

W&M Email Link Style Guide

TRADITIONAL PALETTE

Rules and examples for hyperlink treatment across all William & Mary email — Marketing Cloud, Emma, Slate, and one-off sends. Colors match the official W&M brand palette.

Quick reference			
Where	Treatment	Weight	Color
Inline body link (light bg)	Underlined	Regular	Dark Gold #846838
Inline body link (Dark Green bg)	Underlined	Regular	Web Gold #B08F5A
CTA text link (“Read more”)	Underlined + chevron	Bold	Dark Gold #846838
Primary CTA button	Solid fill, white text, ALL CAPS	Bold	Dark Gold or W&M Green
Article heading link	Heading style — no underline	Bold (heading)	W&M Green #004E38
Top nav links	No underline	Semibold, uppercase	W&M Green #004E38
Footer / utility links	Underlined	Regular	Dark Silver #565858
Bold black text	Editorial emphasis — never a link	Bold	Soft Black #212220

The rules

1. Every inline body link needs two signals — color is not enough

WCAG AA requires links be distinguishable from surrounding text by more than color alone. This is why underline is required in addition to gold.

2. Bold is for emphasis, gold + underline is for links

Reserve bold text for emphasis in body copy. Reserve gold + underline for “this is clickable.”

3. Bold weight is only added when prominence is the goal

CTAs get bold. Inline body links do not.

4. Headings that link stay styled as headings

Wherever possible, don't make headings clickable. When you must, never apply gold + underline to the heading itself — style it in W&M Green, make the surrounding block clickable, and pair with an explicit CTA text link underneath.

5. Match the color to the background

Dark Gold on white. Web Gold on Dark Green. Never Web Gold on white — it fails contrast.

6. Consistency across platforms

The same rules apply in Marketing Cloud, Emma, and Slate.

Live examples — Light backgrounds

INLINE BODY LINK · DARK GOLD #846838

Learn more about the [Reves Center for International Studies](#) and how it supports faculty research across campus. Applications for the fall cohort are open through August.

CTA TEXT LINK · DARK GOLD BOLD + CHEVRON

Our new alumni mentorship program pairs current students with W&M grads in their field of interest.

[Read the full story ›](#)

PRIMARY CTA BUTTON · W&M GREEN WITH WHITE TEXT

Reserve your seat for the 37th Lord Botetourt Affair.

REGISTER NOW

ALTERNATE CTA BUTTON · DARK GOLD WITH WHITE TEXT

Give to the Fund for William & Mary and help sustain student scholarships.

GIVE TODAY

ARTICLE HEADING WITH PAIRED CTA — RECOMMENDED PATTERN FOR HARK!

Jill Ellis '88 reflects on this summer's World Cup

The FIFA Chief Football Officer returned to campus in June to speak with student-athletes about leadership on the global stage.

[Read the story ›](#)

NAVIGATION LINKS (HEADER) · W&M GREEN, NO UNDERLINE

[NEWS](#) [EVENTS](#) [GIVE](#) [ALUMNI](#)

FOOTER / UTILITY LINKS · DARK SILVER, UNDERLINED

[Update preferences](#) · [Unsubscribe](#) · [View in browser](#)

Live examples — Dark Green backgrounds

When email sections use Dark Green backgrounds (common in headers and callouts), swap Dark Gold for **Web Gold** #B08F5A on links. Web Gold is optimized specifically for readability on Dark Green. **Note:** W&M Green is not approved as a background for sections containing text links — use Dark Green instead. W&M Green may still be used as a section background when the only foreground content is a gold button.

INLINE BODY LINK ON DARK GREEN · WEB GOLD

Read the latest from [President Rowe's summer update](#) on the state of the university and this year's incoming class.

CTA TEXT LINK ON DARK GREEN · WEB GOLD BOLD + CHEVRON

Join us for Homecoming Weekend, October 23–26.

[View the schedule ›](#)

Do / Don't

DO

Applications are open for the [2026 Summer Research Fellowship](#). Faculty across all departments are encouraged to apply.

Dark Gold + underlined. Body copy stays clean and readable.

DON'T

Applications are open for the **[2026 Summer Research Fellowship](#)**. Faculty across all departments are encouraged to apply.

Bold on inline link competes with editorial emphasis. Save bold for CTAs.

DO

The registration deadline is **Friday, August 8**. Don't miss out — [reserve your spot](#) today.

Bold-Soft-Black draws editorial emphasis. Dark-Gold-underlined signals the click. Two separate signals, zero conflict.

DON'T

The registration deadline is **[Friday, August 8](#)**. Don't miss out — **[reserve your spot](#)** today.

Everything is bold-gold — reader can't tell what's the CTA. The date isn't even a link.

DO

Jill Ellis '88 reflects on the World Cup

Full story below · [Read now >](#)

Heading styled as a heading in W&M Green. Article block is clickable. Explicit CTA carries the link style.

DON'T

Jill Ellis '88 reflects on the World Cup

Gold + underlined heading looks like a phishing email. Heavy, dated, hurts scan-ability.

DO (ON DARK BG)

Registration is open for [Homecoming 2026](#). Reserve your tickets by September 15.

Dark Green background with Web Gold #B08F5A link. Meets contrast, matches brand.

DON'T (ON DARK BG)

Registration is open for [Homecoming 2026](#). Reserve your tickets by September 15.

W&M Green is not approved as a background for inline text links — use Dark Green instead. W&M Green backgrounds are OK only when the content is a gold button.

Approved colors & contrast

Token	Hex	Use in email	Contrast ratio	WCAG AA
■ W&M Green	#004E38	Headings, nav links, CTA button fill. Not approved as a background for inline text links — use Dark Green. Acceptable as a section background only when the content is a gold button.	9.78:1 on white	Pass AAA
■ Dark Green	#183028	Section backgrounds, footer band	14.07:1 on white (as text)	Pass AAA
□ White	#FFFFFF	Text on Dark Green backgrounds. Also a section background.	14.07:1 on Dark Green	Pass AAA
■ Dark Gold	#846838	Link text on white / light backgrounds. CTA text links, inline links, secondary buttons.	5.22:1 on white	Pass AA
■ Web Gold	#B08F5A	Link text on Dark Green backgrounds only. Never use on white backgrounds.	3.03:1 on white / 7.62:1 on Dark Green	Fail on white · Pass AAA on Dark Green

Token	Hex	Use in email	Contrast ratio	WCAG AA
 Soft Black	<code>#212220</code>	Body copy, editorial bold-for-emphasis	15.97:1 on white	Pass AAA
 Dark Silver	<code>#565858</code>	Footer links, timestamps, secondary text	7.16:1 on white	Pass AAA
 Lightest Gold	<code>#F8F4EE</code>	Callout / highlight backgrounds	—	Background use
 Lightest Silver	<code>#F0F1F2</code>	Section backgrounds	—	Background use

Critical color rules from the W&M Brand Hub:

- **Dark Gold** `#846838` is the approved link/button color on White, Lightest Silver, and Lightest Gold backgrounds.
- **Web Gold** `#B08F5A` is approved for links on Dark Green backgrounds only — it fails contrast on white.
- **W&M Green** `#004E38` is not approved as a background for inline text links — use Dark Green instead. W&M Green may still be used as a section background when the only content is a gold button.

Approved fonts

Two fonts, chosen because they render reliably in every major email client — including Outlook desktop, which silently drops custom web fonts.

Font	Use for	Rendering stack
Arial Sans-serif	Default for all standard email — body copy, headings, CTA buttons, navigation, labels, UI text	<code>Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif</code>
Georgia Serif	Longer-form editorial contexts (e.g., Hark! feature stories) when a more traditional feel is warranted	<code>Georgia, "Times New Roman", Times, serif</code>

Why only these two? Georgia and Arial are pre-installed on every major operating system and email client. Custom web fonts (Adobe Fonts, Google Fonts, self-hosted @font-face) work in some clients but silently fall back to system defaults in Outlook desktop, Gmail app, and older clients — meaning an email can look correct in preview but broken to a third of recipients.

Don't use in email

- Custom web fonts (Adobe Fonts, Google Fonts, self-hosted)
- System font stacks (-apple-system , BlinkMacSystemFont , "Segoe UI") — render inconsistently across clients
- Times New Roman as a primary — it's the Georgia fallback only, never the intent

Code snippet

```
<!-- Body copy -->
<p style="font-family:Georgia,'Times New Roman',Times,serif;
  font-size:16px; line-height:1.6; color:#212220;">Body text.</p>

<!-- Heading -->
<h2 style="font-family:Arial,Helvetica,sans-serif;
  font-size:22px; font-weight:700; color:#004E38;">Heading</h2>
```

Code snippets (email-safe)

Inline body link — on white / light background

```
<a href="..." style="color:#846838; text-decoration:underline;
  text-underline-offset:2px;">link text</a>
```

Inline body link — on W&M Green / Dark Green background

```
<a href="..." style="color:#B08F5A; text-decoration:underline;
  text-underline-offset:2px;">link text</a>
```

CTA text link — on white / light background

```
<a href="..." style="color:#846838; text-decoration:underline;
text-underline-offset:3px; font-weight:700;">Read more &rsaquo;</a>
```

Primary CTA button — W&M Green (bulletproof)

```
<table cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" border="0"><tr><td
style="background:#004E38; border-radius:4px;">
<a href="..." style="display:inline-block; padding:12px 26px;
color:#ffffff; text-decoration:none; font-weight:700;
font-size:14px; text-transform:uppercase; letter-spacing:0.08em;
font-family:Arial,sans-serif;">Register now</a>
</td></tr></table>
```

Secondary CTA button — Dark Gold (bulletproof)

```
<table cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" border="0"><tr><td
style="background:#846838; border-radius:4px;">
<a href="..." style="display:inline-block; padding:12px 26px;
color:#ffffff; text-decoration:none; font-weight:700;
font-size:14px; text-transform:uppercase; letter-spacing:0.08em;
font-family:Arial,sans-serif;">Give today</a>
</td></tr></table>
```

Article heading + CTA pattern

```
<a href="..." style="color:#004E38; text-decoration:none;
font-weight:700; font-size:22px; line-height:1.2;
display:block; margin-bottom:8px;">Article title here</a>
<p>One-line dek or summary of the story.</p>
<p><a href="..." style="color:#846838; text-decoration:underline;
font-weight:700;">Read the story &rsaquo;</a></p>
```

Accessibility checklist

- Link text describes the destination — never use “click here” or “learn more” alone.
- Two visual signals minimum (color + underline, or color + weight + chevron).

- Link text contrast at least 4.5:1 against background (WCAG AA normal text).
- Contrast ratio at least 3:1 between link color and surrounding body text.
- Touch targets at least 44×44 px on mobile — apply padding to CTA links.
- Underline offset at least 2px so it doesn't merge with text at small sizes.
- Buttons include descriptive `alt` text if image-based; prefer live text.
- Match the link color to the background — Dark Gold on light, Web Gold on Dark Green.

Client compatibility notes

- **Outlook desktop** strips `text-decoration: underline` — plan for tight underlines on Windows. Consider `border-bottom` as a fallback for CTAs.
- **Dark mode** (Apple Mail, Outlook mobile) may invert colors. Web Gold on inverted backgrounds may need testing for critical sends.
- **Font weight** renders inconsistently — Outlook renders `font-weight: 700` lighter than most clients. Bold-vs-regular contrast will look weaker there.
- **Buttons:** always use table-based bulletproof buttons for Outlook compatibility.

Governance

This spec applies to all UMARK and UCOMM-managed email including Marketing Cloud, Emma, and Slate communications. Individual departments running one-off sends should follow the same rules. Color values pull directly from the W&M Brand Hub official palette.

Questions or exceptions: creative@wm.edu

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Aligns with the William & Mary web design system and Brand Hub color standards.