

National FFA Organization
Brand Identity Manual
for FFA Chapters



Introduction

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For all those times when you've wondered how to use the FFA trademark, what color to make the logo, what should be on your chapter's website or whether your shirt design is OK, we've provided this Brand Identity Manual. It gives you specific standards on the dos and don'ts of using the trademark, and it also provides tips on how to promote the right image of FFA in your school and community.

Remember: The image of FFA in your hometown is projected by your chapter and the individual members. The image that we put forth as an organization is what the world sees. That's why it is important that you use this Brand Identity Manual whenever you plan to do any sort of public communication or create anything that will be viewed by the public. While your chapter still enjoys the freedom to express its own personality, you can consider this guide as a way to make sure you're putting FFA in the best light.

The manual is set up in an easy-to-use format. Visual references appear in the left column, while written descriptions are on the right. Come back online often to use this reference tool, or download it to print for your records.

If you have a question that isn't answered in this manual, please contact FFA Marketing and Communication Services, media@ffa.org, 317-802-6060.

Chapter 1: Brand, Logo and Trademark



What is a brand?

If someone asked you to name a brand, your first response might be to say Nike, McDonald's or Ford, right? So what does that have to do with FFA?

Plenty. At its most basic, *a brand is the name, term, symbol or special design that identifies an organization's goods or services.* FFA is a brand just as much as all of the consumer goods we see advertised and buy every day. It has a place in people's minds based on their perceptions of what FFA is and all the emotions that go along with those perceptions. Read more about the FFA brand in Chapter 2.

What is a logo?

A logo is a brand mark. It's a visual representation of what a company or organization is. It can be one of the strongest tools for building and reinforcing a brand image and maintaining its value. A logo plays a key role in building loyalty and trust in a brand because it elicits an immediate reaction.

That's why it is so important to use a logo consistently, no matter what medium is being used. See specific guidelines in Chapter 3.

What is a trademark?

A trademark is a brand that has been registered through the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the exclusive use of one party. You may not realize it, but trademarks can include names (Orville Redenbacher), slogans (Got Milk?) and numbers (501 [jeans]). This is another reason why it is so important that we all work to protect all usage of the name FFA as well as its symbols.

Chapter 2: The FFA Brand



The three key components of our mission statement:

- *premier leadership*
- *personal growth*
- *career success*

The three important messages of our mission statement:

- *premier leadership*
- *personal growth*
- *career success*

The FFA brand is backed by our own identity research results, which found that FFA members are:

- hardworking
- moral and ethical
- trustworthy
- enthusiastic and spirited

Research results further indicate that FFA chapters:

- get support from the agricultural community
- promote American values, morals and high ideals
- are led by dedicated, professional teachers
- develop future leaders
- provide hands-on learning opportunities
- thrive in a group-learning environment

These characteristics go hand in hand with the three key components of our mission statement:

- premier leadership
- personal growth
- career success

All of these qualities are something to be proud of! So use them as a checklist whenever you have an opportunity for public communications, such as making a statement to an interviewer, printing a flyer or designing your website.

What do the letters “FFA” stand for?

We’re sure you’ve heard this question before. While the letters still mean Future Farmers of America, the name of our organization is now simply FFA. The new name helps to better represent the wide diversity of career options available to agriculture students. FFA is the preferred name to use, and most chapters have adopted the simplified name.

The three-letter name can cause confusion in the media because they prefer to identify an organization by its full name in first reference. It can also be confusing in other conversations, interviews and speaking engagements.

To reduce this confusion, we have provided you with the following appropriate responses:

In writing (brochures, news releases, etc.)

FFA is a dynamic youth organization within agricultural education that changes lives and prepares students for personal growth, premier leadership and career success. FFA was created in 1928 as the Future Farmers of America, and the name was changed in 1988 to the National FFA Organization to represent the growing diversity of agriculture. Today, almost a half million student members are engaged in a wide range of agricultural activities, leading to more than 300 career opportunities in the food, fiber and natural resources industry. Student success remains the primary mission of FFA.



In conversations

The letters FFA stand for Future Farmers of America; however, the official name of the organization was changed in 1988 to the National FFA Organization. Over the past 75 years, the FFA and agricultural education have grown to encompass all aspects of agriculture, from production farming, agribusiness and forestry to biotechnology, marketing and food processing.

Remember: This is meant to be conversational, so keep it easy and learn to be comfortable with it. Don't make it sound like a rehearsed speech.

What about the mission statement?

No matter what size your chapter is or where you're located, you share a common mission with every other chapter in the country. That's why you see the mission statement printed so often on stationery, in handbooks, on ffa.org and more. It's something to live by, and it's something to be sure to communicate to the public:

*FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth and career success** through agricultural education.*

Our Motto:

*Learning to Do. Doing to Learn.
Earning to Live. Living to Serve.*



In Chapter 3, you'll see different ways the mission statement can be used. Remember: The more people see and hear our mission statement, the better they'll understand what FFA does.

What is the FFA motto?

*Learning to Do. Doing to Learn.
Earning to Live. Living to Serve.*

When you express this motto — either in writing or through your actions — you're carrying on a 75-year tradition. That's right. The motto was included in the first Official FFA Manual. And its words are as powerful today as they were in the beginning.

Why is the creed important?

Like our motto, the creed has stood the test of time and remains a vital part of FFA. Written by E. M. Tiffany, it was adopted at the 3rd National FFA Convention and revised at the 38th and 63rd conventions. By committing its words to heart, members will more instinctively keep the important aspects of our brand at the forefront. As its opening words say, "I believe in the future of agriculture, with a faith born not of words but of deeds...." By living this creed, members promote the FFA brand not only in their personal lives but to everyone they meet.

Mission, motto, creed: the big three

These FFA traditions provide you with the foundation for a strong chapter. They give you the power to be an individual who can make a difference in your own life and the lives of those you serve. In FFA, you'll make lifelong friends who will impact your life. And you can plan for a future that's based on well-founded traditions. For these reasons, you should remember to keep "the big three" in the forefront as you communicate the FFA brand.

The FFA code of ethics

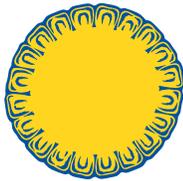
Another important trait that distinguishes an FFA member from others is his or her pledge to uphold the code of ethics, written in 1952. It reminds you to act as professional young adults at all times, and especially during FFA functions, so it is also an integral part of our brand. By your actions, you can live the FFA brand by observing the code of ethics.

Chapter 3: The FFA Logo



All members of FFA are brand managers, so it's important for each of you to act responsibly and use the FFA logos in a proper and consistent way — just like all the other chapters across the nation. FFA has three versions of its logo:

- a freestanding emblem
- the emblem within a box
- the letters FFA



Cross-section of an ear of corn

You must use the emblem intact. Do not take out parts or alter the emblem in any way. To do so weakens the image, integrity and legal position of the FFA trademark and brand.

The FFA emblem contains a lot of detail, and it comprises five basic elements:

- cross-section of an ear of corn
- rising sun
- eagle
- owl
- plow



Rising Sun

You know the symbolism of these elements from reading your manual and your student handbook. Because the emblem is so detailed, you must work carefully with printers, embroiderers, screen printers and other suppliers when asking them to reproduce the logo.



Eagle

The following guidelines will help you get the best results from your projects.



Owl



Plow



3-color



PMS Reflex Blue



Black



PMS Reflex Blue



PMS 116C Yellow
or
PMS 115U Yellow



PMS 485 Red



PMS Reflex Blue



PMS 116C Yellow
or
PMS 115U Yellow



PMS 485 Red

The freestanding emblem

The FFA emblem can be printed in full color or using one color (either Reflex Blue or black). No substitution of colors is permitted when printing the logo. Gold floss can be used for embroidery work on hats and T-shirts.

The boxed emblem

Likewise, the boxed emblem prints in full color or using one color (either Reflex Blue or black). Again, if you are having the emblem embroidered, gold floss can be used.

How to order printing

There are two ways to order printing: either with three separate inks (referred to as Pantone Matching System, or PMS, colors) or with four-color process, where all colors are made up of some combination of cyan, magenta, yellow and black.

These are the numbers you should give your printer to get the correct colors:

PMS colors for the three-color logo:

- PMS Reflex Blue
- PMS 485 Red
- PMS 116C Yellow (if printing on coated paper) or PMS 115U Yellow (if printing on uncoated paper)

Process colors for the three-color logo:

- Blue 100C, 90M, 10K
- Red 100M, 70Y
- Yellow 20M, 100Y

Arial Regular and Arial Bold



FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth** and **career success** through agricultural education.



FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth** and **career success** through agricultural education.



**Premier Leadership
Personal Growth
Career Success**

**Premier Leadership
Personal Growth
Career Success**

Using the letters FFA without the emblem

There will be times when you want to use only the letters FFA rather than the intricate emblem. The preferred typeface (font) is Arial or Times New Roman.

Using the mission statement with the emblem

Whenever possible, use the full mission statement. However, when this is not possible (such as on a banner), use the three key components of the mission statement (Premier Leadership, Personal Growth, Career Success) with the emblem. Also, be sure to use the mission statement in a size proportionate to the emblem.

Times New Roman and Times New Roman Bold



FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth** and **career success** through agricultural education.



FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for **premier leadership, personal growth** and **career success** through agricultural education.



**Premier Leadership
Personal Growth
Career Success**

**Premier Leadership
Personal Growth
Career Success**

Chapter 4: The FFA Image



True or False:

- All FFA members have blond hair.
- All FFA members drive tractors.
- All FFA members were in 4-H.

Get the point? We all know that one of our strengths is that FFA has such a diverse makeup. Different people have different talents and interests, and when they're pooled together, that creates success. Even with the diversity of your chapter members, you are all good, ethical people connected by your common FFA experiences. Through the leadership opportunities offered by FFA, you have fun and learn from each other.

Along with that important diversity, you still need to maintain a consistent overall image of FFA in your school and community. So whether you're sponsoring a car wash or bringing in a guest speaker, all communications associated with the activity should maintain the integrity of the FFA brand.

Our primary mission is student success. So before you plan an activity or make 250 copies of a flyer, make sure they say "student success" in one way or another.

The official jacket

No doubt FFA members are most easily identified by their blue corduroy jackets. It's almost a zippable logo, isn't it? Take a look at this nine-step reference on jacket wearing:

1. Don't let anyone who is not an FFA member wear a jacket.
2. Keep it clean and neat.
3. Only the FFA emblem, state association and local chapter name go on the back. The front includes a small emblem, your name and the name and year of one office you've held.
4. If you're wearing it to an official function, zip it all the way up. Turn down the collar and button your cuffs.



5. Wear it to all official FFA occasions. You can also wear it to school and other appropriate places. But don't wear it somewhere an FFA member shouldn't be. You've pledged to the code of ethics, after all.
6. No smoking or drinking alcohol while wearing your jacket.
7. This jacket represents FFA only. Don't put any other patches, logos or letters on it.
8. All medals go under your name on the right side of the jacket. The only exception is a single State FFA Degree charm or American FFA Degree key. These go above your name. Limit the number of medals to the three highest you've earned: highest degree earned, highest office held and the highest award earned.
9. If your jacket becomes faded or worn, remove all the FFA items from it or dispose of the jacket. Don't put it in a garage sale unless you've removed all the FFA items. Don't give it away or sell it to any non-member with the FFA materials intact.

Now, what do you wear with your neat, clean, intact jacket? A checklist follows:

Females

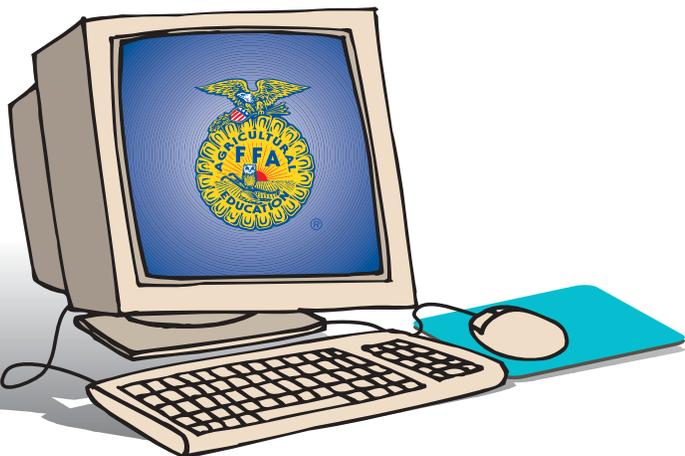
- Black skirt (or black slacks for travel or outdoor activities)
- White blouse
- Official FFA blue scarf
- Black shoes

Males

- Black slacks
- White shirt
- Official FFA tie
- Black shoes

Please visit www.ffanlimited.org for all of your official dress and chapter needs. Make sure to check out the latest in FFA-wear online or in the blue catalog. If you don't have a catalog, ask your advisor for one.

Chapter 5: FFA on the Net



Quick, what's your biggest pet peeve about websites? Bet you said clicking on a link that doesn't go anywhere. Or maybe you said information that's two years old. A big waste of your time, right? And you probably won't visit that site again anytime soon.

That's one of the main things to keep in mind if you decide to take your chapter online. Do you have someone who can create a good site for you? And does that person, or another volunteer, have the time and interest to maintain your site? If not, it might be better not to have a site at all for your chapter.

But if you do have that Web whiz in your group, here are some ideas that might help make your website a useful tool.

1. Remember that the potential audience is wide open. Your site is your window to the world. You'll be sharing news with your chapter members, parents, corporations, other students and anybody else who happens onto your site. For that reason, be sure that the FFA brand is represented well. Include the full mission statement, or the key phrases, somewhere on your homepage.
2. A website is the one and only place where you should use the letters FFA in lower case. The Web has redefined usage rules to some degree, but it's best to leave those deviations online.
3. The National FFA Organization has not officially specified a font or typeface family for the letters FFA for the Web. However, as type can be a strong visual element in creating a recognizable identity, it is strongly recommended that the Arial type family be used for electronic publishing in no less than 10 point black type. (The Verdana typeface is also acceptable.) These sans serif fonts use straight lines and are easier to read on screen. Additionally, the vast majority of computers come equipped with Arial and Verdana fonts; use of these fonts will guarantee your e-mails will be received complete and in the proper format. Different fonts, colors and sizes are fun and tempting to use, but to ensure your message is

easy to read, stick to the basics. Large headings can be used in colors other than black; just make sure to use a dark font on a light background for readability.

4. If you're going to use flying graphics, that's OK. But remember that less is sometimes more. In other words, they're more effective when used here and there, not everywhere!
5. Be sure to include a calendar of events and highlight important activities that might have broad appeal.
6. You might include a special section for parents of your members where they can be kept current on your events. Maybe that will prompt someone to volunteer who might not otherwise have thought of it.
7. Do you have a digital camera or a scanner? If so, include some fun pictures. This is a good way to show visitors the wide scope of activities and interests your chapter has.
8. If you have a printed newsletter, turn it into an online version. Or if you don't have a printed one, start an electronic version. Then you can e-mail the link to your corporate sponsors to show them your successes. They will appreciate knowing that they are getting some publicity for their effort.
9. Be sure to provide a link to the National FFA Organization's site. The logo at left is the logo to use for that link.
10. Register your site on ffa.org so others can see what you're doing. Simply go to http://www.ffa.org/dcd/Schools_and_Universities/Chapter_Homepages/ and follow the instructions under "Add Resource" to submit your site to the FFA webmaster.
11. You can also join a webring so you are linked with other chapters across the country. To learn more about that, visit www.ffa.org/chapters/html/webrings.html



Chapter 6: FFA in Print



This chapter covers some of the many ways FFA is used in print, whether that's ink on paper or electronic words on a website. One of the reasons it is so important to protect our trademarked name is that it might otherwise become a generic term for student agricultural groups. Did you know aspirin began as a brand name? You wouldn't know it today.

You're an important watchdog for us in your part of the world. So if you see the FFA name or logo being used improperly, please contact FFA Marketing and Communication Services, media@ffa.org, 317-802-6060.

The difference between FFA “the brand” and FFA “the name”

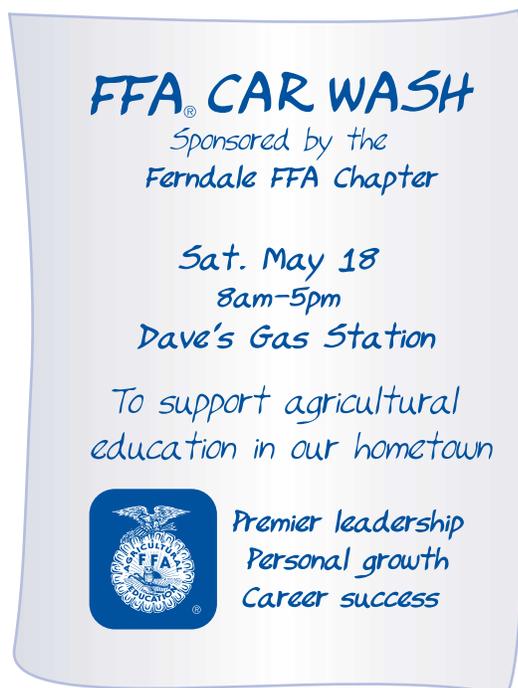
If you're printing a flyer or advertisement, FFA should be used as a logo and should include the ® mark. But within a block of text, FFA is being used as a name and can appear in the same font as the rest of the text.

For articles in a newspaper, the first reference should be your local chapter's full name. After that, just FFA can be used.

How to handle merchandising

As you know, the National FFA Organization works with a professional team of merchandisers to offer you the latest in young-adult fashions and items. But maybe you want to have a shirt or cap with a local angle. That's perfectly fine, but you need to remember all of the logo lessons you've learned so far. You should use the right colors, for example, and always include the ®. Work closely with your supplier to be sure he or she has the capability to screen print or embroider your design. Iron out all these details ahead of time so you don't end up with a bunch of shirts you don't like or — worse yet — can't use. Be sure to keep your advisor involved to approve both pricing and message.

If you have a special theme or slogan for your shirt, keep in mind that it should promote the mission's three key phrases: premier leadership, personal



growth, career success. You don't have to use those words exactly, but they should still be an underlying theme of your slogan. You might also look to the current year's annual theme as a possibility. Refer to the Copywriting Tips and Key Messages section of this manual for some great words and phrases to use.

Sending chapter letters

You want to make a good impression when you send a letter to a business sponsor or potential contributor. Always make sure to use your official chapter stationery for your letters. (Official FFA stationery can be ordered from the gold catalog.) In the supplement to this manual, you will find sample letters that can be customized for your chapter's use.



Chapter 7: FFA and the Media



FFA chapters are located in schools of all sizes in both rural and urban settings. That means some of you have two local newspapers and four television stations, while others have just one weekly newspaper in town. The media might include television, radio, newspapers, magazines, online publications and more. No matter how many media outlets are in your hometown, they present an excellent and free outlet for promoting your chapter.

Journalists are looking for reliable sources, quick information, accurate facts, interesting details and story ideas. You can become a favorite source of information for them if you can provide these things reliably and accurately.

Get to know the various editors and writers at the newspaper. FFA appeals to at least three special-section writers: school news, agriculture and business. Send them news releases often and offer to come and speak with them in person.

Maybe you're making plans for National FFA Week. Or maybe your chapter just won a bunch of awards. Let the media know about it! And be sure to follow up with a phone call.

You will find two examples of press release formats in the Appendix of this manual. One is a special format just for press releases, and the other shows you how to format your chapter stationery into accepted standards for press releases.

Get on the airwaves

If you have local radio and television stations in your area, get to know the staff as well. Many times you can appear in person to promote your special events. This should help to increase awareness of your events, and it will also give you good experience in public speaking.

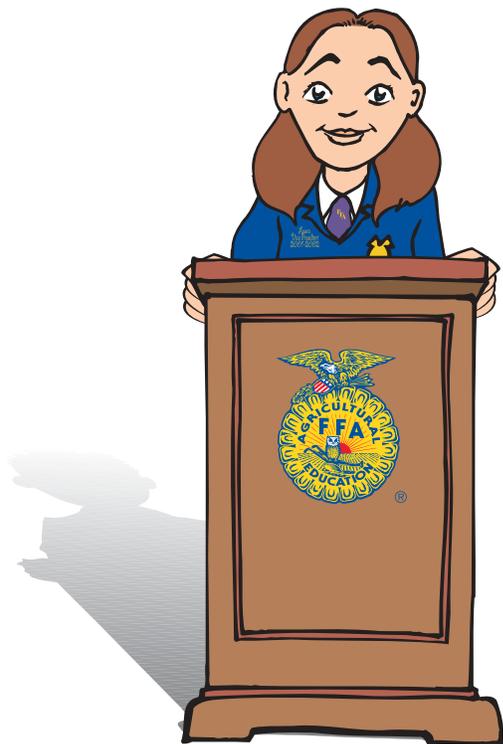
If for some reason the topic you're discussing is controversial, remember that the worst answer you can give to a tough question is, "No comment." On the other hand, there's nothing wrong with saying, "I don't know." That way you can take time to consult with your advisor and decide how best to handle a sticky situation.

These interviews are an excellent time to wear your official dress, especially if you're being interviewed on television.



Chapter 8: FFA Meets the Public

So you're at the podium, the spotlight's on, your topic is your FFA chapter...what do you do now? Take a deep breath, a sip of water and don't panic! You've prepared ahead of time, and you're ready to represent your chapter in public.



Public presentations are an excellent way to let more people know about FFA. When they see it's a vibrant, exciting organization, they'll want to be a part of it. If you're speaking to a corporation, maybe they'll decide to sponsor your chapter next year. If you're speaking to non-FFA members, maybe some will decide to join. So how do you get these opportunities to make public presentations?

First, form a public-speaking committee for your chapter. Then write a letter (on your official chapter letterhead). Mail it to service groups, church boards and professional associations in town. Offer to be a guest speaker at one of their meetings. You can have a few presentations prepared ahead of time on topics of interest to various groups. Your chapter can prepare overhead slides or a PowerPoint® presentation so more than one person can make the same speech. This is a great forum for letting adults in the community know what mature students you are and what a difference you're making in town.

Having booths and special exhibits at fairs is another way to make a public impression. As always, be sure that all of the materials displayed in your exhibit represent FFA in a positive light.

Everyone loves convention — especially the 50,000-plus people who attended the 75th National FFA Convention last fall! This is definitely a very public display of FFA, so your dress and behavior at convention are of paramount importance. Not only will chapter members from all across the country see what FFA means at your school, but the host city will form its impression from you, too. Teachers, other students, parents and community members will all see how you represent FFA. And don't forget that portions of the convention are broadcast nationwide via the media, and you are the brand. Remember: This is your time to shine!

Telephone etiquette

Last but not least, remember your telephone manners. Just as a receptionist creates the first impression of a company or an organization, so do you when you answer the phone in the agriculture department at school or when you make a telephone call for your advisor.

Here are some simple rules that are easy to follow but sometimes forgotten:

- When you answer a telephone, speak clearly and slowly, and identify yourself. Example: “Good morning. Thank you for calling Ferndale High School’s Agriculture Department. This is Mary Smith. How may I help you?”
- If the call is for someone else, do not yell across the room. Take the time to walk to that person and tell them they have a telephone call.
- If you are making a telephone call, always identify yourself when your call is answered. Do not launch into a conversation assuming the person answering the phone knows who you are. Example: “Hello, this is Mary Smith with the Ferndale FFA Chapter.”
- When leaving a voice mail message, speak clearly and slowly, and be brief. Make sure to give your name, the date and time you called, a short message about why you are calling, and your telephone number, including area code. Example: “Hello, this is Mary Smith with the Ferndale FFA Chapter. It’s 2 p.m. on Friday, October 13. I am calling to check on the status of our banquet banner. Please call me at 317-555-5555. Thank you.”

Chapter 9: FFA With Sponsors



We are proud
to support FFA

FFA is a stronger organization because of its corporate sponsors, so it is important for us to give them all the support we can.

If a sponsor chooses to run an advertisement in support of your chapter, you need to provide them with a copy of the logo at left. It is a simplified version of the plain FFA emblem, used in conjunction with the phrase “We are proud to support FFA.” Sponsors should know that they must use this logo only; they are not permitted to use the official trademarked logo without the accompanying phrase. Prior to running the ad, they should submit a copy of the proposed advertisement and a request for approval to: Marketing Specialist, National FFA Foundation, 6060 FFA Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46268-0960. As a courtesy to your sponsor, you could offer to take care of this detail.

Be sure to thank your sponsors. And thank them often! Send them handwritten thank-you notes. Have everyone in the chapter sign one letter. You can order preprinted note cards through the gold catalog. Or if the sponsor really went out of their way for you, have each member of your chapter send an individual letter saying how the sponsor’s support impacted him or her personally.

At the end of the year, send the sponsors a recap of the year’s activities. This will make them feel good about their support, and it’s another opportunity to promote the FFA brand to the corporate community.

Chapter 10: National FFA Organization Style Guide

How and why to use this style guide

For the National FFA Organization, it is at once challenging and necessary to ensure that our communication — from published periodicals to brochures to the website — is consistent and professional. Our task is compounded by the fact that we use some terms that can be interpreted, especially by people without an agricultural background, several different ways. We can all point to examples in which a publication from one team capitalizes something that another publication does not. We are striving to eliminate those inconsistencies, and this style guide can be a valuable tool to help us reach that goal.

Don't be discouraged by the size of this manual. Built for use in different ways by different people, the FFA Style Guide is divided into sections that affect everyone who compiles information for distribution by FFA. To enable quick checking, these sections are set up like dictionaries, with entries arranged alphabetically. The entries represent a combination of basic English and specific FFA terminology.

Even if a document is not being “officially” published — such as a letter to a member or potential sponsor — the slightest grammatical error and misspelling can be embarrassing and connote carelessness. This reflects negatively on the organization and is something we want to avoid. It's a good rule of thumb to play it safe and check your writing against the style guide, even when you are positive you're right.

The National FFA Organization uses the Associated Press (AP) stylebook as its source; however, the FFA Style Guide takes precedence over AP style on matters where the two guides differ. Additional standards may be determined as new words, phrases and acronyms are adopted by the organization. Remember to check this style guide first if in doubt, since dictionaries and other sources may vary on some rules or spelling. The FFA Style Guide always takes precedence over other sources.

Please contact the Marketing and Communication Services Team if you have any questions about style.

Style Guide A to Z

A

acronyms: Similar to abbreviations, acronyms are a collection of capital letters standing for a full, proper name or title. When writing FFA acronyms for publication, remember that the letters may mean something different outside the context of FFA. For example, ALD can mean Affective Learning Disorder. To avoid confusion, always use the full phrase or title on first reference and follow with the initials in parentheses. On second reference and every use thereafter, only the acronyms are needed. The exception to this is “FFA,” since we do not use “Future Farmers of America.” Do not use periods within acronyms or abbreviations: *MFE*, not *M. F. E.*

When using acronyms after the first reference, be consistent. If you’ve already defined your term once, use the acronym on every occasion thereafter within a single document.

a or an: Use *an* in place of a when it precedes a vowel *sound*, not just a vowel.

It’s an honor. I saw a UFO. (Pronounced with a consonant sound: YOO)

academic degrees: In formal writing, it is preferable to use the full name of the degree on first reference. To abbreviate degrees, use all caps but no periods. After a name, use a comma before the degree and a comma

FFA Acronyms

Advanced Leadership Development Conference	ALD
American Agricultural Editors’ Association	AAEA
American Association for Agricultural Education	AAAE
Agricultural Relations Council	ARC
Building Leaders and Strong Teams of Officers	BLAST Off
Career Development Event	CDE
Experiencing Discovery, Growth and Excellence	EDGE
International Leadership Seminar for State Officers	ILSSO
Local Program Success	LPS
Made For Excellence	MFE
National Agri-Marketing Association	NAMA
National Association of Agricultural Educators	NAAE
National Association of Agricultural Journalists	NAAJ
National Association of Farm Broadcasters	NAFB
National Association, Supervisors of Agricultural Education	NASAE
National Young Farmer Educational Association Inc.	NYFEA
National Leadership Conference for State Officers	NLC SO
National Council for Agricultural Education	The Council
National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization	PAS
New Century Farmers	NCF
New Farmers of America	NFA
Partners in Active Learning Support	PALS
State Presidents’ Conference	SPC
Supervised Agricultural Experience Program	SAE

after if used in the middle of a sentence.

Smith holds a master's degree in business administration from Ball State. Jerry Marshall, BS, MBA, is the president of the committee.

accept / except: *Accept* means to receive. *Except* means to exclude.

I accept your invitation. Everyone can leave, except Joe.

A.D.: Use this abbreviation, with periods but no spaces, for *Anno Domini* (in the year of the Lord).

advisor: Always advis**or**, not advis**er**. The proper term for the agriculture instructor when he or she is performing FFA-related responsibilities.

affect / effect: *Affect* is a verb; *effect* is (usually) a noun. When you *affect* something, you have an *effect* on it. The exception to the rule is when you use *effect* as a verb meaning to bring about or accomplish, as in "To *effect* a change."

The virus affects only Microsoft-based programs. The movie had an effect on me.

affiliate: Term used in reference to local alumni groups. It should be capitalized only when used as part of a proper noun.

The Denmark FFA Alumni Affiliate. Local FFA alumni affiliates should submit dues by Oct. 15.

afterward: Not afterwards.

agricultural / agriculture: When used as an adjective (describing something), the term "agricultural" is appropriate (it's always agricultural education). When used as a noun, the term "agriculture" is correct. Note: Always use agriculture teacher/instructor (remember that the teacher isn't agricultural, she's human! She *teaches* agriculture.)

The agricultural industry encompasses more than 300 careers.

There are more than 300 careers in agriculture.

agriculturalist: Someone who works in the agricultural industry. Agriculturalist is preferred to agriculturist.

agricultural education: Term used in reference to the instructional program that includes FFA. Replaces the term "vocational agriculture" in most instances. Do not use "agriculture" education.

agriculture: In formal writing, do not abbreviate to the slang "ag." The term "science, business and technology industry" is acceptable.

agriscience: *Agriscience* is the term for common use in reference to curriculum or career areas. Do not hyphenate.

Steve McCallion teaches bioengineering and genetics in his agriscience classes.

Agriscience Teacher of the Year program:

Agriscience Teacher of the Year program is the official name. It may be *agriscience program* or *agriscience winner* in second reference.

Linda Rist was named the Agriscience Teacher of the Year.

alumni: Alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae. *Alumni* can be used when referring to a group of men and women. Use *alumnus* (singular) to refer to a man who has attended a school or belonged to an organization. For women, the singular is *alumna*. Can be shortened to *alum*, but only for informal purposes.

An alumnus of Baylor University, Joe is a prominent attorney. She's an alumna of Campfire Girls. It's a pleasure to speak to the alumni gathered here tonight.

See also National FFA Alumni Association.

a.m. / p.m. Lowercase, with periods. **See also "Time."**

artwork: One word in all uses.

assure: You assure a person by making him confident. You can only assure a person, not a thing. Never use as in "assure the wording is correct."

See also ensure/insure.

I assure you this will be corrected.

audiocassette, audiotaping, audiovisual: One word, not hyphenated.

awards: Set titles for some of the many FFA awards include:

- VIP Award
- Distinguished Service Citation
- Honorary American FFA Degree
- American Star Farmer
- American Star in Agribusiness
- National Chapter Award

B

backward: Not backwards.

band, chorus and talent: Should be written as follows in first reference:

- National FFA Band
- National FFA Chorus
- National FFA Talent

In second reference, use national band. (e.g., The National FFA Band is terrific. The national band members love music.)

B.C.: Use this abbreviation, with periods, for *before Christ*.

board of directors: Never capitalize board of directors or board of trustees when they stand alone. (e.g., The national organization is headed by a board of directors.) Capitalize them when linked with the organization's name.

*The National FFA Board of Directors met in January.
The board passed a motion to. . .*

C

cancel, canceled, canceling, cancellation: No double / in canceled and canceling.

capital, capitol: A capital is the city where a seat of government is located or (when referring to money) a type of expenditure, equipment or property. Do not capitalize unless part of a proper noun such as a business name. A capitol is the specific building of state or federal government. Capitalize when used in conjunction with U.S. or a state name, or when using the word as a

proper noun. Don't capitalize when referring to more than one capitol.

Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana. He works at Capital City Ford.

Students toured the Nevada State Capitol as part of their excursion. Live from the Capitol, I'm Lisa Myers. The officers visited 43 state capitol buildings during their year of service.

career development events: Capitalize when the letters "FFA" are present, as the event now becomes a proper noun; do not capitalize without "FFA." If you have already used the full name on first reference and indicated the acronym, then use the acronym thereafter. . . . *in the midst of the floriculture career development event. (FFA member) participated in the FFA Parliamentary Procedure Career Development Event. She placed in the National FFA Floriculture Career Development Event (CDE). As the floriculture CDE winner, she was interviewed by Tom Brand.*

CD-ROM: Acronym for *Compact Disc – Read Only Memory*. Capitalize the acronym and use a hyphen as indicated.

century: Lowercase unless part of a formal title. Use numerals in all instances. *21st century. Produced by 20th Century Fox.*

chapter: Capitalize the word chapter only when used with the name of a specific FFA chapter. *The Salinas FFA Chapter is one of several FFA chapters participating in NLCSO.*

colors: Do not capitalize FFA colors. Colors should be written national blue and corn gold.

comprise: Traditionally means comprehend or contain, not constitute. In other words, a zoo *comprises* animals — it's not comprised of them (though it is *composed of* them). Avoid the phrase "is comprised of."

contact: When placing contact information in a document, use the following format:
Contact: Bill Stagg, bstagg@ffa.org, 317-802-4243

continual vs. continuous: *Continual* means “happening over and over again”; *continuous* means “happening constantly without stopping.” If you’re *continually* on the Internet, it means you keep going on; if you’re *continuously* on the Internet, it means you haven’t gotten off at all.

convention: Refer to the annual meeting of FFA as the 2002 National FFA Convention or the 75th National FFA Convention for first reference; the national FFA convention or the national convention on second reference. Do not capitalize *national convention* unless accompanied by the specific year or convention number.

Plan now to attend the 75th National FFA Convention. Welcome to the 2002 National FFA Convention. At the national convention, I toured the career show.

courtesy titles: In general, use them only for salutation in a letter. In formal writing, do not use Miss, Mr., Mrs., or Ms. in first reference. Use first and last name in first reference and only the last name in second reference. *Jane Smith, from Keokuk, Iowa, won the \$100 prize. Smith, a senior, will use the cash for a vacation. Dear Mr. Jones:*

An exception may be in feature writing for members, where we tend to refer to students by their first names and teachers by courtesy titles and last names.

D

dates: In formal writing, spell out months in their entirety. In more casual writing, abbreviation is acceptable for all months except May, June and July. When signifying a date with numerals only, please use forward slashes with the month first, day second and year last.

The convention will begin on October 31, 2002. Please respond by Jan. 15.

directions and regions: Lowercase when referring to a compass direction, capitalize when a region is being designated.

Michigan is north of here. My family is from the Midwest. The South lost the war.

But if a region is being identified that is not part of an official designation, use the lowercase.

We’re from southern Alabama. He experienced the raw emotion so common in Northern Ireland.

If in doubt, opt for the lowercase.

Do not capitalize FFA regions. They are not necessarily geographic regions. *Ohio is in the eastern region, but is generally considered a state in the Midwest.*

The central region had 258 American FFA Degree recipients this year.

Capitalize only when part of a title: *Central Region Vice President Doug Kueker.*

divisions: There are four divisions composed of the various teams. The divisions are Business Development, Information Services, Educational Programs and Development and Partnerships.

departments: FFA does not have departments, it has teams. Please see *Teams* entry.

dot-com: When referring to companies or locations on the Web, a dot-com company, use a hyphen. Plural form is “dot-coms.”

He worked with a dot-com that ended up going bankrupt.

E

e-mail: Hyphenate as shown. Capitalize only at the beginning of a sentence or as part of a formal title.

each / every: *Each* is a singular noun that requires a singular verb. *Every* is a bit trickier, but it also requires a singular verb and singular pronouns. Examples make this easier to understand:

WRONG: *Each of them have a place.*

RIGHT: *Each of them **has** a place.*

WRONG: *Every one of the papers have been graded.*

RIGHT: *Every one of the papers **has** been graded.*

WRONG: *Every one must sign their name.*

RIGHT: *Every one must sign his or her name.*

ensure / insure: *Ensure* means to guarantee. Always use *ensure* except when you specifically mean insurance as in monetary value of property, life and limb. *We want to ensure the project is successful. We will*

make every effort to ensure your satisfaction. The pension fund was fully diversified, ensuring the relative safety of its assets.

He insured the contents of his home with riders to his original policy.

F

FFA: Always treat the name of our organization with respect. On first reference, the full name, National FFA Organization, should be used and capitalized accordingly. For informal references, the word national doesn't need to be capitalized with FFA, unless the full title is being used.

FFA'er: Refrain from using FFA'er when indicating an FFA member, and NEVER use *FFA'er* in headlines. *FFA member* is acceptable.

FFA's: Our brand is uncluttered and more powerful when the three letters FFA stand alone. Do not make the acronym possessive. In all writing, rework your phrase so that FFA stands alone. Attempt to avoid this misuse when speaking as well as writing.

WRONG: *FFA's new programs*

RIGHT: *the new FFA programs*

FFA degrees: The names of FFA degrees should be capitalized and include the letters "FFA" on first reference, meaning the degrees become proper nouns. Greenhand FFA Degree, Chapter FFA Degree, State FFA Degree, American FFA Degree, Honorary American FFA Degree. On second reference, they may be referenced more casually, only without *FFA*. The exception? Always capitalize *American*.

Two Thousand-Four hundred students received the organization's highest honor, the American FFA Degree. He received his greenhand degree last year. She holds the American degree.

ffa.org: ffa.org is the official name for the national FFA website. FFA website on second reference.

FFA Week: Should be written as follows: FFA Week or National FFA Week

The 2002 FFA Week theme is "FFA Makes It Real."

farther/further: Farther refers to physical distance.

Further refers to an extension of time or degree.

We walked farther into the woods. He explained his theory further using hands-on examples.

Food For America: Refers to the program to teach young people about Food For America. Do not abbreviate.

foundation: See *National FFA Foundation*.

fundraising: Whether used as a noun, adjective, adverb or verb, do not hyphenate.

Fundraising by the National FFA Foundation supports National FFA programs and activities.

H

handicapped, disabled, impaired: The preferred term is *disabled*, but use this to describe an individual only if it is pertinent to the story or material. In general terms, *disabled* indicates a condition that interferes with an individual's ability to do something independently. See Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

high school agriculture: Use "high school agriculture" only when referring to programs specifically for high school students (middle schools may feel left out). When referring to the instructional program, use the term "agricultural education." Because of the narrow images associated with the word "vocational," we only use it when talking specifically about U.S. Department of Education projects or people. Use lowercase and do not abbreviate.

high school agriculture, not high school ag. Coleman Harris is a program specialist, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE.

I

inservice: The term inservice may be used as an adjective with a noun such as training, education, workshop, etc. It may not stand alone. Do not hyphenate inservice.

instructor: The individual in charge of an agricultural education program. He or she is **not** the "FFA teacher" (*see advisor*).

Internet terms:

download: Copying a document or file from the Internet to a personal computer.

e-mail: Electronic mail. Can be a noun or verb. Always use a hyphen.

homepage: A company or organization's domain on the Web.

HTML: Hypertext markup language — the computer language behind the web pages you see.

Internet: The global computer network — .net for short, capital "I" to denote a proper noun.

online: On the Internet, on an electronic network. One word.

website: One word. Refers to the entire site, usually directed to the homepage.

World Wide Web: The commercial part of the Internet. Web for short, or www as part of a Web address.

it's / its: Memorize this rule: *It's* with an apostrophe means "it is"; *its* without an apostrophe means "belonging to it." Don't go apostrophe crazy. If you can't use "it is" in place of the word in question, leave the apostrophe out.

The committee achieved its goals. The project reached its deadline.

It's my turn. I don't think it's going to happen. It's not my fault the product didn't live up to its potential.

J

junior, senior: Abbreviate as *Jr.* and *Sr.* only with full names. Do not precede with a comma: Joseph P. Kennedy *Jr.* The notation *II* or *2nd* may be used if it is the individual's preference. Note, however, that *II* and *2nd* are not necessarily the equivalent of junior —they often are used by a grandson or nephew. If necessary to distinguish between father and son in second reference, use the *elder Smith* or the *younger Smith*.

M

money: \$6, not \$6.00

N

names: After first reference in all hard news stories or press releases, use only the subject's last name. In feature stories, it is acceptable to use the subject's first name.

national advisor: Larry D. Case is the national FFA advisor. On first reference it may be National FFA Advisor Larry D. Case. In educational context, it may be Larry D. Case, Ed.D., but it is not Dr. Case. In second reference, it is national advisor or, simply, Case.

National FFA Center: Always capitalize when used as National FFA Center. Do not capitalize center when used alone.

They will meet at the center.

national FFA convention: national FFA convention is not capitalized unless you are referring to a specific convention. The 74th National FFA Convention or 2001 National FFA Convention

National FFA Foundation: In formal organizational writing, always mention the National FFA Foundation when referring to a sponsored project, activity or award. *The State Presidents' Conference is sponsored by CHEVY TRUCKS as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.*

Use the phrase "sponsored as a special project of the National FFA Foundation" or an approved variation thereof. On first reference, use the following terms and capitalize accordingly:

National FFA Foundation; National FFA Foundation Sponsors' Board; National FFA Foundation Executive Council

On second reference, use these terms and do not capitalize unless using "FFA":

FFA Foundation or foundation; foundation sponsors' board; foundation executive council or executive council

National FFA Organization: Refer to the organization by the acronym FFA .

The National FFA Organization is located in Indianapolis. Express as the organization on second reference.

National FFA Officers: The correct name for the organization's national officers is the National FFA Officers. Capitalize whenever referring to this official group as a proper noun, but lowercase if referring casually to the group.

We present the 2001-2001 National FFA Officers! The national officers have been busy in their travels.

In text, biographies and introductions, capitalize only when the national officer title immediately precedes the student's name. Lowercase officer titles when they stand alone. Do not hyphenate vice president. The year may be used if the story is about a former officer (e.g., 1999-00 National FFA President Chris Vitelli), Refer to the national FFA officers as follows:

Dane White, national president.

National FFA President Dane White.

The national president spoke at the banquet.

New Farmers of America: Former organization for African American males. The correct terminology for its relationship with FFA is that it was incorporated into FFA in 1965.

none: In general, use plural verbs and pronouns.
None have passed this way. He saw that none of them were ready.

nonmember: Not hyphenated unless a proper pronoun. (e.g., H. O. Sargent Non-Member Award)

numbers: In general, spell out single-digit numbers in text, but use numerals for 10 and above. Never begin a sentence with a numeral; either spell out the number or rewrite the sentence to move the number from the beginning. Very large round numbers should be spelled out (*one million* instead of 1,000,000) except when a dollar sign is present; then use a numeral and spell out *million* or *billion*. Dates should always get numerals (*October 31, 1966*). *Available in sets of six, eight or 12. He made \$3 million last year.*

O

officers: See *National FFA Officers*.

over: In general, use the word over to indicate spatial relationship only. It is grammatically incorrect to use it in reference to numbers. In almost all instances, replace with more than.

WRONG: *Over 150,000 people have tried it.*

RIGHT: *More than 150,000 people have tried it.*

P

phone numbers: Use dashes between area code, prefix and suffix. No parentheses.

317-817-5389, not (317)817-5389

plurals: Use an apostrophe only to indicate ownership. Otherwise, just add an s.

NLCSOs means more than one *NLCSO*. *NLCSO's* identifies something at a specific conference.

Perry had been chosen as his NLCSO's conference speaker.

publications: FFA publications should be written as follows:

FFA Advisors Making a Difference

FFA New Horizons

UPDATE

FFA Today Proceedings

FFA Chapter Catalog or *Student Catalog*

Official FFA Manual

Italicize publication titles in all references.

principal / principle: *Principal* is a noun and adjective meaning someone or something first in rank, authority, importance or degree. At FFA, we generally use *principal* to refer to a school principal, but it can also mean capital and monetary value. *Principle* is a noun that means a fundamental truth, doctrine or motivating force. *Joe Smith is the principal at Roncalli High School. His principal desire is to improve the school lunch program. He stands firm, deeply rooted in this principle.*

proficiency awards: Proficiency awards should be written as follows:

National FFA Agricultural Communications Proficiency Award

national agricultural communications proficiency award

program: When referring to the activities conducted by FFA members as part of their “SAE,” SAE is a **program** not project. “Projects” have a definite beginning and ending, whereas “programs” have a definite beginning but are continuous and evolve throughout the time a student is enrolled in an agricultural education program.

Program of Activities: Activities specified by the three standing committees that are to be accomplished by the local chapter, district, region or state association. It is **not** referred to as the “Program of Work.”

S

SAE: The acronym for “supervised agricultural experience program” and is defined as the individualized experience program designed in cooperation with the student, parents, agriculture instructor and, in some cases, employers to provide each student the opportunity to practice, in as near a real-life situation as possible, that which has been learned in the classroom. Correct use on first reference is: *supervised agricultural experience program (SAE)*. Once you have defined the acronym, use it consistently thereafter within the context of a single document.

SCANS: Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills. This is a Department of Labor report.

School-to-Career: A national education initiative stressing connections between school and careers. In “school-to-career language,” FFA key components are: school-based or contextual learning — classroom/laboratory instruction; work-based learning — SAE; a connecting activity — FFA.

spaces: Use one space between sentences for: letters, memos, internal documents, printed materials, newsletters, brochures, manuals and posting on the website.

Star awards: Stars are named, not awarded. Chapter Star Farmer, State Star Farmer, etc. The four highest awards the organization can bestow are the American Star Farmer, American Star in Agribusiness, American Star in Agriscience and American Star in Agricultural Placement. Always use the full, formal title in formal

writing. At FFA, we generally refer to the Star awards as a proper noun, and therefore, they are almost always capitalized.

Steven Friess was named American Star Farmer.

T

teams: The National FFA Organization is composed of seven teams: Student Services Team, Teacher Services Team, Ventures Marketing Team, Customer Service and Distribution Team, Administrative Services Team, Information Technology Team and Marketing and Communication Services Team. These are not to be called “departments.”

When referring to a specific activity area within a team, use a long dash, then the title of the area. *Student Services Team—Global*

telephone numbers: see *phone numbers*.

that / which: In general, you don’t need a comma when using *that* in a sentence, but you do need a comma when you use *which*. Both are relative pronouns. When at all possible, use *that* and avoid “lapsing into a comma.”

She used a new brand of coffee that didn’t keep her awake. She read the memo, which mentioned the appointment.

throughout: one word, no hyphen.

time: 6 p.m., not 6:00 p.m.

V

video titles: Video titles, like other composition titles, should be in italics. *Make It Happen* is a video about recruitment.

vocational: Because of the narrow images associated with the term “vocational,” we only use it when talking specifically about U.S. Department of Education projects or people.

Coleman Harris is a program specialist, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE.

W

website: Use as one word.

Y

Young Farmer: Always capitalize "Young Farmer" when referring to members of the National Young Farmer Educational Association (lowercase when referring to farmers under 12 years of age).

Your / you're: The word your is a pronoun that denotes ownership and is used whenever referring to an object or trait that belongs to a person. The contraction you're combines the words you are, and should only be used where "you are" could be substituted.

You dropped your wallet. I was reviewing your strengths and weaknesses. You're a real asset to this team.

Please let me know what you're doing.

Z

ZIP codes: Use two spaces between state and ZIP code. Use zip +four whenever possible. Indianapolis, IN 46268-0960

Grammar

Adjectives and adverbs

An adjective is a word that modifies a noun or pronoun. It answers *which one, how many or what kind*. *The big one. Seven books. A devoted student.*

Adverbs, on the other hand, usually modify verbs and answer *in what manner, to what degree, when, how, how many times* and so forth.

*He ran **quickly**. I'll do it **soon**. We went **twice**.*

Sometimes adverbs modify adjectives or other adverbs. *She finished **very** quickly.* (Very modifies the adverb, quickly, which in turn modifies the verb finished.)

*The work was **clearly** inadequate.* (Clearly modifies the adjective inadequate, which in turn modifies work.)

The best rule for spotting adverbs is to look for *-ly*. Of course, for confusion's sake, not all adverbs end in *-ly* and not all *-ly* words are adverbs: *soon, twice* and *never* are **adverbs**; *friendly, ugly* and *northerly* are **adjectives**.

Go easy on the adjectives and adverbs. While modifiers are necessary in any sort of writing, make sure your nouns and verbs are clear and are doing most of the work. There is no substitute for using the right noun in the first place.

Agreement

One of the fundamental rules of grammar is that the parts of a sentence should agree with each other. It's easier to demonstrate than to define agreement.

Agreement is usually instinctive in native English speakers. In "I *has* a minute," the verb *has* doesn't agree with the subject *I*. We would say "I *have*." In "John got their briefcase," assuming John got his own briefcase, *their* should be *his*. It's obvious.

Only rarely does it get tricky. A plural noun right in front of the singular verb can confuse you. Consider: Any one of the articles *are* available": the verb *are* shouldn't agree with *articles*, but with the subject, *one*. The sentence should read, "Any one of the articles is available."

A preposition or a verb that governs two pronouns can also cause problems. In "He wanted you and *I* for the team " the word *I* should be **me**; he wanted *you* and he wanted **me**, so he wanted you and **me**. Pay special attention to phrases such as *you and I, you and she*.

Capitalization

It's customary to capitalize:

- The first word of a sentence
- The first word in a line of poetry
- The major words in the title of a work
- Proper nouns (names), including most adjectives derived from proper nouns (Spanish from Spain, Freudian from Freud)
- Personal titles when they come before a name (Mr. Smith, Ms. Jones)
- All (or most) letters in an abbreviation or acronym (NASA, MRI)

Capitalize formal titles only when the title appears before a name. Lowercase job titles standing alone or set off by commas after a name. Do not capitalize formal titles after names.

National FFA Advisor Larry Case; Larry Case, national FFA advisor. The national FFA advisor was present.

Avoid unnecessary capitalization by using the following rules: Capitalize only proper names of a specific person, place or thing. Capitalize titles, programs, awards, etc., only if they include the organization's name or acronym (FFA).

National FFA Band, national band

2000 National FFA Convention, national convention

Owasso FFA Chapter, local chapters

At FFA, the first word of an independent clause after a colon gets a cap.

It leads us to one conclusion: Not enough rock bands use horn sections.

For more detailed information on specific cases, look under the item's individual entry.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are little words that connect various elements in a sentence, such as *if, and, but*. Coordinating conjunctions connect two things of the same kind — two nouns (cats *and* dogs), two verbs (kicking *and* screaming), two adjectives (short *and* stout) or even two

independent clauses (Bob sings louder, *but* Sheila has the better voice).

Subordinating conjunctions are a little trickier. A subordinating conjunction joins entire clauses, but one is principal, the other subordinate (“subordinate” means something like “secondary” or “under the control of”). A subordinating conjunction joins an independent clause to a dependent one, and it’s the conjunction that makes the dependent clause dependent. Take two independent clauses: “I went to the doctor” and “I feel rotten.” A subordinating conjunction shows their relation: “I went to the doctor because I feel rotten.”

Subordinating conjunctions include after, although, as if, because, before (but before can also be an adverb or a preposition), if, notwithstanding, since, so (as in “with the result that”), that (as in “I’m surprised that you’re here”), until, whenever, whereas and why.

Dangling modifiers/dangling participles

Avoid modifiers that do not refer clearly and logically to some word in the sentence. A present participle is a verb ending in –ing, and is called dangling when the subject of the –ing verb and the subject of the sentence do not agree

Example: *Taking our seats, the play started.* Who was taking the seats? The play didn’t take the seats, so this is an incorrect usage.

Correct: *Taking our seats, we settled in to watch the play.* We were taking our seats.

A good way to tell whether the participle or modifier is dangling is to put the modifier right after the subject of the sentence. Example: *We, taking our seats, settled in to watch the play.* If the sentence makes sense, you know it’s correct.

Rushing from the office, Bob’s printer broke.
Bob’s printer, rushing from the office, broke.
 Doesn’t make sense.

Dependent vs. independent clauses

A clause is a group of words with a subject and a verb, a part of a sentence. Some clauses can get by on their own without any help; these are called independent. Others can’t stand alone; either they don’t have their own subject and verb, or they’re subordinated to another

part of the sentence. These are dependent. Dependent clauses often begin with words like if, whether, since and so on. Knowing the difference can help you figure out when to use commas.

For example, consider the sentence “Since we’ve fallen a week behind, we’ll skip the second paper.” The first part, “since we’ve fallen a week behind,” is dependent, because it can’t be a sentence on its own. The second part, “we’ll skip the second paper,” does just fine on its own; it’s an independent clause. The independent clause can be a sentence without any help from the dependent clause.

Paragraph

A paragraph is a group of sentences that contains only one developed idea. A paragraph often begins with a topic sentence that sets the tone of the paragraph; the rest amplifies, clarifies or explores the topic sentence.

There’s no hard and fast rule for the length of a paragraph; it can be as short as a single sentence or as long as it has to be. Consider breaking a long paragraph for the ease and comfort of your readers. Paragraphs and the white spaces (indents or line breaks) that accompany them assist readers in keeping track of their place in long stretches of text.

Pronoun

A pronoun takes the place of a noun; it stands for the noun in a sentence. Pronouns include *he, it, her, me* and so forth. Instead of saying “Bob gave Terri a memo Bob wrote, and Terri read the memo,” we’d use the nouns *Bob, Terri* and *memo* only once, and let pronouns do the rest: “Bob gave Terri a memo *he* wrote, and *she* read *it*.”

Split infinitive

An infinitive is the form of a verb that comes after *to*, as in *to support* or *to write*. A split infinitive occurs when another word comes between the *to* and the verb. At FFA, we prefer to keep the *to* next to the verb at all times; it’s probably better to avoid split infinitives whenever possible.

WRONG: *Matt seems to always do it that way.*

RIGHT: *Matt always seems to do it that way.*

Punctuation

Apostrophe ’

The most common way to form a possessive in English is with apostrophe and s: “a hard day’s night.” After a plural noun ending in s, put just an apostrophe: “two hours’ work” (i. e., “the work of two hours”). If a plural doesn’t end in s — children, men, people — plain old apostrophe s: “children’s, “men’s,” “people’s.” It’s never mens or childrens.

There’s also the opposite case: when a singular noun ends in s. That’s a little trickier. At FFA, we use a single apostrophe after the s. James’ house. Note that the possessives of pronouns never get apostrophes: theirs, not their’s; hers, not her’s, its, not it’s (See It’s versus Its).

Don’t use apostrophes to make abbreviations or acronyms plural. They took their SATs, not They took their SAT’s. It’s much the same with decades. Don’t use an apostrophe before the s. Refer to the 1960s, not the 1960’s.

Use apostrophes to set off quotations within a quotation.

Jack said, “That man just said ‘doop doop’ to me. Do you know what ‘doop doop’ means?”

Colon :

A colon marks a pause for explanation, expansion, enumeration or elaboration. Use a colon to introduce a list: thing one, thing two and thing three. Use it to pause and explain: This sentence makes the point. Use it to give an example: this, for instance.

There are other uses. Americans use it after the salutation in a formal letter. It can also introduce a block quotation or a list of bullet points. See also Semicolon (don’t confuse them!) and the end of Capitalization.

Dash — and hyphen –

When using a dash, place a space on either side.
The award was given — and surely earned — by a deserving team.

An endash (regular hyphen) should be used for hyphenated words and to indicate ranges. (e.g., January 2-8; 6-8 grades; self-esteem)

If the dash is used as punctuation in a sentence to offset a phrase, use an emdash (e.g., type straight through — don’t leave a space) Also use the emdash as part of a company’s name (e.g., Monsanto —Crop Protection Business).

Ellipsis . . .

The ellipsis (plural *ellipses*) is the mark that indicates the omission of quoted material. An ellipsis consists of three periods with a space in between each. It can appear next to other punctuation, including an end-of-sentence period (resulting in four periods). He spoke eloquently and with great spirit for three hours about the dangers of long-windedness. *He spoke eloquently with great spirit . . . about the dangers of long-windedness.*

Period .

Periods end all sentences except questions. A period can also be used to form an ellipsis, and to designate the “dots” in Web addresses and file extensions. At FFA, we don’t use periods in telephone numbers.

Question mark ?

A question mark punctuates a question. If you’re phrasing a sentence as a question, please use a question mark.

Quotation marks “ ”

Quotation marks surround direct quotations within a sentence to let the reader know the writer is referencing material from someone else. At FFA, we prefer “curly quotes,” which face forward at the beginning of a quotation and backward at the end.

In America, commas and periods go inside quotation marks, while semicolons and colons go outside, regardless of the punctuation in the original quotation. Question marks and exclamation points depend on whether the question or exclamation is part of the quotation or part of the sentence containing the quotation.

Semicolon ;

The semicolon has only two common uses: 1) to separate the items in a list if one or more items contain a comma 2) to separate two independent clauses in one sentence. The first is obvious enough: We packed our pillows; cough syrup; strips of rough, orange cardboard; bottled water and dry socks. (Remember, we don't use a comma or a semicolon to separate the last item in a series when we use and.)

For the second, use this simple test: If you can use a period and a new sentence, you should use a semicolon. In this second use, the semicolon can always be replaced by a period and a new sentence. Simon's speech is monotonous. He bores me to tears.

Simon's speech is monotonous; he bores me to tears.

The two separate sentences can stand by themselves or be joined by a semicolon. The semicolon juxtaposes the two ideas, making their shared meaning more apparent.

Spaces

At FFA, we use single spaces after sentence-ending periods and colons. In fact, the only time we use double spaces is within an address to separate the ZIP code from the state.

Writing Tips

Audience

The key to all good writing is understanding your audience. Every time you use language, your attention should always be on the effect it will have on your audience. Think of grammar and style as you would table manners. Just like dining with a slob, a poorly written document can be a bad experience for the reader.

Your job as a writer is to have certain effects on your readers. Your readers are continuously judging you, consciously or unconsciously. To have the greatest effect, therefore, you'll have to adjust your style to suit the audience.

Action verbs

Action verbs, as the name reveals, express actions; contrast them with verbs of being. Think of the difference between “I study” (action verb) and “I am a student” (verb of being). It's often wise to replace passive verbs of being with action verbs; that will make your writing “punchier.”

Clichés

Avoid clichés. It's such common advice that it's almost a cliché itself, but no worse for that. It's stated clearly by Pinney: Clichés offer prefabricated phrasing that may be used without effort on your part. They are thus used at the expense of both individuality and precision, since you can't say just what you mean in the mechanical response of a cliché. In other words, if you're depending on a stock phrase, you're letting someone else do half your thinking for you.

If you must resort to clichés, though, be especially careful not to muddle them. Remember, for example, that the more widely accepted phrase is “I couldn't care less,” not could. Pay attention to every word.

Concrete language

Use specific, concrete words instead of vague, general ones wherever possible: instead of “apparent significant financial gains,” use “a lot of money” or “large profits.” Instead of “Job suffers a series of unfavorable experiences,” use “Job's family is killed and his possessions are destroyed.” Be precise.

Jargon

Jargon is the use of technical and organization-specific terms with such frequency and so little explanation that it becomes confusing for all but absolute experts. At FFA, a little jargon is sometimes necessary, but try not to let it rule your writing. Remember to state the full titles of programs first before jumping right in and using an acronym. If you're using terms specific to an activity or competition, assume your reader is starting from scratch. At the very least, explain your terms before you weave them through your writing.

Run-on sentences

Just as there's nothing inherently wrong with a long word, there's nothing inherently wrong with a long sentence. It can be long, but it has to be grammatical. A run-on sentence is ungrammatical, not just long, and usually involves misplaced or unused commas or semicolons. At FFA, we try to pay special attention to the needs of our readers. If you get tired writing the sentence, it's a good chance your reader will find it confusing. When in doubt, try to break up a long sentence into two shorter ones, especially in columnar text. When text is presented in columns, such as in *Making a Difference*, long sentences occupy lots of vertical space. It can be difficult to keep your place without a break now and then.

Chapter 11: Copy Writing Tips and Key Messages

Please use this information for your communication materials such as advertising copy, posters and flyers.

BROCHURES AND PROGRAMS

HEADLINES

- Brief and attention-getting; use a sub headline if necessary.
- If you are using a visual or photos, make sure the headline connects with the visual.
- FFA should always be in the headline.

BODY COPY

- Brief prose-style establishing the messages
- Brief, supporting bullet copy; keep it simple and to the point
- Use bullet points to emphasis key messages or benefit phrases for emphasis.
- Avoid fancy, hard-to-read type; remember to always keep it simple and to the point.
- Use pictures and captions to add interest; make sure to list people left to right and spell their names properly.
- Action verbs such as Join, Lead, Launch at the beginning of bullet point are great for motivating people.

KEY “BENEFIT” WORDS/PHRASES FOR FFA

• MEMBERSHIP

When speaking or writing about members, use these descriptors in your copy :

- Enthusiastic
- Spirited
- Upbeat, fun
- Good character, trustworthy
- Hard working, responsible
- Connected
- Stewards of all living things

• BENEFITS OF FFA MEMBERSHIP

These are great words and phrases to describe the benefits you gain from FFA:

- It is fun and exciting
- Supported by great teachers who care
- “Hands-on” learning opportunities in and out of the classroom

- Opportunity to travel and make lifelong friends
- A great place to make friends for a lifetime
- Promotes American values and citizenship
- Builds confidence and self-respect
- Career connection within agriculture for better jobs
- Develops potential and makes a positive difference
- FFA helps you to be your best.
- A whole new way to experience school

• GENERAL FFA MESSAGES

- Teach Ag Ed.
- Think Ag Ed. Think FFA. Think Success.
- FFA is a life-changing organization, committed to students achieving their goals by discovering their unique talents and passions in life.
- More than 300 diverse career opportunities through Agricultural Education and FFA
- More than 300 careers in agriculture, from turf grass management to landscape architecture to food science to production agriculture
- Hands-on learning and career exploration at the local level
- Leadership and personal growth development at the local level
- Agricultural Education and FFA offer sustained, intensive and total education.
- Agricultural Education appeals to what young adults respond to.

• FFA at 75 MESSAGES

- Celebrate FFA at 75. One Mission: Student Success.
- Celebrate 75 years of student success.
- Celebrate 75 years of fulfilling the powerful mission of FFA and Agricultural Education.
- Celebrate 75 years of life-changing LEADERSHIP from local FFA and agricultural advisors.
- Celebrate 75 years of Service from the National FFA Organization.
- Celebrate 75 years of support from local and national communities.