

W&M Email Link Style Guide

VIMS PALETTE

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

Quick reference

WHERE	TREATMENT	WEIGHT	COLOR
Inline body link (light bg)	Underlined	Regular	 Dark Gold #846838
Inline body link (Midnight Blue 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	 Marine Blue #00677E or  Dark Gold #846838
Article heading link	Heading style — no underline	Bold (heading)	 Marine Blue #00677E
Top nav links	No underline	Semibold, uppercase	 Marine Blue #00677E
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 Dark Gold.

2. Bold is for emphasis, Dark Gold + underline is for links.

Reserve bold text for emphasis in body copy. Reserve Dark 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 Dark Gold + underline to the heading itself — style it in Marine Blue, 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 Midnight Blue. Marine Blue or Dark Gold for primary CTA button fills. Never Web Gold on White — it fails contrast.

6. Marine Blue backgrounds are buttons-only — never link surfaces.

Marine Blue #00677E is a valid background for sections that contain only buttons, but it fails accessibility for inline links, CTA text links, and heading text. When a section needs a dark background *and* contains any inline link, CTA text link, or linked heading, use Midnight Blue #06263B instead.

7. Consistency across platforms.

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

Important — dark backgrounds: Marine Blue does not pass WCAG AA as a background with link or heading text. Marine Blue can be used as a background — but only for sections that use buttons and no text links or linked headings.

Note on headings inside Midnight Blue sections: Marine Blue text fails contrast against Midnight Blue (2.4:1 — well under the 3:1 minimum for large bold text). If a heading must live inside a Midnight Blue section, style it in White instead, and never in Marine Blue.

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 · MARINE BLUE 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) · MARINE BLUE, NO UNDERLINE

NEWS EVENTS GIVE ALUMNI

FOOTER / UTILITY LINKS · DARK SILVER, UNDERLINED

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

Live examples — Midnight Blue backgrounds

When email sections use Midnight Blue #06263B backgrounds (common in headers and callouts), swap Dark Gold for Web Gold #B08F5A on links. Web Gold is the only approved link color on Midnight Blue. Note: Marine Blue is not approved as a background for sections

containing text links or headings — use Midnight Blue instead. Marine Blue may still be used as a section background when the only foreground content is a button.

INLINE BODY LINK ON MIDNIGHT BLUE · 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 MIDNIGHT BLUE · WEB GOLD BOLD + CHEVRON

Join us for Homecoming Weekend, October 23–26.

[View the schedule ›](#)

Live examples — Marine Blue backgrounds (buttons only)

Marine Blue #00677E works as a background for sections that contain only buttons. It does **not** pass contrast for inline links, CTA text links, or heading text — use Midnight Blue for those.

BUTTON-ONLY SECTION ON MARINE BLUE — PERMITTED

Ready to see campus for yourself?

SCHEDULE A VISIT

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 Marine Blue. Article block is clickable. Explicit CTA carries the link style.

DON'T

Jill Ellis '88 reflects on the World Cup

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

DO (ON MIDNIGHT BLUE BG)

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

Web Gold #B08F5A on Midnight Blue #06263B.
5.1:1 contrast — Pass AA. Matches brand.

DON'T (ON MARINE BLUE BG)

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

Marine Blue is not approved as a background for
inline text links or headings. Move link content to a
Midnight Blue section, or keep Marine Blue button-
only.

Approved colors & contrast

TOKEN	HEX	USE IN EMAIL	CONTRAST RATIO	WCAG AA
 Marine Blue	#00677E	Headings, nav links, top borders, button-only background sections. Not approved as a background for inline text links or linked headings — use Midnight Blue.	6.48:1 on White	Pass AA
 Midnight Blue	#06263B	Section backgrounds for any section containing inline links or CTA text links. Footer band.	15.58:1 on White (as text)	Pass AAA
 White	#FFFFFF	Text on Marine Blue and Midnight Blue backgrounds. Also a section background.	6.48:1 on Marine Blue / 15.58:1 on Midnight Blue	Pass AA / AAA
 Dark Gold	#846838	Link text on White / light backgrounds. CTA text links, inline links, alternate CTA button fill.	5.22:1 on White	Pass AA
 Web Gold	#B08F5A	Link text on Midnight Blue backgrounds only. Never use on White or on Marine Blue.	3.03:1 on White · 5.14:1 on Midnight Blue	Fail on White · Pass AA on Midnight Blue

TOKEN	HEX	USE IN EMAIL	CONTRAST RATIO	WCAG AA
■ Soft Black	#212220	Body copy, editorial bold-for-emphasis	15.97:1 on White	Pass AAA
■ Dark Silver	#565858	Footer links, timestamps, secondary text	7.16:1 on White	Pass AAA
□ Lightest Silver	#F0F1F2	Section backgrounds	—	Background use

Critical color rules for the VIMS Palette:

- **Dark Gold #846838** is the approved link/button color on White and Lightest Silver backgrounds.
- **Web Gold #B08F5A** is approved for links on Midnight Blue backgrounds only — it fails contrast on White and on Marine Blue.
- **Marine Blue #00677E** is a valid background only for button-only sections. Do not place inline links, CTA text links, or linked headings on Marine Blue — use Midnight Blue #06263B for those. Marine Blue text also fails contrast against Midnight Blue (2.4:1) — use White for any heading that must live inside a Midnight Blue section.

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	Arial, Helvetica, sans-serif
Georgia Serif	Longer-form editorial contexts (e.g., Hark! feature stories) when a more traditional feel is warranted	Georgia, "Times New Roman", Times, serif

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:#00677E;">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 Midnight Blue 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 — Marine Blue (bulletproof)

```
<table cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0" border="0"><tr><td
style="background:#00677E; 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>
```

Alternate 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:#00677E; 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 Midnight Blue.
- Never place inline links, CTA text links, or linked headings on a Marine Blue background — use Midnight Blue.

Client compatibility notes

- **Outlook desktop** strips `text-decoration-offset` — 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 VIMS brand palette.

Questions or exceptions: creative@wm.edu