

Office of the Harris County Attorney Style Manual

Written communications from the Office of the Harris County Attorney should reflect not only the style of the individual writer but also be consistent, maintain certain standards, and convey a positive image of our Office. The purpose of this style manual is to establish a standard for clear and consistent writing in the publications, websites and other communications of the HCAO.

This manual will help answer common questions we encounter in our writing, will enhance our ability to work together, and will also serve as a training aid for new members of our Office.

The Texas Law Review Manual on Usage & Style (MoUS) is the guide followed by the HCAO except as modified below.

Please follow these conventions in written communications:

Refer to Vince Ryan as Vince Ryan and not Vincent Ryan.

Use Terence O'Rourke in formal written matters such as legal pleadings, formal letters, and Commissioners Court orders, otherwise Terry is ok.

There is no apostrophe in Commissioners Court.

Not Commissioner's Court

Not Commissioners' Court

When referring to the Office of the Harris County Attorney, uppercase Office and Harris County Attorney:

Example: "We work for the Office of the Harris County Attorney."

Example: "We know our Office helps elected officials." (Uppercase Office but not our).

The preferred abbreviation is HCAO but CAO is acceptable if the context is clear.

When referring to Harris County uppercase County.

Example: "the County" or "our County".

When referring to a Harris County office or department use uppercase.

Example: The Tax Assessor-Collector when referring to the office in Harris County.

When referring to a government office generically do not uppercase the first letter.

Example: Every Texas county has a commissioners court. The Harris County Commissioners Court met today.

When using the word "precinct" state whether the reference is to a constable, a justice of the peace, commissioner, or election precinct unless the context is clear.

Example: “He works for Commissioner Precinct Four.” Do not write: “He works for Precinct Four.”

Spell out the precinct numbers. Not Commissioner Precinct 3, but Commissioner Precinct Three.”

Generally spell out dates: May 1, 2011 is preferable to 5/1/11.

The legal name of the county is Harris County, not Harris County, Texas.

Sugar Land is the name of the city but there may be companies or other entities which use the name Sugarland.

La Porte is the name of the city but there may be companies or other entities which use the name Laporte.

The correct acronym for the Texas Department of Transportation is TxDOT.

Typographical conventions:

Do not italicize and underline at same time.

Do not bold and underline at the same time.

Use full justify in the body of written communications.

Salutations and greetings:

The website <http://www.formsofaddress.info/USO.html> provides guidance on how to address letters and other communications to officials.

Commissioners Court:

Harris County Commissioners Court
1001 Preston, Suite 911
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Judge Emmett and Commissioners:

Elected Officials:

The Honorable Ed Emmett
Harris County Judge
1001 Preston, 9th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Judge Emmett:

The Honorable El Franco Lee
Harris County Commissioner Precinct One
1001 Preston, 9th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Commissioner Lee:

The Honorable Kenneth W. Berry
Harris County Constable Precinct One
1302 Preston, 3rd Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Constable Berry:

Department heads and appointed officials:

Arthur L. Storey, Jr. P.E.
Executive Director
Public Infrastructure Department
1001 Preston, 5th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Storey:

William Jackson
Executive Director/County Budget Officer
Budget Management Department
1001 Preston, Suite 630
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Jackson:

Michael D. Talbott, P.E.
Director
Harris County Flood Control District
9900 Northwest Freeway
Houston, TX 77092

Dear Mr. Talbott:

David Lopez
President and CEO
Harris County Hospital District
2525 Holly Hall
Houston, TX 77054

Dear Mr. Lopez:

Peter Key
Director,
Harris County Toll Road Authority

77001 Wilshire Place Dr.
Houston, TX 77040

Dear Mr. Key:

David Turkell
Director
Community Services Department
8410 Lantern Point
Houston, TX 77054

Dear Mr. Turkell:

Barbara Schott
County Auditor
1001 Preston, 8th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Ms. Schott:

Kelly Johnson
Purchasing Agent
1001 Preston, Suite 670
Houston, TX 77002

Dear Mr. Johnson:

Standard Form for Signature Blocks

In letters:

Sincerely,

VINCE RYAN
County Attorney

BY: John Doe
Assistant County Attorney

Email Communications:

Signature blocks in formal email communications to those outside of the office should be in a format similar to the following:

John Doe
Senior Assistant County Attorney
Office of Vince Ryan
Harris County Attorney
1019 Congress, 15th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002
Phone (713) 755-4321
Fax (713) 755-1234
Email john.doe@cao.hctx.net

We do not have to use a signature block in informal emails (even to those outside the office) or in internal communications.