EDITORIAL
STYLE GUIDE

Legal
Services
Society

British Columbia
www.legalaid.bc.ca

This style guide is published by the Legal Services Society (LSS), a non-profit organization that provides legal aid to British Columbians. LSS is separate from the BC government, its primary funder. It also receives grants from the Law Foundation and the Notary Foundation (of BC).

Contents

Accurate, helpful, readable, and clear.

Introduction

The Legal Services Society (LSS) is committed to producing print and online material that is accurate, helpful, readable, and clear; sensitive to the needs and backgrounds of its audience; and easily available to those who need it. The *Legal Services Society Editorial Style Guide* is intended to provide guidelines for writers and editors working on LSS materials.

Plain language

Plain language is an approach to presenting information that puts the needs of the reader first. It's intended to make material, especially legal information, understandable to people so they're able to exercise their rights. LSS is committed to the use of plain language in all its materials. ***See also Plain language on page 28***.

The key elements of plain language are:

- knowing who the readers are,

- using straightforward, direct language that will be understood by the intended audience,

- organizing the material in the order the reader will use it,

- replacing unnecessarily difficult terms with simpler ones and explaining any legal terms that are used, and

- using design that makes the content legible and effective and is appropriate for the intended audience.

> We are the "Legal Services Society," *not* the "Legal Services Society of BC."
>
> "Of BC" is not and has never been part of our name.

Editorial style

LSS editorial standards are listed alphabetically here. If you *must* deviate from these standards, record such changes for future reference (contract editors must check with in-house editors before making style changes). The important thing is to be consistent within each document.

Abbreviations

- Use abbreviations without periods wherever possible. Remember, the important thing is readability, so use the style that makes the most sense. For abbreviations or acronyms that are names, try to find out if the organization uses periods or not. Direction abbreviations take periods (for example, W. Pender Street).

- Usually, a name is spelled out the first time it appears, with the abbreviation, acronym, or initialism in parentheses after the full name; for example, "The Legal Services Society (LSS or the society)."

- Write out "Street" or "Avenue." Abbreviate street name directions, such as "N.W." or "S.E."

- If an abbreviation appears at the end of a sentence, and you're using periods within the abbreviation, don't follow with an extra period.

- a.m./p.m. — in print publications, use with periods, lower case (don't use "o'clock").

- am/pm — on websites, use without periods, lower case (don't use "o'clock").

- e.g., — has two periods, followed by a comma (generally, it's better to use "for example" in text).

- i.e., — has two periods, followed by a comma (generally, it's better to use "that is," or put the phrase in parentheses).

- pp. — plural for pages (p. is singular) (in most documents, page(s) is written out in full).

- In addresses or text, abbreviated forms of province names don't take a period. For example, BC, ON, AB (see Addresses below for more information).

Addresses

The style of an address is the same whether it appears in text or in a list. On envelopes, use the Canada Post style.

In text

When addresses appear in the text (print or online), the address style is:

> Concerned Organization
> 100 – 2020 E. Main Street
> Vancouver, BC V6E 2G1

Use an en dash, with a space before and after, to separate the suite and street numbers.

Leave out the periods in post office boxes (PO Box 123).

Email addresses

Don't use personal email addresses in print or online. If an email address is needed for any material going out to the public, a generic email should be set up for the purpose (e.g., **helpdesk.tariff@lss.bc.ca** or **familylawinquiries@lss.bc.ca**). If there isn't an existing generic email address for your purpose, contact the department/division involved and ask them to request a new email address from IT.

Email addresses don't appear on LSS web pages. If you want to include a link to an email address somewhere on a web page, incorporate the instruction to send email into the text.

Sample 1

> Email the disbursements coordinator
> (the words disbursements coordinator being the email link)

Sample 2

Email us (the word email being the email link)

Sample 3 (From an LSS job ad)

Legal Services Society
Human Resources Department
Competition no: B#022-01
400 – 510 Burrard Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 3A8

Fax: 604-682-0725
Email: **Human Resources**

Website addresses

Don't use "www" unless the url doesn't work without it.

In print publications, avoid underlining the address. If the url runs more than one line, avoid large white spaces in the text by breaking it:

- after a colon or double slash,

- before or after an equals sign or ampersand, or

- before a single slash, period, or any other punctuation or symbols.

Never break an address at a hyphen.

Sample

This service can give you the name of a family law lawyer who can meet with you for a half-hour. See cbabc.org/for-the-public /lawyer-referral-service.

As part of the basic LSS logo template, the LSS website address appears on the front cover of all newsletters, brochures, booklets, posters, promos, and books, usually at the bottom of the page, in small lower case type.

The LSS website address is legalaid.bc.ca.

Bold

- In print documents, use bold only for a word being defined or to signal first use of a particular term (use italics for emphasis).

- In web copy, use bold for phone numbers.

- Sometimes bold works better than italics for legal terms.

See also Web writing and editing on page 41.

Bullet lists

See Lists on page 23.

Capitalization

LSS usually follows the "down style" in capitalization. That is, capitalize as few words as possible. However, depending on the publication and its use, you may decide that more capitalization is appropriate. Record your decision for that publication.

Follow these usages wherever possible:

- In titles, capitalize the second part of a hyphenated word if the two words could stand alone (Law-Related Videos). (***See also Punctuation — Hyphens on page 37***.)

- In titles or headings, capitalize the first word that follows an em dash (Filling out court forms — Who can help). (***See also Punctuation — Em dashes on page 36***.)

- Supreme Court, Provincial Court, Small Claims Court, Family Court, Court of Appeal, but the court. (If a document refers to only Family or Small Claims Court and no other courts, you could lower case the court name in that document only. Record this on your style sheet.)

- Capitalize all parts of department names when written out in full (Community and Publishing Services Department).

- First Nations, Native, Native Indian, Native Courtworker, Indigenous, and Aboriginal are capped. Note lower case in status Indian.

- Nation (Coldwater First Nation, a member of the Nation)

- Sechelt Band, but the band, band office

- Sechelt Tribal Council, but tribal council

- the Legal Services Society, but the society

- LSS Board of Directors, but the LSS board

- Landlord and Tenant Act, but the act ("She found the answer in section 12 of the act.")

- Bill 19, but the bill

- section 87 of the Indian Act

- the Government of Canada, but the federal government

- Criminal Code, but the code

- the Ministry of Attorney General, the Attorney General, but not the Minister of the Attorney General

- the Minister of Finance, but the minister

- Judge Susan Sloan, but the judge

- North Vancouver, but north Vancouver Island (try to follow local usage)

- Parliament

- legislature

- Crown (Crown counsel)

Heads and subheads

- Publication titles: use title case.

- Chapter titles: use title case and try to keep titles short.

- H1 headings: use title case or sentence case, depending on the material. The important thing is to be consistent within the publication.

A person's title

In general text, civil titles (including political titles) and honorifics (for judges, chiefs, etc.) are capitalized when part of the name — that is, directly preceding the name without "the" or modifiers:

> Chief Justice Christopher Hinkson (but the chief justice of BC's Supreme Court Christopher Hinkson)

> Chief Executive Officer Mark Benton

Publication titles

For design purposes, titles on covers are sometimes treated differently from how they appear in the text. However, our general style for capitalization of titles — whether the title is in the publication's text or in a poster, brochure, or catalogue — is:

1. Capitalize the first and last words, and all nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and subordinating conjunctions (if, because, as, that, etc.) in a title.

2. Lower case articles (a, an, the), coordinating conjunctions (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet), and prepositions — of less than five letters — unless they are the first or last word in a title.

Sample

> *Living Together or Living Apart: Common-law relationships, marriage, separation, and divorce*

In text

*   No word in a quoted title is ever set in full capitals, unless it's an acronym or initialism, such as PLE or IPP.

*   Capitalize the second part of a hyphenated word if the two words could stand alone — "Law-Related Videos." Don't capitalize the second part if it's one word that uses a hyphen — "Non-profit."

See Italics on page 21 for when to italicize titles.

Citations

This applies to case and statute citations only. For other kinds of citations, refer to the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

As of January 1, 2000, the BC Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of Canada both implemented new case law citation protocols that use neutral citations. Wherever possible, use neutral citations, as they are much simpler and easier to read. Neutral citations should be followed by a citation to a printed reporter, if one is available. For further information on citing sources, refer to the latest edition of the *Canadian Guide to Uniform Legal Citation*.

Consistency

When act names appear in text, they are usually *not* italicized. See Italics on page 21.

In general, if the same information appears more than once in a publication, ensure that the wording is, if not identical, at least as consistent as possible across all instances (for example, in the various sections of the *LSS Tariffs* or in describing the same process in different family law self-help guides). If you're editing companion publications (for example, *How to Appeal Your Sentence* and *How to Appeal Your Conviction*), ensure that both publications use the same wording when referring to the same circumstances or instructions. This helps to clarify material, especially instructions.

Contractions

In some publications (for example, *Living Together or Living Apart*), LSS uses contractions (don't, can't, isn't, you're, you've, etc.) to make the tone of the publication friendlier and more conversational.

- Make sure you use contractions consistently. The following auxiliary verbs form contractions with "not":

    - be (is, was, were)

    - can, could

    - do (does, did)

    - have (has, had)

    - will, would

    - should

The "find and replace" function is useful in this case.

- Only use contractions for the phrases "you are" and "you have" when they function as part of the verb (for example, "when you're filling out the form" or "if you've seen a doctor"). Don't use a contraction when "have" is the main verb in the sentence (for example, "you have no income"). When "are" is the main verb, the contraction is optional (for example, "you're eligible" and "you're under investigation").

- Include a list of all contractions used on the project style sheet.

Covers

Front covers

The front cover of a publication includes:

1. The title of the publication.

2. The subtitle, if any. (A subtitle is used to quickly alert readers to the contents. For example, the subtitle for *Living Together or Living Apart* is *Common-law relationships, marriage, separation, and divorce*.)

3. The LSS logo (and/or other logo or emblem, if it's a joint publication or appropriate).

4. The date of publication or revision. For publications that must be legally reviewed, the date on the cover is the date of the last full legal review before printing in this format: January 2018. (This date is often much earlier than the printing date, particularly for LOTE versions of the publication.) For publications that don't need to be legally reviewed, such as corporate and legal aid materials, bookmarks, wallet cards, etc., the date will be the publication sign-off date in this format: 01/18.

5. The language of the publication in English, if it's an LOTE publication.

6. An illustration, drawing, or photograph.

Back covers

The back cover or the inside back cover can be used to promote other LSS publications and resources when appropriate and provide ordering information.

The back cover may include:

• other publication or website screenshots of potential interest to the same audience, with a short description and a list of languages available, if there's space

• a list of the other languages this publication is available in or languages that are in production, if applicable (this could go on the inside front cover or inside back cover instead)

- the LSS logo and website address may appear on the bottom of the back cover if they don't fit on the front cover

- the ordering information:

> *How to get this and other free Legal Aid BC publications*
>
> **Read: legalaid.bc.ca/read**
>
> **Order: crownpub.bc.ca**
> (under Quick Links, click BC Public Legal Education
> & Information)
>
> **Questions about ordering?**
> 604-601-6000
> distribution@lss.bc.ca
>
> **Feedback on this publication?**
> publications@lss.bc.ca
>
> Add the social media icons and @legalaidbc

If the publication is for Aboriginal audiences, start with:

> *How to get this and other free Aboriginal Legal Aid BC publications*
>
> **Read: aboriginal.legalaid.bc.ca/read**

Cross-references

Make sure your cross-references are consistent throughout the publication. The cross-reference can be a complete sentence within the paragraph, usually but not always the final sentence. Include the page number and a brief description, which is often a heading on the destination page:

Sample

> A lawyer can give you legal advice on your options. See page 89 for how to find a lawyer.

If you're just giving the page number, use parentheses:

Sample

> If you don't have a lawyer but need an emergency order, talk to family duty counsel (see page 7).

Cross-references following a bullet list can be a single sentence paragraph.

Dashes

See Punctuation — Dashes on page 36.

Dates

- In text, write dates as April 15, 2000 — not April 15th, 2000, or 15 April 2000 or the 15th day of April, 2000 — with a comma after the year if it appears in the middle of a sentence (except in citations — see Citations on page 8).

- If you use just the month and the year, no comma is needed: "She started planning in April 2000."

- Spell out references to centuries and decades: the twentieth century, the eighties and nineties, but recast any sentence containing a reference to the first two decades of 2000 to avoid referring to them in this way.

- Avoid using a date at the beginning of a sentence.

Email addresses

See Addresses — Email addresses on page 4.

Em dashes

See Punctuation — Dashes — Em dashes on page 36.

En dashes

See Punctuation — Dashes — En dashes on page 36.

Errata sheets

Use the title "Update" rather than "Errata" when producing an errata sheet. Although contrary to the guidelines given in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, LSS does use update sheets to insert additions and changes to the text. These updates are usually about changes in the law. (Sometimes the change is minimal enough to allow us to insert a small label instead.) If there's a choice between producing an update sheet or a label, update sheets are preferred, as labels are more labour-intensive.

Update sheets must show the date the legal changes come into effect. Different update sheets for the same publication should be in different colours to distinguish between them.

Forms

When writing or editing forms, try to look at the form from the user's viewpoint. The purpose of the form is to get information. To give accurate information, the person filling in the form must first understand what's being asked, or what's wanted. Remember, not everyone will know a particular abbreviation, or understand "popular" terminology. Many people, including lawyers, doctors, and form designers, find forms confusing!

Remember that the most important information on the form is that given by the person filling in the form. Make sure there's enough space, whether on paper or online, for the person filling in the form to enter their responses. The person receiving the form also needs to read the completed form, and make sense of the responses. This is easier if the space is adequate.

Consider:

- What's the purpose of the form? Does it achieve this purpose?

- Is the form easy to understand, follow, and use (self-explanatory)?

- Is the language consistent?

- Is the font too small to read, or are the spaces too small to enter information?

- Are the terms/abbreviations that are used consistent and understandable?

- Are LSS editing conventions followed?

- Is the form written to plain language standards?

- Are instructions kept to a minimum? (Tests show that people don't read form instructions.)

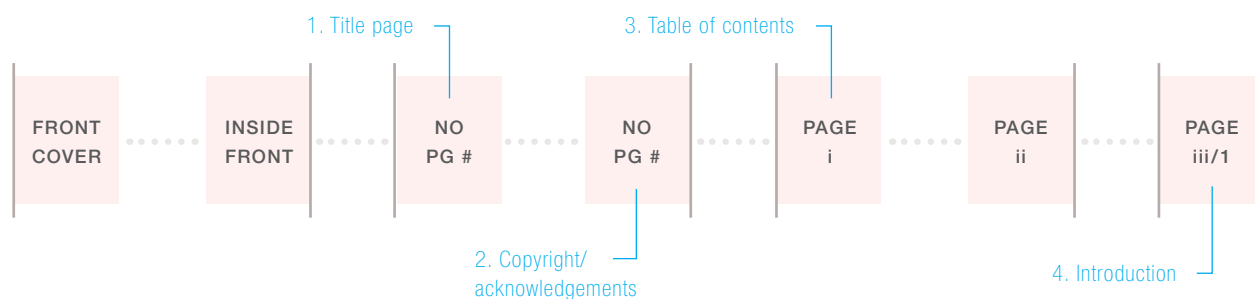- Does the information flow logically, and is important information highlighted in some way?

All LSS forms must have:

- the LSS logo, and

- a revision date.

Some forms must also include:

- the LSS wordmark,

- the office address, and

- a form number, if the form is part of a series.

Front matter

1. Title page		3. Table of contents	

FRONT COVER	INSIDE FRONT	NO PG #	NO PG #	PAGE i	PAGE ii	PAGE iii/1

2. Copyright/ acknowledgements

4. Introduction

Front matter order is:

1. Title page, if there is one — right-hand page, no page number.

2. Copyright/Acknowledgements page — inside front cover or reverse of title page, no page number. In LSS publications, acknowledgements usually go on the copyright page.

3. Table of contents — right-hand page, begin roman numeral page numbering, taking into account, if necessary, pages for title and copyright/acknowledgements pages (that is, the table of contents usually start on page i, but may start on page iii if there's a title page). The heading should be "Contents" and not "Table of Contents."

4. Introduction — right-hand page, roman numeral page numbering unless the introduction is functioning as the first chapter in a booklet; if so, begin arabic page numbering with page 1.

> *Don't* put page numbers or running headers or footers on blank pages, no matter where they appear.

Title page

The title page includes:

• the title and subtitle,

• the author's name, if applicable,

• the LSS logo (and other logo(s), if it's a joint publication), and

• the month and year.

Copyright/Acknowledgements page

The copyright/acknowledgements page includes the following, in this order:

> © 2017 Legal Services Society, BC
>
> Seventh edition: January 2017
> First edition: February 1997; reprinted with minor revisions:
> May 1998
>
> ISSN 1715-8753 (Print)
> ISSN 1925-4857 (Online)

1. *Copyright information*

The current copyright date. If LSS shares copyright with any other person or organization, indicate this:

> © 2016 QMUNITY and Legal Services Society, BC

2. *Edition and revision dates*

The current edition appears first. For three or more revisions, use the first and last editions only.

3. *International Standard Serial Number (ISSN)*

The ISSN (a unique eight-digit number) usually goes on this page of any publication of more than 10 pages.

ISSN Canada requires a different ISSN for the print version and online version (and each translation) of each new publication. The same ISSN can be used on subsequent editions, unless the title changes. If there is a title change, you must apply for a new ISSN for each version. Place the ISSN (for both print and online versions) after the copyright information. (Note, there's no colon after "ISSN.")

To request an ISSN, see the publications production coordinator. Allow 10 business days for ISSN Canada, Library and Archives Canada, to process the application.

4. Credits

Acknowledgements credit everyone involved with the project, usually in the following order:

- Writer (if applicable)
- Editor
- Designer
- Legal reviewer
- Development coordinator
- Translator (if applicable)

with a separate optional credit to organizers of and participants in field tests:

> Thank you to the [funders, field testers, reviewers, etc.] for [whatever they did].

Endorsements for the material from people outside LSS could also appear on this page.

5. Photo credits

The photographer's name or the source of the photograph may appear in a caption under or beside the photograph in publications, or in a list of photo credits on the copyright/acknowledgements page.

6. Publishing information

Always include the following standard statements:

> This booklet **[or catalogue/guide/publication, etc.]** may not be commercially reproduced, but copying for other purposes, with credit, is encouraged.
>
> **[*Title of publication*]** is published by the Legal Services Society (LSS), a non-profit organization that provides legal aid to British Columbians. LSS is separate from the BC government, its primary funder. It also receives grants from the Law Foundation and the Notary Foundation (of BC).

> If you need to list who funded the publication, you could add another sentence (for example, "Thank you to the Law Foundation of BC for its financial contribution toward the publication of this catalogue.").

7. Disclaimers

A disclaimer goes on this page if the publication contains any legal information (omit the disclaimer in process manuals or corporate publications like the *Service Plan* that don't contain any legal content). The standard disclaimer for LSS publications is:

> This publication [or booklet] explains the law in general. It isn't intended to give you legal advice on your particular problem. Because each person's case is different, you may need to get legal help. The information in this publication [or booklet] is up to date as of **[insert month and year of latest legal check]**.

All publications must include the date the legal information was last checked/ verified. This date always goes on the front cover and is noted as part of the disclaimer.

Aboriginal publications audience sidebar

For most publications for Aboriginal audiences, add a page at the front of the booklet, or a sidebar in the text or introduction, that specifies the publication's audience. For example, is the publication for status Indians only, or for people who identify as Aboriginal, including status Indians, non-status Indians, Métis, and Inuit? If the publication excludes one of these groups, the sidebar needs to include a list of sources where those groups can get help and information on the publication's topic.

Glossary

This section may also be entitled "Definitions" or "Words you need to know." Explain glossary terms in the text:

> Words in **bold** type are explained in the text or in the definitions sections.

> Words in this booklet in **bold** are described in the glossary on page 53.

> *See the Glossary on page 94* for definitions of the **bold** terms in this booklet.

Hyphens

See Punctuation — Hyphens on page 37.

Italics

- Use italics (*not* bold) to stress certain words, but use in moderation. Try to avoid italicizing more than one or two words, as this makes text harder to read.

- Use italics for case names for all parts of the name, even the "v." (*Joan v. Mary* decided an important point. The decision in *Joan* was . . .)

- Use italics for titles and subtitles of published books, brochures, periodicals, collections, newspapers, and newspaper sections when they appear in text.

- Don't use italics for the names of acts in PLE materials. However, use italics for the names of acts in corporate materials and material intended for lawyers.

- Don't italicize website names (the Family Law in British Columbia website, the LSS website).

- On our websites, italicize the titles of our PDF publications but not the titles of our other web pages.

Links

Links on all LSS websites must be introduced to clearly indicate their destinations. Your wording should let the user know what page, on what site, they will see if they click the link. Include enough text in the link to make the destination obvious, but avoid linking any more words than necessary. Avoid using "click here" before providing a link whenever possible (use "see" instead, as in Sample 1, below).

If there are multiple links in the same place to non-HTML files, list the format names, and link the format name rather than the link name (see Sample 2).

Sample 1

Important: If either party lives outside BC, you won't be able to use these guides. Contact a lawyer for advice. For more information about getting support, see Interjurisdictional Support Orders on the ministry website.

Sample 2

Application Record index (PDF) (Word)

Lists

To make text easier to read, LSS frequently uses lists to eliminate long, complex sentences. Our basic guidelines are:

- Use bullets for lists.

- Use numbers (1., 2.) *only* if the list is a series of steps that are done in a particular order. Avoid roman numerals.

- If you use an (a), (b) format, include a parenthesis on both sides of the letter; this makes it easier to see in the text.

- In general use lower case.

Sample

> Every employer is required to provide for employees a sufficient supply of:
>
> - individual clean towels,
> - soap,
> - toilet paper, and
> - safe drinking water.

- If the items in a list in the text are long and especially if they contain punctuation, use semicolons rather than commas to separate them.

- If you have full sentences in your list items, use punctuation.

Sample

> In this case, expect the following:
>
> 1. Crown counsel presents evidence against your partner.
> 2. Crown counsel calls you as an important witness.
> 3. Crown counsel presents physical evidence, such as torn clothing, photos of injuries, or medical records.

Make exceptions for posters, promo materials (such as bookmarks), and flyers, where simple bullets with caps, etc., would be punchier and more visually appealing.

If there's a bullet that doesn't fit and is forcing you to redo the list, think of that as a flag to rework that particular bullet (maybe break it into two bullets, etc.) rather than changing the punctuation for the entire list.

LSS logo

See the Visual Identity section of the Design Style Guide.

LSS standard text

LSS has developed standard blurbs for the following:

- publishing information in the front matter of publications, and

- resources.

There are also some guidelines available for what to include in the description of a resource.

Standard text for front matter

See Copyright/Acknowledgements page on page 18, Publishing information on page 19, and Disclaimers on page 20.

Standard content for resources

The "Who can help" or "Resources" sections of many of our publications contain information on how to contact resources. We try to standardize descriptions of the services or organizations we refer people to. Refer to current materials for the most up-to-date information.

Urls (If long)

Instead of giving a long url or detailed instructions to access information on a government website, list the root url and direct the reader to search for the information.

Samples

Service BC
www2.gov.bc.ca (in the search bar, type Service BC)

Restorative Justice Programs in BC
www2.gov.bc.ca (in the search bar, type restorative justice)

Phone numbers

If there are only two phone numbers, put the number first, then the location. If there are more than two phone numbers, put the location first. Use your discretion for publications which have some resources with two phone numbers, and others with more.

Samples

Seniors First BC
Provides province-wide legal information, referrals, and advocacy to seniors.

604-437-1940 (Greater Vancouver)
1-866-437-1940 (elsewhere in BC)
seniorsfirstbc.ca

Dial-A-Law
Dial-A-Law is a library of recordings that give you information about the law in BC. Some of these recordings are available in Chinese and Punjabi as well as English.

Greater Vancouver: **604-687-4680**
Victoria: **250-455-6876**
Elsewhere in BC: **1-800-565-5297**

You can also read or listen to transcripts of the Dial-A-Law recordings at dialalaw.org.

Measurement

In general, LSS uses only metric measurements in publications.

- For specific amounts, use numerals with the metric abbreviation (3 km). The abbreviations are lower case.

- Don't use a period after abbreviations (20 kg — not 20 kg.) unless the abbreviation is at the end of a sentence. Don't make the abbreviations plural (45 kg — not 45 kgs).

- Use a forward slash in the abbreviations for compound units (for example, km/h). However, when writing out the compound unit name, use the word "per" (for example, kilometres per hour).

Numbers

- Spell out numbers one through nine, and use figures for numbers 10 and above. Use your discretion if there are figures less than and above 10 in the same paragraph. **Exceptions:** parts of a book (chapter 5), units of money ($1.50), measurement (3 km), and age/time (19 years old; 2 hours 30 minutes). Also: s. 2 of the act; the court ruled 6 to 2.

- Percentages: Use a numeral and spell out "percent" (for example, 10 percent). Only use "%" when there are many percentages in one paragraph (and in the *Annual Service Plan Report* or other corporate publication that contains many figures). Be consistent.

- Use a comma in a number of four or more digits (for example, 2,000; 50,000).

- With the exception of corporate financial reports, don't put ".00" after dollar amounts unless another figure in the same paragraph or list has a cents designation. (Jane had $5 and Jack had $3. But, Jane had $5.00 and Jack had $3.25.)

- If you need to round numbers up or down, round them up to the next highest number when the partial amount is 0.5 or more, and down if it's less than 0.5 (for example, if a video is 22.75 minutes long, it would be listed as 23 minutes, but if it were 22.25 minutes long, it would be listed as 22 minutes).

- Don't start a sentence with a number — spell it out or rewrite the sentence.

See also Time on page 40.

Plain language

- Remember to consider the ethnic or cultural identity, literacy level, and special interests of the reader. For example, are all terms clearly explained? Is the language too colloquial to be understood by someone whose first language isn't English?

- Address the reader directly when appropriate.

- Explain the topic from the reader's point of view rather than from the system's. For example, in our welfare rights publications, the steps are listed in the order someone who is applying has to go through rather than in the order the system goes through to process an application.

- Present material in a positive, helpful tone. Positive statements are easier to understand and remember than negative statements. For example, change "Don't be late for court" to "On the day you go to court, arrive about 10 or 15 minutes early. You can go in and get used to the room. This will help you to stay calm and relaxed."

Structure

- A table of contents and an index can help readers find information quickly and easily.

- The introduction should explain the purpose of the material and what the reader can expect. If relevant, it should explain how the reader can use the information.

- Divide long documents into chapters and sections.

- Make sure the material is easy to follow. Are new subjects clearly introduced? Has the writer covered all the points? Are instructions given in the same order as the steps that are to be taken?

- Make sure the format suits the purpose, content, and audience. To make information easier to grasp, you can use the following:
    * headings and subheads,
    * lists,
    * illustrations and icons,
    * a question-and-answer format, or
    * tables, charts, and graphs.

- Make sure that conclusions are worded in a straightforward way and that other points of view are summarized if they are relevant.

Writing style

- Keep in mind that most LSS materials are published for *users* of the law, not for lawyers. Wherever possible, replace legal terms with words anyone would understand (for example, replace "pursuant to" with "following"). If there is no appropriate substitute for a legal term, explain it the first time it appears.

- Eliminate legalese and unnecessarily complex language wherever possible to ensure material is clear and straightforward.

- Delete jargon. Explain difficult or technical words in their context.

- Use fewer rather than more words, except when extra words are needed to explain the material. Replace wordy phrases with short ones; for example, use "now" instead of "at the present time."

- Use the active voice as often as possible. For example, change "A sworn statement will have to be made before a case can proceed" to "You'll have to sign and swear a statement before going to court."

- Try to avoid using "you should" statements. For example, change "You should consult a lawyer before going to court" to either "See a lawyer before going to court" or "Because this area of law is complicated, you need to see a lawyer before going to court."

- Use verbs instead of nouns made from verbs. For example, change "Careful entry of charge codes on your invoice will speed up processing" to "You'll be paid faster if you enter charge codes correctly on your bill."

- Use abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms sparingly. Spell them out the first time they appear, with the abbreviation, acronym, or initialism following in parentheses. If many abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms are used, list them at the front of the publication, following the table of contents and before the introduction, or on the inside back cover.

- Short paragraphs are preferable (no more than four or five sentences).

- Sentences should flow forward, and complex sentences should be broken down. Vary the sentence length, but keep the grammatical structure simple.

> Using plain language doesn't mean using overly simplified language, but language that's appropriate to the context.

Proofreading

All LSS publications and website materials are proofread in the final stages of production. This applies to both print and electronic material. Most text goes through several rounds of proofreading.

Print publications

In addition to checking for typos, minor errors missed in the editing, text lost during layout, etc., check the following:

Back covers

- Is the ordering, feedback, and social media information on the cover?

Front covers

- Is the date of the last legal check on the cover?
- Does the language of the publication appear in English at the bottom of the front cover, if applicable?
- Is the correct logo on the cover? Is it correctly placed?

Front matter

- Are all the necessary pages (copyright/acknowledgements page, table of contents) included?
- Does the copyright/acknowledgements page include all the necessary elements (copyright information, current ISSN, credits, photo credits, publishing information, disclaimers)?

Heads

- Are the head levels as formatted in edited copy?
- Are heads in the correct typeface for that head level?
- Has title case and "down style" capitalization been followed consistently, if applicable?
- Is the position correct?
- Is the spacing before and after the heads correct? Check heads against the same level heads on other pages.

Running heads

- Are they accurate? Short forms of section titles are okay.

- Are they in the right position?

Hyphens, em dashes, en dashes

- Ensure hyphenated words don't break at the end of the lines.

- Are hyphens, em dashes, and en dashes used correctly and appropriately?

- Are there breaks in phone numbers and urls that need correction?

Illustrations and photographs

- Does the position make sense?

- Is the caption, if any, correct?

- Are required credits given?

Indents and bullets

- Check that indents are used appropriately, in paragraphs and bulleted text. Do bullets and text line up with each other? Is the subsequent paragraph indent applied consistently, if used?

- Do the indents work? If there are a lot of lists, bullets, and numbers, it may be better to make text flush left.

ISSN

Check against the email the publications production coordinator sends you from ISSN Canada, Library and Archives Canada, which lists the assigned ISSNs (print and online).

Page numbers and footers

- Are they accurate?

- Are they in the same position on each page? If the footer alternates sides from page to page, is it on the correct side on each page? Is the footer text the same on every page?

Page references

Mark all references to other pages and samples in the text to check accuracy after final layout changes are made.

Paragraph formatting

- Is the typeface consistent throughout the text?
- Is it correct? (Is the use of bold and italics consistent? Are the phone numbers and urls in bold?)
- Is the leading and paragraph spacing consistent?
- Check, in particular, front matter, heads, page numbers, etc.

Phone numbers and web addresses

Have all phone numbers and Internet addresses been fact checked during the final stages of design? These should all be called, tested, or verified, not just proofread.

Table of contents

The table of contents doesn't have to include every head level.

- Are the page numbers accurate?
- Are the headings the same level as in the text? They're often changed at the last minute.
- Is the right typeface used? (Do variations occur consistently?)

Website material

Proofreading of website material differs a bit from proofreading of printed material, although some aspects are the same. Here are guidelines for proofreading HTML pages and PDFs.

HTML pages

Proofreading of HTML pages may be done either on paper or online for the first round and online for subsequent rounds. In-house editors will make corrections themselves, using Dreamweaver. Freelance editors must mark up a PDF or any changes on a hard copy, using blue or red pen (check with the designer to determine preference). By the time online proofing takes place, the text is usually final, and you're just checking that the links work, and the material flows well.

In addition to checking for text or images lost during conversion, etc., check the following:

- Is the typeface consistent throughout the page and with that used on other pages of the same type?

- Is the paragraph spacing consistent? Watch for missing paragraph breaks, as these often crop up when material is first flowed into Dreamweaver.

- Are the head levels correct?

- Is the spacing before and after the heads correct?

- Are the headings consistent with those appearing on other pages of the same type?

- Are hyphens, em dashes, and en dashes used correctly and appropriately?

- Are all links on the page working and logical? Links to other sections of the website must open in the same window. Links to external websites or Word/PDF files must open in a new browser window.

- Check other pages on the site that link to this new page to ensure all links work.

- If you're proofing a new page on any website, has it been linked to all relevant pages on that site?

Checklist for proofing PDFs

Proofreading of PDFs is done onscreen, with a copy of the print publication (or final proof) for reference. When proofing, check the following:

- Under File — Properties, are the title and author (Legal Services Society) included and correct?

- Are all pages included? Scroll through the document page by page, using the next page/previous page buttons.

- Have all blank pages been removed from the PDF?

- Does the pagination of the PDF match the pagination of the print document (with lower case roman numerals to denote front matter, including the credits and contents page and the words "Cover" and "Appendices" or "Appendix 1," etc., as appropriate)?

- Has text moved from one page to another? Spot check the top and bottom of each page against the original.

- Do all the links from the bookmarks work? Do each of the bookmarks match the headings they link to and are all necessary bookmarks included? (Front covers don't need bookmarks.) Check the spelling in the text of the bookmarks.

- Do all internal links, if any, work?

- Do all images and graphics appear correctly?

- When you first open the file, do the bookmarks show and are the bookmark subfolders all open? This setting is "Bookmarks panel and page." Is the magnification set to "fit height" and page layout set to "default" or "continuous"? These are all settings in File — Properties — Initial View.

- Bookmarks are done in English only.

- If there are no bookmarks, make sure that the bookmarks pane isn't showing.

- When you upload the PDF, check the website links that lead to the PDF.

- Open the PDF from the website, and check that the file works properly.

Punctuation

Commas

- Commas can often help readers make better sense of the meaning of a sentence. For example, commas after an introductory phrase alert readers to where the important part begins.

- Commas can be crucial to meaning. For example, compare the difference between the following two sentences:

Samples

> Jane, I put in the $2 I owe you for your share. Mary, Fred and I each put in $1 for you.

> Jane, I put in the $2 I owe you for your share. Mary, Fred, and I each put in $1 for you.

- In general, use a comma to separate the two parts of a compound sentence (a sentence that contains two complete statements joined by a conjunction). Don't use commas when two verbs have the same subject.

- Use a comma when a dependent clause is followed by an independent clause but *not* when the clauses are in the reverse order. For example:

Samples

> If you're uncertain of the rule, refer to the *Style Guide*.

> Refer to the *Style Guide* if you're uncertain of the rule.

- Always use serial commas (a comma before "and" or "or") in a list of three or more words. For example, "The prosecutor, the accused, and the judge . . ." "The beginning, middle, or end . . ."

- Use a comma after "for example," and "that is," (or their abbreviations "e.g.," or "i.e.," although these are best avoided in plain language).

Dashes

Two types of dashes are commonly used in LSS publications: em dashes and en dashes. Each of these has its own uses.

Em dashes

Em dashes are used in text to set off — amplify, explain, or note — elements in a sentence. Use a space before and after the em dash.

Sample

> Ask to appeal at the Legal Services Society office where you applied — as soon as possible.

Exception: The spaces may be omitted in design treatments such as a title that appears on a cover.

En dashes

The en dash is half the length of an em dash and longer than a hyphen. It's used to signify a range of dates, times, and numbers (including page numbers). In these cases, use a space before and after the en dash, unless it's being used to separate a range of numbers in an index.

Sample

> Open: May – June 1997;
> 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

But: from May to June 1967 (not from May – June 1967); and between 1968 and 1970 (not between 1968 – 70)

Hyphens

- Hyphenate words if it increases comprehension (for example, co-worker). However, the trend is to eliminate hyphens in compound nouns (checklist, counterclaim). Refer to the current *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* for guidance.

- Avoid end-of-line hyphenation altogether. If your word processing or design program is set to hyphenate automatically, turn this feature off for LSS material.

- Hyphens are used within hyphenated words in text. Don't put a space before and after.

    Sample

    The text was self-explanatory.

- Hyphens are also used to connect numbers that are not inclusive, such as phone numbers.

    Sample

    604-367-4800

- Watch for words that have hyphens when used as one part of speech, but don't when used as another:

    Sample

    She was a good decision maker. (noun, don't use hyphen)

    Sample

    Her decision-making abilities were good. (adjective, use hyphen)

- Most words starting with "self," "ex," and "vice" have a hyphen, but not the LSS title Vice President.

Sample

> self-government, ex-husband, vice-chair

- In titles, capitalize the second part of a hyphenated word only if the two words could stand alone (Law-Related Videos).

- Don't hyphenate adverbs that end in "ly" when used with another modifier (widely known facts).

Periods/ellipsis

- Don't use periods in heads or subheads.

- Use non-breaking spaces within an ellipsis. When an ellipsis comes at the end of a sentence or represents the end of a sentence, use a period before the ellipsis: ". . . and then the judge said to leave. . . ."

Quotation marks

- Use double quotation marks; use single marks for quotes within a quote.

- "Smart quotes" are used in print material, and "straight quotes" are used online.

- Periods and commas go inside quotation marks, but all other punctuation, such as semicolons and colons, go outside, unless part of the quote itself.

Samples

> Did the participants enjoy the workshop "Introducing the LSS Style Guide"?

> She jumped when they yelled "Surprise!"

- A quotation that takes up three lines or less of text is run into the text body and enclosed by quotation marks. A longer quote is set apart from the text by a space above and below it, is indented an equal amount from the normal left and right margins, and has no quotation marks.

Spelling and usage

LSS uses the current edition of the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* as an authority for spelling, and in general follows Canadian spelling conventions. CPS has adopted the following spelling as house style.

acknowledgement	daycare	Métis	reserve (not reservation)
analyze	dependant (noun)	off reserve (adverb)	résumé
band member (2 words)	dependent (adjective)	off-reserve (adjective)	staff (plural, "LSS staff are invited to pay at the bar")
centring	email	online	
childcare	enroll, enrollment,	on reserve (adverb)	toll-free
cooperate	enrolled	on-reserve (adjective)	up to date (adjective, when following noun)
coordinate	family law (adjective)	percent (per cent in some corporate publications)	
coordinator	healthcare		up-to-date (adjective, when preceding noun)
counsel (plural, "Duty counsel are lawyers who give free legal advice.")	homepage	practice (noun)	website, the web (note: use "Internet" where possible)
	judgment	practise (verb)	
data (plural)	mail-out (noun)	Québec	

Other LSS usage

INSTEAD OF	USE
low-income people	people with low incomes
high-risk people	people with high-risk factors
disabled (or handicapped) people	people with disabilities
confined to a wheelchair	wheelchair user
aged or elderly	senior or older people or people over 65 (if age is relevant)
foreign languages	languages other than English

Style sheets

For each publication or project you work on, even if it's a revision, create a style sheet showing the editorial choices you've made. This would include any changes from the preferred styles listed here, capitalizations, spelling of unusual words, hyphenation style, technical words, and proper names. The style sheet remains in the yellow working folder or Teamwork even after the project has concluded. Contract editors must submit their style sheets with the final edit.

Time

In text, use whatever form for time seems the most appropriate and consistent with the rest of the publication. Note that "a.m." and "p.m." always contain periods unless the copy is for a website.

Samples for print

> The workshop will run between 11:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m.

> Store hours: Monday – Saturday: 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 a.m.

Be consistent when noting minutes. For example, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.; but 9:00 a.m. – 10:30 p.m., *not* 9 a.m. – 10:30 p.m. unless the copy is for a website.

Samples for web

> Store hours: Mon, Wed, Fri: 9 am to 5 pm

or

> 9 am to 5:30 pm

Titles

See Capitalization on page 6 for guidelines on job titles, for publication titles in text and on covers, and for titles used as organizational headings.

Web writing and editing

When writing or editing for LSS websites, keep information brief, with self-contained chunks of information appearing on one screen wherever possible. From the homepage, users should ideally be able to find the information they're looking for by linking to a maximum of three screens. Here are a few tips:

- Try to make each web page a complete information package, so that it doesn't rely on information from other pages (though this won't work in a self-help guide, which contains sequential steps that work together with other parts of the guide, like the forms).

- When creating new self-help guides, refer to existing guides and try to follow the same format, structure, and wording wherever possible.

- Use plain language, and follow the style rules in this guide.

- Update web pages with time-sensitive information (phone numbers, email addresses, addresses) as often as needed.

- Keep in mind the main audience: members of the general public, advocates, and lawyers, who want information about LSS, the law, and legal aid in BC.

- Work within the existing website structures.

- Have new web pages signed off by the relevant program/division/ department representatives/legal reviewer (if applicable) before you upload the page.

LSS, Aboriginal Legal Aid in BC, MyLawBC, and Family Law in BC websites

General

- Use contractions wherever possible.

- Lower case form names when used generically, and cap only when referring directly to a particular form.

- Use the same wording if referring to the same process or instructions in multiple places or on different pages.

- Use bold for phone numbers, place names if necessary, and emphasis if you want to emphasize a term or phrase.

- Use italics to emphasize *one or two* words.

- Don't use "Click here." Always set out clearly in the text what users are being linked to and what kind of file they're going to be opening (web page, Word form, etc.)

Samples

> For more information, see our fact sheet about separation agreements.

> If you want to change your name to something other than your birth or married surname, you must also fill out the Identification Particulars form (Word) from the BC Vital Statistics Agency.

> For information about the latest changes to *LSS Tariffs*, please see the most recent Notices to Counsel and highlights of the new CFCSA tariff, and the revised criminal tariff.

> For more information, see our self-help guide How to get a copy of your marriage certificate.

- PDFs are the default setting. No need to include "(PDF)," since any non-HTML file we link to (that isn't otherwise identified) is a PDF, unless there are links to files in multiple formats at the same place.

- Don't include urls in text. Always put links onto meaningful text.

- If you link to a publication within a fact sheet, FAQ, or self-help guide, add italics to the title to indicate the difference between links to PDF publications and links to other web pages.

Samples

> The following resources may be of help to you and your family:

> See our fact sheet *Understanding Aboriginal Delegated Agencies.*

> See our fact sheet Understanding Aboriginal Child Protection / Removal Matters.

> See our wallet card *Your Right to Get a Lawyer.*

> See our poster outlining the *Aboriginal Child Protection Process.*

Page titles, page headings, and file names are three entities that are slightly different from one another. The page title appears in the browser tab and includes both the page heading and a site descriptor; the page heading appears above the content and describes that content; and the file name is done camelback style, contains a meaningful description of the page, and becomes part of the url.

Legal advice: Legal aid BC ✕

Page titles

Legal advice

Page headings

https://www.lss.bc.ca/legal_aid/legalAdvice.php

File names

Standard elements

- The copyright statement must be used on all websites:

© 2018 Legal Services Society

British Columbia's Legal Services Society holds the copyright to all information on this site. None of this material may be commercially reproduced, but copying for other purposes, with credit, is encouraged.

Writing for your audience

In addition to being sensitive to the needs of its intended audience, LSS strives to be aware of current sensitivities around language. When appropriate, consider new terms/spellings that groups are using themselves. As examples, "Indigenous" has begun replacing "Aboriginal" (although "Aboriginal" remains the term used in legislation); being gender neutral may now mean being inclusive of all gender identities; and some Americans are proposing "Black" be capitalized to give it the same status as Jewish or Chinese. Depending on the publication, new approaches to language may be appropriate.

Keep the following in mind when writing or editing material for LSS:

- Expressions such as "turning a blind eye," "being handicapped by," and "not having a leg to stand on" can be hurtful to people with disabilities.

- Use "Aboriginal peoples" unless there is a specific reason to use another term. "People" should be used when referring to individuals, and "peoples" when referring to the collective, or all Indigenous peoples. (Depending on the context, the terms "Native people" or "First Nations people" may be used. "Native Indian" or "status Indian" may also be used in some legal contexts; for example, when discussing the Indian Act. The term "status Indian" includes Bill C-31 Indians.)

- Not all of our publications about abuse and family violence are written solely for women.

- Check material to see if the writer seems to assume that all readers are white or middle class. Has the writer assumed that all readers are heterosexual?

- Does the writing or design exclude or discount members of the intended audience? For example, has the writer used the term "we" without defining "we"? Does the information or law the writer is discussing apply equally to all racial groups? To people over 65? To lesbian and gay couples? To men and women? To Aboriginal peoples living on reserve? To people with disabilities? Add or change examples or illustrations to take these variations into account. If the information doesn't apply equally to everyone, say so.

- Is the pronoun "he" used when it's meant to apply to women as well? Use a specific term instead. For example, the consumer, the lawyer, students, etc. Or use the plural. For example, "When a lawyer speaks to a judge, they . . ." Use "they" for the singular form if you're certain it won't confuse readers, or rewrite the sentence. It's appropriate for publications with a conversational tone.