

West Virginia Legislature

Bill Drafting Manual

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RULES OF DRAFTING - STYLE AND GRAMMAR

1. Consistency

- a. Don't use different words to denote the same thing.
- b. Don't use the same words to denote different things.
- c. Use the same words and phrases in a new section or new article or in an amendment to a section or article that are already used in other parts of the section, article or chapter.

Example: If "spouse" is used, do not change the reference in your bill to "widow or widower." If several notices are to be sent by "registered mail," do not change the reference in your bill to "certified mail."

- d. Use the same grammatical form in a series.

Example: Gerunds - selling, advertising, marketing, etc.
Infinitives - to sell, to advertise, to market, etc.

- e. Use parallel construction. This ensures that all items in a series relate to the initial phrase.

Example: The commissioner shall:

- (1) Report to
- (2) Advise the
- (3) Supervise the

INCORRECT: (4) The commissioner shall regulate

2. Brevity

Brevity is good but don't overdo and arrive at confusion.

3. Sentences

Sentences should be short and express only a single thought. Clarity is better than appearance.

4. Order

State circumstances first; then, the law; and at the end, the exceptions. Short exceptions may be stated first. Avoid unwieldy circumstances--make a list where necessary.

5. Tense

Avoid future tense (will be paid) and future perfect tense (will have been paid). Use present tense (is paid).