

Style Guide from Ashford University: Lists

Information is often written in a list to improve readability. Two types of lists are used in writing. If a list is incorporated into a sentence, it is referred to as a horizontal or run-in list. If items are stacked below an introductory phrase or sentence, the list is called a vertical or display list. In either case, a list should always be introduced by a phrase or a complete sentence.

Rule #1:

All items in a list should be parallel in expression and format. The items should all be words, phrases, or complete sentences, not mixed. If one item begins with a verb, the others should begin with verbs. If one item ends with a comma, they should all end with commas.

Rule #2:

Limit a list to ten items. Too many items in a list defeat the purpose of separating the items for the reader.

Rule #3:

You can use different methods of formatting lists within the same document, as long as all lists of the same type are formatted the same way.

Horizontal lists

Rule #4:

Use a horizontal list for short listings or a chronology of events.

Example of Rule #4:

After work, I need to get gas, pick up some groceries, and stop **Rule**

#5:

A horizontal list may be numbered or unnumbered. Numbers are used to give items in the list special emphasis.

Example of Rule #5:

Tips on interviewing include (1) researching the organization, (2) identifying personal strengths and weaknesses, (3) communicating enthusiasm during the interview, and (4) asking for a business card to follow up with a thank-you *Punctuation in horizontal lists*

Rule #6:

In a list with three or more items, separate items with commas. Use the word and only before the last item in the list, and always follow the last item with the proper punctuation when the list ends the sentence.

Examples of Rule #6:

Acceptable identification includes a driver's license, a social security card, and a passport.

First we have to pick up Mike, Kevin, and Kristen from the **Rule #7:**

Use a colon after a complete sentence that introduces a numbered or unnumbered horizontal list.

Examples of Rule #7:

I have owned several cars: a Honda Accord, a Ford Escort, and a Volkswagen Jetta. I have owned several cars: (1) a Honda Accord, (2) a Ford Escort, and (3) a Volkswagen Jetta.

DO NOT use a colon if the list is introduced by an incomplete sentence.

In this case, items in the list complete the sentence.

The places I wish to visit include Hawaii, the Bahamas, and **Rule**

#8:

Use a colon after a sentence that introduces a horizontal list and includes the words the following, as follows, these, or thus.

Example of Rule #8:

Cody test-drove the following cars: a Dodge Ram, a Ford Explorer, and a Toyota 4Runner.

DO NOT use a colon if the sentence is followed by a transitional word or phrase such as namely, for example, for instance, or however. In that case, use a semicolon before the transitional word and a comma after it.

Many exercises can increase endurance; for example, (1) running, **Rule**

#9:

In a horizontal list introduced with a complete sentence, if the items in the list are also complete sentences follow these rules: (1) use a colon after the introductory sentence, (2) capitalize the first word of each sentence, and (3) end the sentences with appropriate punctuation.

Example of Rule #9:

Three simple actions will guarantee customer satisfaction: (1) Respond to customer requests immediately. Do not put a request on hold for more than 24 hours. (2) Be sure shipments are complete. Before mailing a package, double-check the contents. (3) Quote prices accurately. Let customers know items on backorder for **Rule #10:**

If the introductory statement is a complete sentence, but the items in the horizontal list are not complete sentences, use a colon after the introductory information and end the last item with a period.

Example of Rule #10:

Carrie enjoys many summer sports: bicycling, water-skiing, **Rule**

#11:

In a horizontal list, use semicolons to separate complete sentences or items that already contain commas.

Example of Rule #11:

I applied to three schools for my master's degree: California State University, Chico; California State University, Sacramento; and California State *Capitalization in horizontal lists*

Rule #12:

In a horizontal list, capitalize the first word in each item only if it is a proper noun.

Examples of Rule #12:

If you stop by the office supply store, we need paper, pencils,
Before you leave, make sure you send the fax to our offices in *Vertical*

lists

Rule #13:

Use a vertical list for a long list, for items that are complex or contain lengthy phrases or sentences, or for items you want to stand out. In a vertical list, number the items when they are arranged in sequence or in a hierarchy. If the arrangement is arbitrary, you may leave the items unnumbered or you may use bullets, checkmarks, or other symbols to separate the items.

Examples of Rule #13:

Sequential List

Arbitrary List

In this meeting, we will address three issues:

In this meeting, we will address three issues: (1) pay raises (2) sales goals (3) employee benefits

- pay raises sales goals
- employee benefits

Rule #14:

Single space the items in a vertical list. However, if any item contains more than one line, you may leave a space between the items and before and after the list. In a numbered vertical list, start second and subsequent lines under the first word of the first line (not under the number).

Examples of Rule #14:

Please make all customers aware of the following:

(1) Returns will be processed as soon as they are received, but at least two business days should be allowed for accounts to be posted. *Punctuation in vertical lists*

Rule #15:

Use a colon after a complete sentence that introduces a numbered, unnumbered, or bulleted vertical list.

Examples of Rule #15:

You should know these rules:

1. The deadline for applications is July 1.
2. Handwritten applications will not be accepted.

DO NOT use a colon (or any other form of punctuation) if the vertical list is introduced by an incomplete sentence. In this case, items in the list complete the sentence.

Two types of printers are

1. laser **Rule**

#16:

Use a colon after a sentence that introduces a vertical list and includes the words the following, as follows, these, or thus.

Examples of Rule #16:

We saw the following cars:

1. a BMW
2. a Jaguar
3. a Porsche

DO NOT use a colon before a numbered vertical list when a sentence that contains the words the following, as follows, these, or thus is followed by another sentence before the listed items.

We saw the following cars. All of them were located at the Auto Mall.

1. a BMW
2. a Jaguar
3. a Porsche

DO NOT use a colon if the sentence is followed by a transitional word or phrase such as namely, for example, for instance, or however. In that case, use a semicolon before the transitional word and a comma after it.

Several places offer exotic vacations; for example,

- (1) Bermuda
- (2) Jamaica

maica **Rule #17:**

In a vertical list introduced with a complete sentence, if the items themselves are also complete sentences, capitalize the first word of each item and end each item with appropriate punctuation.

Example of Rule #17:

Three simple actions will guarantee customer satisfaction:

1. Respond to customer requests immediately. Do not put a request on hold for more than 24 hours.
2. Be sure shipments are complete. Before mailing a package, double-check the contents.
3. Quote prices accurately. Let customers know that items on backorder for more than **Rule #18:**

In a vertical list introduced with a complete sentence, if the list items are not complete sentences, you may separate them with commas. The word and should follow the comma after the next to last item, with a period added after the last item.

Example of Rule #18:

Three forms of identification are accepted:

driver's license, social
security card, and
passport.

NOTE: You have the option of omitting the punctuation in a list of items that are not complete sentences. In that case, the "and" is not added.

Rule #19:

If items in a vertical list are not complete sentences and one or more of them contain internal commas, separate the items with semicolons.

Example of Rule #19:

Qualified applicants must have

1. a master's degree or a Ph.D. from an accredited college or university;
2. experience in teaching, management, or administration; and

Capitalization in vertical lists**Rule #20:**

Capitalize the first letter of each item in a vertical list if the items are complete sentences. Because each item is a complete sentence, use proper punctuation to end the sentences.

Examples of Rule #20:

I ask two things of my employees:

- (1) Arrive on time.

Rule #21:

Capitalize the first letter of each item in a vertical list if the items are proper nouns.

Examples of Rule #21:

I only applied to two institutions:

- (1) California State University, Chico **Rule**

#22:

Capitalizing items in a vertical list that are not complete sentences or proper nouns is optional. Just be consistent throughout the document.

Example of Rule #22:

Three forms of identification are accepted:

- Driver's license
- Credit card