Pre-K, MINC (Multiple Intense Needs Class) and preschool. Write as one word with no hyphen. **Pre-K** is a half-day program for children who are four years old by September 1 and meet certain criteria, including income eligibility, homelessness and foster care status. Write with uppercase P, a hyphen and uppercase K.

**re-** – Use a hyphen after “re” when the word that follows begins with an “e,” such as in “re-elect.”

**state names** – The names of the 50 U.S. states should be spelled out when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base.

The two-letter state abbreviations (all-caps, no periods, no spaces) are abbreviations of the U.S. Postal Service only. Use them only in full addresses with zip codes.

### **student descriptions** –

- Use “student groups” rather than “subgroups.”
- Use “students needing special education services,” not “special education students.”
- Use “emotional disability,” not “emotional disturbance.”
- Use “two or more races,” rather than “multirace/multiracial.”

**superintendent** – See page 1.

**that/which** – Use “that” to begin restrictive clauses. A restrictive clause is a part of a sentence that cannot be eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence.

*Example:*

Flowers that wilt quickly are not worth the money.

If you remove “that wilt quickly,” the sentence will not have the same meaning. It will infer that all flowers are not worth the money instead of the intended meaning that flowers that wilt quickly are not worth the money. Restrictive clauses are not surrounded by commas.

Use “which” in a nonrestrictive clause. A nonrestrictive clause is a phrase that can be left out without changing the meaning of the sentence – it simply provides additional information.

*Example:*

Tulips, which bloom in the spring, are my favorite.

If you leave off the clause “which bloom in the spring,” the meaning of the sentence doesn’t change. It still states that tulips are my favorite. Nonrestrictive clauses are set off by commas.

(Memory tip: You can throw out the “whiches” and no harm will be done.)

**time** – Use figures, except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes. If the time is on the hour, do not include “:00” minutes. Use periods and lowercase letters for **a.m./p.m.**, with a space after the number. If showing a range of time, (e.g., 9 a.m.–10:30 a.m.) use an en dash with no space surrounding it.

*correct:* 6–8:30 p.m.

*incorrect:* 6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

**United States** – spell out as a noun. Abbreviate United States as an adjective.

*Example:*

U.S. Supreme Court

**web, website, webpage** – lowercase, one word. It is cumbersome and unnecessary to list an entire URL (e.g., <http://www.hcpss.org>). Typically, web addresses should begin with “www” so they can be recognized as URLs. However, abbreviated URLs (that work without http or www) may be used to shorten a particularly lengthy URL, for brevity. Please call the Public Information Office at 410-313-7496 with questions related to URL standards or to request to have a bitly (shortened URL) created.

**who/that** – “Who” is the pronoun used for references to human beings and to animals with a name. Use “that” when referring to inanimate objects.

**-wide** (suffix) – Words with this ending are written as one word: countywide, districtwide, statewide, systemwide, etc.

## LETTER TEMPLATE

Letterhead templates are available on the Staff Hub for all HCPSS buildings/schools. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources.



Date (Font: Times New Roman 12; may use 11 pt. to keep to one page)

Recipient Name  
Street Address  
City, ST ZIP Code

Dear Ms. Name:

The date should align with the body of the letter. The addressee begins four returns after the date. The salutation begins two returns after the last line of the addressee. The body of the letter begins two returns after the salutation.

Use one-inch margins.

One return is required between each paragraph. Four returns are used between the closing and the name. A letter should be taken to a second sheet if it is closer than one inch to the bottom of the paper. If the letter is longer than one page, include at least two lines of text on each following page and include a header.

Sincerely,

Your Name  
Title

MM/ka

Attachment

Copy to: John Smith  
Mary Jones



# MEMO TEMPLATE

(Internal correspondence)

A memo template is available on the Staff Hub. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources.



Date (Font: Times New Roman 12)

## MEMORANDUM

To: Full Name  
Title

From: Full Name (this section should be initialed by the writer if sent in paper copy)  
Title

Subject: HCPSS Memorandum Instructions

Suggested opening: “The purpose of this memorandum is to inform...” The memo format simplifies the exchange of information within an organization and can also be used for documents transmitted by email. It should not be used for correspondence outside of the organization.

Interoffice memos do not require a salutation.

Use single spacing and either block paragraphs at the left margin or indent the first line of each paragraph 0.5 inch. Leave one blank line between paragraphs.

2nd Page Note: If the memo continues beyond the first page, insert a continuation heading on a new sheet of paper.

Example: HCPSS Memorandum Instructions – Page 2

Leave two blank lines between the continuation-page heading and the content. Include at least two lines of text on a continuation page.

Type the reference initials at the left margin on the second line below the last line of the message. Type enclosure or attachment notations on the line below the reference initials as shown below.

MM/ka

Attachment

Copy to:

BOARD REPORT  
COVER PAGE  
TEMPLATE

A Board Report template is available on the Staff Hub. Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources>Templates.



(Choose the heading below as appropriate):

- REPORT**
- ACTION**
- WORK SESSION**
- INFORMATION**
- DISCUSSION**
- PUBLIC HEARING**

**BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY  
MEETING AGENDA ITEM**

**TITLE:** Title must match the BOE Quarterly Agenda **DATE:** Board meeting date

**PRESENTER(S):** List all presenters and their titles, including non-employees

**OVERVIEW:**

To guide staff through the Board Report process, the following templates/guidelines are available on the Staff Hub: Board Meeting Agenda Item Procedures, Board Report Guidelines, Board Report Cover template, Proclamation Guidelines, and a BOE PowerPoint presentation template. **Click on Sitemap>Hub Docs; under Document Library, click on Communication Resources>Templates.**

1. **Heading and Title:** These must match the Board's Quarterly Agenda. If there is a discrepancy, please inform the Board's office before preparing the cover.
2. **Date:** The date of the Board meeting when the item will be presented.
3. **Presenter(s):** Names and titles of all presenters, including those from outside the HCPSS.
4. Include a summary of the report in the Overview section, using Times New Roman in 11 or 12 point font. **Please keep the Board cover to one page.**

**RECOMMENDATION/FUTURE DIRECTION:**

Identify the requested action or recommendation for the Board. For example: It is recommended that the Board approve \_\_\_\_\_.

<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>		<b>APPROVAL/CONCURRENCE:</b>	
	Name		Name
	Title		Title
	Name		Name
	Title		Title
	Name		Name
	Title		Title



Communications Office  
Howard County Public School System  
10910 Clarksville Pike  
Ellicott City, MD 21042