

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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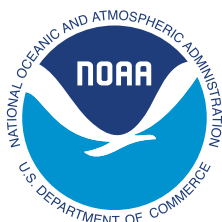
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BEING A WRITER IS A VERY PECULIAR SORT OF JOB. IT'S ALWAYS YOU VERSUS A BLANK SHEET OF PAPER (OR A BLANK SCREEN) AND QUITE OFTEN THE BLANK PIECE OF PAPER WINS.

– Neil Gaiman

April 2024, Issue 63



COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

NATIVE AMERICAN STYLE GUIDANCE

My organization's unyielding commitment to quality is one of the many things I like about working here (NOAA's Office for Coastal Management). That commitment manifests itself in many ways, one being the use of a professional editor to ensure that our written word is accurate and professionally presented.

Our primary editor has been with us for almost 25 years. He and a co-editor edit nearly everything released from our office, from letters to 50-page reports and webpage updates. They base most of their daily editing decisions on our style guide.

During the past couple of years, discussions about the style guide have come up more frequently, recently because of a renewed interest in how federal and state governments portray and serve Native Americans. While the intentions are always good, there is a tendency (in my humble opinion) in government to over-capitalize when writing about itself, or just about anything. I say "government," but the same can be said about most professions, from real estate and restaurant menus to economic reports. While there is no 100 percent right or wrong way to handle this, I'd like to introduce you to the approach taken by our editors.

The Style Guide

But first, let's define the style guide. I liken a style guide to scientific standards or authoritative data, except the focus is on the written word. Editorial style determinations for our office are based on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, a stalwart for this sort of thing. We also look to other established sources to meet content-specific needs, which include the *Associated Press (AP) Stylebook*, and in the instance of matters relating to Native Americans, the editorial guide created by the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#)—among others. These guidance publications, especially the *AP Stylebook*, are frequently updated to mirror changing times, particularly when it comes to culturally sensitive usage matters. Fortunately, most of these style resources are in agreement in regard to the suggested approaches.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Other organizations may approach this task differently, as they may create style and language usage guidelines based on their particular situation, which is certainly okay. But our editors (myself included) prefer to follow mainstream, established protocols as much as possible.

Capitalization Basics

There is a lot we can talk about here, but let's focus on the situations most often seen within our office when it comes to writing about Native American matters. The emphasis here is on proper use of capitalization.

tribe, *but* Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians of Washington (proper names)

tribal, *but* Ojibway Tribal Council (proper names)

tribal nation, *but* Mi'kmaq Nation (proper names)

federal, the **federal government**

state, *but* State of Indiana

Native American (*but for Alaska, use Alaska Natives*). *Can use Native on second reference; also Native communities, Native games, etc.*

Native American tribe, Native tribe

Indigenous, Indigenous peoples,

Indigenous knowledge – *Capitalize*

Indigenous to refer to original inhabitants of a place.

American Indians (*but not Indian by itself to refer to an individual*)

Regardless of what the style guide says, our goal is to show respect for our audience. If we know an audience has specific sensitivities, then by all means, we work to adhere to those sensitivities as much as possible. For example,

certain words or concepts are not welcomed by various groups (“underserved,” “vulnerable populations,” “stakeholder,” or “chief,” to name a few). Another example: tribes have varying preferences for the title used for a tribal leader (such as “chairman,” “chairperson,” “president,” or sometimes “chief”).

Some Native American groups have their own style guides, and within these documents their written and verbal preferences are clarified. Our office always recommends searching for and studying those guides, and tribal websites, when meeting with specific tribes. That said, it's impractical to incorporate every style preference of every group into an overall style, which is one of the reasons we follow the established and broadly applicable style guides.

And you have to be careful. One member of a group might say, “Oh yes, you have to do it this way,” whereas other members, or groups, may feel differently. Unless there is an established style guide and a commitment to follow it, inconsistency can abound.

Final Thoughts

Everything is subject to change as our language continues to evolve. Probably the most important things a writer or speaker can do is respect the audience, institute some form of standards for your office's written word, pay attention to changing times (and yet not weave with every opinion expressed), and strive, above all, for consistency within each document.

Donna McCaskill
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COMMUNICATION PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Featured products: Infographic:
Generative AI Explained by AI

Source: Visual Capitalist,
visualcapitalist.com/generative-ai-explained-by-ai

Submitted by: Pamela Jacobs,
Lynker for NOAA's Office for
Coastal Management

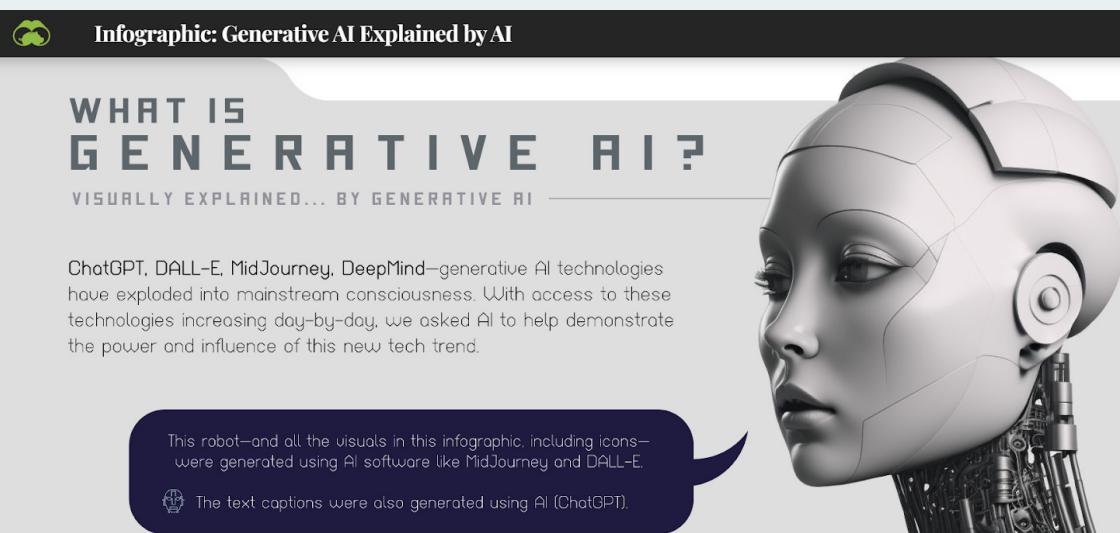
What it is: It's all in the title: this is an infographic about artificial intelligence (AI) that was created using artificial intelligence. AI is nothing if not masterful at all things meta.

Why I like it: Fresh off a training on using AI in communications, I've got it on the brain. I knew I wanted to find a communication product having something to do with AI to highlight as this month's product, but much like with AI itself, I wasn't sure where to begin; it's exciting and intriguing, but can be totally overwhelming. Then I thought,

"Wouldn't it be great if I could find something created with AI to explain AI?"—and lo and behold, because I looked to the internet, where if you can think it, you can find it, I came across this infographic.

First and foremost, the very fact that it was almost entirely generated by AI helps explain what AI is and what it can be used for. But the infographic also includes a succinct overview of what AI is and examples of what can be created by specific AI programs (spoiler: there's a limerick). So if you're not sure what AI-generated images or content (or limericks!) look like, this provides several examples. One thing to note: this infographic is now a year old, which is about a decade in technology time, but the overall concepts, applications, and examples are all still relevant.

(Please note: this is not an endorsement of the designers, websites, or any proprietary tools, but simply this writer's opinion on a good communication product.)



FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – RISK COMMUNICATION MENTAL SHORTCUTS

You've probably noticed that when communicating an important issue to people, they tend to react based on their own past experiences, or focus on only one aspect of the conversation. It's because people often use mental shortcuts when talking about risk, which can be a major roadblock for the person leading the conversation. This short, self-guided tutorial helps you recognize when and why people use mental shortcuts, and offers tips for handling them effectively. Find it here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/mental-shortcuts.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, and tag along with these themes:

- All month: Coastal management photo contest
- April 1 to 5: Florida (Gulf Coast)
- April 8 to 12: Citizen Science Week

- April 15 to 19: Puerto Rico
- April 22: Earth Day
- April 22 to 26: U.S. Virgin Islands
- April 29 to May 3: Hurricane Prep Week

TAILORED IMPACT STORIES

Earth Day—celebrated globally on April 22—is like the Super Bowl for everyone working in environmental science and conservation. In honor of our big day, you can highlight some of the game-changing work being done throughout the state coastal management programs and research reserves. Office for Coastal Management impact stories can be filtered by program and theme to easily share the exact stories that suit your needs. For example, find all Bipartisan Infrastructure Law stories [here](#); all coastal zone management conservation stories [here](#); and all research reserve natural infrastructure stories [here](#).

FAST FACTS – NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

This is one of the many graphics and facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/natural-infrastructure.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

Natural Infrastructure
**Wetlands and reefs
and mangroves...oh my!**

Billions in savings (\$23 billion/year),
services (water quality and storm protection),
and value (37% higher property value).

Coastal Communicators is published by the NOAA Office for Coastal Management.

To subscribe to this newsletter, visit coast.noaa.gov/contactform.

Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

View past issues at coast.noaa.gov/gallery/newsletter.html.

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