

HOW WE TALK

Here at the Foundation, we always aim to be grammatically correct and consistent in our copy. We know that by doing so, we come across as professional, aligned and unified.

To help you do this, we created an easy-to-reference guide that covers some common stumbling blocks. Things like when to use an en and em dash. Proper spelling on tricky words. And even the language we use when we refer to our colleagues or health care providers.

If you ever have questions, just ask. You can also check out the guides we often turn to for guidance—the Canadian Press and the Canadian Oxford Dictionary.

OUR PERSONALITY IN OUR WRITING

Here at the Foundation, we have four attributes that make up our brand personality: we are **compassionate**, **engaged**, **imaginative** and **tenacious**. When writing, it's helpful to look at these traits as a guide for how we want to communicate. *Let us explain.*

COMPASSIONATE

Words can be an incredibly powerful tool to not only highlight what we do, but also why we do it. This is where our compassionate side shines. One of the best ways to show it and evoke feelings of empathy in others is by telling stories or sharing examples. When readers understand the real journeys of kids and families who count us, they're more likely to develop an emotional connection to our cause. So when crafting narratives, add quotes that convey true feelings and include details that paint vivid pictures.

Another way to demonstrate compassion through our writing is to find the human element or real-life impact of what you're writing about. For example, when explaining a piece of equipment, talk about the impact it's had in the lives of kids and families who have benefitted from it.

BE: Authentic, genuine and empathetic

- > **EXAMPLE CONTENT:** By supporting our pet therapy program, you've helped create brighter moments for children when they need it most. One of the kids impacted by your generosity is Sarah, who was diagnosed with a rare heart defect when she was two years old. Her happiest memories during her stay at the hospital were the times when she was able to play with her favourite puppies.

ENGAGED

Passion is contagious. One way to inspire it in others is by showing that we are fully engaged and committed to our cause. Our writing can help do that in myriad ways. For starters, use the active voice—it's vigorous and bold. It also helps to add a dynamic rhythm to your copy by breaking paragraphs into short, digestible chunks and using varying sentence lengths. Finally, use strong verbs and concrete phrases to instill confidence.

BE: Confident, energetic and strong

- > **EXAMPLE CONTENT:** We're on a quest to beat childhood diseases—so every kid can beat the odds. But to realize our dreams, it will take every one of us.

IMAGINATIVE

A lot of our work is focused on the now. But as we've entered a new era of children's health care, we're also playing a leading role in shaping what care will look like tomorrow. When we speak of this future, our visionary side kicks in. You can reflect this in your prose by telling others of our ultimate vision—keeping kids out of the hospital. But be sure to back it up with tangible examples to add credibility.

BE: Inspiring, empowering and future-focused

- > **EXAMPLE CONTENT:** The top medical minds are learning everything they can about diseases—not just to treat them, but to stop them before they start. Take asthma, for example. Researchers recently discovered that kids who are missing four types of gut bacteria at three months are more likely to develop the disease. So now, they're working to develop treatments that could replace the bacteria. The ultimate vision? Changing the course of kids' lives by intervening earlier.

TENACIOUS

We've made some amazing strides in the quest to transform care. We're not ones to rest on our laurels, though—because our work doesn't have a finish line. Here's where we show our tenacious spirit. We acknowledge the hurdles in front of us, but use language that shows our tireless determination to race toward every single one. To never give up. It's, for instance, the difference between writing we can and we hope to.

BE: Unstoppable, optimistic and devoted

- > **EXAMPLE CONTENT:** Every day, our kids face new health challenges. While many can be treated and cured, not all battles can be won—yet. That's why our researchers are relentlessly pursuing new therapies for the kids who need it.

BRINGING OUR BRAND VOICE TO LIFE

WRITE HOW YOU SPEAK

People feel most comfortable reading copy in natural, everyday language. So, feel free to use contractions, start sentences with “and” or “but,” and call children “kids.” The same goes for using acronyms. For internal purposes and efficiency, you may need to use them—but outside those instances, avoid using them as they can cause confusion and feel too corporate.

SHARE, DON'T SHOUT

Our continuous efforts are creating positive change in child health across the province. And while every milestone and event is something to be celebrated, it's important to do it in a way that feels genuine. When writing, avoid using exclamation marks or capital letters as easy ways to show excitement. Deliver your main messages through clear and compelling examples, stories, analogies and statistics.

LESS IS MORE

No matter the content, try to quickly get to the point. Avoid packing your pages with sprawling, longwinded copy. Try not to over explain. And when you can, keep sentences short.

DON'T OVERSTATE

We always want to evoke feeling for our cause and engage our readers, but it's important not to overdo it or try too hard. Odds are, they'll see through this attempt and lose trust. Instead, be smart with your copy. Ensure your tone is authentic, and use meaningful words that paint a powerful picture that resonates.

GO BEYOND SUPERLATIVES

When showcasing our expertise, don't default to only using superlatives like "best in class" "world-renowned," "cuttingedge" and "groundbreaking." When used repeatedly on their own, they lose their meaning and readers simply gloss over them. Instead, use these descriptors to set the stage before proving what sets us apart by explaining the real impact of your subject.

WHAT IFS OVER IF NOTS

We're a place of possibility. When encouraging support, steer clear of using guilt or negative language to compel people to give us their time or money. Instead, draw them in by illustrating the positive impact their contribution can make.

LANGUAGE WE USE

THE HOSPITAL

Whether you're referring to *BC Children's Hospital*, *BC Children's Hospital Foundation*, *BC Children's Hospital Research Institute*, or *Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children*, there are a few general guidelines we like to follow.

- ✓ Spell out the full name at first mention—just like above.
After that, feel free to use shorter variations, (as outlined below)
- ✓ When it appears alone, hospital is lowercase but the Foundation and Research Institute are title case.
- ✗ Avoid putting the before the full name (e.g., “At the Sunny Hill Health Centre,...”)
- ✗ Unless it's internal, legal documents or gift agreements, try not to fill your prose with acronyms like BCCH, BCCHF or BCCHRI. The same goes for the Teck Acute Care Centre—for clarity, we always spell it out.

Acceptable abbreviations

- ✓ ***BC Children's Hospital***
Second reference: BC Children's / The hospital
- ✗ Not: Children's Hospital / BCCH (external)
- ✓ ***BC Children's Hospital Foundation***
Second reference: our/the Foundation
- ✗ Not: BC Children's Foundation / Children's Hospital Foundation / BCCHF (external)
- ✓ ***BC Children's Hospital Research Institute***
Second reference: The Research Institute
- ✗ Not: The Institute / BCCHRI (external)
- ✓ ***Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children***
Second reference: Sunny Hill
- ✗ Not: SHHC (external)

COLLECTIVE WRITING

It's even better if you use collective pronouns like **we**, **us** or **our** in copy. But we also recognize that by doing so, we need to be careful we don't suggest that we're doing the work of the hospital. We wouldn't, for instance, say **our patients** or **our researchers**—since that could be misleading.

- ✗ We're working to ensure our patients have the best health outcomes.
- ✓ We're helping to ensure kids have the best health outcomes.
- ✗ Our researchers are on a mission to conquer childhood diseases.
- ✓ Researchers here are on a mission to conquer childhood diseases.

HEALTH PROVIDERS

You've probably noticed there are a bunch of ways to refer to people who work in the health care industry. When referring to them as a whole, we prefer the term **health care providers** as a first choice. That's not to say you can't use other variations like health care professionals, medical experts, specialists, and so on. Also, be specific when possible—if you can instead say doctor, nurse or researcher, go for it.

A note on the term caregiver: It's best to avoid using the term caregiver when referring to health care providers like doctors, surgeons and so on. Caregiver refers to any person who provides direct care to another person—including a family member or guardian. When it's used in a general sense, there can be ambiguity as to who you're referring to. So if you're referring to a family member or loved one, it's okay to say caregiver. But if it's someone who works within the health care industry, avoid it.

- ✗ Over 4,000 caregivers work at BC Children's Hospital.
- ✓ As a parent or caregiver, you play an important role in the treatment of your child.

When referring to researchers, you could simply write 'researchers at BC Children's Hospital' (without Research Institute)

INTERNAL LINGO

We try to be careful in the language we use when we refer to each other within the walls of our Foundation. That means we avoid first-person singular pronouns like **my** in favour of collective pronouns like **our**, **we** and **us**. We also like to use words that are inclusive (like **colleague**, **team** or **peers**) and not hierarchical (like **boss**, **employee** or **assistant**).

- ✘ I'm getting my team together for a brainstorm today.
- ✔ Our team is getting together for a brainstorm today.
- ✘ My assistant will send that to you shortly.
- ✔ My colleague will send that to you shortly.
- ✘ Employees at BC Children's Hospital Foundation work to ensure kids receive the best health care imaginable.
- ✔ Our team works to ensure kids receive the best health care imaginable.

GRAMMAR

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

Keep these at a minimum. They can confuse our readers.

If you do need to use one, write words in their full form on first appearance and then indicate the acronym in parentheses and use that in the rest of your copy. But if the short version is a familiar one—like DNA, ACL, MRI or CT—you don't need to write it out.

- ✗ This year's ANOM is supporting the POCUS program.
- ✓ The piece of equipment will benefit gastrointestinal (GI) patients at the hospital.

ACTIVE VS. PASSIVE

Always use the active voice—which is when the subject performs the action instead of receiving it (which is passive). It's much more clear, concise and direct.

- ✗ An ambulance was called by John.
- ✓ John called an ambulance.
- ✗ Tests were performed by his doctor to find out the cause of the symptoms.
- ✓ His doctor performed tests to find out the cause of his symptoms.
- ✗ A critical piece of equipment was funded by the family.
- ✓ The family funded a critical piece of equipment.

AGE

Always use numerals when indicating an age. When age is used as an adjective, it needs to be hyphenated. Otherwise, there's no hyphen.

- ✓ A 14-year-old patient.
- ✓ The patient is 14 years old.

& AMPERSANDS

Unless they are part of a proper noun or company name, avoid ampersands in body copy. It's OK to use them in headings, tables, charts, lists or anytime you're limited on space.

BIAS-FREE WRITING

Always use gender-neutral terms.

✓ Chair or chairperson

✗ Chairman

✓ People

✗ Mankind

Avoid using he/she slash constructions—we are an inclusive organization.

Instead, opt for using plural pronouns like **they** or **their**.

✗ Each applicant can send his/her resume to us.

✓ Each applicant can send their resume to us.

Avoid classifying people by their diseases

✗ Diabetics often need several finger pricks each day.

✓ Kids with diabetes often need several finger pricks each day.

CAPITALIZATION

We follow a “modified down style.” That means capitalize all proper names, trade names, government departments and agencies of government, names of associations, companies, clubs, buildings, religions, languages, nations, races, places, and addresses.

Otherwise, use lowercase.

Here are a few specific guidelines that relate to our work. Capitalize formal job titles only when they appear directly in front of a name. Otherwise, use lowercase for all job and occupational titles.

✓ President & CEO Malcolm Berry spoke at the event.

✓ Rita Thodos, vice-president, philanthropy, corporate & community giving, said the gift would make a huge impact.

✓ The child life specialist helped calm him before his surgery.

Don't capitalize a medical condition unless its name includes a proper noun.

A few examples are Crohn's disease, Down syndrome, Ewing's sarcoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma, Tourette syndrome and Wilms tumour. For stages of cancer, use numerals and lowercase the word **stage**.

✓ The doctor diagnosed stage 2 Hodgkin's lymphoma. He was diagnosed with cancer.

Names of specific programs and departments are capitalized. Lowercase is used for the general term.

✓ The Surgical Day Care Unit at BC Children's Hospital recently won an award.

Surgical day care is offered at BC Children's.

- ✓ She works in the Hudson Family Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. He spent a week in intensive care.

Capitalize 'annual' and 'gala' when it relates to our events.

- ✓ The 10th Annual A Night of Miracles Gala is almost here.

If you're not sure about whether a word should be capitalized, it's a safer bet to use lowercase.

Uppercase only the first letter of the first word of the headline/subheadline (with the exception of proper nouns). Use lower case for all other words.

- ✓ Four children's hospitals across Canada announce significant new funding from HSBC (from news release)

Lowercase seasons—spring, summer, fall and winter

- ✓ This fall, join us as we help launch a whole new era in children's health care.

CONTRACTIONS

A contraction is two words made shorter by placing an apostrophe where letters have been omitted, like **you've** for **you have**. We like to use them often. It makes our writing friendlier.

DATES & TIMES

Use the month-day-year format.

- ✓ The event will be held on July 2, 2018.

Always use numerals without st, nd, rd or th

- ✓ January 1, 2018
- ✗ January 1st, 2018

When a month is used only with a year, don't use a comma.

- ✓ January 2016

Indicate the fiscal year by the initial full year, backslash, the last two digits of the following partial year

✓ 2017/18

When writing times, use figures (except for noon and midnight) with uppercase for AM and PM and no periods. Times on the hour don't need zeroes.

✗ The event will be held at 6:00 p.m.

✓ The event will be held at 6 PM

FRACTIONS

Spell them out with a hyphen.

✓ One-third of kids under the age of two aren't up to date on their vaccinations.

ITALICS

Use it to emphasize a word or phrase.

✓ Turvey believes the asthma culprit is that our kids are **too** clean.

MONEY

Always use numerals to express money with the appropriate symbols—with no space between the money sign and numeral. Very large amounts may be expressed with numerals and spelled-out numbers and should appear with the currency symbol.

✓ We received a \$1-million gift from the donor.

NUMBERS & FIGURES

Write out numbers one through nine. Use numerals for 10 or more. If a number comes at the beginning of a sentence, spell it out. The exception is if it's a year— in that case use numerals or rearrange the sentence.

✓ Three hundred full-time researchers work at BC Children's Hospital.

TELEPHONE & ADDRESSES

Telephone numbers should be separated with periods.

✓ 604.875.2444

When writing addresses, there's no comma after the province. The postal code is always preceded by a double space.

BC Children's Hospital Foundation
938 West 28th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4H4
Canada

SAYS VS. SAID

When attributing quotes, use the past tense.

✓ "BC Children's made that possible," said Jane

SIMPLE, EVERYDAY WORDS.

Always use a simpler, shorter word if you can. It makes our writing more approachable. Here's a few examples of that.

Use instead of **utilize**

Approve instead of **authorize**

Let instead of **permit**

People instead of **individuals**

WEB & EMAIL ADDRESSES

Omit "**http://www.**" when referring to a website in copy. In general, keep websites lowercase (like **bcchf.ca**). Exceptions can be made for promotional purposes for recall.

Website is all one word.

The word **email** doesn't have a hyphen.

If you're writing about the **internet** it should have a lowercase 'i'.

If a web or email address comes at the end of a sentence, it should have a period after it.

PUNCTUATION BASICS

' APOSTROPHES

Use them to denote a contraction and show possession.
Don't use them to indicate a plural acronym or decade.

- ✓ The 1990s were a transformative decade in children's health care.
- ✗ We are still collecting RSVP's for Crystal Ball.

A good rule of thumb is to keep your writing around a sixth grade reading level.

> BULLETS

Capitalize the first words in bulleted list. Do not use periods or any punctuation mark at the end of a bulleted list of items unless the bulleted item is a full sentence. List items in a given list should be syntactically alike (all should be nouns, phrases or full sentences, as appropriate).

, COMMAS

Use them to divide items in lists. We don't use the serial comma—that's when you put a comma before the 'and' in a simple list. If it's however a complex list or if the meaning could be confusing without a comma, use one.

- ✓ We host a variety of fundraisers, events and galas each year.
- ✗ More than 400 pieces of art distract, engage, inspire, and educate our kids.

Use them for joining. Commas are used when two complete sentences are joined together, using such conjunctions as and, or, but, while and yet.

- ✓ We've made many strides in our quest to conquer childhood cancer, but there is still so much more to do.

But be sure to avoid the comma splice when the conjunction is omitted. A comma splice is when you use a comma to separate two independent clauses, when you should actually be using a semicolon, em dash, or conjunction like 'and' or 'so'.

- ✗ The Teck Acute Care Centre has opened, kids now have a state-of-the-art facility to heal.
- ✓ The Teck Acute Care Centre has opened, and kids now have a state-of-the-art facility to heal.

The comma may be omitted when the clauses are short or the subject of both is the same.

✓ The treatment started and he began to feel better.

Use them to signal an interruption. Use bracketing commas to mark both ends of a weak interruption to a sentence.

✓ I am, of course, going to be there for the event.

Use commas to set off an introductory clause or long phrase that precedes the main clause.

✓ Because of you, we can help to advance research, provide specialized care, and comfort families during their toughest days

DASHES

Generally speaking: A hyphen (-) links words. An en dash (–) links numbers. An em dash (—) sets off a related but non-essential thought.

- HYPHENS

There aren't many hard and fast rules to help you decide which words are run together, hyphenated or left separate. It's always a bit of a judgement call. Here are a few general guidelines to help you decide.

Hyphenate

- ✓ Words that are used adjectivally (the 5-year-old boy was admitted)
- ✓ When spelling out numbers (twenty-four)
- ✓ When it's needed to unravel meaning (the 10 year-old children were vaccinated vs. the 10-year-old children were vaccinated)
- ✓ When the prefix of a word ends in the same vowel that begins the word (co-operate)
- ✓ When writing of millions or billions of dollars (\$20-million)
- ✓ Fractions (two-thirds)

Still confused? Here are some tips.

- > If you can avoid using a hyphen, do.
- > If you think there's any risk of ambiguity, use one.
- > If you're unsure about when to use a hyphen, it's a good call to look it up in the **Canadian Oxford Dictionary**.

- EN DASHES

Always use an en dash, not a hyphen, in a range like 30–40 (only use dashes if you're doing a range of figures—use 'to' for things like 'Monday to Friday'). And for those ranges, don't forget to take the spaces out from either side of the dash.

— EM DASHES

An em dash is a mark of separation stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses. Use it to set off a sharp break or interruption and to announce a long appositive or summary. Don't use spaces between the dash and letter.

- ✓ Six community partners—The Vancouver Art Gallery, Royal BC Museum, Vancouver Aquarium, H.R. MacMillan Space Centre, Museum of Anthropology at UBC, and Science World—created exhibits to engage kids in ways never before seen in a hospital.
- ✓ A host of doctors at the hospital—among them, specialists in blood disorders, cancer, rheumatology and gastroenterology—couldn't pin down the cause of the child's illness.

Think of punctuation as the traffic signals of language—they tell us to slow down, notice this, take a detour and stop.

... ELLIPSES

Ellipses serve two primary purposes.

- 1 It can convey to the reader that a section of a quote or excerpted text has been removed.
- 2 It can also leave something unfinished. When using ellipses, put spaces before and after the periods.

! EXCLAMATION MARKS

We rarely use these. Avoid them when you simply think an idea is notable and instead, save them for genuinely emphatic expressions that convey strong emotions. If you do need to use an exclamation mark, keep it to just one.

- ✓ Wow! The 31st Annual Miracle Weekend raised an astounding \$21,005,878.
- ✗ Thank you for your support! You just changed lives!!
- ✗ Come and join us!

“ ” QUOTATIONS

Use double quotation marks to enclose direct quotes.

✓ “Let’s go see the exhibit,” said the child.

Use single quotation marks for quotes within quotes.

✓ “I heard her ask ‘when are we leaving,’ but I didn’t give her a reply,” she said.

Periods and commas always go inside of quotation marks. Colons and semicolons go outside quotation marks.

When you are looking to insert one of the dashes using your keyboard you can use the ‘minus’ sign for an en dash and ‘- -’ double hyphen for the em dash

() PARENTHESIS

Use sparingly. They tend to break the reader’s concentration.

;: SEMICOLONS & COLONS

A colon is used to introduce more information such as a list, words, phrases, clauses or quotations. A complete sentence must precede a colon, but a complete sentence does not have to follow a colon.

✓ Every day we are moving closer to our vision: that every child is healthy and able to fulfill their hopes and dreams

A semicolon is used to separate statements too closely related to stand as separate sentences. It tells the reader that there’s still some question about the preceding full sentence—something needs to be added.

✓ It is said that it takes a village to raise a child; in this case, the entire province was onboard.

A semicolon is also used to separate complicated lists that already contain commas.

✓ The site offers tips that’s personalized to each audience— kids and parents; coaches and teachers; officials and administrators; and health care professionals.

Do not capitalize the first word after a colon or semi colon.

SENTENCE SPACING

Use one space, not two, between the end punctuation of one sentence and the beginning of the next sentence.

SPELLING

There's some words we just tend to use a lot. But sometimes, there can be a bit of confusion as to how they're written. Here's a list of commonly-used words with their correct spelling.

3D	open-heart surgery
CAR T-cell therapy (<i>but use 'CAR T cells' when it isn't a compound adjective centre</i>)	orthopedic (not orthopaedic)
children's health	patient- and family-centered care
cutting-edge	patient-oriented
emergency department (not emergency room)	pediatric (not paediatric)
evidence-based	per cent (always spell out with two words)
follow-up	province wide
fundraising (not fund-raising or fund raising)	specialty (not speciality)
health care (not healthcare or health-care)	state-of-the-art
honour	telehealth (no hyphen, lowercase)
long-term & short-term	tumour (include the "u")
nonprofit (one word, don't hyphenate)	wait list (not waitlist)
online	well-being
on-site	world-class
	X-ray (always hyphenate and capitalize the X)

We always use Canadian spelling in our copy. If you're ever not sure on how to spell a word, look it up in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary.