

TO: Dr. Nahrwold

Cc: KAB Foundation

FROM: Anna Waller and Kelsie Walker

DATE: 6 December 2012

SUBJECT: Style Manual for the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Commission

I. The Context

We created our style manual on behalf of the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Foundation (KAB Foundation), a charitable organization that exists with the “exclusive purpose of supporting and benefiting the programs and activities of the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Commission” (KAB Commission). In turn, the mission of the KAB Commission is to “inspire and educate individuals to prevent litter, recycle and keep Arkansas beautiful.”

The purpose of the style manual was to gather a set of writing and design standards across the major publication categories including external business letters to donors, internal memos, grant proposals, and news releases. We were committed to working with this specific organization because we realized our efforts had the potential to have a practical, positive impact on the well-being and growth of the Foundation and the beautification movement in Arkansas. As the new Executive Director Bill Smith explained, even though the Foundation has been around since 2002, part of the largest reason it has been unable to flourish is due to inconsistent language usage in publication and branding materials. Therefore, our goal for the manual became not only to provide uniformity in style and formatting within a document and across multiple documents, but, ultimately, to also assist the Foundation in creating an appealing and memorable presence in the community that will attract financial donors and sponsors.

From the very beginning, we realized that if we did not make the manual simple, accessible, and user-friendly, the manual would fail to become the dynamic, valuable asset it was intended to be. Our thought process was that if we could make the style manual simple, it could be usable; and once it was usable, it could generate consistency.

II. The Users

The users for this style manual include Foundation Executive Director Bill Smith, Associate Director of Public Relations Julie C. Robbins, Senior Copyeditor Robert Dunn, and Commission Executive Director Bob Phelps. The users’ direct need is an accessible, easy-to-use guide to standardize formal and informal, internal and external methods of written discourse. The users’ indirect need is consistent voice, style and design in marketing and communication publications, as well as a reputation of professionalism and integrity.

III. The Rhetorical Techniques

Every rhetorical technique and design choice—from the causal tone to the abundant white space—was intended to simplify navigation and use for the user. Our references for the style manual included the *Handbook of Technical Writing* (10th Ed.), *Technical Editing* (5th Ed.), and the *Punctuation* pages on the Purdue OWL website. We choose to use these references as our foundation for creating the manual because they were accessible and offered straight-forward and concise explanations.

From page one, we tried to keep our words short and sweet. We decided to make our introduction of the manual a Q and A set-up to provide a friendly welcome to the otherwise dreaded task of cracking the cover. We attempted to answer the questions a nervous or otherwise less-than-enthusiastic user might ask. Questions include, “What is a style manual?” “Why should I use the style manual?” and, “How do I use a style manual?” We knew a user would not feel like digging for these answers in a couple of chunky-sized paragraphs, because we knew we would not appreciate that, either. With the swift and sturdy “handshake” of our introduction in place, we moved on to considering the organization of our style manual, a task that was no small matter.

We chose to organize the manual into eight different sections in descending order of priority:

1. Using the Names of the KAB Foundation and Commission
2. Using Common KAB Foundation Words
3. Formatting
4. Punctuation
5. Capitalization
6. Acronyms and Initialisms
7. Numerals
8. Appendices

For each of these sections, we kept the Foundation's vocabulary and usage in mind and employed simple illustrations. In the punctuation, capitalization, numerals, and acronyms and initialisms sections, we introduced a simple, imperative rule, and then followed up with a pertinent example, usually thematically related to the Foundation itself or the environment in general. If necessary, we added a brief definition to the item before presenting the rule and example. Figure 1 shows the format for the illustration of a capitalization rule along with its example.

Do not capitalize directions or other general geographical words.

Head east on Cantrell Road to find the Foundation's office.

There are efforts to beautify southwest Little Rock.

Figure 1: Example of a capitalization rule

1. Using the Names of the KAB Foundation and Commission

From the very beginning, our most basic objective for the project was to standardize the Foundation and Commission names and initialisms across the organization. During our first meeting, our clients, Bill and Julie, expressed frustration regarding the inconsistency in this area; some staff used the initialism *KABF*, while others used *KAB Foundation*, and still others simply used *Foundation*. Julie made it very clear that she did not approve of the initialism *KABF*, so we swiftly implemented the initialism *KAB Foundation*. This section also contains instructions on how to use the name in special instances, such as in the web address or in an email address.

We hope that if this manual does not accomplish anything else, it will help to standardize the usage of the Foundation and Commission's names. As noted previously, this section's top priority earned its spot as the first section.

2. Using Common KAB Foundation Words

The second most important priority we determined for the style manual was the standardization of Using Common KAB Foundation Words . We created an alphabetized list of the Foundation's commonly used words or phrases that have several variations in punctuation. Though we had originally separated this section into two different sections (one called "Comma Rules for Commonly Used KAB words" and another called "Hyphen Rules for Commonly Used KAB words"), we soon realized that it was better to compile all commonly used words into a single list to ensure simplicity and usability.

3. Formatting

We created the formatting section with the hope that it could become the one-stop station for users who have questions on how to format aspects of correspondence, whether a signature on an email or a formal business letter to a prospective donor. Not surprisingly, this section involved the most exhaustive efforts and evolved more than any other section throughout our drafting process. First, we set forth the guidelines for

using font and font size and established the documentation style. These choices were easy to establish as we knew that we needed a universal serif font (we decided on Georgia, 12 pt.) and were instructed to adhere to the AP style for questions of grammar, punctuation, and abbreviations. The Foundation, however, had not decided on a documentation style for citing sources and left that decision up to us. We proposed using MLA to document source citations because we thought that it would be the simplest style to follow. Bill and Julie agreed.

Next, we provided marked-up illustrations of templates for the external business letters and internal memos. The goal was to show examples for formatting rather than to give a model for the content. Therefore, in the case of the memo, when we thought that body text would be too confusing for manual users, we replaced the body text with Lorem Ipsum.

We also choose to include templates for constructing an email signature and guidelines on formatting grant proposals and news releases. The email signature was an especially important rhetorical decision because it was one that the KAB Foundation had not made yet. In fact, before we began the style manual, the way Bill's email signature was set up split the KAB Foundation's name into two separate lines, violating the branding rules.

4. Punctuation

This section is the most extensive because we wanted it to be a comprehensive reference for any punctuation question. The punctuation marks chosen for explanation and illustration in this section were selected based on their frequency of occurrence in the KAB Foundation documents that we reviewed. More emphasis was placed on items that reoccurred most often. For example, because use of semicolons and hyphens were cited as the most number of times in confusion and/or error, these were the sections that received the most attention. Conversely, because italics were most often used correctly in the discourse we reviewed, this section was much shorter. Perhaps the most significant item we standardized in this section was the decision to *not* use the oxford comma. This was one of the most difficult rules for us to follow in the style manual as we were both so accustomed to using the oxford comma (please note that we allowed ourselves to use the oxford comma in this cover letter as it is not intended as an example for the Foundation).

5. Capitalization

We referred to the rules from the Purdue OWL to establish the Foundation's standards for capitalization. We explained the rules on capitalization for people, places, dates and events, titles of works, and products/ brand names, as we anticipated that

these would be the categories that most of the manual's users would have questions about.

6. *Acronyms and Initialisms*

The purpose of this section was to define the difference between acronyms and initialisms to encourage correct usage. We felt that if we defined what and why these items were important, users of the manual would be motivated to use the correct form of the Foundation and Commission's names, along with other critical acronyms such as email, PDF, and RFP.

7. *Numerals*

We chose to dedicate an entire section to discuss the rules for using numerals because we saw this as a reoccurring point of confusion and inconsistency in the document samples we received from the KAB Foundation. We organized this section into the categories related to numerals or words, measurements, percents, money, numbers with more than four digits, and fractions, to give the user the ability to easily target the appropriate category with the least amount of confusion.

8. *Appendices*

We choose to include a robust appendix to provide further explanation and assistance with using the style manual. The appendices' sections include commonly misused words, guidelines for news releases, works referenced, formatting guidelines for the style manual, and our style sheet.

Appendix A includes an alphabetized list of commonly misused words that clarifies the common mistakes and misunderstandings between and among words (for example, the difference between *allude*, *elude*, and *refer*). With the inspiration from homework assignments in the *Handbook of Technical Writing*, we used our daily schedule to pinpoint tricky words whose explanations would be relevant to the literature and correspondence of the Foundation. We realized this was an important section because we knew first-hand how easy it can be to get confused on word usage.

We chose to detail the guidelines for writing and designing a news release in Appendix B because we felt that this was one item of publication whose strict adherence to the specified standards could not be overemphasized. Appendix C simply shows the list of works that we referenced in the making of this style manual, while Appendix F shows the guidelines for maintaining the formatting for the style manual. Appendix F is especially relevant to the manual in that it will be the key that enables the users to maintain and update the manual in years to come. Finally, the style sheet in Appendix G outlines our record of stylistic decisions.

IV. Multimodal Formats of the Style Manual

To allow for adaptability, expansion, and revision, we chose to make the style

manual available in hard-copy as well as digital form in Wordpress and on a flash-drive. In order to ensure successful turnover to the new Wordpress administrators, we included a section with the log-in codes and brief explanation of how to access the site. In our clients' hard copies of the style manual we will attach the flash drive on the inside cover.

V. Overall Experience

Practicing what we were preaching proved to be the most challenging aspect of this project. We discovered this first-hand as we (two distinct writers with two distinct writing styles) attempted to make the case for “unifying style and formatting” in this style manual while simultaneously trying to follow the rules we were creating. Fortunately, we came to the realization that our drafting experience provided a built-in usability test. After testing out the manual for ourselves, we can certainly empathize with the user that it is a challenge to strive for unification and uniformity in the midst of a multiplicity of voices—and we only had two writers!

We are grateful for the chance to have engaged in a collaborative, authentic activity that allowed us to serve real-world clients. Though writing a style manual can be tedious work, it is rewarding to reflect on our compilation and imagine how our rhetorical contributions might play a part in creating a new reality for the Keep Arkansas Beautiful Foundation.