

Cascade Bicycle Club Style Guide

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Foundations for brand and storytelling

Audience personas and audience journey mapping

Personas give content creators a sense of whom they're writing/designing for. You can read more about the audience personas in the [user research report](#).

Writing principles

Writing principles help us understand what our content should convey to our community. When we align our communication around these goals and principles, our community will recognize our cohesive and consistent brand voice.

Our principles:

We approach every piece of content we create by being **welcoming** and **collaborative**.

We aim to create content that is **educational** and **helpful**.

We know our content is successful if our community feels **encouraged** and had **fun** engaging with our content.

You can [learn more](#) about these principles and how to use them. You can also [view the deck](#) that walks you through how we selected brand personality terms and formed the writing principles.

Audience journey messaging

When we understand the value that Cascade offers its audiences through its services and programming, we can better communicate that value through our messaging. The [audience journey messaging](#) statements reflect the value that each of the audience groups gain from engaging with the different opportunities that Cascade offers.

Create accessible and inclusive content

We want to ensure that Cascade's content is accessible and welcoming to everyone. This work is integral to our vision of a future where bicycles bring people together, eliminate inequity, and create thriving communities.

To embody Cascade's values of equity and community, it's important that we use language and approaches that are accessible to everyone. The words and approaches we use can make the difference between forging positive connections with our audience and making them feel like they don't belong.

Writing for accessibility goes beyond text best practices and affects the way you organize content and guide readers through a page.

Making your website accessible doesn't just make a positive experience for everyone, it also helps boost search engine optimization efforts. Google can more easily crawl and rank websites that incorporate accessibility best practices.

The below guidance includes universal best practices for writing for the web in a way that boosts accessibility and search engine optimization. The sections on ability and disability; age; gender and sexuality; and race, ethnicity, and religion are adapted from [18F's style guide](#).

Ability and disability

If a person's situation, medical condition, illness, or injury is relevant to the content, be as specific as possible and avoid inserting value judgements about their circumstance (for example, use *has multiple sclerosis*, not *is afflicted with* or *suffers from*).

Just like with language around race, gender, or other identities, it's always best to ask people how they identify rather than assuming. For help finding appropriate or accurate language, see the [Disability Language Style Guide](#) from the National Center on Disability and Journalism.

Avoid describing people as *disabled*, *handicapped*, or *confined to a wheelchair*.

Avoid terms that contribute to stigmas around disability or mental illness: *crazy*, *lame*.

Avoid terms that contribute to sensory disabilities stigmas: *blind spot* or *tone deaf*.

Age

Avoid referring to someone's age, unless it's relevant to what you're writing about (for example, when referring to benefits that are available to people of certain ages or describing a group ride that's meant for people above a certain age).

Don't use women or older relatives as a substitute for a novice or beginner.

We prefer *older person* or *senior* to *elderly*.

Gender and sexuality

Make content gender neutral wherever possible, and strive to write in a [gender-fair](#) way. If you're writing about a hypothetical person or if you're unsure of the person's pronouns, use *they* or *them* instead of *he/she*.

Use descriptors of gender identity or sexual orientation as modifiers, not as nouns (for example, *transgender person*, *cisgender person*, or *lesbian woman*). Avoid guessing gender identity or sexual orientation. When in doubt, either reconsider the need to include this information or ask the person you're referring to how they identify and what terms they prefer.

Use *different gender* instead of *opposite sex/gender* (because this recognizes gender as a spectrum, rather than a binary).

We support using *they* or *their* as singular pronouns.

Avoid *guys* as a way to refer to mixed-gender groups.

Don't make assumptions about family relationships (for example, use *spouse* or *partner* instead of *husband* and *wife*; use *parent* or *caregiver* instead of *mother* and *father*).

For more detailed guidance, see the [GLAAD Media Reference Guide](#).

Race, ethnicity, and religion

Avoid using words, images, or situations that reinforce racial, ethnic, or religious stereotypes (even stereotypes that may appear to be positive). Avoid terms that treat whiteness as a default.

Don't make assumptions: ask how people identify themselves, and be aware of complexities within racial, ethnic, and religious identities. For example, not all Arabs are Muslim, and many nationalities and ethnicities include various religious practices and traditions.

When referring to a person's race or ethnicity, use adjectives, not nouns (for example, *a Hispanic person*, not *a Hispanic*).

How We Write

Keep it simple, clear, and concise

Simple, clear, and concise language benefits our audience.

Why we use simple, clear, and concise language:

We want to convey straightforward information so readers can understand the message and move on to the next piece of information or take action.

When people can quickly understand our message, they'll view us as helpful.

We want to be accessible to people who speak English as a second language.

This type of language makes it easier for people to find our website pages in search engine results.

Tips for writing:

Don't write for yourself, **write for how Cascade's audiences think**.

Remember most website visitors are not experts and some may have zero knowledge of the topic. They are here to learn from us. Be encouraging and instructive.

Avoid industry jargon and technical phrases. As a guide, choose common, familiar words that a sixth grader would understand. If you need to use an abbreviation or acronym that people may not understand, explain what it means on first reference.

It's hard to read long paragraphs and phrases on a small screen, but near impossible on a smartphone. Use short sentences and short paragraphs.

After you draft something, edit it down to remove redundant points, flowery language, and to communicate a message in a briefer way. **Shorter is always better.**

Make it mobile-friendly

Half of Cascade's audience engages with our site on their smartphones, so it's vital that we make our content mobile-friendly. That work goes beyond the design.

Tips for making our site mobile-friendly:

Present content in small chunks. Short phrases, sentences, and paragraphs also mean more whitespace, which makes scanning for information easier.

Write titles and headers that are six words or fewer. Ensure that the title and headers accurately reflect the content.

Opt for simple words instead of complex ones (e.g., change "subsequent" to "next").

Replace wordy phrases with simple words (e.g., change "in the event that" to "if").

Use illustrations and images. They add a visual appeal and break up text. They can also convey a lot of information quickly when they support the text.

Before you publish, preview the content on your mobile device and ask yourself if Cascade's target audience would enjoy reading it on their phones.

Active voice

Try to use an active voice. It helps the reader identify the sentence's subject and it helps keep your writing concise and direct.

Avoid passive voice except when there's a reason to use it. Passive voice can cause confusion and make the writing sound impersonal.

In active voice, the subject of the sentence does the action. In passive voice, the subject of the sentence has the action done to it.

Active voice example: Lucy led the Chilly Hilly event

Passive voice example: The Chilly Hill event was led by Lucy

Words like "was" and "by" may indicate that you're writing in a passive voice. Scan for these words and rework sentences where they appear.

One exception is when you want to specifically emphasize the action over the subject. In some cases, this is fine. For example, "your account was flagged by our security team." That type of sentence structure helps catch the reader's attention.

Put the most important information first

Think of writing in the form of an inverted pyramid. At the top, you have all the "need to know" information: the who, what, when, where, and why. Next, you'll have supporting details to back up that information. You'll finish the piece with "nice to know" information.

The headers you choose should align with the key points you want to communicate. Each paragraph should start with a topic sentence that captures the paragraph's main point. Bulleted lists are also a great way to quickly convey information. When you revise the piece, cut unnecessary information that doesn't support the key points.

Since most readers only spend a few seconds skimming a page, the inverted pyramid approach helps readers quickly understand the information's main points. It also encourages interested readers to keep scrolling for further details.

How we write for the web or digital platforms

Avoid directional language

Avoid directional instructions and any language that requires the reader to see the layout or page design. This is also helpful for layout changes on mobile.

For example, instead of writing “Select from the options in the right sidebar” instead write, “Select from these options” with the steps listed after the title.

Use descriptive links

Links should provide information on the associated action or destination. Try to avoid “click here” or “learn more.” Instead, provide links for action and destination-oriented phrases like “register for the event” or “access our advocacy toolkit.”

Use headers/headings

People who have limited reading comprehension or use screen readers can use clear headers to decide which sections to read. Correct use of headings is also helpful for search engine optimization, especially when the headers match a viewer’s intent for reading that page.

Clearly separate different topics with headings. Place similar topics and key messages in the same paragraph and organize ideas in a logical way.

Label forms

When creating a form, such as an event sign-up form, think carefully about what fields are necessary, especially which ones you mark as required. Label all fields clearly. The shorter the form, the better.

Be mindful of visual elements

Aim for high contrast between your font and background colors.

Since images may not load or may not be seen, they should not be the only method to communicate information. Avoid using images when the same information could be communicated in writing.

Use alt text

Alt text describes a visual element on the back-end and is only visible to viewers when an image fails to load or if the viewer is using a screen reader. Alt text also helps search engines crawl and rank your website.

You should include alt text on all visual elements. It should accurately describe the image. If you're sharing a chart or graph, include the data's main message or the most important data in the alt text so people have all the important information. For example, "A graph represents how helmet usage for bicyclists has increased in King County between 2015 and 2020."

Each browser handles alt text differently. Supplement images with standard captions.

How We Edit: Style & Punctuation

Fonts

For Cascade:

Quicksand for feature style headlines

Helvetica for titles and headings

Arial for the body

For Washington Bikes:

Helvetica Neue (or Arial if that is not available) for headings and body

Aller or Kelson Bold for brand specific headlines (think press releases)

For Campaign Monitor, use KARLA for headlines

Formatting

Sentence spacing should always be single spaced in blog posts, emails, and press releases.

Colors

Cascade's branded hex:

#43b02a (kelly green)

#006f44 (dark green)

#0092bc (blue)

Washington Bikes' branded hex:

#00677F (blue)

#43b02a (kelly green)

Major Taylor Project's branded hex:

#EF7721 (orange)

Commas

We use the **Oxford Comma** on our website, but we do not use it in press releases (AP Style).

Marketing Signatures

- **Marketing Signatures** should always be one line, italicized, small font on Gmail, and approved by marketing
 - Correct example:
 - *Join us for the Bike Everywhere Breakfast on June 3, 2020, now VIRTUAL!*
 - Incorrect example:
 - BE SURE TO GO TO THIS WEBSITE LINK NOW: <LINK>
 - Incorrect example:
 - There are four things <link>
 - That I would like you <link>
 - To click on <link>
 - So you will click on none of them <link>

Dates, times, numbers

- In dates and times, it is “**The meeting is Feb. 22, 2020 at 6 p.m.**” not “The meeting is Feb 22nd at 6 PM”
 - Correct:
 - Monday, Oct. 17, 2012
 - Friday, June 2
 - Incorrect
 - Mon. October 17th
 - 10/17/12
 - Oct. 17th
- Correct abbreviations for months:
 - Jan.
 - Feb.
 - March
 - April
 - May
 - June
 - July
 - Aug.
 - Sept.
 - Oct.
 - Nov.
 - Dec.
- Time:
 - Use figures except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes. For morning and afternoon, use a.m. and p.m. Separate times in a range with the word to, not with a dash.
 - Correct:
 - 10 a.m.

- 1:30 p.m.
- 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- 9 to noon
- 9 to 11:30 a.m.
- Incorrect:
 - 10am
 - 1:00 pm
 - 1:00 p.m.
 - 9-11
 - 9am-11:30am
- Telephone numbers are **(206) 522-3222**, not 206.522.3222 or 206-522-3222
- Numbers are **spelled out below 10**: zero, one...nine
- Ages: We always use figures. For example, the **6-year-old** child; the class is for **6 year olds**; the **6-year-olds** did well in the class

Preferred Language

We Say	Instead of	Notes
"COVID-19" or "the pandemic."		Covid in lowercase is acceptable on second reference for conversational communications.
Washington state	Washington State	
state Legislature	state legislature	
e-bike (E-bike if it is the beginning of a sentence; E-Bike if it is a headline)		This is based on Bicycling Magazine and <u>PBOT's</u> style guide
bicycling	cycling	
people who bike	cyclists	
bike box		
bike rack		
bike-share		
Black with a capital B	African-American	To encompass the full African diaspora
Build-a-Bike (caps on the Bs)		
percent	%	Percent is written out in email

		communications, blog posts, and press releases.
people of color	minority	
Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities		Try to avoid the acronym “BIPOC” and list out the names.
people walking	pedestrians	See more active transportation language tips
Cascade Bicycle Club and its [partner, sister organization, or affiliate] Washington Bikes		
“The Major Taylor Project” or “MTP”	The MTP	The Major Taylor Project is used on first reference. MTP is ok after but not “the MTP.”
The Kaiser Permanente Seattle to Portland Bicycle Classic Sponsored by Alaska Airlines.	The STP	STP on second reference. Can use STP in headlines and subject lines for space, clarity reasons. Refer to the full name just below.
The Kaiser Permanente Bike Everywhere Breakfast		The Breakfast or The Bike Everywhere Breakfast are OK for first reference in a headline or subject line. Refer to the full name immediately below.

Visual Guidance

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in visuals

Cascade uses visuals as an opportunity to convey inclusiveness and belonging. We select images that reflect authentic representation and celebrate diverse identities. We avoid using images that come across as superficial or as tokenism.

When you’re deciding what kinds of images to use that relate to different identity groups, consider the following questions around inclusivity. Many of the questions are from [Getty Images’ DEI Imagery Toolkit](#).

Race and Ethnicity questions to ask when choosing visuals

1. Are we actively representing people in ways that break or diminish stereotypes?

2. Are you showing a range of skin tones, facial features, hair textures, and authentically reflecting the diversity within communities of color?
3. Are you relying on “tokenism” and making a symbolic and/or minimal effort to depict race/ethnicity? Or are you humanizing people in the images and telling robust, authentic stories of communities of color?

Gender

1. Are you considering images that help counter gender reinforcing stereotypes?
2. Are you embracing people of all gender identities as possible choices for your portrayal of people, including trans, nonbinary and other gender non-conforming people?
3. When focusing on children, are you conscious of stereotypes related to their perceived gender?

Sexual orientation

1. Are you showing LGBTQ+ people of various races and ethnicities? Are you considering the race and ethnicities of their partners?
2. Are you representing LGBTQ+ people over 40? Over 50? Over 60? Are you doing it in a positive way?
3. In your depiction of nonheterosexual people, are you showing a diverse range of gender expressions in terms of clothing, makeup, jewelry, hair length, etc.?

Age

1. Are you representing a multidimensional experience of aging for everyone? Are you focusing on what older people can't do, rather than what they can do?
2. Are you showing women over 40 as content, active, and fulfilled?
3. Are you representing older people alongside other intersections of their identities (e.g., race/ ethnicity, gender identity or expression, body type, religion, etc.)?

Disability

1. Are you focusing on a person's disability rather than on their whole identity?
2. Are you showing people with disabilities alongside other intersections of their identities (e.g., race/ ethnicity, gender identity or expression, age, etc.)?
3. Have you considered the camera angle? Is the viewer looking down at the person with a disability?

Religion

1. When choosing to depict communities that practice religious faith of any kind, are you representing a range of different religious backgrounds?
2. Are you using tokenistic iconography to visually speak to a faith (e.g., Islam, Christianity, Hinduism), or even a holiday like Hanukkah?
3. When focused on representing faith communities, have you fully researched the norms, common practices, etc. related to the practice of their faith?

Representing community in visuals

Community is at the center of Cascade’s work. Visuals are an opportunity to reflect the sense of community that’s embedded within every Cascade experience.

Visuals that reflect Cascade’s community value include:

- Visuals that include groups of people instead of just individuals
- Visuals that show people supporting and encouraging each other
- Visuals that show people welcoming each other

Other guidance

Stock photos

Avoid stock photos. If you need to use stock photos, ensure that they don’t “look like” stock photos. [Unsplash](#) provides free stock photography that often doesn’t “look like” stock photography.

Image size and resolution

For image quality, the larger the file size, the better. Select images with high resolution. When you adjust an image’s size, crop instead of changing the dimensions.

Orientation

Use landscape orientation instead of portrait orientation unless portrait is specifically needed.

Licensing

Ensure you have proper licensing for the photos you use.

Alt text

You should include alt text on all visual elements. It should accurately describe the image. If you’re sharing a chart or graph, include the data’s main message or the most important data in the alt text so people have all the important information. For example, “A graph represents how helmet usage for bicyclists has increased in King County between 2015 and 2020.” Each browser handles alt text differently. Supplement images with standard captions.

Editing

Edit photos so there’s good levels of contrast, highlights, and exposure. Adjust vibrancy and temperature. Sharpen details. Crop unnecessary details to focus on the main subject.

Example of what not to do

The below image from Cascade's "Learn" page looks like an obvious stock photo. It's blurry due to low resolution. It lacks alt text to make it "visible" to screen readers or voice-command features.

Bike to School



May is National Bike to Month.

Students and schools can participate in bike month and/or bike day and be entered to win a prize.

Learn how to get started.

Example of what to do

The below photo from Cascade's Instagram account has good image quality and shows a group of people enjoying socializing together after a ride. The photo emphasizes community, authenticity, and diversity.



 cascadebicycle • Following



cascadebicycle Founded last year in the wake of anti-Asian violence, the Asian Bike Club has grown into a community of about 100 frequent riders who participate in monthly ramen rides and impromptu bike outings, and provide a feeling of Asian pride. Learn more about ABC, their monthly ramen rides (the next one is tonight), and the club's decision to ride STP, on Cascade News. Link in bio or visit cascade.org/blog

Photos courtesy of Kae-Lin Wang

#SeattleToPortland #STP #BikingWithFriends #AsianBikeClub #Community #RamenOutside

Edited · 2w

 321for321

This is awesome. How can ally's get involved?

2w Reply

 lindazhou68

Wow serious ramen there!

2w Reply

 pelodoan

@tofububble @vivwangg @frantran90 you're famous!

2w 2 likes Reply

View replies (5)

  

157 likes

APRIL 7

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