Texas A&M Forest Service Style Guide

The following is a set of standards to follow when writing for Texas A&M Forest Service. We adhere to standards set forth in [The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law](http://www.apstylebook.com/online/).

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# **Acronyms**

Do not follow an organization’s full name with an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses or set off by dashes. If an abbreviation or acronym would not be clear on second reference without this arrangement, do not use it.

Use Texas A&M Forest Service throughout a news release. See **Texas A&M Forest Service**

# **Attribution**

Attribution for quotes should be placed at the end of the first sentence.

*“More than 2,000 people attended this year’s commencement ceremony,” said President Michal K. Young. “It was the best graduate reception we’ve ever had at Texas A&M University.”*

Said Young vs. Young said:

Use “said Young” when you introduce a person with a full name and title.

Use “Young said” when the person has already been introduced and you are using his/her last name only.

*“More than 2,000 people attended this year’s commencement ceremony,” Young said.*

# **Capitalization**

In general, avoid unnecessary capitals. Use a capital letter only if you can justify it by one of the principles listed here.

PROPER NOUNS: Capitalize nouns that constitute the unique identification for a specific person, place, or thing: *John, Mary, American, Houston, Texas.* Some words, such as those just given, are always proper nouns. Some common nouns receive proper noun status when they are used as the name of a particular entity: *General Electric, Gulf Oil.*

PROPER NAMES: Capitalize common nouns such as *party, river, street* and *west* when they are an integral part of the full name of a person, place or thing: *Democratic Party, Mississippi River, Fleet Street, West Virginia.*

Lowercase these common nouns when they stand alone in subsequent references: *the party, the river, the street.*

Lowercase the common noun elements of names in all plural uses: *the Democratic and Republican parties, Main and State streets, lakes Erie and Ontario.*

POPULAR NAMES: Some places and events lack officially designated proper names but have popular names that are the effective equivalent: *the Brazos Valley, Aggieland, the Greater Houston Area.*

DERIVATIVES: Capitalize words that are derived from a proper noun and still depend on it for their meaning: *American, Christian, Christianity, English, French, Marxism, Shakespearean.*

Lowercase words that are derived from a proper noun but no longer depend on it for their meaning: *french fries, herculean, manhattan cocktail, malapropism, pasteurize, quixotic, venetian blind.*

OFFICIAL NAMES: Do not capitalize unofficial, informal, shortened or generic names. Do not capitalize phrases such as the center, the academy, the department or the museum.

*Texas Forestry Museum; the museum*

*Wildfire and Incident Management Academy; the academy*

*TFS communications office*

# **City**

Capitalize *city* if part of a proper name, an integral part of an official name or a regularly used nickname: *Kansas City, New York City*

Lowercase everywhere else: *a Texas city; the city government; the city Board of Education;* and all *city of* phrases: *the city of Austin*

Capitalize when part of a formal title before a name: *City Manager Francis McGrath.* Lowercase when not part of the formal title: *city Health Commissioner Frank Smith.*

# **County**

Capitalize when an integral part of a proper name: *Dade County, Nassau County, Harris County.*

Capitalize the full names of county governmental units: *the Harris County Commission, the Bexar County Department of Social Service, the Travis County Legislature.*

Retain capitalization for the name of a county body if the proper noun is not needed in the context; lowercase the word *county* if it is used to distinguish an agency from state or federal counterparts: the *Board of Supervisors, the county Board of Supervisors, the Department of Social Services, the county Department of Social Services.* Lowercase *the board, the department, etc.* whenever they stand alone.

Capitalize *county* if it is an integral part of a specific body’s name even without the proper noun: *the County Commission, the County Legislature.* Lowercase *the commission, the legislature, etc.* when not preceded by the word county.

Capitalize as part of a formal title before a name: *County Manager John Smith.* Lowercase when it is not part of the formal title: *county Health Commissioner Frank Jones.*

Avoid *county* *of* phrases where possible, but when necessary, always lowercase: *the county of Sabine.*

Lowercase plural combinations: *Reeves and Pecos counties.*

Apply the same rules to similar terms such as *parish.*

# **Courtesy titles**

Refer to both men and women by first and last name, without courtesy titles, on first reference: *Susan Smith* or *Robert Smith.* Refer to both men and women by last name, without courtesy titles, in subsequent references. Use the courtesy titles *Mr., Miss, Ms.* or *Mrs.* only in direct quotations or after first reference when someone specifically requests it: for example, where a woman prefers to be known as *Mrs. Smith* or *Ms. Smith.*

When it is necessary to distinguish between two people who use the same last name, as in married couples or brothers and sisters, use the first and last name, without courtesy title.

In cases where a person’s gender is not clear from the first name or from the story’s context, indicate the gender by using *he* or *she* in subsequent references.

# **Dates**

Always use Arabic figures without st, nd, rd or th.

# **Datelines**

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Text

Cities that do not need a state name to follow:  
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

Use *New York state* when necessary to distinguish from *New York City*. Use *state of Washington* or *Washington state* when necessary to distinguish from District of Columbia.

# **Departments**

Spell out all department titles to avoid acronyms. A phrase such as *the department* is preferable on second reference because it is more readable and avoids alphabet soup. *The Incident Response Department arrived on the scene.*

Lowercase *department* in plural uses, but capitalize the proper name element: *the departments of East Texas Operations and Capacity Building.*

Lowercase *the department* whenever it stands alone.

Do not abbreviate *department* in any usage.

# **Directions and Regions**

In general, lowercase north, south, northeast, northern, etc., when they indicate compass direction; capitalize these words when they designate regions.

COMPASS DIRECTIONS: *He drove west. The cold front is moving east.*

**TFS REGIONS:** Capitalize North Texas, South Texas, West Texas, East Texas, the Panhandle, Central Texas, High Plains, Trans Pecos, Hill Country, Rio Grande Plains, Pineywoods, (See the predictive services graph for more information on counties that make up these areas <http://ticc.tamu.edu/Documents/PredictiveServices/Fuels/erc_map.htm>

# **Events**

Titles of one-time events are generally enclosed in quotes.

# **Fire**

TFS uses wildfire in most references. Wildland fire is also acceptable.

# **Fire department**

FULL NAME: Capitalize the full proper names of fire departments: *the Houston Fire Department.*

WITHOUT JURISDICTION: Do not capitalize when referring to a specific department if the city or name is not used: *the fire department* or *the city fire department.*

Capitalize fire department in plural uses: *the Bryan and College Station Fire Departments*.

Lowercase *the department* when it stands alone.

# **Firefighter**

TFS uses wildland firefighter or wildland fireman in all references. Use these abbreviations for firefighter titles: Fire Lt. David Jones, Fire Chief Todd Leddy, Fire Capt. John Doe, Fire Battalion Chief Tom Kreel, and Fire Assistant Chief Lonny Frey.

# **Headlines**

Press releases or news articles: Use sentence case. Only capitalize the first word in a headline and proper names: *High wildfire danger alert for Central Texas* or *Tax workshop detail incentives for timber landowners*.

Website headers: Capitalize the first letter of each word, known as title case. Articles, conjunctions and prepositions do not get capital letters unless they start the title:   
*Prepare for Wildfires.*

# **High-water**

Use hyphen, as high describes the water

# **Initial-attack**

Use hyphen, as initial describes the attack

# **Italics**

AP style does not use italics in news stories

# **Jargon**

The special vocabulary and idioms of a particular class or occupational group.  
In general, avoid jargon. When it is appropriate in a special context, include an explanation of any words likely to be unfamiliar to most readers.

# **Months**

Capitalize the names of months in all uses. 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.   
  
When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas. Example: January 1972 was a cold month. Jan. 2 was the coldest day of the month. Feb. 14, 1987, was the target date. She testified that it was Friday, Dec. 3, when the accident occurred. His birthday is May 8.

# **Names**

In general, use only last names on second reference.

When it is necessary to distinguish between two people who use the same last name, use first and last name. See **courtesy titles.**

In stories involving juveniles, generally refer to them on second reference by surname if they are 16 or older and by first name if they are 15 or younger. Exceptions would be if they are involved in serious crimes or are athletes or entertainers.

# **Numbers**

PLANES, SHIPS, AND SPACECRAFT: Use figures to designate. *B-2 bomber, Queen Elizabeth 2*

SPEEDS: Use figures for all speeds. *7 mph, winds of 5 to 100 mph*

SENTENCE START: Spell out a numeral at the beginning of a sentence. If necessary, rewrite the sentence. There is one exception—a numeral that identifies a calendar year. *Last year 993 freshmen entered the college. 1976 was a very good year.*

CASUAL USES: Spell out casual expressions. *A thousand times! Thanks a million. He walked a quarter of a mile.*

PROPER NAMES: Use words or numerals according to an organization’s practice: *3M, Twentieth Century Fund, Big Ten*

FIGURES or WORDS

Spell out first through ninth when they indicate sequence in time or location: *first base, the First Amendment, he was first in line.* Starting with *10th* use figures.

Use 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. when the sequence has been assigned in forming names. The principal examples are geographic, military and political designation such as the *1st Ward, 7th Fleet* and *1st Sgt.*

Spell out whole numbers below 10, use figures for 10 and above. Typical examples: *They had three sons and two daughters. They had a fleet of 10 station wagons and two buses. The three-year-old girl went to the store with her 16-year-old sister.*

Grade/grader: ninth-grade class, ninth-grader; 10th-grader, first-grade teacher, third grade; pre-K

IN A SERIES: Apply the appropriate guidelines: They had 10 dogs, six cats and 97 hamsters. They had four four-room houses, 10 three-room houses and 12 10-room houses

OTHER: 4-acre piece of land; 4 acres; 2,540 acres; .05 acre; The factory floor is 10,000 square feet. It's a 10,000-square-foot area; 100-acre ranch

# **Punctuation**

APOSTROPHE (‘)

Plural nouns not ending in s: Add ’s: *alumni’s contribution, firefighter’s PPE*

Plural nouns ending in s: Add only an apostrophe: *the girls’ toys, states’ rights*

Singular nouns not ending in s: Add *’*s: *the horse’s food, the VIP’s seats*

Singular common nouns ending in s: Add ’s unless the next word begins with s: *the witness’s answer, the witness’ story*

BRACKETS ([ ])

They cannot be transmitted over news wires. Use parenthesis or rewrite

COLON (:)

The most frequent use of a colon is at the end of a sentence to introduce lists, tabulations, text, etc. Use one space after colons.

EMPHASIS: The colon often can be effective in giving emphasis: *He had only one hobby: eating.*

LISTINGS: Use the colon in such listings as time elapsed (*0:31:07.2)*, time of day (*8:31 p.m.*), biblical and legal citations (*2 Kings 2:14; Missouri Code 3:245-2560)*

COMMA (,)

The following guidelines treat some of the most frequent questions about the use of commas.

IN A SERIES: Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series: *The flag is red, white and blue. They planted pines, oaks and cedars.*

Do put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series if an integral element of the series requites a conjunction: *I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast*

Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: *The main points to consider are whether the athletes are skillful enough to compete, whether they have the stamina to endure the training, and whether they have the proper mental attitude.*

WITH INTRODUCTORY CLAUSES AND PHRASES:

A comma is used to separate an introductory clause or phrase from the main clause: *When he had tired of the mad pace of New York, he moved to Dubuque.*

The comma may be omitted after short introductory phrases if no ambiguity would result: *During the night he heard many noises.*

Use the comma if its omission would slow comprehension: *On the street below, the curious gathered.*

WITH CONJUCTIONS:

When a conjunction such as *and, but* or *for* links two clauses that could stand alone as separate sentences, use a comma before the conjunction in most cases: *She was glad she had looked, for a man was approaching the house.*

As a rule of thumb, use a comma if the subject of each clause is expressly stated: *We are visiting Washington, and we also plan a side trip to Williamsburg. We visited Washington, and our senator greeted us personally.* But no comma when the subject of the two clauses is the same and is not repeated in the second: *We are visiting Washington and plan to see the White House.*

INTRODUCTING DIRECT QUOTES:

Use a comma to introduce a complete one-sentence quotation within a paragraph: *Wallace said, “She spent six months in Argentina and came back speaking English with a Spanish accent.”*

Do not use a comma at the start of an indirect or partial quotation: *He said the victory put him “firmly on the road to a first-ballot nomination.”*

BEFORE ATTRIBUTION:

Use a comma instead of a period at the end of a quote that is followed by attribution: *“Rub my shoulders,” Miss Crawley said.*

Do not use a comma, however, if the quoted statement ends with a question mark or exclamation point: *“Why should I?” he asked.*

WITH HOMETOWNS AND AGES:

Use a comma to set off an individual’s hometown when it is placed in apposition to a name (whether *of* is used or not): *Mary Richards, Houston, and Maude Findlay, Bryan, Texas, were there.*

If an individual’s age is used, set it off by commas: *Maude Findlay, 48, Bryan, Texas, was present.*

NAMES OF STATES AND NATIONS USED WITH CITY NAMES: *His journey will take him from Dublin, Ireland, to Fargo, N.D., and back. The Brownwood, Texas, group saw the governor.*

WITH YES AND NO: *Yes, I will be there.*

IN DIRECT ADDRESS: *Mother, I will be home late. No, sir, I did not take it.*

PLACEMENT WITHIN QUOTES: **Commas always go inside the quotation marks.**

DASHES

The em dash (—), like commas, semicolons, colons, ellipses and parenthesis, indicates added emphasis, an interruption or an abrupt change of thought. The em dash is typically used with spaces on either side. *The wildfire — which consumed over 25,000 acres­ — was the worst fire in over 20 years.*

The en dash (–) is slightly wider than the hyphen (-) but narrower than the em dash (—) and is used to represent a span or range of numbers, dates or times. There should be no space between the en dash and the adjacent material. *300–400; Sept. 5–8; 6 a.m.–5 p.m.*

ELLIPSIS (…)

In writing a story, do not use ellipses at the beginning and end of direct quotes. *“It has become evident to me that I no longer have a strong political base,” Nixon said.*

EXCLAMATION POINT (!)

The following guidelines treat some of the most frequent questions about the use of exclamation points.

EMPHATIC EXPRESSIONS: Use the mark to express a high degree of surprise, incredulity or other strong emotion

AVOID OVERUSE: Use a comma after mild interjections. End mildly exclamatory sentences with a period

PLACEMENT WITHIN QUOTES: Place the mark inside quotations marks when it is part of the quoted material: *“How wonderful!” he said. “Never!” she shouted.*

Place the mark outside the quotation marks when it is not part of the quoted material. *I hated reading Spenser’s “Faerie Queen”!*

MISCELLANEOUS: Do not use a comma or a period after the exclamation mark:

Wrong: *“Halt!”, the corporal cried.*

Right: *“Halt!” the corporal cried.*

HYPHENS (-)

Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. They are never used interchangeably with dashes.

*Well-maintained landscape; full-time job; non-flammable landscaping material; swift-water; high-water; initial-attack*

PARENTHESES ()

Try not to use parentheses. Commas or an em dash is preferred.

PERIODS (.)

Follow these guidelines:

END OF A DECLARTIVE SENTENCE: *The fire is out.*

END OF MILDLY IMPERATIVE SENTENCE: *Shut the door.*

Use an exclamation point if greater emphasis is desired: *Be careful!*

END OF SOME RHETORICAL QUESTIONS: A period is preferable if a statement is more a suggestion than a question: *Why don’t we go.*

END OF AN INDIRECT QUESTION: *He asked what the score was.*

INITIALS: *John F. Kennedy, T.S. Eliot (*No spacing between T. and S., to prevent them from being placed on two lines in typesetting)

Abbreviations using only the initials of a name do not take periods: *JFK, LBJ*

ENUMERATIONS: After numbers or letters in enumerating elements of a summary: *1. Wash the car. 2. Clean the basement.*

PLACEMENT WITH QUOTATION MARKS: **Periods always go inside quotation marks.**

SPACING: Use a **single space** after a period at the end of a sentence.

QUESTION MARK (?)

Follow these guidelines:

END OF A DIRECT QUESTION: *How did the fire start?*

*Did he ask who started the fire?* (The sentence as a whole is a direct question despite the indirect question at the end.)

*You started the fire?* (A question in the form of a declarative statement.)

INTERPOLATED QUESTION: *You told me* — *Did I hear you correctly?* — *that you started the fire.*

MULTIPLE QUESTION: Use a single question mark at the end of the full sentence:

*Did you hear him say, “What right have you to ask about the riot?”*

*Did he plan the riot, employ assistants, and give the signal to begin?*

Or, to cause full stops and throw emphasis on each element, break into separate sentences: *Did he plan the riot? Employ assistants? Give the signal to begin?*

CAUTION: Do not use question marks to indicate the end of indirect questions:

*He asked who started the riot. To ask why the riot started is unnecessary. I want to know what the cause of the riot was. How foolish it is to ask what caused the riot*.

QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMAT: Do not use quotation marks. Paragraph each speaker’s words:

*Q: Where did you keep it?*

*A: In a little tin box.*

PLACEMENT WITH QUOTATION MARKS: Inside or outside, depending on the meaning:

*Who wrote “Gone With The Wind”?*

*He asked, “How long will it take?”*

MISCELLANOUS: The quotation mark supersedes the comma that normally is used when supplying attribution for a question: *“Who is there?” she asked.*

QUOTATION MARKS (“”)

The basic guidelines for open-quote marks (“) and closed-quote marks (”):

FOR DIRECT QUOTATIONS: To surround the exact words of a speaker or writer when reported in a story:

*“I have no intention of staying,” he replied.*

*“I do not object,” he said, “to the tenor of the report.”*

*Franklin said, “A penny saved is a penny earned.”*

*A speculator said the practice is “too conservative for inflationary times.”*

RUNNING QUOTATIONS

If a full paragraph of quoted material is followed by a paragraph that continues that quotation, do not put close-quote marks at the end of the first paragraph. Do, however, put open-quote marks at the start of the second paragraph. Continue in this fashion for any succeeding paragraphs, using close-quote marks only at the end of the quoted material.

If a paragraph does not start with quotation marks but ends with a quotation that is continued in the next paragraph, do not use close-quote marks at the end of the introductory paragraph if the quoted material constitutes a full sentence. Use close-quote marks, however, if the quoted material does not constitute a full sentence. For example:

*He said, “I am shocked and horrified by the incident. “I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty.”*

But: *He said he was “shocked and horrified by the incident.”*

*“I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty,” he said.*

DIALOGUE OR CONVERSATION: Each person’s words, no matter how brief, are placed in a separate paragraph, with quotation marks at the beginning and the end of each person’s speech:

*“Will you go?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“When?”*

*“Thursday.”*

NOT IN Q-AND-A: Quotation marks are not required in formats that identify questions and answers by *Q:* and *A:.*

NOT IN TEXTS: Quotation marks are not required in full texts, condensed texts or textual excerpts.

INRONY: Put quotation marks around a word or words used in an ironical sense: *The “debate” turned into a free-for-all.*

AVOID UNNECESSARY FRAGMENTS: Do not use quotation marks to report a few ordinary words that a speaker or writer has used:

Wrong: *The senator said he would “go home to Michigan” if he lost the election.*

Right: *The senator said he would go home to Michigan if he lost the election.*

PARTIAL QUOTES: When a partial quote is used, do not put quotation marks around words that the speaker could not have used.

Suppose the individual said, *“I am horrified at your slovenly manners.”*

Wrong: *She said she “was horrified at their slovenly manners.”*

Right: *She said she was horrified at their “slovenly manners.”*

Better when practical: Use the full quote

QUOTES WITHIN QUOTES: Alternate between double quotation marks (“or”) and single marks (‘or’):

*She said, “I quote from his letter, ‘I agree with Kipling that “the female of the species is more deadly than the male,” but the phenomenon is not an unchangeable law of nature,’ a remark he did not explain.”*

Use three marks together if two quoted elements end at the same time: *She said, “He told me, “I love you.’”*

PLACEMENT WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION: Follow these long-established printers’ rules:

The period and the comma always go within quotation marks.

The dash, the semi colon, the question mark and the exclamation point go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence.

SEMICOLON (;)

In general, use the semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can convey but less than the separation that a period implies.

TO CLARIFY A SERIES: Use semicolons to separate elements of a series when the items in the series are long or when individual segments contain material that also must be set off by commas:

*He is survived by a son, John Smith, of Chicago; three daughters, Jane Smith, of Wichita, Kan., Mary Smith, of Denver, and Susan Smith, of Boston; and a sister, Martha Smith, of Omaha, Neb.* (Note that the semicolon is used before the final *and* in such a series.)

TO LINK INDEPENDENT CLAUSES: Use semicolon when a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but* or *for* is not present: *The package was due last week; it arrived today.*

If a coordinating conjunction is present, use a semicolon before it only if extensive punctuation also is required in one or more of the individual clauses: *They pulled their boats from the water, sandbagged the retaining walls, and boarded up the windows; but even with these precautions, the island was hard-hit by the hurricane.*

Unless a particular literary effect is desired, however, the better approach in these circumstances is to break the independent clauses into separate sentences.

PLACEMENT WITH QUOTES: Place semicolons outside quotation marks.

# **Quotes**

Quotes should be placed in a paragraph by themselves so they do not get buried. See entry in punctuation section.

# **Smokejumper**

One word, lowercase.

# **Smokey Bear**

Do not use Smokey the Bear.

# **States**

Never abbreviated

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Alaska | Maine |
| Hawaii | Ohio |
| Idaho | Texas |
| Iowa | Utah |

Abbreviations for the other 42:

Even in datelines, you use these abbreviations

Ala. Md. N.D.   
 Ariz. Mass. Okla.  
 Ark. Mich. Ore.  
 Calif. Minn. Pa.  
 Colo. Miss. R.I.  
 Conn. Mo. S.C.  
 Del. Mont. S.D.  
 Fla. Neb. Tenn.  
 Ga. Nev. Vt.  
 Ill. N.H. Va.  
 Ind. N.J. Wash.  
 Kan. N.M. W.Va.  
 Ky. N.Y. Wis.  
 La. N.C. Wyo.

# **Swift-water**

Use hyphen, as swift describes the water

# **Task Force**

Written as *task force*, two words.

# **Texas A&M Forest Service**

Reference the agency as Texas A&M Forest Service, never the/The Texas A&M Forest Service. In long reports, articles and feature stories use of Texas A&M Forest Service upon first reference is mandatory. You may use *the agency* if it is clear you are talking about Texas A&M Forest Service. Do not use Forest Service, forest service or TX Forest Service.

You may use TFS on first reference in stories for Arbor Reader or those that are seen only by an internal audience.

# **Titles**

Capitalize someone’s title when it comes before the name, lowercase after the name.

*Director Tom Boggus; Mark Stanford, associate agency director*

Lowercase titles when not associated with a name.

*Several resource specialists met to discuss urban tree care. Agency department heads went to a conference in the Greater Houston Area.*

Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas:

*Tom Boggus, Texas A&M Forest Service Director, went to a conference in Corpus Christi.*

# **Trees**

In general, lowercase the names of trees, but capitalize proper nouns or adjectives that occur in a name. *tree, fir, white fir, Douglas fir, Scotch pine.*

If a botanical name (Genus, species) is used, capitalize the first, or generic, Latin name for the class of plant; lowercase species. *pine tree (Pinus), red cedar (Juniperus virginiana), Kentucky coffee tree (Gymnocladus dioica)*

# **Weather terms**

The following are based on definitions used by the National Weather Service. All temperatures are Fahrenheit.

BLIZZARDS: Wind speeds of 35 mph or more and considerable falling and/or blowing of snow with visibility near zero. *Severe blizzard*, winds of 45 mph, temperature at or below 10 F and visibility reduced to near zero.

COASTAL WATERS: The waters within 100 miles of the coast, including bays, harbors and sounds.

CYCLONE: A storm with strong winds rotating about a moving center of low pressure. The word sometimes is used in the United States to mean *tornado* and in the Indian Ocean area to means *hurricane.*

DUST STORM: Visibility of one-half mile or less due to dust, wind speeds of 30 mph or more.

FLASH FLOOD: A sudden, violent flood. It typically occurs after a heavy rain or the melting of a heavy snow.

FLASH FLOO WARNING: Warns that flash flooding is imminent or in progress. Those in the affected area should take necessary precautions immediately.

FLASH FLOOD WATCH: Alerts the public that flash flooding is possible. Those in the affected area are urged to be ready to take additional precautions if a flash flood warning is issued or if flooding is observed.

FLOOD: Stories about floods usually tell how high the water is and where it is expected to crest. Such a story should also, for comparison, list flood stage and how high the water is above, or below, flood stage.

**Wrong** – The river is expected to crest at 39 feet.

**Right** – The river is expected to crest at 39 feet, 12 feet above flood stage

FREEZE: Describes conditions when the temperature at or near the surface is expected to be below 32 degrees during the growing season. Adjectives such as *severe* or *hard* are used if a cold spell exceeding two days is expected.

A freeze may or may not be accompanied by the formation of frost. However, use of the term *freeze* usually is restricted for occasions when wind or other conditions prevent frost.

FROST: Describes the formation of very small ice crystals, which might develop under conditions similar to dew except for the minimum temperatures involved. Phrases such as *frost in low places* or *scattered frost* are used when appropriate

HIGH WIND: Normally indicates that sustained winds of 40 mph or greater are expected to last one hour or longer; or winds of 58 mph regardless of how long they last.

HURRICANE CATEGORIES: Hurricanes are ranked 1 to 5 according to what is known as the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Categories 3, 4 and 5 are considered major.

**Category 1**—Hurricane has central barometric pressure of 28.94 inches or more and winds of 74 to 95 mph, is accompanied by a 4 to 5 foot storm surge and causes minimal damage.

**Category 2**—Pressure of 28.50 to 28.93 inches, winds from 96 to 110 mph, storm surge 6 to 8 feet, damage extensive.

**Category 3**—Pressure of 27.91 to 28.49 inches, winds from 111 to 129 mph, storm surge 9 to 12 feet, damage devastating.

**Category 4**—Pressure of 27.17 to 27.90 inches, winds from 130 to 156 mph, storm surge 13 to 18 feet, damage catastrophic.

**Category 5**—Pressure of 27.17 inches, winds greater than 157 mph, storm surge higher than 18 feet, damage catastrophic.

Only three *Category 5* storms have hit the United States since record-keeping began: the 1935 Labor Day hurricane that hit the Florida Keys and killed 600 people; Hurricane Camille, which devastated the Mississippi coast in 1969, killing 256 and leaving $1.4 billion damage; and Hurricane Andrew, which hit South Florida in 1992, killing 43 and causing $30.5 billion in damage. Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which killed 1,200 people and caused $108 billion in damage, reached Category 5 in open water but hit the coast as a Category 3

HURRICANE EYE: The relatively calm area in the center of the storm. In this area winds are light and the sky often is covered only partly by clouds

HURRICANE OR TYPHOON: A warm-core tropical cyclone in which the minimum sustained surface wind is 75 mph or more.

Hurricanes are spawned east of the international date line. Typhoons develop west of the line. They are known as cyclones in the Indian Ocean and Australia.

When a hurricane or typhoon loses strength (wind speed), usually after landfall, it is reduced to *tropical storm* status.

HURRICANE SEASON: The portion of the year that has a relatively high incidence of hurricanes. In the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, this is from June through November. In the eastern Pacific, it is May 15 through Nov. 30. In the central Pacific, it is June 1 through Nov. 30

HURRICANE WARNING: Warns that one or both of these dangerous effects of a hurricane are expected in specified areas in 24 hours or less.

Sustained winds of 74 mph or higher, and/or

Dangerously high water or a combination of dangerously high water and exceptionally high waves, even though winds expected may be less than hurricane force.

HURRICANE WATCH: An announcement for specific areas that a hurricane or incipient hurricane conditions may pose a threat to coastal and inland communities

ICE STORM WARNING: Reserved for occasions when significant and possibly damaging, accumulations of ice are expected

ICE STORM, FREEZING DRIZZLE, FREEZING RAIN: Describes the freezing of drizzle or rain on objects as it strikes them. *Freezing drizzle* and *freezing rain* are synonyms for *ice storm.*

NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER: The National Weather Service’s National Hurricane Center in Miami has overall responsibility for tracking and providing information about tropical depressions, tropical storms and hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

The service’s Central Pacific Hurricane Center in Honolulu is responsible for hurricane information in the Pacific Ocean area north of the equator from 140 degrees west longitude to 180 degrees.

On the Web: [www.nhc.noaa.gov](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov)

NEARSHORE WATERS: The waters extended to five miles from shore

OFFSHORE WATERS: The waters extending to about 250 miles from shore

SANDSTORM: Visibility of one-half mile or less due to sand blown by winds of 30 mph or more.

SANTA ANA WIND: In Southern California, a weather condition in which strong, hot, dry, dust-bearing winds descend to the Pacific Coast from inland desert regions.

SEVERE THUNDERSTORM: Describes either of the following:

WINDS—Thunderstorm-related surface winds sustained or gusts 58 mph or greater.

HAIL—Surface hail 1 inch in diameter or larger. The word *hail* in a watch implies hail at the surface and aloft unless qualifying phrases such as *hail aloft* are used.

SLEET: (one form of ice pellet)—Describes generally solid grains of ice formed by the freezing of raindrops or the refreezing of largely melted snowflakes. Sleet, like small hail, usually bounces when hitting a hard surface.

SLEET (HEAVY): Heavy sleet is a fairly rare event in which the ground is covered to a depth of significance to motorists and others.

STORM TIDE: Water level rise due to the combination of storm surge and the astronomical tide.

TORNADO: A violent rotating column of air forming a pendant usually from a cumulonimbus cloud, and touching the ground. It usually stars as a funnel cloud and is accompanied by a loud roaring noise. On a local scale, it is the most destructive of all atmospheric phenomena. Plural is *tornadoes.*

TORNADO WARNING: Warns the public of an existing tornado or one suspected to be in existence.

TORNADO WATCH: Alerts the public to the possibility of a tornado.

TROPICAL DEPRESSION: A tropical cyclone in which the maximum sustained surface wind is 38 mph or less.

TROPICAL STORM: A warm-core tropical cyclone in which the maximum sustained surface winds range from 39 to 73 mph inclusive.

WIND SHEAR: A sudden shift in wind direction and/or speed. It can prevent development of some storms and is sometimes visible when the wind shears off the top of a cloud to form an anvil.

WINTER STORM WARNING: Notifies the public that severe winter weather conditions are almost certain to occur.

WINTER STORM WATCH: Alerts the public to the possibility of severe winter weather conditions

# **Website**

The website address should always be listed as tfsweb.tamu.edu

Web is capitalized when referring to the World Wide Web.

Written one word, no hyphen.

# **Workshop/conference titles**

Capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters. Capitalize an article — *the, a, an* — or words of fewer than four letters if it is in the first or last word of a title.

*Ember Alert: Preparing for Wildfires*

One-time event names are often enclosed in quotes and principal words capitalized.

# **Years**

Use figures, without commas: 1975. Use commas only with a month and day: Dec. 18, 1994, was a special day. Use an s without an apostrophe to indicate spans of decades or centuries: the 1890s, the 1800s.

Years are the lone exception to the general rule in numerals that a figure is not used to start a sentence: 1976 was a very good year.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Texas A&M Forest Service views social media as an opportunity to enhance communication between the public, stakeholders and the agency. Social media can help build public awareness of our agency and strengthen dialogue with our audiences.

The purpose of these guidelines is to define [agency requirements](http://tfsweb.tamu.edu/agencyguidelines/) relating to the use of social media and to ensure the portrayal of a consistent and accurate message and branding of TFS via online media outlets. In addition, the following guidelines supplement the [Texas A&M System Social Media Guidelines](https://www.tamus.edu/offices/marcomm/socialmedia/employee-guidelines/).

The agency has approved the use of Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Picasa, Google, Vimeo, YouTube, LinkedIn and Pintrest. The use of other media must be approved through the Communications Manager.

**Create content on the TFS website that is sharable:**

Social media is often overlooked as a search engine optimization tool. Not only does it increase interest and discovery, social media links can also increase a website's rank in search—the higher our rank, the more visitors we’ll receive.

When a user comes to your content page, it's important that any piece of content is one click away from being shared on social media.

Here are a few ways to make your content more social media friendly:

**Use keywords.** Keywords are important here as well, just as they are in your URLs, headings, subheadings and content. Use the same keywords both in your image file names, alt and description tags. Share your keywords with the communications office, and we can incorporate them into social media posts to make your content more discoverable.

**Add images and tag posts. Images share better on social media. Tagging adds value by broadening our reach and by including our partners.**

**Keep content short, interesting and relevant.** This will make the content more likely to be read and shared.

Keep content relevant by tracking what is trending on social media in your industry. While our content has more permanence, consider revising or catering content to current trends. One example from urban forestry is adding information about flood-damaged trees because flooding was a hot topic in May 2015. This part takes some research, but will give you a deeper understanding of your audience and make it easier to create share-worthy content.

**Proofread!** This cannot be stressed enough. Proofread before and after you hit “post” and edit if necessary.

**WRITING TOOLS**

There are a number of government websites devoted to writing in plain language instead of bureaucratic jargon:

[Plain Writing Act of 2010](http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111publ274/pdf/PLAW-111publ274.pdf)

[PlainLanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov/)

[Usability.gov](http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/writing-for-the-web.html)

[Center for Plain Language](http://centerforplainlanguage.org/)

Plain language in industry

[Nielsen Norman Group research on jargon](http://www.nngroup.com/articles/user-centric-language/)

Other resources

[TFS Media Guide](https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/uploadedFiles/TFS_Main/Connect/Newsroom/Media_Resources/MEDIA%20FIRE%20GUIDE%202015.pdf)

TFS Fire Weather Terms

Brand Guides

TFS Branding Guide

[Texas A&M University Brand Guide](http://brandguide.tamu.edu/)

Social Media Guides

TFS Social Media Guide

[Texas A&M University Social Media Policies](http://marcomm.tamu.edu/toolkit/social/policies.html)