



# Inova Editorial Resource and Style Guide

*(Last update: April 29, 2021)*

By following a single set of editorial guidelines, we can ensure all Inova written communications – whether for team members, patients, donors or the community – present a clear and consistent voice.

The accepted companion to this style guide is the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook. When the Inova style guide and AP Stylebook differ, you should observe the rules in Inova’s style guide. (One notable difference: We use the abbreviation “MD” for Medical Doctor, whereas AP style is “M.D.”) When a rule could not be decided using AP style, AMA style was used.

For information on Inova’s graphic guidelines (e.g., logo usage, templates, design guidelines), go to InovaNet > About Inova > Brand Central. For the latest version of this guide, visit [inova.org/style](http://inova.org/style). For inquiries or corrections, please find us on InovaNet > IHS Departments > External Affairs, Communications & Marketing (<http://inovanet.net.inova.org/EACM>).

## Official Inova Boilerplate

Inova is Northern Virginia’s leading nonprofit healthcare provider. Our mission is to provide world-class healthcare – every time, every touch – to each person in every community we have the privilege to serve. Inova’s 18,000 team members serve more than 2 million individuals annually through an integrated network of hospitals, primary and specialty care practices, emergency and urgent care centers, outpatient services and destination institutes. Inova’s five hospitals are consistently recognized by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals and Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades for excellence in healthcare. Inova is home to Northern Virginia’s only Level 1 Trauma Center and Level 4 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Its hospitals have a total of 1,936 licensed beds. More information and statistics about Inova can be found at [inova.org](http://inova.org).

## Inova Mission, Vision and Values

**MISSION:** Inova’s mission is to provide world-class healthcare – every time, every touch – to each person in every community we have the privilege to serve.

**VISION:** To be among the leading health systems in the nation.

### VALUES:

**Patient Always** – We work with compassion to ensure every action we take puts the patient and family first.

**Our People** – We create an environment of respect and growth, where contributions are recognized and rewarded.

**One Team** – We are stronger together as a unified healthcare system, enriched by our diversity and driven by a shared purpose.

**Integrity** – We consistently uphold the highest moral and ethical standards and honor our commitments.

**Excellence** – We act with courage, hold ourselves accountable, and achieve results at the highest level of performance in our field.

## History of the Inova Name

The name “Inova” was created in the late 1980s, when leaders of the Fairfax Hospital Association (FHA) sought a new identity for their growing hospital system. They chose Inova for two reasons. First, FHA had expanded to include hospitals outside of Fairfax County and needed a name of which everyone could be part. Second, leaders wanted to promote their vision of continuous innovation — of a healthcare system focused on new ideas and new approaches. Thus, the Inova name is a play on “innovation” and “Northern Virginia” and is pronounced with a short “i” (same as the word “innovation”).

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## ***NEW IN THIS EDITION***

- Updated boilerplate
- Updated abbreviation for AFib

## ***Previous update: November 9, 2020***

- New appendix entry on preferred spellings
- New recommendation on “pre-operative” (instead of preoperative)
- COVID-19 / Coronavirus terminology

# Chapter 1: Acronyms and Abbreviations

**Acronyms.** On the first reference, use the full name, followed in parentheses by the acronym or abbreviation. On subsequent references, use the acronym or abbreviation, doing your best to avoid an “alphabet soup” presentation. Do not use periods in acronyms/abbreviations. Note: If the name is used only once and not repeated in the text, do not indicate the acronym.

**Exceptions** – *These acronyms may be used on first reference: AIDS, CPR, FDA, HIPAA, HIV, MBA, MD, RSVP*

**e.g. / i.e.** The abbreviation e.g. means “for example.” The abbreviation i.e. means “that is.” Try to avoid these often-confused abbreviations in written copy by spelling out what you mean (either “for example” or “that is”).

**Healthcare and Medical Terms.** See Chapter 8 for preferred forms of AFib, OB-GYN and other common terms.

**HIPAA.** The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, commonly known as HIPAA. “HIPAA” alone may be used without the formal name, even on first reference.

**Inova Facilities.** For marketing collateral and public website copy, always spell out the full name of Inova hospitals, facilities and services. For internal communications, you may use abbreviations on subsequent references.

**Inova Health System.** Use all three words on the first reference, then use Inova. Do not add “the” before Inova Health System. Do not use IHS. (Exception: For internal communications, use “Inova” on all references.)

**Inova Program Abbreviations.** You may use acronyms for Inova programs or institutes in Internal communications or press releases if explained. They should be avoided in marketing materials.

*Inova Translational Medicine Institute (ITMI)*

*Inova Medical Group (IMG)*

*Inova Schar Cancer Institute (ISCI)*

*Inova Center for Personalized Health (ICPH)*

**Junior, Senior.** Abbreviate as Jr. and Sr. only with full names. Per AP style, do not precede with a comma.

**Periods.** Do not use periods in acronyms (such as HIPAA) or abbreviations (such as MD, MBA, PhD, RN or RSVP).

**United States or U.S.** When using it as a noun, spell it out. When using it as a modifier, abbreviate it and use periods.

*In the United States, trees are endangered.*

*The U.S. Department of Transportation is testing airbag safety.*

## Chapter 2: Addresses and Places

**City and State Together.** When using a city and state together in text, abbreviate the state. Set off the state abbreviation with commas to the left and right.

*The tournament will be held in Palm Springs, CA, in February.*

**DC Metro Area.** Standard construction is “Washington, DC, region” but if a similar phrase must be used several times in one document and it would sound tedious to repeat it, you may use similar, grammatically correct phrases such as “DC metro area.”

*Inova is one of the leading healthcare systems in the Washington, DC, metro area.*

*Inova Heart and Vascular Institute is one of the largest cardiac surgery providers in the DC metro region.*

**Institution Names and Locations.** When we state the locations of universities, hospitals, etc., we should include the names of the cities where they are, unless it's obvious, like University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Hospital.

- Always include the designation if the institution's location would not be obvious from the name, such as Cleveland Clinic in Jacksonville, FL.
- Include the state name abbreviation ONLY if it's not a well-known city. When a university/school doesn't have an obvious city location in its name (e.g., NYU), then we should include the city (Cone Health Family Medicine Center in Greenville, NC). Also, if it's a well-known city (Miami), we don't need to include the state.

**Room Numbers.** Use figures and capitalization when referring to a specific room or suite. (Lowercase is used for the generic terms room or suite when not speaking about a specific one).

*Room 212, Conference Room D, Suite 201  
The conference room was empty. The suite was being used.*

**State Abbreviations in Text.** Use U.S. Postal Service state abbreviations within text.

**State Name Used Alone.** Do not abbreviate the name of a state when using the name alone.

*Several Virginia counties have severe transportation problems.  
Her home is near the Tennessee state line.*

**Street Names.** Use USPS abbreviations for St., Rd., Blvd. etc. only when part of a specific numbered address. Spell out the words Street, Road, Boulevard etc. and capitalize when part of a formal street name without a number.

*The office is located at 123 Main St.  
We have two medical office buildings in downtown Fairfax on Main Street.*

**Street location identifiers (N, S, W, E):** AP Style says to abbreviate compass points and use a period: 180 Maple Ave. W. / 740 E. Main St. For D.C. addresses with quadrants, use the google maps style.

**Suite.** Spell out and capitalize the word "Suite" when used as part of an address. (AP rule)

Avenue	Ave.
Boulevard	Blvd.
Circle	Cir.
Court	Ct.
Drive	Dr.
Highway	Hwy.
Lane	Ln.
Parkway	Pkwy.
Pike	Pike
Place	Pl.
Road	Rd.
Route	Rte.
Run	Run
Street	St.
Terrace	Ter.
Turnpike	Tpke.
Way	Way

## Chapter 3: Capitalization & Italics

**Board of Directors.** Do not capitalize unless it is part of a formal title. On second reference, the word board (used alone) is always lowercased.

**Diseases / Medical Conditions.** Use lowercase, unless proper names are part of the term: *multiple sclerosis, non-Hodgkin's disease, Alzheimer's disease*

**Government.** The general terms federal government, state government, etc., are lowercased.

**Headlines and subheads.** Title case is to be used for article headlines, brochure titles, and H1 (main page headers) in webpages. Capitalize the first letter of each word in a headline, **EXCEPT** prepositions, conjunctions or definite articles (the, a, an, to, for, with, on, etc.). *Title Case: First Letter of Every Major Word is Capitalized*

- **Short prepositions** (fewer than 5 letters) are not capitalized – For example *at, by, from*
- **Longer prepositions** are capitalized – For example *During*

**Hospital Auxiliaries.** Use an uppercase “A” when the word appears as part of the proper name of the organization; use lowercase on subsequent references.

*The Inova Fair Oaks Hospital Auxiliary will sponsor an art show and sale. So far, the auxiliary has raised \$1 million for the hospital. The auxiliaries at all Inova hospitals are very active.*

**Hyphen within a Headline.** If the headline contains a hyphenated word, capitalize all words unless they are prepositions, conjunctions or definite articles.

*Inova Provides Cutting-Edge Care*  
*Inova Provides State-of-the-Art Care*

**Inova Hospitals.** Use a lowercase “h” when the names of more than one hospital appear in succession:

*We offer emergency care at Inova Alexandria, Inova Fair Oaks, Inova Fairfax, Inova Loudoun and Inova Mount Vernon hospitals.*

**Italics.** Italics are no longer applied to the names of publications, as per AP.

**Job Titles.** In Inova style, job titles are always capitalized when associated with a name. Always capitalize official titles. Be consistent within the same piece.

**The Joint Commission.** Capitalize the word “the” on first reference, because it is the commission’s proper name. On subsequent references, do not capitalize “the.” Do not abbreviate the commission’s name.

**mid-Atlantic,** not Mid-Atlantic.

**Northern Virginia,** not northern Virginia.

**Program, Department or Service Names.** Capitalize nouns when they are part of the complete, formal name of a person, place or program. This includes the names of facilities, centers, departments, units, sections, programs, committees and rooms. Use lowercase for these nouns when using them in the generic form.

*Steven D. Nathan, MD, is the Medical Director of Inova Fairfax Hospital’s Lung Transplant Program. Dr. Nathan joined the transplant program in 1996.*

*Dr. Smith has practiced cardiology since 1985. Dr. Smith is President of Cardiology at Inova Fairfax Hospital.*

**Room Numbers.** Use figures and capitalization when referring to a specific room or suite. (Lowercase is used for the generic terms room or suite when not speaking about a specific one).

*Room 212, Conference Room D, Suite 201*  
*The conference room was empty. The suite was being used.*

## Chapter 4: Collective Nouns/Compound Words

**Collective Nouns** are nouns that denote a unit. These nouns take singular verbs and pronouns. Examples:

Class	Herd
Committee	Jury
Crowd	Orchestra
Family	Team
Group	Unit

*The committee is meeting to set its agenda; The jury reached its verdict.*

Some words that are plural in form become collective nouns and take singular verbs when the group or quantity is regarded as a unit.

*A thousand bushels is a good yield. (unit)*  
*A thousand bushels were created. (individual items)*

**“Data” as a collective noun.** Since the word “data” as a singular or plural noun differs in common usage, to avoid confusion you can re-word the sentence to maintain grammatical correctness and aid in reading comprehension. For example, instead of “The data show an increase...” you could say “After examining the data, researchers reported an increase.”

*The data is sound. (unit)\**  
*The data have been carefully collected. (individual items)\**

**Compound Words with Adverbs (words ending in ly).** Inova follows AP style for adverb modifiers ending in ly. This means no hyphen in such compound words as specially trained, highly qualified or newly expanded.

\* **Hyphenation in Compound Words.** (See Chapter 13 – Punctuation)

**Compound Word Variations Based on Use:**

check up – two words when it is a verb checkup – one word when it is a noun	login ID log in to a computer
kick off – two words when it is a verb kickoff – one word when it is a noun	roll out – two words when it is a verb rollout – one word when it is a noun

## Chapter 5: Days, Dates and Times

**24/7.** In long prose, use the full phrase “24 hours a day, seven days a week” or “around the clock.” In flyers, social media, and online, 24/7 is acceptable as well:

*Inova nurses care for patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

*Inova nurses provide care around the clock. / Inova nurses provide around-the-clock care.*

*Emergency services available 24/7*

**Commas.** When writing out a date, separate the day and the year with a comma: *March 4, 2003*

**Dates and Hours:**

- When describing an event, it is good for clarity to include the day of the week.
- You do not need to re-state the year if it is clearly listed in a header or event title.
- If only a start time is given, use “at” or an en-dash (Alt 0151) before it.

**Days of the Week.** Capitalize and do not abbreviate, except when needed in a tabular format (see Formatting).

**Eastern Standard Time.** When needed, the abbreviation EST shall be used.

**Formatting.** For invitations or schedules where design considerations must prevail, it’s acceptable to use stylized day, time or date formats if needed for visual consistency in a layout. Days of the week are 3 letters, no periods:

EVENT SCHEDULE				
Mon	11/5	8:30 a.m.	Speaker 1	
Tue	11/6	11:30 a.m.	Speaker 2	

**Hours:**

- If the time is on the hour, leave off the 00
- Use a.m. and p.m. (*not AM or pm*).
- Use the words “noon” or “midnight” instead of 12 p.m. or 12 a.m. to reduce confusion.
- Ranges: Use the en dash – (Alt 0150) with space on either side. Do not use a dash/hyphen -
- You may also use “to”, “through” or “from” for ranges in copy.
- If start/end times are both a.m. or p.m., use the designation only once. If the event takes place in both the a.m. and p.m., use both sets of initials.
- After the date or day indicator, place a comma before the hour designation.

Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
Monday and Wednesday, 8 – 11 a.m.  
Saturday, 8 a.m. – noon  
Our office is open on Tuesdays from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

**Months:**

- **Without a specific date** – Spell out the names of all months when used without a specific date. Do not put a comma between the month and the year.
- **With a specific date** – Spell out the names of months with five or fewer letters; abbreviate the names of months with more than five letters. (For formal invitations, the month may be spelled out.)

*September 2003*

*Sept. 4, 2003*

**Ordinal Usage in Dates.** Use Arabic figures only. Do not add nd, rd, th or st to dates.

*May 4 (not May 4<sup>th</sup>)*

*June 21 (not June 21<sup>st</sup>)*

**Punctuation.** When using a specific date within a sentence, offset the year with commas. When only using a month/year combination, do not use the comma.

*It was decided on August 4, 1996, by the group.*

*It was decided in August 1996 by the group.*

**Seasons.** Seasons (winter, spring, summer, fall) are not capitalized unless part of a formal name.

*The committee was formed in the spring of 2007.*

*The Winter Olympics will be held in Canada next year.*

**September 11.** When referring to the specific date September 11, 2001, do not abbreviate the term (Sept. 11 or 9/11). The use of the year is optional and based on the context in which the term is used.

*The events of September 11, 2001, will remain with us forever.  
September 11 marked a turning point in American history.*

## Chapter 6: Digital and Internet Terms

### Digital / Internet Terms.

- email (without a hyphen), not Email (unless it begins a sentence)
- homepage (one word)
- InovaNet, not InovaNET
- Internet (lowercase is a new AP rule in 2016)
- intranet, not Intranet (there are many intranets; so it is not capitalized)
- web (new AP rule 2019)
- website, not web site or web-site
- WiFi (AP style is still Wi-Fi as of 2019)

**Email Addresses.** All lowercase: tom.smith@inova.org

**URL Format.** Do not use www or http:// in any URL in printed material. Do not underline the URL in printed material. When there is a URL in an email, use a direct, clickable URL. Use all lowercase for website addresses:

*inova.org/cancer*  
*inova.org/forthecure*  
*inova.org/breastcancer*

### Writing for Digital and Social Media:

- Although care should be taken to use complete words and correct grammar whenever possible, the rules of the medium must prevail – to enhance audience engagement, to bolster our believability within the medium, and to aid reader comprehension and quick digestion.
- Additional space-saving exceptions may be used in cases where character limitations require it (such as in a character-limited digital ad or twitter post).
- Best practices for link text. Do not use the word “online” when you’re already online, or to describe something you’re linking to from a webpage. (For example, there’s no need to state “Visit our online database” because the user is already online.)
- Inova digital style is to eliminate the archaic use of “click here” and instead simply describe the target within the hyperlink.

## Chapter 7: Headlines

**Capitalization in Headlines.** Capitalize the first letter of each word in a headline, except:

- Do not capitalize prepositions (of, in, to, for, with, on, at, from, by, about, as)
- Do not capitalize conjunctions (and, but, if) or definite articles (the, a, an).
- Do not capitalize “to”



DO Capitalize linking verbs (Are, Is). Do not end a line with a preposition. The first word after a colon is always capitalized in headlines.

*Exercising After Joint Replacement: A Guide for New Patients*  
*Inova Is Leading the Way in Medical Research*  
*Where to Go Before Surgery*

**Hyphen within a Headline.** If the headline contains a hyphenated word, capitalize all words unless they are prepositions, conjunctions or definite articles.

*Inova Provides Cutting-Edge Care*  
*Inova Provides State-of-the-Art Care*

**Quote within a Headline.** When a quote appears within a headline, set off the quote with single quotation marks.

*Inova Alexandria Hospital: 'A Gem of a Hospital'*

**Splitting Headlines.** Do not dangle prepositions at the end of a line or split complete names.

<b>Correct Break:</b>	<b>Incorrect Break:</b>
<i>Keep Your Medicines in a Healthy Place</i>	<i>Keep Your Medicines in a Healthy Place</i>

## Chapter 8: Healthcare and Medical Terms

**Advanced Practice Provider (APP),** not advance practice provider.

**AFib (Abbreviation for Atrial Fibrillation).** In written content for our heart and vascular services, the preferred abbreviation for Atrial Fibrillation is AFib as per the American Heart Association.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.** Not Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Abbreviate as CDC on subsequent reference.

**Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services** (note the ampersand in the official name). Abbreviate as CMS on subsequent reference.

**COVID-19** or Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)

**Copay.** The AP style for the shortened, colloquial form of the original term “co-payment” is “copay” (no hyphen).

**CT Scan.** While “CT scan” and “CAT scan” are both correct, the preferred Inova use is CT scan.

**Dietitian** (not dietician).

**Doctor vs. Physician.** Although physicians like to use the word “physician,” we must remember that for marketing materials and websites it is advisable to use the word “doctor” at least as often. “Doctor” is a more easily recognizable (and understood) word for patients of all reading levels, and is also better for Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

**Emergency Room / ER.** For internal communications, you may refer to the Emergency Department or ED. For marketing, the more widely understood Emergency Room / ER should be used.

**EVALI.** Lung injury in patients with suspected e-cigarette or vaping product use is now known by its acronym, "EVALI."

**Healthcare vs. Health care.** Healthcare (one word) is preferred Inova style, particularly when used as an adjective (“We are in the healthcare industry.”) This complies with CMS style. *Exceptions:* Keep the two-word phrase if part of a formal title (such as Maryland Health Care Commission), or if it was used in quoted material. The two-word version “health care” is technically correct as per AMA, AP style and Cleveland Clinic style, but it is better to re-write or re-work the text to fit Inova style.

**HIPAA.** The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, commonly known as HIPAA.

**IV.** The abbreviation “IV” is acceptable in all references as substitute for “intravenous.”

**The Joint Commission.** Capitalize the word “the” on first reference, because it is the commission’s proper name. On subsequent references, do not capitalize “the.” Do not abbreviate the Joint Commission’s name.

**MD vs. M.D.** At Inova, we use the abbreviation “MD” for Medical Doctor, NOT the variation “M.D.” used in AP style.

**Medicare/Medicaid.** These are proper names and should be capitalized.

**Multidisciplinary**

**National Institutes of Health.** Not National Institute of Health. Abbreviate as NIH on subsequent reference.

**Neurological,** not neurologic.

**OB-GYN** is the preferred abbreviation as per AP style.

**Orthopedics,** not orthopaedics (unless it is part of a title such as Anderson Orthopaedic Clinic).

**Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.** Use the full name or Accountable Care Act. Avoid “Obamacare” unless quoting someone.

**Payer,** not payor.

**PGY1, PGY2** (no hyphen). Abbreviation for Program Year in medical residency programs.

**Physician Assistant (PA),** not physician’s assistant.

**Pre-operative / pre-op** (*new decision May 2020*).

**Pre-procedural.** For readability purposes, the Inova style team has decided that “pre-procedural” should be kept as an exception to the normal rule of no space after the “pre.”

**Preventive vs. Preventative.** Although both are technically correct, Inova style favors the shorter “preventive” as described in the AMA Manual of Style.

**Tourette syndrome,** not Tourette’s Syndrome.

**Well-Being.** Used as a noun, it is two words and hyphenated (AP style). AMA does not indicate a preferred style.

**X-ray,** not x-ray.

## Chapter 9: Inova-Specific Words and Usage

**Employees / Team Members.** Inova CEO Dr. Stephen Jones has indicated that Inova employees are to be referred to as “team members.”

**Inova**, not INOVA. Do not use IHS. Inova is not an acronym; it is a proper name, and thus should only be used in all capitals in a graphic treatment in a logo. In text or any other use it has an initial cap only.

The correct way to state the name of our company is “Inova Health System” on first mention, and “Inova” on subsequent mentions within a document.

**Inova leadership and management structure terms.** The terms “service line” and “triad” should not be capitalized unless used as part of a formal title. Referring to an executive as “head of a service line” is not a formal title; use their formal title in any external communications.

**Nonprofit.** Inova is a nonprofit organization. (The single word “nonprofit” is preferred to the term “not-for-profit.”)

### **O.U. / Hospital**

Inova CEO Dr. Stephen Jones has indicated that the formerly popular term “O.U.” (operating unit) should no longer be used when referring to our hospitals, even internally. The word “hospital” should be used.

### **Physicians Conference Center**

“Physicians Conference Center” and “Physicians Office Building” are spelled with initial caps and no punctuation.

**System-wide** and **hospital-wide** should be hyphenated. (New rule established Oct. 2019)

## Chapter 10: Names, Titles, Academic Degrees

**Academic Degrees/Certifications.** With the exception of MD, academic degrees, honorary degrees or certifications are used only when needed to underscore achievement or credibility. Do not use periods in the initials.

*John A. Administrator, RN, MSN*

*Deborah Smith, RN, made a presentation at the clinical seminar.*

**Academic Degree Punctuation.** Inova style is to use lowercase with an apostrophe (bachelor’s degree; master’s degree). The formal names “Bachelor of Arts degree” or “Master of Business Administration degree” are to be avoided. Do not capitalize the word degree. Use lowercase on the fields of study, unless they are proper nouns or proper adjectives such as English. This complies with AP and Chicago style.

**Inova Leader Names.** Use the full name on first reference. For doctor bios, use “Dr. [Last Name]” on subsequent references. For leadership bios, use the first name on subsequent references.

**Dr. Jones’s name and title:** *J. Stephen Jones, MD, MBA, FACS – President and CEO, Inova*

**Job Titles.** In Inova style, job titles are always capitalized when associated with a name.

**Military Titles.** Use AP style for military titles and abbreviations, for example when used in a bio.

**Patient Names.** When writing an article about an Inova patient, use the patient’s full name on first reference and the first name on subsequent references.

**Physicians:**

- Use the full name plus MD on the first reference.
- Use the title Dr. [Last Name] on subsequent references. (*\*Exception: Leadership bios use first name on subsequent references.*)
- Do not use the doctor’s last name alone without a title (“Smith”).

*John Smith, MD, is Chief Medical Officer at Inova Fairfax Hospital. Dr. Smith is board certified in pediatric surgery.*

## Chapter 11: Numbers

**Ages.** Use “age” (single age) or “ages” (range), never “aged.” Use numerals for 10 and below. These are all correct:

*The toddler, age 3, ate the cookies.  
Americans age 65 and over will be affected.  
Americans ages 65 to 70 may participate.*

**Dollar Amounts:** Do not use punctuation or zeroes when indicating a whole dollar amount of money: *Parking is \$5.*

**Extension Numbers.** The correct form is **x3368**.

**Floor Numbers:**

- In sentence copy, use spelled-out ordinals for all floors under 10th (*The office is located on the third floor*).
- For floors above 10, use numerals with ordinal style (*Take the elevator to the 10th floor*).
- Always spell out the word “floor” (lowercase).

**Fractions.** In text, spell out amounts less than one and use hyphens between the words. Example: *two-thirds*

**Million.** Use a figure and spell out the word million.

*Inova serves more than 2 million patients annually.*

**Numerals.** Spell out whole numbers one through nine; use figures for 10 and above. This rule applies to units of time and measurements, except when listed in a chart or graph. When the sentence includes a number under nine and a number over nine, use figures for both. Be consistent.

*We have six patients to discharge and two patients to admit.  
We have 6 patients to discharge and 212 to admit.*

**Over / More Than.** “Over” refers to spatial relationships. “More than” refers to amounts.

**Percentages.** Use the word percent, not the symbol (%), except on charts or graphs. Exceptions can be made, for example in copy that contains numerous statistics, as long as consistency is kept within the same document. Use figures and decimals, not fractions.

*1 percent, 2.5 percent, 0.5 percent*

**Phone Numbers.** In general, **boldface** telephone numbers and extensions. Try to avoid a phone number break between lines. For printed marketing materials, currently dots are being used to separate the numerical parts of the number. For web and email, hyphens are used. Only use a “1” before the number if it is a toll-free number.

**Quarters.** In body text, spell it out (first quarter). In charts or graphs, use Q1.

**Ratios.** Use a colon to represent the word “to”: *A 2:1 ratio* / *A ratio of 2:1*

**Units of Measure.** Use figures:

*10 to 120 cm, 0.4 to 0.5 mg/kg*  
*The temperature dropped to minus 36 degrees.*

**Years of experience:** *13 years of clinical experience* / *13 years’ clinical experience* (AP style)

## Chapter 12: Pronouns

**Gendered Pronouns.** The AP style guide has many good examples for workarounds when dealing with copy containing difficult constructions with gendered pronouns and the correct use of the word “they.”

For example, instead of saying “The patient will be told how much they will be required to pay” you could instead write “The patient will be told about all required costs.”

**His/Her.** Avoid using his/her or him/her or variations. Try to write around gender-specific references instead, so that “their” is correct, or else substitute “your child” or “the patient.”

Instead of this:	Try this:
Everyone should take his or her seat.	Everyone should take their seat. Everyone should take a seat.
Each team member should fill out his or her feedback form.	All team members should fill out their feedback forms.
When you get to the ER with your child, we will try to make him or her as comfortable as possible.	Upon arrival at the ER, we will try to make your child as comfortable as possible.

## Chapter 13: Punctuation

**Ampersand (&).** Unless it is part of a formal name, do not use an ampersand in written material.

*Barnes & Noble is a great bookstore.*

**Apostrophe.** Use apostrophes to denote contractions or the possessive *only*.

*Its* is possessive. *It’s* is a contraction of the words it and is. *The dog is on its leash* / *It’s raining outside.*

Avoid the common mistake of using an apostrophe in a plural, non-possessive word. There are NO apostrophes in:

- Tysons Corner
- Physicians Conference Center

- Doctors Day/Nurses Day
- Plural acronyms, such as CDs and SUVs
- Plural years, such as the 1970s
- Plural abbreviations, such as MDs or RNs

**BULLETS.** Capitalize the first word in each element of a bulleted list. Use a period at the end of each bullet if each element is a complete sentence; do not use periods after any bullets if the elements are not complete sentences. (*NOTE: This goes against the new AP rule, which calls for a period at the end of every bullet even if the elements are single words or fragments.*)

Be consistent, using parallel construction for each item in a list. To maintain **consistency of structure** within a bulleted list, you may need to re-work your content (for example, make each item start with a noun or with a verb).

<p><b>Services Provided at this Clinic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urgent Care</li> <li>• Primary Care</li> <li>• Flu Shots</li> </ul>	<p><b>This manual will teach you how to do the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform brain surgery.</li> <li>• Obtain adequate malpractice insurance.</li> <li>• Get a tee time at Burning Tree Country Club.</li> </ul>
<p><b>We have many problems:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ozone hole is growing.</li> <li>• There are still too many nuclear weapons.</li> <li>• No one knows how to punctuate a list of bullets.</li> </ul>	

**Action verbs in a bulleted list.** When listing a series of actions in a bulleted list, make sure each element begins with the action verb rather than the word “to.” For example:

**Workshop Objectives**

- Describe research results... [*instead of “To describe research results”*]
- Understand clinical protocols... [*instead of “To understand clinical protocols”*]

**COLONS:** To capitalize the first letter after a colon is correct if what follows the colon is a complete sentence.

**COMMAS.** A nonessential clause must be set off by commas. An essential clause must not be set off from the rest of a sentence by commas. As with all punctuation, clarity is the biggest rule. If a comma does not help make clear what is being said, it should not be there. If omitting a comma could lead to confusion or misinterpretation, then use the comma. If a conjunction such as “and” / “but” / “for” links two clauses that could stand alone as separate sentences, use a comma before the conjunction in most cases.

**RESTRICTIVE CLAUSE:** *The hospital with the new ER is on Gallows Rd.*

**NONRESTRICTIVE CLAUSE:** *The hospital, which has a new ER, is on Gallows Rd.*

**INDEPENDENT CLAUSES TOGETHER IN A SENTENCE:** *Research shows that heart attacks strike more women than men, and death rates remain higher among women.*

**COMMA NEEDED FOR CLARITY:** *On the street below, the curious gathered.*

**CONJUNCTION LINKING TWO CLAUSES:** *She was glad she had looked, for a man was approaching the house.*

**Commas with that / which.** “That” never has a comma in front of it; “which” always does. *There is the car that ran over my foot. Ed’s car, which ran over my foot, is over there.*

**Serial commas.** In general, a serial comma or “Oxford comma” is NOT to be used, unless needed for clarity.

- Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series if needed for clarity, or if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction.
- Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases or in a complex list.

**Dashes.** For time ranges and parenthetical phrases in a sentence, use the en dash – which is created by typing Alt 0150 on your keyboard – surrounded by spaces as in this sentence. The hyphen (on your computer keyboard to the right of the zero key) is **only** to be used for phone numbers and compound words.

**Exclamation Points!** In almost every case they look unprofessional and unnecessary. In a few rare instances they can be appropriate, for example in a headline on a postcard that says “Thank You Donors!” But almost never in regular copy.

## HYPHENS

- Generally do **not** hyphenate when using a prefix with a word starting with a consonant.
- Use a hyphen if the prefix ends in a vowel and the word that follows begins with the same vowel. (Exceptions: cooperate, coordinate, and double-e combinations such as preestablish, preeminent, preeclampsia, preempt.)
- Use a hyphen if the word that follows is capitalized (sub-Equator). Use a hyphen to join doubled prefixes (sub-subparagraph).

**Citywide, etc.** There is no hyphen in citywide, nationwide, statewide, or other similar examples.

**Compound word NOT preceding a noun** – Not hyphenated: *The physician is board certified.*

**Double modifier or compound word preceding a noun** – Always hyphenated:

*He is a board-certified physician.  
We use age-appropriate procedures.  
You will be included in the decision-making process.  
The decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis.  
You will receive more information at your pre-operative visit.*

**Hospital-wide, system-wide, and in-house** should be hyphenated in all instances. (*New rule established Oct. 2019, also in compliance with updated AP guideline*)

**Length of stay** is never hyphenated, no matter how it is used.

**Prefix ends with a vowel / root word starts with the same vowel.** Except for cooperate and coordinate, use a hyphen if the prefix ends in a vowel or consonant and the word that follows begins with the same vowel or consonant, such as re-elect.

**Prefix ends with a vowel / root word starts with a different vowel.** Earlier Inova style rules said we should not hyphenate when using a prefix that ends with a vowel, followed by a word that begins with a different vowel (for instance *reaccredited*). However for clarity and readability, the Marketing and Internal Comms team in May 2020 updated this rule to recommend the use of **pre-operative** and **pre-op**, with hyphens.

**Repeat letters.** AP style states that a hyphen should be used to avoid reader confusion in such terms as “shell-like” or “anti-intellectual” or “post-transplant.” However, the common words “preempt” and “reelected” should **not** have a hyphen.

**“Self” words.** Hyphenate all “self” words such as self-conscious and self-image.

**Well-being** is always hyphenated, no matter how it is used.

**PERIODS.** One space after a sentence. Do not use periods in the abbreviation “MD” (medical doctor).

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**APPENDIX 1: Hyphenation.** The following words are not hyphenated: Breastfeeding, Caregiver, Freestanding, Fundraiser, Fundraising, Groundbreaking, Inpatient, Multidisciplinary, Noninvasive, Offsite, Online, Onsite, Outpatient, Overall, Restrooms, Wheelchair, Worksite, Workup, Website

**APPENDIX 2: Hyphenation Variations.** The following are hyphenated when they precede the noun they modify, but not hyphenated when they follow the noun:

- Acute-care facility (We provide acute care)
- He is a board-certified physician (He is board certified)
- Cutting-edge treatments (The treatments are cutting edge)
- Decision-making skills (We can help with your decision making)
- Follow-up appointment (We will follow up)
- Full-time staff (All of the staff members are full time)
- Part-time staff (All of the teaching aides are part time)
- State-of-the-art care (Our treatments are state of the art)
- Up-to-date procedures (Our procedures are up to date)

*Inova hospitals provide around-the-clock care.  
Care is provided around the clock.*

*Inova’s board-certified physicians provide cutting-edge care.  
Inova’s physicians are board certified. Their care is cutting edge.*

*Inova’s state-of-the-art technology is unsurpassed.  
Inova’s technology is state of the art.*

**APPENDIX 3: Preferred spellings.**

Canceled with one “L”

Frontline (one word) when used as an adjective. (“Frontline heroes”)

**APPENDIX 4: Commonly confused words.** All writers, editors and proofreaders must be familiar with the correct usage of these and other commonly confused words. When in doubt, look it up.

Complementary vs. complimentary / Ensure vs. insure / Affect vs. effect