

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Do **not** use the abbreviation NPTA, **always** reference us as National PTA.
- United States as a **noun**: United States (e.g., *The woman left for the United States this morning*); as an **adjective**: U.S. (no spaces; e.g., *A U.S. soldier was killed in Iraq*).

## ACADEMIC DEGREES

- Avoid abbreviations (e.g., *Mary Ellen has a doctorate in psychology*).
- Use an apostrophe in bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc.
- There is no apostrophe in Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science.
- Use the abbreviations only after a full name and set the abbreviations off with commas (e.g., *Michael Brown, Ph.D., lectured yesterday on biology*).

## ADDRESSES

- Use the abbreviations "Ave." "Blvd." and "St." only with a numbered address (e.g., *1600 Reynard St.*).
- Spell these words out when used without a number (e.g., *Reynard Street*).
- Always spell out "alley," "drive," "road" and "terrace."
- Always use numerical figures for an address number (e.g., *9 Foxlair Drive*).
- Spell out and capitalize First through Ninth when referring to a street name (e.g., *First Street; 10 Avenue*).

## “AND” SYMBOL (AMPERSAND)

- Do **not** use the ampersand (&) in place of the word “and” unless it is part of a company name or publication title (e.g., *Barnes & Noble; Better Homes & Gardens*).
- Use an ampersand with Health & Safety.

## COMMAS

- Do **not** use a comma after the final item in a series when continuing the sentence. (e.g., *The colors red, white and blue are patriotic*).
- Do **not** use a comma before “because.”

## BULLETED LISTS

- All list items should be styled the same way—either all sentence fragments or all complete sentences, not a mix of both.
- If the list items form complete sentences on their own, they should each end in a period. Otherwise, no periods are necessary at the ends of list items.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

- Use these standard formats:
  - Email National PTA at [programs@pta.org](mailto:programs@pta.org) for more info.
  - For more info, contact Web Content Manager [Kisha DeSandies](#), (703) 518-1253.
  - Use parentheses to separate area codes (e.g., *Call the National PTA Info Center at (800) 307-4782*).
- Do not use acronyms/letters in phone numbers, always use numerals (i.e., do not use 4PTA).
- It is okay to use “info” (no period) in contact references.

## CONTRACTIONS

- Common items that will have contractions include marketing and communications materials such as brochures, posters and flyers, as well as articles for *Our Children* and other editorial products.
- It is ok to use a contraction if that is the way it commonly appears in speech or writing (e.g., *let's instead of let us*).
- Avoid the excessive use of contractions.

## DASHES

- You can use an em dash (ALT + 0151) in place of a comma or parentheses with no space before or after text. (e.g., *Read Our Children—National PTA's magazine for members—for best practices in running your PTA.*)
- Use an en dash (ALT + 0150) to connect things that are related to each other by distance (e.g., *pages 125–155*).
- Use a hyphen to connect two things intimately related, usually words that function together (e.g., *log-in to the computer; two-thirds majority*).

## DATE AND TIME

- When writing dates, do not use st, nd, rd, or th. (e.g., *Registration ends January 15*).
- If the month, day, and year are given, commas are used before and after the year. (e.g., *The February 17, 2006, event was a success*).
- The hour does not require full notation, unless the time given is not at the top of the hour. (e.g., *The meeting will begin at 1 p.m.* or *Exhibit hall hours are from 1:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.*)
- Use numeric figures except for “noon” and “midnight.”
- Do **not** write “12 noon” or “12 midnight.”
- To show a span of years, use an en-dash (–) and full year (in four digits) for the first and last years of the span (e.g., *1995–1998*; *2000–2005*).
- Do not use the year, if the date is referencing the current year (e.g. *The webinar will be Aug. 13*).
- EDT vs. EST: EDT is Eastern Day light Time for daylight saving time and EST is Eastern Standard Time.
- Use one of these standard formats for full date and time references:
  - 7 p.m. EST, Wednesday, June 20
  - Friday, Aug. 24 at 9:30 a.m. EST

## DAYS OF THE WEEK

- Days of the week should be capitalized and not abbreviated.

## DIMENSIONS

- Use figures and spell out “inches,” “feet,” “yards,” etc. (e.g., *The car is 17 feet long and 6 feet wide*).

## ELLIPSES

- An ellipsis consists of three periods, with a space before and after. (e.g., *Hey, guys ... what are you talking about?*)

## EMAIL

- Email is acceptable in all references for electronic mail.
- Use a hyphen with other e-terms. (e.g., *e-book*, *e-newsletter*, *e-learning*).

## FRACTIONS

- Spell out amounts less than one in stories, using hyphens between the words (e.g., *two-thirds*)
- Use figures for precise amounts larger than one, converting to decimals when practical.

## MONETARY UNITS

- Spell out the word “cents” in lowercase and use numerals for amounts less than a dollar (e.g.; *12 cents*).
- Use the \$ sign and decimal system for larger amounts (e.g., *\$1.01*).
- For dollars, use numerical amounts and the \$ sign except in casual references. In these cases, the word should be spelled in lowercase (e.g., *The book cost \$4.*; *Dad, give me a dollar*).
- For amounts exceeding \$1 million, use the \$ sign and numerals up to two decimal places (e.g., *It is worth \$4.45 million*).

## MONTHS

- Capitalize the names of months in all uses.
- When a month is used with a specific date, you may abbreviate “Jan.” “Feb.” “Aug.” “Sept.” “Oct.” “Nov.” and “Dec.” All remaining months may not be abbreviated.
- When a phrase uses only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas. When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas: “January 1972 was a cold month.” “His birthday is Feb. 14, 1987.”

## NUMBERS

- For numbers one to nine, always use words; use numeric figures for 10 and up.
- Use the % sign instead of spelling out the word percent.
- Spell out numerals that start a sentence (e.g., *Twenty-eight students were relocated yesterday*).
- For large numbers, use a hyphen to connect a word ending in ‘y’ to another word (e.g., *twenty-one*, *one hundred forty-five*).

## PUNCTUATION AND QUOTATION MARKS

- Periods and commas should *always go inside* “quotation marks.”
- All semicolons, colons, dashes, question marks, exclamation marks, etc., go outside of the quotation marks unless part of the original quoted material.

## SPACES

- There should be only *one space* after punctuation—including periods and colons.
- Never put two (or three) spaces after a period.

## STATE ABBREVIATIONS

- Abbreviate states in text (not for proper nouns).
- Do *not* abbreviate Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah.

Ala.	Md.	N.D.
Ariz.	Mass.	Okl.
Ark.	Mich.	Ore.
Calif.	Minn.	Pa.
Colo.	Miss.	RI.
Conn.	Mo.	S.C.
Del.	Mont.	S.D.
Fla.	Neb.	Tenn.
Ga.	Nev.	Vt.
Ill.	N.H.	Va.
Ind.	N.J.	Wash.
Kan.	N.M.	W.Va.
Ky.	N.Y.	Wis.
La.	N.C.	Wyo.

- Washington, DC: Always include “DC” when referring to Washington DC. No commas before or after DC and no periods in DC.
  - Exception: In postal addresses, place a comma between Washington and DC.

## TITLES

- Capitalize titles only if they immediately precede a person’s name. (e.g., *National PTA President Jane Doe and Jane Doe, National PTA president*).
- Capitalize titles in signatures of letters and memos (e.g., *Sincerely, Jane Doe, National PTA President*).
- Titles of books, movies, plays, poems, songs, television programs, workshops, webinars and works of art:

- Put quotation marks around the title.
- Capitalize the principal words, including all verbs and prepositions and conjunctions with more than three letters
- Examples:
  - Book:** “The Cat in the Hat”
  - Movie:** “Remember the Titans”
  - Play:** “Death of a Salesman”
  - Poem:** “Phenomenal Woman”
  - Song:** “The Star-Spangled Banner”
  - TV Program:** “CBS Evening News”
  - Workshop:** “Emerging Minority Leaders Conference Workshop”
  - Webinar:** “10 Ways to Improve Your School”
  - Work of Art:** “Mona Lisa”

- Titles of newspapers and magazines:
  - Italicize and do not place in quotation marks.
  - Capitalize ‘the’ in the name if that is the way the publication prefers to be known.
  - Lowercase ‘the’ before names if listing several publications, some of which use ‘the’ as part of the name and some of which do not (e.g., *Time, Newsweek, the Washington Post, and the New York Times*).
- Titles of ethnic groups:
  - African Americans: “black,” not capitalized.
  - Caucasians: “white,” not capitalized.
  - Asians: “Asian,” capitalized.
  - “American Indian,” capitalized with no hyphen, is preferred over “Native American.”
- Titles of seasons:
  - Lowercase “spring,” “summer,” “fall” and “winter” and derivatives such as “wintertime” unless part of a formal name (e.g., I love Paris in the springtime; the Winter Olympics).

## URLS

- List webpages as such: PTA.org/ParentGuides, PTA.org/Reflections
- Avoid using the terms “click here,” use “visit” “go to” (e.g., *For more info, visit our [Leader Resources Page](#); to find a local PTA, go to [PTA.org/Join](#)*).

## WRITING MODE

- Always write in third person, except in blogs.
- Avoid passive voice.

## WEBSITE GUIDELINES

A website is a living document we will continuously tweak to enhance our brand as the #1 source for relevant information for children, their families and schools.

Our goal is to have our content consistent across PTA.org as we update our information and add new Web offerings for our members and other visitors.

### WRITING CONTENT FOR PTA.ORG

Our content needs to be highly readable, so our members and other visitors can quickly digest the information. Make content easy to understand and scannable. Studies show that people only read about 28% of text on a webpage, so you need to make your point quickly. Here are some tips on how to do it:

- Highlight key words: Bold program or names or use hyperlinks
- Clear sub-heads: They break up the text
- Use bulleted lists
- One idea per paragraph: Keep it simple
- Start with the conclusion: Use the inverted pyramid writing style instead of telling a story
- Say it with less: Read the text and cut out unnecessary words. You can most likely cut it to half the word count.
- Avoid “marketese”: Web users want the facts, not clever jargon or promotional prose.

*(Source: Various research findings and suggestions by Jakob Nielsen, usability expert, useit.com/jakob)*

## DIGITAL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

The e-mail inbox is an incredibly competitive environment and our members/audience have a low tolerance for irrelevant or poorly written e-communication. These readers will be quick to delete and/or unsubscribe to our communication if it is not clear and concise—and also if we send messages too frequently. Therefore, we need to be strategic in how we write and disseminate our content.

### Four tips to consider in writing content for digital messages:

- 1. Keep it short and to the point.** The first two sentences of your content should be short and give the reader all the key information they need to respond. People read their email the same way they read websites; they quickly scan them to determine its value and relevance. If you take too long to get to the point, they will not read it. Research shows that readers spend less than 51 seconds reading a complete e-newsletter and only read word-for-word 19% of the time.
- 2. Watch your word count.** To optimize an digital message for maximum readability, follow these word count guidelines:
  - Sponsor blurb: 50-75 words
  - General blurb: 75-100 words
  - Headline length: 8-10 words or less; one line, action focused
  - 50 – 250 words for e-blasts
  - 400 words or less for the One-Voice Blog

3. **Focus on your audience.** Write directly to the needs and interests of the people receiving the message. Readers choose to subscribe to and open e-newsletters because of perceived value and relevance. Therefore, tacking on a generic blurb to get the word out is not a strategy. The Communications Department can help to work on an angle that will resonate with the target audience.
  4. **We review all content.** The Communications Department will edit your content for accuracy, spelling/grammar, relevance and National PTA style/branding. If working with a sponsor or partner organization, please set this expectation and we provide our edits in time for additional review (with outside groups) when necessary. We also strategically schedule e-newsletters/e-blasts to ensure our members do not become weary from an abundance of e-mails from the National PTA.
- **PTA Parent:** This action-driven publication shares ideas on how PTA families can be engaged in their child's education and wellbeing. Content includes PTA toolkit resources, fundraising programs, tips/advice, as well as PTA Radio and Our Children magazine content. Audience: PTA members and National PTA staff, with elected leaders to subscribe. *(Distribution: 300,000)*
  - **Local Leader News:** This channel keeps PTA local leaders informed on the latest National PTA developments, as well as new programs and resources available at National PTA. *(Distribution: 26,000; integrated with Partners in Leadership in May 2013)*
  - **PTA Takes Action:** Information related to National PTA policy priorities and activities. Audience: Subscribers and National PTA staff. *(Distribution: 250,000)*

National PTA produces four e-newsletters for distinct audiences:

- **Leadership Briefing:** This channel keeps all PTA stakeholders informed on new National PTA events, partnerships, programs and resources. This is a prime venue to share updates on newly developed resources, partnerships, grants/awards, and events. Audience: PTA state presidents, state president-elects, state offices, and National PTA staff. *(Distribution: 2,500)*



## ABOUT PTA

National PTA® comprises millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of parent involvement in schools.

PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education. Membership in PTA is open to anyone who wants to be involved and make a difference for the education, health, and welfare of children and youth.

## ADVOCACY

As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization in the nation, National PTA is the conscience of the country for children and youth issues. Through advocacy, as well as family and community education, National PTA has established programs and called for legislation that improves our children's lives, such as: creation of Kindergarten classes, child labor laws, public health service, hot and healthy lunch programs, juvenile justice system, mandatory immunization, arts in education and school safety.

Each year National PTA publishes a public policy agenda that outlines policy priorities and recommendations for Congress. From universal kindergarten to a juvenile justice system—National PTA® advocates have been at the heart of our nation's greatest advances for youth.

## EVERY CHILD IN FOCUS

National PTA's Every Child in Focus is a school-year-long campaign centered on strengthening family engagement in schools by celebrating important cultural distinctions and achievements, while highlighting solutions to potential educational issues.

Each month, National PTA will spotlight the educational issues surrounding a particular group, highlight their accomplishments and focus on ways to foster Family-School Partnerships.

## GOVERNANCE

National PTA—as directed by its board of directors—provides leadership, programs, support, and resources to its members at all levels of the association. National, state and local PTAs are connected—forming a nationwide network of members, working for every child, with one voice.

National PTA is composed of 55 state congresses and more than 20,000 local units in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Department of Defense Schools in Europe and the Pacific.

State PTAs are the liaison between the local PTA and National PTA, helping each to function effectively and to support and sustain the other. PTAs at the local level are valuable assets to their school communities by providing educational and parent involvement information, resources, events, and activities.

## HISTORY

For more than 100 years, National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA®) has worked to better the lives of every child in education, health, and safety. Founded in 1897 as the National Congress of Mothers by Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst, National PTA is a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education.

## REFLECTIONS

The Reflections program is the National PTA's cornerstone arts program. It was developed in 1969 by Colorado's PTA President Mary Lou Anderson to encourage students to explore their talents and express themselves. Since then, the Reflections Program has inspired millions of students to reflect on a specific theme and create original artwork. National PTA believes every child deserves a quality arts education. Participation in arts programs, like Reflections, levels the playing field for underserved students, develops the whole-child, nurtures creativity and teamwork, and connects families and schools to one another and to their communities. Learn more at [PTA.org/Reflections](https://www.pta.org/Reflections).

## DC PTA

Use DC PTA to differentiate from the Washington State PTA.

## ORGANIZATIONAL NAMES

Use lowercase for names of committees, departments, offices and conventions when standing alone (e.g., the legislative committee; resource development department; finance chair; the board of directors; national convention).

## OTHER PARENT GROUPS

Use “unaffiliated parent groups” or “other parent groups” instead of PTOs.

## PTA®/PARENT TEACHER ASSOCIATION® NATIONAL PTA®

- In documents with non-PTA audiences (e.g., press releases, brochures), write out Parent Teacher Association® (PTA®) on first reference and use PTA in subsequent references.
- The association is a registered service (®) and should always be capitalized. (e.g., PTA®)
- Parent Teacher Association, PTA and National PTA are all *registered services* (®) and should always be capitalized; Parent Teacher Association has no hyphen.

## PTAS AND PTA'S

- PTAs is the plural case of PTA.
- PTA's is the possessive case of PTA, but try to avoid using it whenever possible. Use PTA as an adjective instead. (e.g., The PTA website is...)

## PTSA® Parent-Teacher-Student Association

- As a registered service mark, Parent-Teacher-Student Association® is capitalized and is hyphenated. The first reference to PTSA or Parent-Teacher-Student Association should include the registered mark (®).
- The term “PTSA” or “PTA/PTSA” applies to five specific state congresses:
  - Connecticut PTSA
  - Hawaii State PTSA
  - Pacific PTA/PTSA
  - U.S. Virgin Islands PTSA
  - Virginia PTA/PTSA

## PTA.ORG / NATIONAL PTA WEBSITE

- The National PTA website should be written as PTA.org in all instances.
- Citations for specific pages and subpages, such as PTA.org/Partnerships also do not have “www” in the front.

## SPONSOR/MEMBER BENEFITS PROVIDERS

- Following are the official titles to use when referring to corporate supporters of National PTA:
    - Proud National Sponsor
    - National Member Benefits Provider
- In copy:
- Place “PTA” at the beginning of the phrase (e.g., *PTA Proud National Sponsor*)
- Without “PTA” or a specific corporate supporter, do not capitalize the terms.

## STATE PTAS

- The word “State” is only used in the four following PTAs:
  - California State PTA
  - Hawaii State PTSA
  - New York State PTA
  - Washington State PTA
- Do not capitalize “state” in phrases such as “the state PTA” or “state PTAs.”

## TENSE

- Pronouns: Avoid the “Singular Them:”
  - In writing about children and children's issues, use of phrases such as “your child” is frequent. The temptation is to use a “singular them” as a pronoun replacement, as in “Your child benefits from parent involvement, which provides them with numerous avenues to success.” While this is commonly accepted in speech and less formal writing, PTA style dictates that the pronoun phrases “he or she” or “him or her” be used.
- Always use “child,” “children” or “students” when referring to a child. Do not refer to them as “kids.”
- The forward slash variations (he/she, him/her) should never be used.
- Use of “he or she” and “him or her” can become cumbersome if overused, in which case the author or editor should write around the situation by using plural forms when possible.