



Web Content & Style Guide

Version 5 - As of November 12, 2015

This guide is a work-in-progress and subject to revision.

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Introduction

This guide includes rules, guidelines and answers to common questions about style and formatting of web content. The guide draws upon the SBCTC Brand and Style Guide (which is based on the Associated Press Stylebook) and “Letting Go of the Words” by Ginny Redish.

The guidelines are meant to create a consistent look, feel and writing style so web visitors have a good web experience and find information easily.

TOPICS

WEB CONTENT	3	TITLES AND HEADINGS.....	7
Publishing.....	3	Main heading.....	7
Keep it fresh.....	3	Hierarchy	7
		Heading capitalization rules	8
WRITING TIPS.....	3	LINKS.....	8
Plain Talk.....	3	Match the target.....	8
Active voice.....	4	Don't click here.....	8
Conversational tone.....	4	Hyperlinking headings, subheadings	8
Bullets and subheadings	4	Circle-Line elements rules	9
		Links to bills, RCWs and WACs.....	10
DOCUMENTS: NAMING, UPDATING,		External and internal link targets	10
STORING	5	TABLES.....	11
File format.....	5	IMAGES	13
Lower-case and hyphens.....	5	VIDEOS	13
No duplicates.....	5	SBCTC videos.....	13
Storing and uploading.....	5	YouTube.....	13
Dates in documents and links	6	SNIPPETS	14
		APPENDIX	15

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Content

Publishing

The content manager position in the SBCTC Communications department (or other authorized publisher) reviews and publishes all material on the website to ensure content has a consistent tone, uses Plain Talk principles and connects coherently under a unified look.

Keep it fresh

Outdated pages make SBCTC seem inattentive and unreliable:

- Review your content at least every three months to make sure it's timely and accurate.
- Set “stale content” reminders for your web pages in OU Campus.
- Delete seldom-visited pages so site visitors can easily find what they need. Google analytics can help you track page visits. (This feature will be added to the OU Dashboard at a later date.)

Pull dates

Use the following guidelines when posting to the website:

Type of information	Time posted on the website
Past meeting schedules, agendas and minutes	Three years
Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only the most current• Five (5) years for research-related reports
Job announcements	Until the closing date
Forms and manuals	Until revised

Contact the SBCTC online content manager to discuss possible exceptions.

Writing Tips

Use Plain Talk

Keep it simple and avoid jargon. Our audience includes high school students and non-native English speakers. Keep readers in mind when writing.

- Our goal is to write for the 8th grade level.
- Limit sentences to about 25 words.
- Limit paragraph length to fewer than six sentences.
- Cut out extra words. Revise your writing several times. Each revision will produce a more concise message.

SBCTC Website Style Guide

- Make one point per paragraph. Ideally, each paragraph should get across one main idea, and each sentence should cover one aspect of that idea.
- Layer information. Shorten web pages by removing information that applies to only a few readers. Put more specialized information in an attachment or link to a new page.

Use active voice

Use the active voice (not passive) to make written content more clear and engaging.

Yes: Submit the request form to the approving official.

No: The request form must be submitted to the approving official.

Keep it conversational

Use an informal, conversational tone. Avoid acronyms and legal terms, slang and colloquialisms. For example, “crosswalk” as a verb could end up translating as “pedestrian crossing the street.”

Yes: We teach students in ways that related directly to their career or academic goals.

No: We provide contextualized learning opportunities.

Use bullets and subheadings

Web users skim instead of read. Stick to the main points, use as few words as possible and include bullets and subheadings.

- Short, concise paragraphs and bulleted lists work best for web use.
- Put the essential and most interesting information at the beginning. Include additional information in order of diminishing importance (an “inverted pyramid”).

Documents: Naming, Updating and Storing

File format

Use PDF format in most cases. If the document is a form to be filled out, returned or use in another way, it is ok to use Word, Excel or other.

The file type — [PDF] [Excel] [Word] — will show up automatically at the end of your link when the page is published.

Document names in lowercase

Document names should be all lowercase letters with hyphens. No blanks, underscores, periods or other symbols.

Yes	No
economic-development-one-pager.pdf	One_Pager_Economic_Development.pdf
middle-class-one-pager.pdf	middle-class-5.22.2015.pdf
hs-release-form-sample.pdf	HS.Release.Form_sample_000.pdf

No duplicate content or documents

Don't recreate or upload content already on another page. Link to the relevant page or document instead. For example, don't upload a one-pager to your own page if it's already in the Publications section. *Link to it.* This will help avoid conflicting and outdated information.

tip *Dependency Manager magic! Always **browse** for the document (instead of typing or pasting in a URL) so your links stay up-to-date.*

*Not sure a document or file is already out there? Try the **OU Search tool**.*

Uploading documents and images

All documents should be stored in the **/resources/documents** folder; not in your local page folders. The **/resources** file structure should *mirror* your page folder names to avoid confusion.

Example:

Page: [/about/commissions-councils/atc/meeting-materials.pcf](#)

Document: [/resources/documents/about/commissions-councils/atc/2015-spring-meeting.pdf](#)

Exceptions:

- **College Access Only.** Some documents are to be accessed only from computers at the colleges. Those documents should be stored in the **_colleges-staff/collegeaccess/_resources** folder.
- **Blogs.** Blog images and files should reside in the **/resources** subfolder of the associated blog.

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Dates in document names

If the year and date are an integral part of the item (minutes, agendas, year-end reports), it *should* have a date.

Dates in files should be **yyyy-mm-dd**.

The dashes make it more human readable and the year-month-day is the only way that will “alphabetize chronologically” a similarly grouped series of documents such as:

Sortable by Date	Not Sortable by Date
bac-meeting-minutes-2014-02-13.pdf bac-meeting-minutes-2014-08-23.pdf bac-meeting-minutes-2015-05-01.pdf	bac-meeting-minutes-02132014.pdf bac-meeting-minutes-05012015.pdf bac-meeting-minutes-08232014.pdf

Dates in link labels

Certain document links are shared, emailed and “bookmarked” at other websites more than others. When you revise a linked document and change the **document name**, the link breaks.

If you must, show revision dates in link label and inside the document, not in the file name.

When you update a linked document in the future, you **might** want show a revision date, depending on the document type (e.g. working drafts, committee lists, time-sensitive edits).

It’s a judgment call whether a revision date is important to your audience.

- DO NOT rename your destination file as this will break links for those who have bookmarked or shared it.
- Make changes to your document and add a revision date IN THE DOCUMENT itself.

tip *Don’t use the Quick Part “date” 1/1/7/2015, otherwise it will appear to have been updated the same day it is opened.*

- If you wish, update your *link label* to reflect the date change with the word “revised.”

Yes	No	Link Label
prof-tech-matrix.pdf	prof-tech-matrix-2015-08-05.pdf	Professional-Technical Programs [PDF]
council-designees-2014-2015.pdf	Council-designees-2014-2015-rev-032015.pdf	2014-15 Council Designees (revised March 2015) [PDF]
time-effort-guidelines.pdf	time-effort-guidelines-rev-feb2014.pdf	Time and Effort Reporting Guidelines [PDF]
ibest-one-pager.pdf	ibest-one-pager-2015-05-22-final.pdf	I-BEST: Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training [PDF]

Titles and Headings

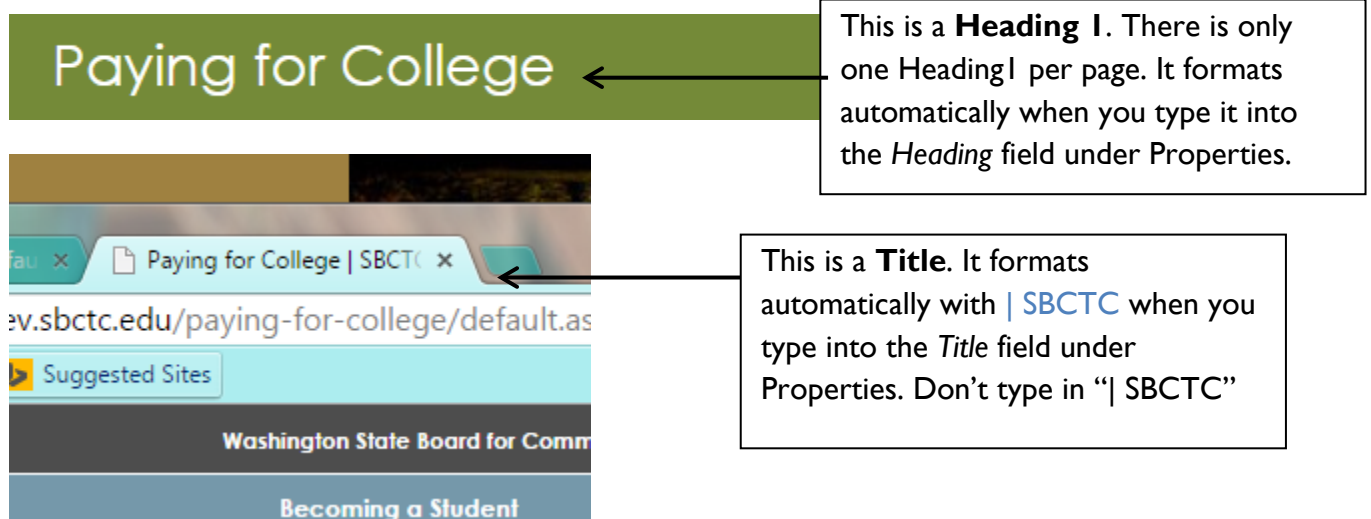
Title your page clearly

Many people start their search for information with a search engine like Google or Yahoo. If they can't find your page, they can't find your content. That's why it's important to title your page clearly. The Title and Heading 1 are usually the same or very similar.

The main heading of your page appears in the green bar on your web page.

Yes: Paying for College

No: Let's Talk About the Money Thing



Structure content with the correct headings

Headings and subheadings allow readers to skim and scan content easily. They also let those using screen readers know which topics are subtopics of another.

- There is only one Heading 1 on any page and it appears in the green bar (see above).
- Heading 2 is always the next heading to be used. If there are related sub-topics, those are Heading 3. Return to Heading 2 for new topics.
- Use headings in outline order. Do not go from Heading 1 to Heading 3 to Heading 2.

Heading 1 is the Main Heading on the Page

Heading 2 is a Topic

Heading 3 is a related sub-topic

Heading 3 is a related sub-topic

Heading 2 is a New Topic

Heading 3 is a sub-topic

Heading 3 is another sub-topic

Heading 4 is a sub-topic

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Capitalize headings correctly

- Heading1 – First letter capitalized in each word: Paying for College
- Heading2 – First letter capitalized in each word: Grants and Scholarships
- Heading3 – Sentence case: Find scholarships for your education
- Heading4 – Sentence case: Find scholarships for your education

Links

Match the link to the target

The link label (or link text) should closely match the name of the destination page (target) or document.

Example: A link to the *Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report* should say exactly that, not “fall report.”

Yes: Demographic information is available in the [Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report](#).

No: Demographic information is available in the [fall report](#).

Don't use “click here”

Link labels should stand alone and make sense all by themselves. If you used a screen-reader and visited our site in “links list” mode, what would these links mean to you?

- wide range of choices
- find one that's right for you
- get involved

That's right. **Nothing**. Instead, link labels should clearly describe what a user will find:

- [Our colleges offer a wide range of programs and courses.](#)
- [Find the college that's right for you.](#)
- [Get involved in student life.](#)

Instead of using the words “click here” when creating links, place the link in the flow of text.

Yes: [Our colleges offer many transfer options.](#)

No: [Click here](#) to learn about transfer options.

Do not hyperlink headings and subheadings

Do not hyperlink Heading1, Heading2, or Heading3.

SBCTC Website Style Guide

A word about the Circle-Line design elements

These design snippets have some **either/or** rules:

- Circle-Line Main Content 2-column
- Circle-line RH Column

If you use a **Circle-Line Main Content 2-column** in the main body, **DO NOT** also use a **Circle-line RH Column** in the right-hand column on the same page. To do so creates a visually cluttered page.

The diagram illustrates four design snippets, each with a circular icon and a horizontal line. The snippets are: News Links, Spotlights, News Releases, and Media Kit. A callout box on the right, titled "Circle-Line Main Content 2-column", points to the Spotlights snippet and contains the following rules:

- Use with **plain header** and no hyperlink.
- Be sure your link label is meaningful. See Links section.

News Links
News articles about and of interest to the Washington state community and technical college system.

Spotlights
Profiles of students, alumni, staff, faculty, programs and partners making a difference in our community and technical college system.

News Releases
News and information about the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and the college system.

Media Kit
The communications office coordinates publications, community relations and media contacts.

For the right-hand column:

The diagram shows a callout box on the left, titled "Circle-line RH Column", pointing to a design snippet on the right. The callout box contains the following rules:

- Use with **plain header** to present link lists or linked text below.
- No hyperlink in header.
- Okay to link to documents in list.

The design snippet on the right is titled "Related Councils and Groups" and "Join a Listserv".

Related Councils and Groups

- Budget Accounting and Reporting Council (BAR)
- Operations and Facilities Council (OFC)
- Purchasing Affairs Council (PAC)
- Bookstore Council
- Safety, Security and Emergency Management Council (SSEMC)

Join a Listserv

Get involved in conversations with your peers at other colleges. Mailman Mail-Lists of interest to business affairs commission members include:

- BAC (Business Affairs Commission) closed listserv
- Meetings-BAC (Business Affairs Commission) open listserv

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Links to RCWs and WACs

In general, avoid citing RCWs and WACs in the content of a page (unless it is part of the SBCTC policy manual). Instead, if necessary, put links to RCWs and WACs at the bottom of the page, under an H3 heading.

- Always link to the actual RCW or WAC online; not to a PDF.
- Put the RCW and/or WAC links under the appropriate heading:
 - “Related laws” if the list includes only RCWs.
 - “Related laws and rules” if it includes both RCWs and WACs.

Include the entire RCW or WAC number and title in the link so it will be accessible to screen readers. It should look like this:

H3 heading: Related laws

- RCW 28B.40.250
- RCW 28B.50.535: Title of the Act (if there is one)

Links to Bills and Acts

If you must cite a legislative bill number, spell it out and include the year. The legislature recycles bill numbers every year, so SHB 1052 in 1997 is not the same as in 2015.

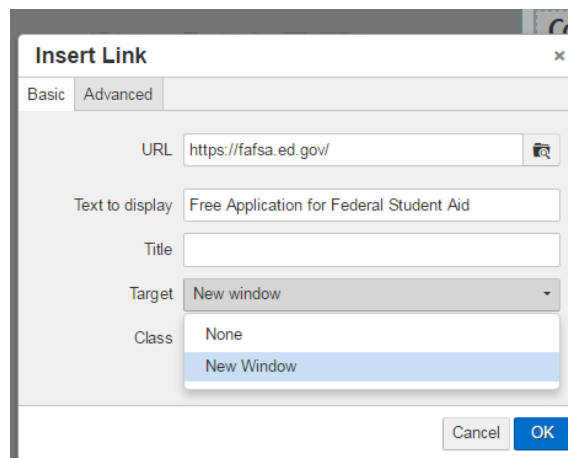
Substitute House Bill 1052 (2015)

If a bill has passed, cite it as a statute (public law).

RCW 28B.15.624: Early course registration period for eligible veterans

External and Internal Links

- Set links to **external** organizations to open in a new window. Target is “New Window.”



SBCTC Website Style Guide

- Set internal links (SBCTC.edu pages) to open in current window. Target is “None.”



Dependency Manager magic! Always **browse** for the appropriate **internal** page or document (instead of typing or pasting in a URL) so your links stay up-to-date.

The **Dependency Manager** updates links to content within OU Campus automatically when linked content, pages or even entire folders are moved or renamed.

Right Column Navigation Options

Three options exist to link to internal and external web pages.

- Related Content. Use this heading when linking to related pages – but not documents – within SBCTC.edu.
- Resource Links. Use this heading when linking to content outside SBCTC.edu or documents on SBCTC.edu that are related to the subject matter of the page.
- In This Section. Used when linking to a SBCTC.edu local navigation menu to navigate to pages within a specific section of the website.

Tables

Use tables sparingly

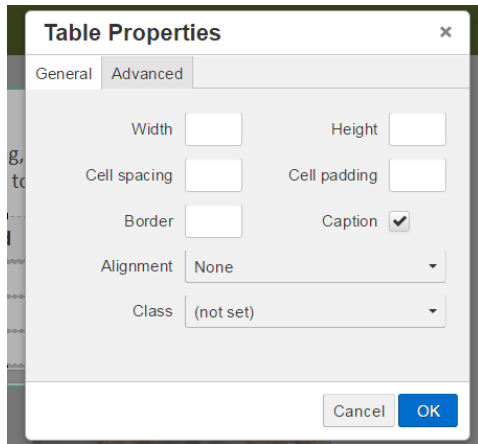
Tables should be used only to represent tabular data (data that must be displayed in rows and columns) or to communicate content so it's easier to understand (such as rosters with titles and phone numbers).

Do not use tables to format a web page in columns. SBCTC already has several formatted templates. Putting text into tables makes it harder for digital screen readers to say the words aloud for people who are visually impaired.

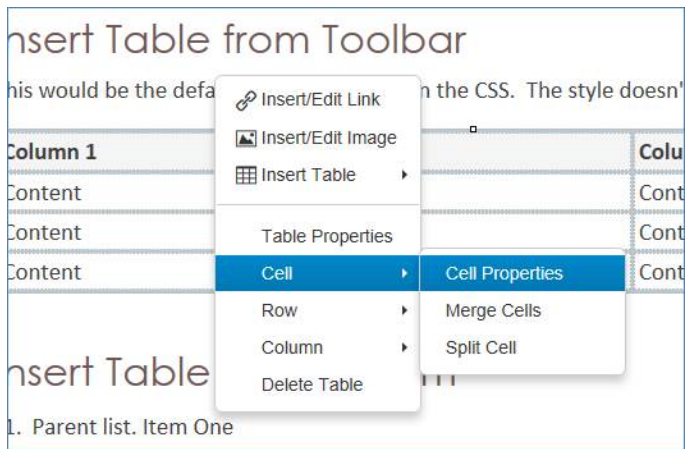
Use captions

Every table should have a caption, unless the table is directly under a heading. A caption is like a title for a table. It displays on a web page.

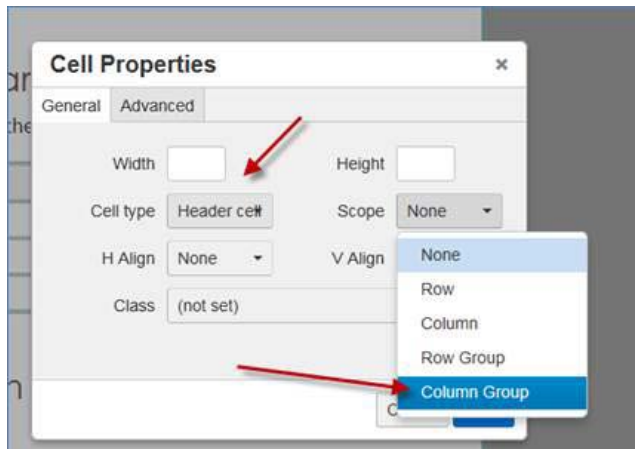
SBCTC Website Style Guide



When you first insert a table, check the Caption box and click OK.



Highlight the first row of your table. Right-click to bring up the menu.
Choose Cell Properties.



In Cell Properties dialog box:

- Cell type → Header cell
- Scope → Column Group

Table capitalization

Table captions (titles) and column headings are in title case or initial caps (like the Heading1 and Heading2).

Table dates and months

See SBCTC Brand and Style Guide.

SBCTC Website Style Guide

SBCTC Website Style Guide

Images

Administrators add photos

Only a few sections of the website contain photos and they are placed there by the SBCTC content manager or another administrator.

Use alt text

Any image on the website must have “alt text” describing the image for visually impaired web visitors who use screen readers.

Yes: A young woman throws a graduation cap in the air.

No: Photo of a young woman throwing a graduation cap in the air. (The screen reader for the visually impaired will already identify it as a photo.)

Image file names

Image names should be all lower-case letters with hyphens instead of blank spaces.

- men-walking-trail.jpg
- military-flags.jpg
- people-walking-bridge.jpg

Videos

SBCTC videos

Videos cannot be saved or uploaded to the OU Campus folder structure.

They must be uploaded to the SBCTC YouTube channel and then embedded on a page using the Video Popup snippet.

Other videos

Use the Video Popup snippet to embed a YouTube video on a web page. For example, a college presentation or program feature.

Video quality

Any video embedded at our website or uploaded to the SBCTC YouTube channel must be:

- High quality, in-focus and have clear audio.
- Captioned for the hearing-impaired. If auto-captioning is used, your department will need to edit the transcript for accuracy.

The SBCTC content manager or another administrator reserves the right to remove Video Popups that don't meet these criteria.

Snippets & Assets

Student Redirect snippet

If you think a student is likely to land on a colleges-staff page and will be confused by policies and staff information, use the Student Redirect snippet.

Insert at the top of your page, edit the topic (e.g. Transfer, I-BEST, athletics) and then link to the page with the student-related information.

 Transfer information for students 

New Transfer Degrees

- [Approval process for new transfer degrees \[PDF\]](#)
- [Transfer degree program approval request form \[Word\]](#)

More Snippets and Assets

See the CMS User Documentation guide.

Appendix

In the future, this guide will be linked to the Brand and Style Guide sections.

See the SBCTC Brand and Style Guide for:

Acronyms
Addresses
Advisory boards, councils and commissions
Ages
Bullets
Capitalization
Commas
Dashes and Hyphens
Dates and Months
Dates in Tables
Degrees
Dimensions
Dollar amounts
eLearning and e-learning
Governor
Numerals
Parentheses
Percentages
Phone numbers
Punctuation
Quarters
Quotes
Seasons
Spaces between sentences
Spelling
State Board and SBCTC
Time
Washington state

REV 2015-10-12