SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

Writing Style Guidelines
Updated 3/2021

Words and sentences
- Always use "the" in front of City Council i.e., "*the City Council*"
- Acronyms: Always spell out the first use of any acronym in a document, even if you think your audience knows the acronym. If the acronym is used in an attachment that is part of the document (e.g. an attachment to a staff report), consider it a new document and re-spell out the acronym again
- Remove genders e.g., *Councilmember* not *Councilman*, *staff the desk* not *man the desk*
- Avoid using abbreviations
- Only capitalize proper nouns. **Government tends to over-capitalize.**
  - Seasons are lower case (spring, fall, summer…)
  - Use lower case for "state" and "federal" unless it is used in a title (e.g. State Board of Equalization)
  - City is always upper case when referencing the City of San Rafael
  - Use lower case for "division", "department", "program", etc. unless used in the full name format (e.g. Streets Maintenance Division)
  - Use lower case for "courts" unless the full name is spelled out (e.g. Marin County Courts)
- Italicize titles of publications, TV programs, videos, etc.
- Citywide, countywide and statewide are written as one word
- Be mindful of correct word choice and grammar
  - Something is "fleshed out" not "flushed out"
  - "*The modest design complemented the neighborhood.*" not "*The modest design complimented the neighborhood.*"
  - "*It's going to happen on Monday.*" not "*Its going to happen on Monday.*"
  - I vs. me vs. myself (used incorrectly more often verbally than in writing)
  - "Your" means belonging to you. "You're" is a contraction for "you are."
  - "Affect" vs. "effect". A new development will affect us. The effect will be minimal.
- Use of i.e. vs. e.g.
  - i.e. means "in other words": "*There is one key project Analysts work with Finance on every spring, i.e., budgeting for the upcoming fiscal year.*"
  - e.g. means "for example": "*There are a number of tasks Analysts work on, e.g., staff reports, administrative process improvements, budgeting.*"
  - e.g. opens up more options, i.e. narrows them down.

Periods and commas
- Do not use periods after bulleted items unless they are complete sentences
- Use the Oxford comma
  - **Oxford comma**: "*The survey was administered in May, December, and February.*"
  - **No Oxford comma**: "*The survey was administered in May, December and February.*"
- Use a comma after a time period at the beginning of a sentence, such as: "*In February 2021, the City Council approved a resolution….*"
- If you are trying to use a semicolon, it is likely better to use a period and a new sentence

Numbers
- Use the "FY 2017-18" format for fiscal year references rather than "FY 17-18" or FY "2017/18"
- Numbers under 10 should be spelled out
- Do not include cents for dollar amounts (e.g. $25,000 not $25,000.00)
- Write out 'percent' in text, use % symbol in charts
- Always use a 0 before decimal points (e.g. 0.5 FTE)