

# 511 Contra Costa Style Guide

## Standards and Conventions

Rev. 1/2020

511CC Writing Goals	Best Practice
When addressing the general public, write for all level readers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aim for 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level</li> <li>- Simplified terms with no transportation jargon</li> </ul>
Lead with the positive – avoid No, Don't and Can't	YES: Play to win. NO: You can't win if you don't play.
Focused messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lead with the main points</li> <li>- Be concise with no extra fluff</li> <li>- Short sentences</li> </ul>
Use active voice – avoid passive	ACTIVE: The dog chased the squirrel. PASSIVE: The squirrel was chased by the dog.
Adopt the 511 Contra Costa brand voice.	See Brand Guide

511CC Words and References	Examples
Written: 511 Contra Costa or 511CC	YES: 511CC or 511 Contra Costa NO: 511cc or 511 CC or 511 cc
Spoken: 511 Contra Costa	Always: 5-1-1 Contra Costa Never: 5-11 or five-hundred eleven
Website URL: 511cc.org or 511contracosta.org	511cc.org = audience knows us, text space is a concern, viewing time is brief or when including secondary pages 511contracosta.org = audience not familiar, text space is not an issue, or presenting document is static <i>Note: Avoid mixing both uses in a single medium</i>
micromobility	YES: micromobility NO: micro-mobility
ridehail, ridehailing. References TNC trips – they are chauffeured trips and are NOT ridesharing unless with multiple passengers or a shared trip	YES: ridehailing, ridehail NO: ride-hailing, ride-hail
rideshare, ridesharing	Yes: rideshare, ridesharing No: ride-share, ride-sharing
ridematch, ridematching	Yes: ridematch, ridematching No: ride-match, ride-matching
carpool, vanpool	Yes: carpool, vanpool No: car-pool, van-pool
multimodal	Yes: multimodal No: multi-modal
telework, teleworking, teleworker. The act of working from a location other than your normal worksite, for any variety of reasons. Telecommuting is a form of teleworking.	Yes: telework, teleworking, teleworker No: tele-work, tele-working, tele-worker

telecommute, telecommuting, telecommuter. The act of working from a remote location in lieu of commuting to a work site.	Yes: telecommute, telecommuting, telecommuter No: tele-commute, tele-commuting, tele-commuter
Guaranteed Ride Home (GRH) Avoid using abbreviation in general public communications.	Guaranteed Ride Home: Use title caps when referencing a specific program. guaranteed ride home: Use when referring to a general trip Concerned she might need a guaranteed ride home if her carpool partner had to leave early, Sheila registered for Guaranteed Ride Home.
Clipper (brand name) always capitalized, but not card	YES: Clipper card NO: Clipper Card or clipper card
BART (brand name) is always all caps	I rode BART to the city.
FasTrak (brand name)	Yes: FasTrak No: Fastrak, Fast Trak, fastrak, fasttrak
ChargePoint (brand name)	Yes: ChargePoint No: Charge point, Chargepoint, Charge Point
PlugShare (brand name)	Yes: PlugShare No: Plug share, Plugshare, Plug Share
e-scooter, e-bike	Yes: e-scooter, e-bike No: E-scooter, E-Bike
transit. Transit is a general term referring to the transport of people by public conveyance. Use specific forms of transit whenever possible: bus, BART, train, ferry.	Yes: He took the bus to work. No: He took transit to work.
electric vehicle (EV) Avoid using abbreviation in general public communications.	Yes: electric vehicle No: e-vehicle, e-car
first mile/last mile	Yes: first mile/last mile No: first-mile/last-mile, first-last mile, first/last mile
commute options, commute choices	Yes: commute options, commute choices No: commute alternatives
Website URLs – all lowercase and leave off the www	511contracosta.org
Park & Ride (P&R), Kiss & Ride. Avoid using abbreviation in general public communications.	Yes: Park & Ride, Kiss & Ride, P&R No: Park and Ride, Kiss and Ride, Park n' Ride, PnR, P & R
app – lower case unless capitalized as part of the name	YES: He loves the Miles app. NO: He loves the Miles App.
greenhouse gases (GHG). Avoid using abbreviation in general public communications.	YES: greenhouse gases, GHG NO: green-house gases, GhG
coworker	YES: coworker NO: co-worker
email	YES: email NO: e-mail
worksite	YES: worksite NO: work-site
website	YES: website NO: web-site

Standard Usage Agreements	Examples
<b>Numbers</b>	
Spell out number under ten.	Wallace ate seven tacos.
Use digits for numbers ten and over unless they start a sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wallace ate 15 tacos.</li> <li>- Fifteen tacos will make you full!</li> </ul>
Spell out any number that starts a sentence. Exception: A business or entity name that starts with a number.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three of us walked to the store.</li> <li>- 511 Contra Costa provides TDM services.</li> </ul>
Use digits for ordinal numbers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kelsie won 1<sup>st</sup> place at the marathon.</li> </ul>
Spell out numbers used as common expressions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He gave me a high five.</li> <li>- It was a third-party software system.</li> <li>- We made a good first impression.</li> </ul>
Spell out centuries and decades. Use the full year when referring to time periods prior to the 1900s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It's the twenty-first century.</li> <li>- The eighties were good to me.</li> <li>- The story was set in the eighteen-eighties.</li> </ul>
Spell out percentages when used in a sentence.	They ate 50 percent of the cookies.
Rounded numbers over a million should join digits with the descriptor.	YES: About 30 million people lived in the city. NO: About 30,000,000 people lived in the city.
Break the rules to avoid two digits next to each other.	YES: We took six 5-year-olds to the movie. NO: We took 6 5-year-olds to the move
Use hyphens between number ranges – with no spaces.	It takes 15-20 days to receive your pass.
Spell out fractions in sentences.	YES: Oddly, two-thirds of the riders paid cash. NO: Oddly, 2/3 of the riders paid cash.
Use commas in numbers with more than three digits.	The lane held 1,215 cars.
<b>Dates and Times</b>	
Spell out days of week and months with commas between any two words or any two numbers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Saturday, January 3</li> <li>- March 12, 2020</li> </ul>
Use numerals and lowercase am or pm with no space.	YES: 7:12am NO: 7:12 am, 7:12 a.m., 7:12AM
Use a hyphen with no spaces, 'from and to' or 'between' to indicate a time period. Am, pm not needed when both times are in the same part of the day.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 7-9:30am, 7am-2pm</li> <li>- From 7 to 9:30am</li> <li>- Between 7am and 9:30pm</li> </ul>
Don't include minutes on the hour.	YES: 7am or 7:12am No: 7:00am
<b>Addresses and States</b>	
In written context, spell out state names. States are proper names and should always be capitalized.	YES: California NO: CA or Cali.
State. The word 'state' is only capitalized when it follows the name of a state.	Yes: The California State park system is amazing. No: The State park system is amazing. No: The California state park system is amazing.
Unless a well-known city, include state on first reference.	YES: She moved to either Tacoma, Washington or Chicago. NO: She moved from Tacoma to Everett.
When joining a city and state, add a comma between, and if the sentence continues, after the state name as well.	I drove through Tacoma, Washington, on my trip to Texas.

Where there could be confusion, distinguish Washington state from the US capitol by adding D.C.	Tacoma, Washington is nowhere near Washington, D.C.
In written context, spell out address designations.	YES: Street, Avenue, Circle, Boulevard NO: St. Ave. Cir. Blvd.
When writing the word, use zip code.	Yes: zip code No: ZIP code or zipcode
Full address in written text should read:	He's lived at 123 Main Street, Tacoma, Washington 99888, since he was a kid.
<b>Phone Numbers</b>	
Use dashes without spaces between numbers—always include area code.	YES: 925-973-2655 NO: (925) 973-2655 or 925.973.2655 or 973-2655
Use a country code for international numbers.	+1-404-123-4567
Abbreviate extensions as 'ext.' with a period and a space.	111-111-1111 ext. 222
When referencing a cell phone, use 'cell'.	Yes: Cell 925-111-1234 No: Mobile 925-111-1234
<b>Money – US Currency</b>	
Write dollars with the \$ before the number - cents only added if it is not a whole number.	\$20 or \$20.12
Write cents with the decimal, a space and the word.	.30 cents or .06 cents
Abbreviate larger round numbers.	He had \$36 million in cash.

Grammar Conventions	Examples
<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b>	
First use as only use or to start a sentence	Transportation Demand Management
First use of multiple uses	Transportation Demand Management (TDM)
Second use or standard use acronym	TDM or HTML
<b>Capitalization</b>	
All proper names	John, Contra Costa County, Pleasant Hill
Sentence case – first word plus proper nouns	Look at Pete ride the bus!
Title/header case – First letter of every word except articles, prepositions and contractions.	Look at Pete Ride the Bus!
File extension types are all caps in general reference and all lowercase with a file name.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- GIF, JPG, PDF</li> <li>- photo.jpg, document.pdf</li> </ul>
Email addresses – all lowercase	commuter@ride.com
Website URLs – all lowercase with no www or http	511contracosta.org or bart.gov
Job Titles – Capitalized when preceding name or referencing a specific role. Lower case for general references.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General Manager John Doe ate lunch.</li> <li>- The new General Manager arrived yesterday</li> <li>- John ate lunch with the other managers.</li> </ul>
Capitalize the name of departments, but not the descriptor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marketing department</li> <li>- Customer Service team</li> </ul>
<b>Apostrophes</b>	
Possessive case single subject – subject doesn't end in 's'	The rider paid Sam's fare.
Possessive case single subject – subject ends in 's'	The rider paid Chris's fare
Possessive case plural subject – subject doesn't end in 's'	The rider paid the children's fares.
Possessive case plural subject – subject ends in 's'	The rider paid three kids' fares.
<b>General Comma Use</b>	
In conversational writing, include a comma where you would take a natural pause in reading and it's probably correct.	
Commas are used to offset language that could be removed from the sentence without changing the meaning.	The bus, which was historically late, arrived on time today.
Include to avoid a misunderstanding.	YES: Let's eat, Grandma. NO: Let's eat Grandma.
Use a comma after a salutation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hello, Heather</li> <li>- Good morning, friends</li> </ul>
Use the Oxford comma when writing a list by putting a comma before the 'and'.	YES: Sierra likes buses, trains, and carpools. NO: Sierra likes buses, trains and carpools.
<b>Quotation Marks - Punctuation</b>	
Periods and commas go within quotation marks.	Beth said, "Let's get lunch."
Questions marks go inside quotation marks if they are part of the quote and outside if asking a question that ends with a quote.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hamlet said, "Hark, who goes there?"</li> <li>- Was it Frank who said, "Don't miss that bus."?</li> </ul>
Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.	Brad said, "My father loved to say, 'Never go to bed angry.'"

Quotation Marks	YES: Smart Quotes NO: Straight Quotes
<b>Ampersands</b>	
Use ampersands in common shorthand expressions.	Park & Ride, Rock & Roll
Use ampersands to reference cross streets.	Meet us at 6 <sup>th</sup> & Pine
Use to join same-last-name pairs.	Fred & Ginger Rogers
Use ampersands for businesses when it is part of their name.	Barnes & Noble, Dolce & Gabbana
An ampersand should not be used in a sentence to replace the word 'and'.	Yes: Meet me at the Park & Ride for coffee and donuts. No: Meet me at the Park & Ride for coffee & donuts.
<b>Names and Titles</b>	
Use first and last name on first mention of a person and first only after that.	Joe Franks went to the bus stop. Later, Joe took BART to San Francisco.
Avoid referring to a person by their relationship to another unless it is relevant.	Yes: Tim and Gloria need help forming a vanpool No: Gloria and her boyfriend Tim need help forming a vanpool.
<b>Text Emphasis</b>	
In interactive text, hyperlinks can be color coded. In written text that could appear black and white, underline.	Website: Go to <a href="http://TriMyRide.com">TriMyRide.com</a> . Print: Visit the store or go to <u>TriMyRide.com</u> .
When referencing a specific button or navigation label, italicize.	Learn more about incentives by clicking <i>Learn More Here</i> .
Use bold to emphasize text within a sentence (It's like an exclamation point for words and phrases). Don't overuse.	You can pay with <b>pre-tax</b> dollars.
Italics are used for book, movie, magazine and album titles.	Claire just finished reading <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> .
Use quotations to highlight articles and reports.	Terrence read "How to Ride the Bus" in <i>Newsweek</i> and has been a transit fan since.
<b>Pronouns</b>	
Which or that <i>Note:</i> if in a phrase offset by commas use 'which', otherwise, use 'that'	Which = non-dependent pronoun. The train, which travels both ways, leaves in an hour That = dependent pronoun. The train that travels our direction leaves in an hour.
Who or Whom <i>Note:</i> If you can answer he or she – use Who If you can answer him or her – use Whom	Who = subject. Who is going to the movies? (He is) Whom = object. To whom are you referring? (To him)
Subject – Object Pronouns I or Me, he/him or she/her, we or us, they or them <i>Note:</i> Subjects do a thing and Objects have stuff done to them.	I, he/she, we, they = subject. Normally comes before the verb Me, him/her, us, them = object. Normally comes after the verb
Be aware of and respect declared pronoun choices of individuals.	These may be declared on an individual's email signature or on a lapel button or name badge.
If a person's gender is unknown or irrelevant, use 'they', 'them', 'their'. Avoid using 'one' as a pronoun.	Yes: They called and left a message for their friend. No: One can access the website from the page link.

Common Word Usage Errors	
Affect or effect	Affect = to influence or act upon. The flood will affect us all. Effect = the result. If it floods, the effect will be devastating.
Fewer or less	Fewer = things you can count. Fewer cars leads to less pollution. Less = things you can't count. Fewer cars leads to less pollution.
Number or amount	Number = things you can count. The number of cars is immense. Amount = things you can't count. The amount of anxiety the traffic created is immense.
Insure, ensure or assure	Insure = secured by an insurance policy. We insure our cars. Ensure = guarantee. We ensure our commitment to the project. Assure = remove doubt. I assure you that I will be there for you.
Your or you're	Your = belongs to you. It's your coat You're = you are. You're a lucky fellow to have a nice coat.
There, their or they're	There = location. Put it there. Their = belonging to them. It is their house. They're = they are. They're on their way to the store
Its or It's	Its = belonging. Put it in its place. It's = it is. It's going to be a long day.
Compliment or complement	Compliment: praise. He complimented her intelligence. Complement: enhancing. The wine complements the chocolate.
Principle or principal	Principle = truth or law. Many life principles are learned in school. Principal =head of school or organization. He was promoted from teacher to principal.
To, too or two	To= preposition meaning towards, reaching or until. I went to the bus stop to catch the bus at ten to two. Too= adverb meaning excessive, very or extreme. It was too long a trip to get too settled in. Two = number. I ate two pieces of pie.
Peak or peek or pique	Peak = topmost point. They reached the peak of the hill. Peek = a glance. I peek at my presents every year. Pique = excite. The movie trailer piqued my interest.
Than or then	Than = comparison. I am taller than you. Then = time or next. Wave down the bus, then get on.
Bring or take	Bring = to you. Please bring the form to my desk. Take = away from you. Please take the form to Paula.
Over or More Than	Over = measures. It was over 14 feet in length. More than = values. They had more than \$25,000 dollars.
Farther or Further	Farther = physical distance. I live farther away than you. Further = advancement. She will further her education at grad school.

Under or Less Than	Under = measures. It was under 14 feet in length. Less than = values. They had less than \$25,000 dollars.
Lie or Lay	Lie = to rest or recline. He wants to lie on the bus bench. Lay = to place something. Lay the jacket on the chair.
Regard or Regards	Regard = in reference to. In regard to the bill, give it to Joe. Regard = hold in esteem. I regard him highly. Regards = good wishes or condolences. Send him my regards.
Regardless NOT irregardless	Regardless is correct. Irregardless is a common misuse.
Supposed to NOT suppose to	Supposed to is correct. Suppose to is a common misuse.
A lot NOT alot	A lot is two words. Alot is a common misuse.