

Editorial Style Guide

Capitalization

Headlines and titles:

- >> Prepositions of four letters or less (such as “of” and “with”) are lowercase, unless appearing as either the first or last word in a headline or title, in which case they are capitalized.
- >> The first element of hyphenated compounds is always capitalized; the second element is also capitalized except for articles (“the,” “a,” etc.) and prepositions of four letters or less (examples: Self-Renewal, Not-for-Profit).

Capitalize initial letters of:

- >> any official title that directly precedes a person’s name (Chief Operating Officer Mary Jones, Director of National Meetings Judy Smith)
- >> names of projects, activities, events, and initiatives
- >> names of trademarked games (Trivial Pursuit), department/team/group/board names when stated in full (GSUSA Communications, Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles Board of Directors, CFO Call Advisory Group)
- >> book series (It’s Your World—Change It!)

Note: When a colon is used between clauses that are linked but independent, the first word after the colon is not initial-capped, even if what follows the colon is a complete sentence.

Lowercase initials of the following:

- >> titles that don’t directly precede a person’s name (Laura Johnson, vice president of communications; the vice president, Laura Johnson) in running text; however, in a list format it may be appropriate to capitalize
- >> titles that are more descriptive than official in nature (developmental psychologist Sue Blue)
- >> generic, stand-alone references to Girl Scout program, projects, and publications (“the project,” even if it refers to the Girl Scout Bronze Award Project)
- >> Girl Scout council (but Girl Scout Council of Tropical Florida)

Hyperlinking

Defined as a word, group of words, or image in an electronic document that readers can click on to jump to another document, the hyperlink is a hyper-efficient means of transportation.

A few tips:

- >> Be direct. Steer clear of outmoded constructions like “click here,” which crowd text with extra, unnecessary words. Instead, insert hyperlinks precisely where indicated by your messaging to streamline copy and avoid link ambiguity for those who routinely scan emails without taking in the context surrounding links—as well as for screen reader users. For example, if you’re pointing readers to a webinar registration page, link off of “register for the webinar”—direct, clear.
- >> Be choosy. Keep in mind that hyperlinks can serve as a tiresome distraction to readers, particularly when used *indiscriminately* and abundantly. So link wisely.
- >> Know the drill. 1) Highlight the word(s)/image you wish to link from. 2) At the top of your screen, click Insert and select Hyperlink. 3) Click Web Page, Document, or E-mail Address, depending on the nature of the item you wish to link to. 4) Proceed as instructed, entering or pasting relevant text into the designated fields.

Italics, Bold Face, and Quote Marks

Italicize titles of:

- >> books (*The Chicago Manual of Style*)
- >> magazines and newspapers (*Los Angeles Times*, *the American Girl*)
- >> movies
- >> plays
- >> TV shows and series
- >> podcasts (*This American Life*)

While there aren’t really hard-and-fast rules for boldfacing, keep in mind:

- >> Titles and section heads in a piece of writing are good targets.
- >> Particular phrasing that you wish to emphasize in a piece can benefit from boldfacing, but remember...
- >> Less is more. Too much boldface in a piece often has the opposite effect of what’s sought (emphasis), making text appear cluttered and reader eyes tired before they’ve even begun to process your messaging.

Use double quotation marks for titles of:

- >> book chapters and sections (“Be Healthy, Be Fit” chapter)
- >> magazine and newspaper articles
- >> poems
- >> songs (“Watch Me Shine” Girl Scout anthem)
- >> TV series episodes (the “Election Night” episode of The West Wing)
- >> podcast episodes (“America’s Concentration Camps?” episode of the Code Switch podcast)
- >> public service announcements (Girl Scouts’ “I’m Prepared” PSA)

You might also use double quotation marks to indicate that a word/construction is somehow special, for instance because:

- >> It constitutes a play on words. (The girls used their cookie “dough” to fund the service project.)
- >> You don’t buy into its meaning. (Women achieved “equality” when they were granted the right to vote in 1920.)
- >> It’s a clear reference point in your sentence. (See the “earth” entry in the “Words, Terms, Names” section of the guide.)

Use single quotation marks for:

- >> quotes within quotes (“I’m really feeling Girl Scouts’ new anthem, ‘Let Me Shine,’” said the Girl Scout.)

Numbers

- >> Spell out numbers one through ten, and use numerals for higher numbers. Exceptions: when used with a unit (4 inches, 2 centimeters; 3 billion people); in a series of three or more numbers, with one or more above nine (8, 9, 18).
- >> You may use an en dash to mean “to” for continuing numbers (examples: ages 12–14; pgs. 10–12).
- >> Numbers that begin a sentence are always spelled out.

Specific rules by category:

- >> **ages:** eight- to nine-year-old girls, six-month-old baby, five-year-old child, five years old, ages 15–18 (use en dash), ages 16 and older, student in first grade, first-grade student, first-grader, 11th grader
- >> **dates:** September 1984; October 1, 1980, (commas before and after the year when the day is included after the month); 2017–18
- >> **fractions:** one-half, two and one-half days

- >> **money:** \$150
- >> **noun plus number:** Chapter 1, Activity 1 (not Chapter #1 or Activity #1)
- >> **page numbers:** pages 2–6 (use en dash with date and other number spreads)
- >> **phone numbers:** in print, 212-852-8000
- >> **plurals of numbers used as nouns:** Add only an s to numbers being used as nouns, whether numerals or spelled out (the 1940s; fours and fives).
- >> **plural acronyms and abbreviations:** Do not use apostrophes: IOUs, CODs, YWCAs.
- >> **temperature:** 300 degrees
- >> **time: 3:00 a.m.** (3:00 AM also acceptable; note that the no-periods rule also applies to small caps); 24-hour period
- >> **weight:** 1 1/2- to 2-pound sleeping bag

Punctuation

ampersand: Avoid using ampersands in text, unless referring to trademarks.

ellipsis: Used to indicate missing text or a trailing thought, the ellipsis consists of three consecutive periods. While our default style guide, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, states otherwise, GS style does not call for separating the periods with spaces; anyhow, often MS Word defaults to automatically inserting half-spaces between ellipsis periods.

em dash, en dash, and hyphen: Do not use a space before or after dashes and hyphens.

- >> Use an em dash to set off clauses. (Choose a goal—saving money, for example.) An em dash should also be used before names in source lines, such as the author of a quotation.

(To make an em dash in Microsoft Word, with NUM LOCK on, hold down CTRL and ALT while pressing the dash key in the number pad.)

- >> Use an en dash for number spreads and in other cases when the meaning is “to” (ages 12–14; 1997–99; 10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.); also when making a compound adjective with a proper noun (Girl Scout-related case study).

(To make an en dash, hold down CTRL while pressing the dash key in the number pad.)

- >> Use a hyphen only in compound words (one-half, mother-in-law) and in end-of-line word division.

exclamation point: Use sparingly to mark an outcry or following an emphatic comment. (Oh, no! or Woohoo, it’s Friday!)

punctuation in lists:

- >> Use numbered lists if items are in a sequence.
 1. Mix flour, macadamia chips, and baking powder.
 2. Add 2 cups of water.
 3. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes.

>> Use a bulleted list for items that are nonsequential.

Be sure to bring the following:

- canteen
- hiking boots
- matches
- poncho

>> Items within a list should be of parallel grammatical structure. Do not mix sentences and phrases within a list. Use periods in bulleted lists only when the items are grammatically complete sentences, or if ambiguity would result. Either:

- Drive on the right side of the road.
- Eat only in designated restaurants.
- Sleep at official campsites.

or:

- driving on the right
- eating in designated restaurants
- sleeping at official campsites

percent: Should be written out in text; the % symbol should be used only in charts/tables and in scientific/statistical text.

serial comma: Always insert a comma before the conjunction in a series. (Girls from Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan attended the event. Some girls choose English, others prefer science, and still others like art or music.)

Writing Guide

Writing tips

Whether you're new to communicating about Girl Scouts or a seasoned pro, here are some quick pointers and refreshers to guide you.

>> **Say it straight, then say it great.**

Be clear and concise. Then find a way to add color where appropriate to make your content more compelling.

>> **A good opening sentence makes eye contact.**

Your own ears are your best editor. They'll be able to hear where any bumps are that you can smooth out with a quick edit.

>> **Big words aren't always better.**

You don't have to have a huge vocabulary to write well. Instead, inventively and imaginatively use words that everyone understands. Avoid using acronyms or jargon.

>> **Say more with less.**

When we keep our writing concise, we invite readers to imagine more. We don't have to spell everything out to be understood.

>> **Be a ruthless editor.**

Good things come to those who spell check and proofread. Always review your writing once or twice (maybe even three times). And never underestimate the value of another set of eyes!

>> **Read it out loud.**

Your own ears are your best editor. They can hear any bumps that need smoothing out.

>> **Keep girls front and center.**

Remember: as a girl-first organization, everything we say should focus on girls first and foremost. Sometimes it's appropriate to talk about Girl Scouts as an organization but limit these instances. Avoid language that brags about ourselves and our expertise, unless specifically appropriate. It's not about us, it's about her.

Naming Index

When writing copy, refer to this list for guidance on how to correctly use our name.

Do:

Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts, Hornets' Nest Council

Girl Scout Gold Award

Girl Scout Cookie Program

Girl Scout Law

Girl Scout Network

Girl Scout Movement

Girl Scout council

Girl Scout Central

Girl Scout Research Institute

Don't:

GS

The Girl Scouts GSHNC

Girl Scouts Gold Award

Girl Scouts Cookie Program

Girl Scouts Law

Girl Scouts Network

Girl Scouts Movement

Girl Scouts Council

Girl Scouts Central

Girl Scouts Research Institute

How we use our name

Here's some guidance on how we use Girl Scouts (our plural and predominant name), and Girl Scout (the singular version of our name that we use in special use cases).

When we use 'Girl Scouts':

When referring to Girl Scouts of the USA and its councils, as well as our overall Movement and our girls, we use 'Girl Scouts.'

For Example:

At Girl Scouts, we support girls in the discovery and pursuit of their ambitions.

When we use 'Girl Scout':

When indicating possession, we use our singular brand name as an adjective. We also use it when referring to a Girl Scout.

For Example:

- >> Girl Scout Cookies
- >> Girl Scout Law
- >> As a Girl Scout she's dreaming big.

Words, terms and phrases

Here are some common writing scenarios and how to use our name accordingly.

Our Highest Awards

When writing about our highest awards, use:

- >> Girl Scout Gold Award
- >> Girl Scout Silver Award
- >> Girl Scout Bronze Award

When talking about a girl who earns her highest award, use the award as an adjective:

- >> Gold Award Girl Scout
- >> Silver Award Girl Scout
- >> Bronze Award Girl Scout

On the Cookie Program

When writing about our Cookie Program, make sure our singular brand name is used as an adjective preceding it.

For Example:

Girl Scout Cookie Program

On Councils

When writing about our council or other Girl Scout councils, do not abbreviate the council name as an acronym. It's best to fully spell it out on first reference and use "Girl Scouts" rather than an acronym for subsequent references, context allowing.

For Example:

- >> Girl Scouts of Greater New York
- >> Girl Scouts of Southern Nevada
- >> Girl Scouts of Oregon and Southwest Washington

On Girl Scouting

When writing about the experiences we offer, you can use Girl Scouts as a verb. At the same time, always remember that Girl Scouts is not just something she does, it's who she is.

For Example:

Always be yourself when Girl Scouting.

Editorial Considerations

Here are a few editorial considerations so you can write your best for Girl Scouts.

1. We use sentence case for our headlines. They should have a period.

Correct: Be yourself with us.

Incorrect: Be Yourself with Us

2. We no longer use the "G.I.R.L." acronym—but we may use the words that form it independently. Remember: the sentiment behind G.I.R.L. still applies to our brand essence, even if we no longer use the acronym.

Correct: She's a true go-getter, risk-taker, innovator, and leader in her community.

Incorrect: She's a true G.I.R.L. (Go-getter, Innovator, Risk-taker, Leader)[™] in her community.

3. We use title case in the SEO titles on our website, but they should not have a period in this case. Major words are capitalized. Minor words are lowercase.

Correct: The Girl Scout Difference

Incorrect: The girl scout difference.

4. We use title case for all proper nouns, professional titles that directly precede a person's name, and official titles or sections of content.

Correct: Join us for Girl Scouts Love State Parks weekend!

Incorrect: Join us for girl scouts love state parks weekend!

Correct: Girl Scout Interim CEO Judith Batty joined us in August

Incorrect: Judith Batty, Girl Scout Interim CEO, joined us in August.