

FFAR's Writing and Grammar Guide

While there is not one “right” way to communicate in writing, there are ways to ensure FFAR staff communicate consistently. The guide below outlines FFAR’s grammar and writing practices. As always, the Communications and Legislative Affairs Team is available to assist.

Writing Starts With Thinking

One of the best ways to begin writing any document is to take a moment to think. Below are a few questions to help direct your writing:

- What am I writing?
- Who is the audience?
- What do I know about the audience? What are their goals, needs and values?
- What is the goal? For example, do you want the audience to give their time or money?
- What benefits can I offer them?
- Am I writing to persuade or inform, or both?

Every FFAR document – whether a decision memo, a project summary or press release – should answer these questions:

- What is the problem or issue?
- Why should the reader care about the problem or issue?
- What is FFAR doing about the problem or issue / what is the solution?
- What is the impact of this work?

Grammar Guide

FFAR uses *The Associated Press Stylebook*, commonly referred to as “AP Style,” as our main style guide. *The Associated Press Stylebook* can be ordered online at www.apstylebook.com. Getting a new copy about every two years is recommended. The Communications and Legislative Affairs team has copies of this book as well as a subscription to their online service. Reach out to the Communications and Legislative Affairs team for login information.

The following Grammar Guide is an alphabetical listing of punctuation and words that are commonly used in FFAR's written work. If what you are looking for is not here, please consult *The Associated Press Stylebook*.

Abbreviations & Acronyms

- Avoid abbreviations and acronyms that bog down your text in alphabet soup.
- Write out all acronyms in the first use.
- If you use the acronym more than once in the document, include the acronym in parentheses after the first use and then only use the acronym in the document.
- If an organization is better known by its acronym than its full name (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO), use the acronym on all references.
- If using an acronym in a title, define the acronym in the first reference in the body of the document.

Academic Degrees

- Use abbreviations for degrees only when listed after a name and separate them with commas.
 - For example: Peter White, LL.D., Ph.D. attended the event.
- Spell out academic degrees in formal writing. Use an apostrophe but do not capitalize the degree title.
 - For example: She has a bachelor's degree, a master's and a doctorate in chemistry.
- The exception is that you do not use an apostrophe when referencing an associate or doctorate degree.
 - For example: John is working towards his associate degree.
- Use lowercase when listing the major or subject area of the degree unless it is a language or nationality.
- Capitalize and do not use possessive in Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science.

Agriculture

- Always write out "agriculture," rather than using the abbreviation "Ag," in professional writing.
- Using the abbreviation "Ag" in personal emails is acceptable.

& (Ampersand)

- Use an ampersand only if part of a company name.
 - For example: Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research, Johnson & Johnson
- Use an ampersand instead of writing out the word “and” in position titles.
 - For example: Communications & Legislative Affairs Officer, Ryan Conley
- Use an ampersand instead of writing out the word “and” in titles and section headings on the on the website and in FFAR documents.
- An ampersand should never replace the word “and” in common text.
- Ampersands are acceptable for use in graphic titles and artwork.

Boards & Committees

- Use lowercase letters for board of directors unless part of a proper name.
 - For example: the following are correct usages with relevant capitalizations.
 - Gwen Chambers is on the board of directors at FFAR.
 - The FFAR Board of Directors is meeting today.
 - The board of directors will discuss the issue.
- Use lowercase letters for general reference to committees. Capitalize committee only when it is part of a formal name.
 - For example: FFAR’s board of directors has numerous committees. She sits on the Development Committee.

Bullets & Lists

- Avoid bullets and lists in running text whenever possible.
- Bullets and lists are, however, often appropriate in magazine and newsletter sidebars, grant proposals and reports.
- When listing items in texts, list them in alphabetical order.
 - For example: The Open Market Consortium is funded in partnership with AgLaunch, Mississippi State University, The Seam, St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Tennessee State University and the Wallace Center.

Punctuation in Bulleted Lists

- If the items in the list are complete sentences, punctuate them as complete sentences with a period at the end.

- If the items in the list are short phrases, you may either set the phrases off with semicolons and the appropriate punctuation for extended phrases or use no end punctuation at all.
 - Example with Semicolons:
 - FFAR supports water research on:
 - Evaluating unrecognized threats to ground water resources;
 - Innovative designs for sustainable water management; and
 - Decision tools to support sustainable water management.
 - Example without Punctuation
 - PIP's research involves:
 - Genetics
 - Technology
 - Data analysis
- Note: With short phrases, you do not need punctuation at the end of each phrase.

Capitalizations in Bullets & Lists

- Capitalize the first letter of items after the period in numbered list.
 - For example: Three factors of erosion are:
 1. Weather
 2. Time
 3. Other Environmental Damage
- Do not capitalize the first letter of items in a bulleted list.
 - For example: To succeed, you should:
 - have clear goals
 - know your abilities
 - try to keep learning

Challenge Areas

- Capitalize "Challenge Areas" when referring to FFAR's research.
- Write out "Health-Agriculture Nexus" and "Next Generation Crops" in professional writing.
- Using the abbreviation "Health-Ag Nexus" and "Next Gen Crops" in personal emails is acceptable.

Climate Change

FFAR uses “climate change” instead of “global warming.”

Commas

- FFAR does not use the Oxford comma, also known as the serial comma.
 - For example: Veterinarians trained in medicine, animal science and public health are needed to address these challenges.

Compound Modifiers

- Use a hyphen if a compound modifier precedes a noun.
 - For example: part-time job
- Never use a hyphen if a compound modifier includes an adverb ending in “-ly.”
 - For example: economically sustainable solutions

Contractions

- Avoid contractions in formal writing.
- Cannot is one word.
- Contractions are appropriate in email.

District of Columbia

- Use D.C., with periods between letters.
- If writing out the “District of Columbia,” use capitalized “District” on second reference.

Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research and FFAR

- Always use an ampersand when writing out the full organization name.
- Write out Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) in the first reference in written documents. Then only refer to the organization as FFAR or The Foundation.
- The FFAR acronym is never hyphenated, such as “F-FAR.”
- FFAR is pronounced /far/.

FFAR's Elevator Pitch

FFAR builds public-private partnerships to fund audacious research addressing the biggest challenges in food and agriculture. We are committed to providing every person access to affordable, nutritious food grown on thriving farms.

FFAR's Tagline

Bold science for big challenges

Links

- Do not include links in a document that will only be read in print.
- Include clickable hyperlinks in documents that will be accessible online.
- Hyperlink to the word(s) that best describe what you are linking to; do not use words like "click here" in formal writing.
- When hyperlinking text has punctuation immediately following it, do not include the punctuation in the hyperlink.

Money

- When referring to money, use numerals.
- For cents or amounts of \$1 million or more, write out the words "cents," "million," "billion," etc.
- Write out "one dollar" rather than using "\$1," but use numerals for all other sums.
- Do not include extra zeros indicating cents with sums of money.
 - For example: \$6 not \$6.00
- Use numerals to indicate thousands.
 - For example: do not use "\$10K" in formal writing.
- When listing a grant amount publicly, FFAR rounds up to the nearest zero.
 - For example: \$249,999.99 is listed as \$250,000.

Nonprofit

FFAR prefers "nonprofit" without a hyphen instead of "NGO" or "non-profit."

Numbers

- Write out numbers one through nine.
- Use numerals for numbers 10 and higher.
 - As exceptions to the rules above, use numerals for the following:
 - Addresses: 6 Maple St.
 - Ages: The 2-year-old girl, the 5-year-old building
 - Dollars and Cents: 5 cents, \$5
 - Dimensions: 6 feet tall, 9-by-12 rug
 - Highways: US Route 1
 - Millions, billions: 3 million people
 - Percentages: 4 percent. See note on percent below.
 - Proportions: 2 parts water
 - Speed: 7 mph
 - Temperatures: 8 degrees, minus 5 degrees
 - Times: 9 a.m.
- Always spell out a number that begins a sentence.
 - For example: Forty people attended the service.
 - An exception is that we use numerals for sentences that begin with years and letter-number combinations.
 - 1492 was the year Columbus sailed the ocean blue.
 - 3D movies are increasingly popular.

Parentheses

- Avoid parentheses when possible and instead include the parenthetical information in the text. Alternatively, use dashes or commas to set off the information. This rule does not apply to academic references.
- Parentheses can be used to introduce acronyms.

Percent

- Spell out “percent”; do not use the symbol “%.”
- Use whole figures with decimals instead of fractions.
- Use numerals for percentages. Write out the number on when it is the first word of the sentence.
 - For example: Four percent of the group agreed.



Press Releases

Boilerplate Language

Boilerplate language is included at the end of all press releases and concisely describes the organization sending the release. Our Boilerplate is:

Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research

The [Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research](#) (FFAR) builds public-private partnerships to fund bold research addressing big food and agriculture challenges. FFAR was established in the 2014 Farm Bill to increase public agriculture research investments, fill knowledge gaps and complement USDA's research agenda. FFAR's model matches federal funding from Congress with private funding, delivering a powerful return on taxpayer investment. Through collaboration and partnerships, FFAR advances actionable science benefiting farmers, consumers and the environment.

Connect: [@FoundationFAR](#) | [@RockTalking](#)

- Individual consortium boilerplates, if available, can be found on the consortium's FFAR webpage.

Datelines

- Datelines in press release contain a city name, a comma, sometimes the name of the state and the date of the release. The city name is entirely in capital letters, the state is listed by its two-five letter abbreviation with a period. Dates are included in parenthesis and the month is not abbreviated.
- Certain domestic cities are listed without a state. These cities include:

Atlanta	Houston	Philadelphia
Baltimore	Indianapolis	Phoenix
Boston	Las Vegas	Pittsburgh
Chicago	Los Angeles	St. Louis
Cincinnati	Miami	Salt Lake City
Cleveland	Milwaukee	San Antonio
Dallas	Minneapolis	San Diego
Denver	New Orleans	San Francisco
Detroit	New York	Seattle
Honolulu	Oklahoma City	Washington

- For example: ATLANTA (May 1, 2003) –
- All other US cities should include both the city and state name in the dateline.

- Always spell out Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah. The appropriate state abbreviations are listed below along with the postal code abbreviations in parentheses for clarity. Do not include a period after states that are written out:

Ala. (AL)	Ind. (IN)	Neb. (NE)	S.C. (SC)
Alaska (AK)	Iowa (IA)	Nev. (NV)	S.D. (SD)
Ariz. (AZ)	Kan. (KS)	N.H. (NH)	Tenn. (TN)
Ark. (AR)	Ky. (KY)	N.J. (NJ)	Texas (TX)
Calif. (CA)	La. (LA)	N.M. (NM)	Utah (UT)
Colo. (CO)	Maine (ME)	N.Y. (NY)	Vt. (VT)
Conn. (CT)	Md. (MD)	N.C. (NC)	Va. (VA)
Del. (DE)	Mass. (MA)	N.D. (ND)	Wash. (WA)
Fla. (FL)	Mich. (MI)	Ohio (OH)	W.Va. (WV)
Ga. (GA)	Minn. (MN)	Okla. (OK)	Wis. (WI)
Hawaii (HI)	Miss. (MS)	Ore. (OR)	Wyo. (WY)
Idaho (ID)	Mo. (MO)	Pa. (PA)	
Ill. (IL)	Mont. (MT)	R.I. (RI)	

- For example: FRESNO, Calif. (October 2, 2020) – JUNO, Alaska (June 5, 1990) –

Professional & Legislative Titles

Nominal Initials

- In first reference, include the professional title “Dr.” and the individual’s first and last names. In all subsequent references, refer to the individual by their last name only.
 - For example: Dr. Joe Murray is in the department. Murray is also a runner.
- When signing letters, or on sections of the FFAR website, add professional designations after a person’s full name. Include a comma after the name and before the designation.
 - For example: John Currant, Esq. or Felicia Silpa, Ph.D.
 - NOTE: Do not use both a title and a designation:
 - Hanesh Patel, M.D. or Dr. Hanesh Patel; not Dr. Hanesh Patel, M.D.

Professional Titles

- Capitalize formal titles that come directly before a name. No punctuation is needed between the title and the name.
 - For example: Executive Director Dr. Hannah Weinstein

- Lowercase formal titles that appear on their own or follow a name.
 - For example: The grant officer or Adam McCoy, communications officer

Legislative Titles

- Capitalize formal titles when referring to someone by name within a legislative body.
 - For example: Speaker Thomas O'Neil, Majority Leader Robert Byrd, Minority Leader John Rhodes, Democratic Whip James Wright and Chairman John Sparkman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
- Spell out all other legislative titles, including assemblywoman, city councilor, delegate, etc., and capitalize titles when used before a name. Use a lowercase title when the title does not follow a name.

Members of Congress

- For members of Congress, use the title's abbreviation, Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens., as formal titles before one or more names and in a direct quotation.
- For members of Congress, always include the capital letters R, D or I, denoting their party affiliation, a short dash and the capitalized two-letter state postal code abbreviation in parenthesis.
- Spell out and lowercase representative, senator, congressman/woman and president in references that do not use an individual's name.
 - For example: Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) endorsed President Ford today. The Arizona senator said he believes the president deserves another term.
- Add US or state before a title only to avoid confusion.
 - For example: US Sen. Nancy Kassebaum spoke with state Sen. Hugh Carter.

Capitalizing Titles

- Do not capitalize federal, state, department, division, board, program, section or unit, unless the word is part of a formal name.
 - For example: The Water Quality Control Division. She contacted the division.
- Capitalize common nouns such as party, river and street if part of a proper name.
 - For example: the Green Party, the Ohio River.
- Capitalize the word "room" when used with the number of the room or when part of the name of a specially designated room.
 - For example: Room 315, the Carson Room
 - For example: the Northeast, the Midwest

Congress

- Capitalize “US Congress” and “Congress” when referring to the US Senate and House of Representatives.
- While “Congress” sometimes is used as a substitute for the House, it properly is reserved for reference to both the Senate and House.
- Capitalize “Senate” and “House of Representatives.”
- Use a lowercase “congressional,” unless referring to a proper name.
 - For example: the Congressional Quarterly

Sentence Spacing

- Always use a single space after a period or other punctuation that ends a sentence.

Publication Titles

- Italicize titles of publications, including journals and media outlets.
 - For example: *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*
- Use quotation marks around titles of short works (poems, stories) and parts of longer works (chapters, sections). This is an exception to AP.

Quotation Marks

- Commas and periods are always placed inside the quotation marks.
- Other punctuation, including dashes, question marks and exclamation points, are placed inside the quotation marks if they apply to the quoted text. If the other punctuation applies to the full sentence, include it outside of the quotation marks.

Technological Terms

Below are correct spelling and capitalization rules for common technological terms:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Download | • Social media |
| • Email | • Smartphone |
| • Cellphone | • Twitter, tweet, retweet |
| • Facebook | • Website |
| • Google, Googling, Googled | • Webpage |
| • Hashtag | • YouTube |
| • LinkedIn | |

Tense/Voice

- All public facing documents should be written in present tense.
- Once a grant's paperwork is signed, write about the grant in present tense.
- Write in active voice; avoid passive voice.
- Active voice is when the sentence's subject performs the verb's action. Sentences in the active voice tend to be stronger and clearer.
 - For example: I ate all the cookies.
- Passive voice is when the subject is acted on by the verb. The passive voice requires using a conjugated form of to be verb and the verb's past participle, making the sentence more complicated than necessary.
 - Incorrect example: All the cookies were eaten by me.

Time

- Use lowercase a.m. and p.m., with periods, when indicating time. Always use numerals, with a space between the time and the a.m. or p.m. It is acceptable to use am or pm, without periods, in email.
 - For example: By 6:30 a.m. she was long gone.
- Do not assume that all participants are in the same time zone. It is helpful to include the time zone where you are if you are suggesting the time. Abbreviated time zones are acceptable in email.
 - For example: The meeting is at 10:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time.
- When using an exact hour, extra zeros indicating minutes are not required.
- Be succinct with time elements.
 - For example: Use 10 a.m. instead of 10 a.m. this morning.
- Use noon or midnight rather than 12 p.m. or 12 a.m. for clarity.

United States

- Always spell out United States when it is used as a noun.
- Use US, always without periods, only when used as an adjective.
 - For example: She loves US culture, so she moved to the United States.
- The United States as well as other country names are treated as singular nouns even though they take the form of a plural noun.
 - For example: The United States is sending aid to the disaster zone.

Years & Dates

- Use an “s” without an apostrophe to indicate spans of decades or centuries.
 - For example: The 1950s is correct; 1950’s is not.
- Include a comma after the day and number in dates.
 - For example: Wednesday, June 17, 2020