

### Eight steps to plot your style guide

A style guide is a reference for public relations practitioners on how to create, share and use a pre-existing brand guide. A well-designed style guide will inherently support staff when they are presenting on behalf of an agency: in writing, presentations or on digital platforms. And it will ensure continuity of the brand identity by defining graphic elements, colors and fonts.

These quick tips will help you plan, design and organize a style guide for your brand. If your district or school does not have a brand identity, this overview also offers an outline of the branding process to your leadership teams.

#### 1. Plan your style, engage your people

Building a school brand creates an opportunity for staff and student engagement. A style guide is an outcome of a branding process. Consider creating an advisory committee to guide the creation of the style guide.

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Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Comment Period	Meeting 4
Introductions	Introductions	Introductions		Introductions
<p><b>Values Brainstorm.</b> When you think of (school, department, initiative) what words come to mind? E.g., special, active, brave, winners, professional.</p> <p><b>Group Share Out</b> Discuss the words.</p> <p><b>Consensus Activity:</b> If you like a word, put a dot next to it.</p>	<p><b>Review Meeting 1.</b> Show words that had dots (narrow to 3-5 ahead of time).</p> <p><b>Mascot Brainstorm:</b> What sorts of animals, plants, or people come to mind when you think of those words?</p> <p><b>Group Share Out:</b> Share the images.</p> <p><b>Consensus Activity:</b> If you like the animal, put a dot next to it.</p>	<p><b>Review meeting 2.</b> Show words and mascot groupings.</p> <p>Prepare color and font research options (2) and present to group.</p> <p>Q &amp; A: color and font.</p> <p><b>Decision:</b> values, mascot, colors, font.</p>	<p><b>Publish draft values, mascot, colors and font to staff and students.</b> Using surveys, suggestion boxes, comment capture sheets and focus groups.</p> <p>Include mock-ups of swag (water bottles, lanyards, t-shirts) and PowerPoint, memo, report, letterhead, Facebook and webpages</p>	<p><b>Share feedback.</b> Share options developed in response to feedback.</p> <p>If no feedback, consider bringing swag for all committee members.</p> <p>Show style guide.</p> <p>Celebrate launch of brand!</p>

<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	<b>Materials:</b> name tags, capture sheets, dot stickers, water, fidgets, snacks.	N/A	<b>Materials:</b> celebration materials, e.g., clappers, confetti, balloons, streamers.
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## 2. Know your audience

Know your audience and craft your communications toward specific groups, (e.g., staff, stakeholders, families, legislators, etc.). Consider cultural elements relevant to your audience and reflect them in messaging. Thoughtfully use different platforms for different audiences. Be sure your style guide includes materials to cover all platforms.

## 3. Embed equity

Develop a set of reflective questions to follow when creating communications materials, especially when telling someone else’s story: Does your work capture and elevate diverse voices with authenticity? Do you have assumptions that come through in the storytelling? Who benefits from the story? What are the power dynamics? Is there any possibility of harm or risk to communities?

Language matters. Adopt a person-first approach. Avoid labeling and careless pop-culture terms. Ensure content (photos, videos, narrative) is representative of student and staff demographics, views and perspectives. Ensure materials are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

## 4. Gather your elements

Style guides consist of various elements: colors, fonts, logos, mascots, spirit lines, symbols of action/movement. All elements should ultimately reflect established agency values.

## 5. Pick your palette

Research shows that colors have an emotional and psychological impact. Fast food chains typically use yellow and red because research shows those colors spur people to action and are more likely to invoke a sense of hunger; certain shades of blue are calming, according to Wendy L. Patrick’s article “Dieting? How Colors Impact Food Appeal and Appetite” in Psychology Today (<http://bit.ly/2MPpyz6>).

Consider the research when suggesting color combinations. Your palette should always reflect your values and/or goals. As an aside, also consider what a logo will look like in a single color, which is frequently requested for items like t-shirts and water bottles.

## 6. Choose your font family

Fonts speak volumes. Think of the times a swirly, curly doodle caught your eye, but it wasn’t for a children’s story time and instead promoted a \$250 one-off keynote imparting the latest greatest InstaWisdom trend. Did you look up the event immediately, or forget the whole thing in a flash except for the poster’s swirly, curly doodle font? What was memorable? The content or the font?

Your font personifies your values, like it or not. Do you have a serif and san serif font?

Learn the difference and choose the one that matches your agency's style. Also, make sure the font family is accessible in a platform that most staff use - not just the design team.

#### **7. Decide on a writer's guide**

Associated Press is the most commonly used style guide for copywriters. However, some educational staff may prefer using Modern Language Association or American Psychological Association formats, which are typically reserved for academic writing and not public relations or news. Additionally, some staff may prefer to modify A.P. standards, such as the way grade levels or titles are written. Agreeing on a house style to accommodate relevant modifications is essential for communications continuity.

#### **8. Give broad access to the guide**

Placing your style guides and templates on a website enhances the likelihood that the brand will be used correctly. Placing restrictions on access to a brand mostly causes people to generate their own version of the brand which most of the time results in a poor visual outcome. There is always the concern that a brand will be used for an unauthorized purpose or a purpose that does not align with the agency. On balance, most uses are in line with the agency and providing ready and easy access gives staff and the community a tool to create great-looking messages and materials.

For examples of style guides and branding guides created by the Multnomah Education Service District's communications team, see sidebar content at [www.multnomahesd.org/staff.html](http://www.multnomahesd.org/staff.html).

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