

# PUNCTUATION

*This section provides a crash course in basic punctuation and grammar. It is important to remember that punctuation rules are set, but punctuation style can and does fluctuate. This is why it is important to have one guide or house style that governs all communication.*



## the period

### PERIODS

Use a period at the end of a complete sentence or independent clause.

*A period does not denote a complete sentence. Be careful of fragments!  
Make sure you have both a subject and verb.*

#### **Example**

> “Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

The period serves as a hard stop, ending one idea to introduce another. Opt for a medium or soft stop by using a semi-colon or comma and conjunction to show a closer relationship between or combine two thoughts.

*You cannot combine more than two sentences. A period must be used at the end of the second, joined independent clause.*

Only one space should separate a period and the start of the next sentence.

# the comma

## COMMAS

Use a comma for clarity in a sentence.

### Examples

- > “While they were eating, Jesus took bread” (Matthew 26:26 NIV).
- > The Nursery was full of crying babies, and mothers.

Use a comma to separate items in a series or list. Always include the comma before the conjunction to prevent confusion.

### Example

- > There is an 8:30, 9:45, and 11:00AM service to choose from at Northside.

Use a comma and conjunction to combine two sentences.

*| No comma is needed when combining words or phrases.*

### Example

- > The clergy were happy yet exhausted after six Christmas Eve services.

Use commas to offset a word, phrase, or clause that interrupts, or is separate, from the main clause yet offers additional context.

*| Words can appear in the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence.*

*| Phrases are not essential to the main idea and often provide additional context.*

*| Clauses are often dependent and begin with a preposition.*

### Examples

- > Oh, no he didn't!
- > Dr. Burch, the Senior Pastor at Northside Church, fancies himself a writer.
- > Despite the rain, more than 200 came out to Wednesday Night Dinner.
- > The choir crushed its Festival Worship program, which saw record attendance.

Most often, dependent clauses begin with prepositions. There are 50+ unique prepositions, but here is a list of the most recognizable.

*of, in, to, for, with, on, at, from, by, about, as, into, through, after, over, between, out, against, during, because, since, without, within, before, under, around, among, despite, upon, until, along, beyond, plus, except*

### Examples

- > Between the ice and freezing temperatures, Roller Hockey practice was cancelled.
- > All of the Preschool kids played outside today, except for Matt.
- > Before commencing an Adult Discipleship class, we always pray.

Use a comma between multiple compound or single-word adjectives that each describe the same noun.

*| If there are three or more adjectives modifying the same noun, it is perfectly acceptable to treat them as a list and include the conjunction.*

### Example

- > Today is bright, sunny, and breezy: a perfect day for The Picnic.

*| If sequential adjectives do not modify the same noun, then no comma is needed.*

### Example

- > The child brought a bright green iguana for Blessing of the Pets.  
(The iguana is bright green, not bright and green.)

Use commas to offset elements of a physical address.

### Example

- > Our address is 2799 Northside Drive NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30305.

Use commas to indicate numbers of one thousand or larger.



# semicolons vs. colons

## SEMICOLONS

Use a semicolon to join two sentences together to show a stronger relationship.

*Semicolons are not necessary at all. You can just as easily use a comma and conjunction to combine two sentences. It is the author's choice which punctuation to use.*

### Example

- > Content for the newsletter has a strict deadline; this gives Creative Services ample time to design, proof, print, and ensure members receive it in a timely manner.

Use semicolons to clarify a series that includes commas.

### Example

- > Northside Missions supports missionaries in Long Island, Bahamas; Orlando, FL; and Budapest, Hungary.

*If the individual items in the series do not include commas, do not use semicolons.*

## COLONS

A colon is used to introduce a list of items.

*Do not use a colon when the listed items are incorporated into the sentence.*

### Example

- > Northside Church offers three opportunities to worship on Sunday mornings: Traditional services at 8:30 and 11:00AM, and a Contemporary service at 9:45AM.

A colon can be placed between two complete sentences when the second explains or illustrates the first.

*Do not confuse a semicolon with a colon here. The former shows a stronger relationship between two sentences, while the latter implies the second sentence contains specific context that clarifies the first.*

*The first word following the colon should not be capitalized, unless the word requires it.*

### Examples

- > I have little time to finish this newsletter article: I leave for vacation in two hours.
- > Three ministries host major summer activities: Students has MAP, Children's has VBS, and Music Ministry has Choir Tour.

Use a colon to emphasize a phrase or single word at the end of the sentence.

*In this way the colon acts similar to an equals sign in Math.*

### Example

- > After much deliberation, the church leadership chose a theme for 2018: All In.

A colon also has several nongrammatical uses:

Time (11:00AM)  
Ratios (1:3)  
Biblical references (Colossians 3:17)  
Professional correspondence  
> Dear Ms. Jackson:  
> cc: Tom Smith  
> Attn: Business Office  
> PS: Don't forget to come to Wednesday Night Dinner!

# en dash vs. em dash

## EN DASH

The en dash is used to represent a span or range of numbers, dates, or time. Depending on context, the en dash is read as ‘to’ or ‘through.’

| *There should be no space between the en dash and adjacent text.*

| *The en dash (–) is slightly wider than the hyphen (-) but narrower than the em dash (—).*

### Examples

- > This year's Choir Tour will travel June 8–16.
- > The church holds office hours during the week: 7:00AM–5:00PM.

| *If you introduce a span with words, such as ‘from’ or ‘between,’ no en dash is needed.*

### Examples

- > The budget meeting today is from 10:00 to 11:00AM.
- > Dr. G. Gil Watson served as Northside's Senior Pastor from 1994 to 2017.

## EM DASH

The em dash is an extremely versatile punctuation mark, and depending on the context, it can replace commas, parentheses, or colons—each case having a slightly different effect.

| *Em dashes are best limited to two per sentence, and there should be no space before or after, similar to en dashes.*

| *If the em dash sets off a clause at the end of the sentence, only a single dash is used.*

### Em Dashes in Place of Commas:

A pair of em dashes can be used in place of commas to enhance readability. Oftentimes, they are used when a particularly long or irrelevant dependent clause interrupts the main idea. Em dashes create more pause than a comma, so choose whichever works best.

| *An irrelevant dependent clause is simply a phrase that offers additional context but is unnecessary in understanding the main idea of the sentence.*

### Example

- > When Preschool finally resumed in August—after being closed for summer break—there were a lot of happy parents in the carpool lane.

### Em Dashes in Place of Parentheses:

A pair of em dashes can also replace parentheses. Dashes are considered less formal and more intrusive than parentheses. If you want to draw attention to the parenthetical content, use em dashes.

| *It is not advisable to use parentheses or multiple em dashes to set off parenthetical content in formal writing. Including parenthetical content, regardless of punctuation, serves to interrupt the main idea and flow of your sentence. Use caution and consider rewording.*

### Em Dashes in Place of a Colon:

The em dash can also be used to replace the colon, when you want to emphasize the conclusion of your sentence.

| *The em dash is less formal than the colon, and the colon already serves to accentuate the conclusion of a sentence. Thus, only use if you wish to emphasize further.*

# hyphens vs. compounds



## HYPHENS

A hyphen's primary function is to bring together certain **compound** terms.

*Be careful to never use a hyphen (-) in place of an en dash (–) or em dash (—), or use it to divide a word at the end of a document margin.*

## TYPES OF COMPOUNDS

Compounds consist of more than one word representing a single item or idea. They come in three styles and can act as three different parts of speech: nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

Open (or spaced) compounds are written as separate words.

- > long term
- > car wash
- > living room

Closed (or solid) compounds are written as a single word.

- > lifestyle
- > bookstore
- > waterproof

Hyphenated compounds are written with hyphens between the words.

- > eye-opener
- > four-year-old
- > free-for-all

## COMPOUND NOUNS, VERBS, AND ADJECTIVES

Deciding whether compound nouns and verbs are open, closed, or hyphenated is typically easier, as most are found in a dictionary.

Compound adjectives are the most difficult, as most will not be found in a dictionary. Also, whether the compound is hyphenated or open depends on its position in the sentence. Let's start with defining a compound adjective.

–A compound adjective is two or more words collectively acting as a single adjective that precedes and modifies a noun. In this case, they are hyphenated.

### Examples

- > Northside comes with a state-of-the-art security system.
- > The purchase came with a money-back guarantee.
- > This month's spotlight features a 94-year-old man with an incredible life story.

–Sometimes a compound adjective is represented in a series or list. In this case, be sure to include the hyphens in the appropriate places.

### Example

- > The Preschool class accepts two-, three-, and four-year-olds.

–A compound adjective is only hyphenated when it precedes the noun it is modifying. If it does not, then no hyphens are necessary.

### Examples

- > Northside has time-honored traditions.
- > The traditions at Northside are time honored.

–Lastly, when a compound consists of one adverb that ends in an 'ly,' a hyphen is unnecessary, even if the compound precedes the noun. However, if the adverb is part of a larger compound adjective, use hyphens.

### Examples

- > The regularly attended Wednesday Night Dinner has become a midweek staple.
- > The not-so-regularly-attended staff devo still meets every Wednesday.



# quotation marks

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## QUOTATION MARKS

Quotation marks are primarily used to reference material verbatim.

## ADJACENT PUNCTUATION

Although illogical at times, the rules for treating punctuation with quotation marks are firmly set and do not change.

–Commas and periods that are part of the sentence always go inside the quotation marks.

### Example

> “The path to Salvation,” bellowed the pastor, “is through Jesus Christ.”

–Unless they are part of the quoted text, all other punctuation are placed outside the quotation marks, including colons, semicolons, exclamation points, and question marks.

### Examples

> The 2018 sermon title for Easter Sunday was “Opening Day”; it served as the culmination of Dr. Bill Burch’s series *Spring Training*.

> Isn’t the third part of our mission “**GO** into the world to serve others”?

## INTRODUCING QUOTED MATERIAL

The comma is the mark most frequently used to introduce a quote.

### Examples

> Northside’s membership vow reads, “With you we renew our pedge to uphold Northside United Methodist Church with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.”

> The Sunday Greeter welcomed us by saying, “It’s so good to see you!”

A colon is used when the text introducing the quote can stand alone as a complete sentence. This is preferred as a much cleaner way to introduce quotes, especially lengthy ones.

### Example

> Northside has one motto: “There’s a place for you at Northside Church.”

*Because direct quotes are capitalized when acting as a complete thought, this would be the one exception to the previously stated rule of never capitalizing after the colon.*

Sometimes it is not necessary to quote an entire sentence, where a single word or phrase would be sufficient. In this case, no punctuation is used to introduce the quoted material.

### Example

> The speaker described the resurrection of Jesus Christ as “miraculous” and “a testament to his fully divine nature.”

## QUOTES WITHIN QUOTES

Sometimes quoted material will already contain quotation marks, either from titles, dialogue, or source material. In these instances, single quotation marks are used to avoid confusion between what you are quoting and what your quote is quoting.

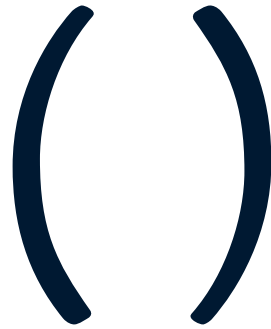
### Example

> The guest musician explained, “When I wrote this song, I felt God saying ‘create a song that speaks to the unspoken emptiness we all feel but never voice.’”

Less often, you may come across an instance where you are quoting a quote within a quote. In these examples, switch back and forth between double and single quotation marks.

### Example

> Jeremy filled me in on his family’s drama-filled Sunday morning: “My wife was like, ‘Ginny, if you say “hell” again, I’ll wash your mouth out with soap.’”



# parentheses

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## PARENTHESES

Parentheses function in a similar way to dependent clauses, in that they provide additional information or context. There are a couple key differences, however.

- Parentheses always come in pairs no matter where they appear in the sentence.
- Parentheses have no grammatical bearing on the main sentence.

Parentheses are typically discouraged in formal writing, especially when used to provide additional information. Most often, you can recast the sentence to avoid them, which begs the question: why use them? If unavoidable, this section will cover punctuation placement and specialty uses.

## PUNCTUATION PLACEMENT

- When parentheses are used on a stand-alone sentence, the punctuation goes inside the parenthetical mark. (Avoid these the most.)
- When parenthetical content occurs at the end of a larger sentence, punctuation is placed outside the mark (including periods, question marks, and exclamation points).
- When parenthetical content appears in the middle of the sentence, punctuation should function as if the content was not there.

### Example

- > We verified the translation (NIV), but the correlation of the scripture seemed a stretch at best.

## SPECIALTY USES

### Numbered or Lettered Lists:

- > To prepare for the prayer note writers, Pastoral Care needed the following items: (1) prayer note stationery, (2) pens, and (3) the prayer list.

### Time Zones:

- > Student Ministries holds Sunday morning Bible study at 9:45AM (EST).

### Area Codes:

- > For more information, contact our main office: (404) 355-6475.

| *We use periods here at Northside: 404.355.6475.*

### Abbreviations and Acronyms:

- > The United Methodist Women (UMW) is open to all women of the church.



## ellipses

### ELLIPSES

Avoid ellipses ( . . . ) in any formal, outward-facing, narrative-style text. Elongated pauses jar the reader and can turn an attempt at dramatic effect into an implication that the idea being presented is not cohesive: a notion that causes most to stop reading.

There is, however, an acceptable use.

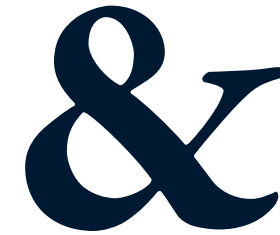
–Use ellipses to indicate an omission of text from a quoted source. Oftentimes, when quoting, we may choose to only quote certain excerpts of a passage or sentence, and ellipses help the reader know this, which, in turn, maintains the integrity of the source.

*Do not use ellipses at the beginning or end of a quote, even if the material was taken from the middle of a sentence. It is generally understood that text comes before and after a quote.*

| *To format, use three ellipsis dots with a space before, after, and between each one.*

#### Example

> The Lord's Prayer is purposely bookended with offerings of praise to God: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name . . . for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen."



## the ampersand

### AMPERSANDS

The ampersand is a contentious symbol. One of the reasons for this is that the ampersand is often misused, and most documentation styles prefer to prevent its usage rather than set firm guidelines. This section will attempt to accomplish the latter.

The most important thing to remember is that the ampersand is not a direct, grammatical replacement for the word 'and.' It is, however, a design-friendly symbol that can look professional. Law firms tend to opt for this example. Therein lies our acceptable use.

–Use an ampersand in header text only, not subheader text.

*If your header includes a series, where the ampersand replaces the conjunction 'and,' no comma is needed.*

#### Example

> Hymn 139: stanzas 1, 3, 4 & 5 | Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

–At Northside, we have stylistically chosen to include ampersands in a few titles.

#### Examples

> Watson Faith & Arts Center

> Sports & Recreation





# the apostrophe

## APOSTROPHES

The apostrophe has three primary uses: contractions, plurals, and possessives.

### CONTRACTIONS

A contraction is a word formed by combining two different words and using an apostrophe to indicate a missing letter (e.g.: let's, don't, couldn't, they're, it's, I'm, haven't). Contractions are typically indicative of a conversational tone, but the absolute avoidance guarantees stilted or unwelcoming text. As with anything, be mindful of your audience.

*Be careful of the most common contraction error: 'it's' vs. 'its'*

- > It's snowing outside today. (contraction)
- > The church closed its doors in response. (possessive)

## PLURALS

The apostrophe is seldom used to form a plural noun.

- > 1980s, not 1980's
- > 2s and 3s Nursery, not 2's and 3's
- > The Thomases, not the Thomas's

The rare exception is when certain abbreviations, letters, or words are used as nouns.

- > He received four A's and two B's.
- > Be sure to cross your 't's' and dot your 'i's.'
- > Were there more yes's than no's in today's vote casting?  
(It is also acceptable to use yeses and noes.)

## POSSESSIVES

In general, possession of a singular noun is formed by adding an apostrophe and 's,' whether the singular noun ends in 's' or not.

- > Wesley's sonnet
- > It's anyone's guess
- > The shuttle bus's route

The exception to the rule is if the singular noun is also a proper noun that ends in 's.'

- > Jesus' disciples
- > Missions' offering

Plural nouns are given possession by adding only an apostrophe or an apostrophe and 's,' depending on if the plural noun ends in 's.'

- > Twenty year's experience
- > Girls' basketball team

## SHARED OR INDIVIDUAL POSSESSIVES

-When nouns share possession, use a single apostrophe on the last possessor.

### Example

- > Today is Allen and Elisabeth's birthday.

-When nouns have individual possession, use an apostrophe for each possessor.

### Example

- > Nick's and Ann's Disciple One books were left in the upstairs classroom.

# NORTHSIDE USAGE

*Usage is more akin to style. Think of it as the generally agreed-upon consensus on how to communicate certain items. These could cover titles, capitalization, spelling, and format, but all fall under the proverbial umbrella of consistency and should be followed.*

The written word is an outpouring of who we are, what we believe, and for what we call others to stand. Thus, it can be tempting to use emphasis to help our audiences understand that passion.

Trust in the power of your words. Do not be tempted to use emphasis in this way.

When in doubt, follow these simple rules:

-Avoid using ALL CAPS whenever possible.

**Example**

> THIS MAKES IT HARD TO READ.

-Do not use multiple punctuation.

**Example**

> This is bad form!!!!!! Stop it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Emphasis does have an acceptable use, however:

-When emphasizing specific words separate from the words of your sentence, use single quotation marks.

**Example**

> The spelling of 'flyers' and 'fliers' often gets confused. The latter is specifically associated with air travel, but both spellings are equally represented for informational printouts. For clarification, Associated Press recommends using 'fliers' for the printouts.

-When instructions for navigating a website are given, the word or button to be clicked should appear in bold italics.

**Example**

> Click ***Worship & Ministry*** and navigate to ***Sunday Mornings***.

## TREATING TITLES

### DO CAPITALIZE

- First word of title
- Last word of title
- Verbs\*
- Nouns
- Pronouns
- Adjectives
- Adverbs
- Some conjunctions
- Words more than 3 letters long

\**Is, are, was, and be* are all short but should be capitalized because they are verbs.

### DON'T CAPITALIZE

- a
- an
- and
- at
- but\*
- by\*
- for
- in\*
- nor
- of
- on\*
- or\*
- so\*
- the\*
- to\*
- up\*
- yet\*

\*It depends on how the word functions in the title.

### TITLES IN ITALICS

Blogs  
Books  
Sermon series  
Journals  
Legal cases  
Magazines  
Musical albums  
Newspapers  
Website names  
Operas  
Paintings  
Plays  
Poems (long)  
Television shows

### TITLES IN QUOTATIONS

Articles in magazines, journals, newspapers, and on websites  
Sermons  
Blog entries  
Television episodes  
Essays  
Photographs  
Poems (short)  
Short stories  
Songs  
Unpublished manuscripts, speeches, dissertations, theses, and lectures

### TITLES IN REGULAR TYPE

Awards  
Job titles  
Political documents  
Scriptural works (including the Bible)  
Sections, books, and prayers within scriptural works

## COMMON NORTHSIDE USAGE

In addition to specific ministry names, there are many words that should be capitalized, abbreviated, or formatted consistently across all communication platforms.

- > Bible and Scripture—not bible and scripture
- > biblical and scriptural—not Biblical and Scriptural
- > Sanctuary
- > Watson Faith & Arts Center
- > Fellowship Hall
- > Room 325—not room or rm.
- > Georgia or GA—not Ga, G.A., or Ga.
- > [www.NorthsideUMC.org/register](http://www.NorthsideUMC.org/register)  
(note the “www,” capitalization, and lowercase after the forwardslash)
- > [BillB@NorthsideUMC.org](mailto:BillB@NorthsideUMC.org)—not [billb@northsideumc.org](mailto:billb@northsideumc.org)
- > Northside Drive NW—not Drive, NW or Drive N.W.
- > NMP, MAP, and UMW—not N.M.P., M.A.P., or U.M.W.  
(acronyms do not receive periods)
- > Stationary vs. stationery
- > Lowercase holy pronouns (he), but capitalize specific names (Alpha and Omega)
- > Sunday school—not Sunday School (unless part of an official class name)
- > Sports & Rec—not Sports & Rec. or Sports and Rec
- > No comma needed for suffixes and Roman numerals (Jr., Sr., III, IV)

### NUMBERS

“One is the loneliest number,” unless you’re God . . . because God is three in one.

While the rules tend to fluctuate according to style, below are a few Northside guidelines for numbers:

–When incorporating numbers into a sentence, spell out one through nine, and use numerical values for anything above 10.

*Money, grades, percentages, ratios, equations, time, and phone numbers are always numerical.*

*Never start a sentence with a number, regardless of what type of number it is. Always reword or spell out.*

#### Examples

- > The musician then invited four artists to join her on stage to form a quintet.
- > The church saw an increase of 40 new members join in the past year.
- > Eight thousand volunteers turned up for the annual service project.
- > The 4th and 5th graders take frequent trips.

### DATES

Can you have a date on a date on a date and still be grammatically correct? Why, yes you can. Here’s how to treat calendar dates at Northside.

–Always spell out dates with years.

*| The exception to this is if the event is happening within the current calendar year.*

#### Examples

- > January 25, not 1/25
- > Last year’s Ash Wednesday service occurred March 1, 2017.

–Abbreviate months only when absolutely necessary for space.

–Avoid using extra characters, such as ‘th,’ ‘st,’ and ‘nd.’

#### Example

- > January 25, not January 25th

–Use an en dash to represent a date range, even one spanning multiple months.

#### Examples

- > The event is March 1–5.
- > The 2018 season of Epiphany is January 7–February 11.

### TIME

Below are a few basic Northside idiosyncrasies on how to handle time . . . time after time. Yeah, now you have a song stuck in you’re head, so good luck with that!

–Always use the full numerical value for time, even if it lands on the hour. ‘Noon’ is only acceptable in copy when it is the only time listed. If in a header or as part of a time span, use ‘12:00PM.’

#### Examples

- > Service begins at 11:00AM in the Santcuary.
- > Shotgun start for the Men’s Golf Tournament is at noon.

–Use AM or PM with no additional spacing or punctuation.

*| If you cannot use small caps, convert to uppercase.*

–Use an en dash (–) when depicting a time span.

*| If you introduce a span with words, such as ‘from’ or ‘between,’ no en dash is needed.*

#### Example

- > The meeting today is from 10:00 to 11:00AM.

–Use the appropriate merīdiem (AM or PM) only when necessary.

#### Examples

- > 9:00–10:00AM, not 9:00AM–10:00AM
- > 10:00AM–1:00PM

### PHONE NUMBERS

We all use the phone, right? Here are the rules:

–Always include the area code

–Use dots instead of parentheses or dashes.

#### Example

- > 404.355.6475

–Use EXT. for extension (not ‘X’ or ‘x’) with a single space before number.

*| If you cannot use small caps, convert to all caps (EXT.).*

#### Example

- > 404.355.6475 EXT. 1100

## THIS IS HOW WE PROOF IT

### ACCURACY

Always double check the spelling and accuracy of all names, dates, locations, websites, job or pastoral titles, phone numbers, and terminology used in your writing. Be careful not to rely on memory or assume information has not changed, lest you lead your audience astray.

### AUDIENCE

Audiences love to ask two questions: “How does this apply to me?” and “Why should I care?” Effective communication is determined by audience, so be sure that your copy is clear and includes the five W’s (who, what, when, where, and why), correct contact information, and a clear path to respond (call to action). When in doubt, ask an outsider to read it and mark areas of confusion.

### CONSISTENCY

A lack of consistency can be the mother of all confusion. When compiling multiple promotional pieces or editing information present on multiple platforms, always be sure to check that everything matches. This can also include design, capitalization of headers, and formatting. Even the smallest change will cause confusion.

Strong marketing does not come from a killer design or a clever hashtag. It comes from consistency.

### TIPS FOR PROOFING

- > Print the document and edit it on paper. Sometimes it’s easy to miss errors on a screen.
- > Read it out loud. You might hear a problem you didn’t otherwise see.
- > If you are prone to a certain mistake, use the search function to find potential errors.
- > Utilize spell check, but be careful not to rely solely on it.
- > Don’t proof for every type of mistake at once. Do one proof for spelling, one for font, one for accuracy, and so on.
- > Always check the headers as well as copy. Most editors skip over the simple stuff.
- > Double check little words: ‘or,’ ‘of,’ ‘it,’ ‘is,’ and ‘in’ are often interchanged.
- > Read it slowly. Your brain is amazing and will fill in gaps and overlook mistakes if you read too quickly.

## EMAIL SIGNATURES

Email signatures are the equivalent of a “digital business card” and should clearly communicate contact information in a professional and consistent manner. Northside Church has a standard email signature for all staff members. See below for an example.

