Published on *University of Colorado* (https://www.cu.edu)

Style guidelines

The University of Colorado recognizes the importance of grammatical consistency and accuracy throughout its web presence and in print publications. The university uses Associate Press Style in all publications, however there are rules not covered in AP that pertain specifically to the university.

To present a consistent and high-quality standard of writing that appropriately reflects the university's standard of excellence, this guide addresses university-related style issues, common errors and common style.

The system style guide, published by University Relations in the Office of the President, is intended to serve as an editorial guideline for language use pertaining to the university and its constituents.

For questions or to make changes, please contact the Office of University Relations [1].

Abbreviations and Acronyms

An *abbreviation* is a shortened or contracted form of a word or phrase used to represent the whole.

- Examples: SPA, CCD, NCAA

An *acronym* is an abbreviation that is read as a word.

- Examples: SMART Registration System, CAM, NASA

General Rules

Use abbreviations and acronyms in moderation.

When using uncommon abbreviations or acronyms (ones that people outside of your field of study, school or department will not recognize) define them on first use—spell out the abbreviation or acronym followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parenthesis.

- Example: The College of Arts and Media (CAM) is sponsoring an art exhibit at the museum next month. Exhibits hosted by CAM are free to all students.

NOTE: If the abbreviation or acronym is not used after the first mention, **do not** abbreviate it. Common-knowledge abbreviations and acronyms do not need to be defined on first use.

- Examples: GPA, GMAT, ACT, SAT

Use of Articles (a, an, the) with Acronyms and Abbreviations

Use the article that you would use when speaking.

- Examples: an M.A. degree, a Ph.D. degree

In general, if the acronym or abbreviation is used as a noun, no article is necessary.

- Example: The theater production is sponsored by CAM and CLAS (not the CAM and the CLAS).

Degrees

Include periods when abbreviating academic degrees fewer than three letters: B.A., BFA, M.A., Ph.D., M.D., etc.

Abbreviated Courtesy Titles

Use a period with abbreviated courtesy titles (Dr., Ms., Mr., Sen., Gov., etc.).

When possible, use degrees instead of courtesy titles; degree names are more accurate. Do not use both.

- Example: John Smith, DDS vs. Dr. John Smith (Dr. is a relatively general title); **not** Dr. John Smith, DDS

State Abbreviations

Use Associated Press (AP) state abbreviations. Never use the two-letter postal abbreviations, unless part of a complete mailing addresses.

- Examples: The Office of the President is located in Denver. The building address is 1800 Grant St., Denver, CO 80203.

Only abbreviate state names when used with the name of a city.

The list of AP state abbreviations is as follows:

Alabama	Ala.	Kentucky	Ky.	North Dakota	N.D.
Alaska	Alaska	Louisiana	La.	Ohio	Ohio
Arkansas	Ark.	Maine	Maine	Oklahoma	Okla.
Arizona	Ariz.	Maryland	Md.	Oregon	Ore.

California	Calif.	Massachusetts	Mass.	Pennsylvania	Pa.
Colorado	Colo.	Michigan	Mich.	Rhode Island	R.I.
Connecticut	Conn.	Minnesota	Minn.	South Carolina	S.C.
Delaware	Del.	Mississippi	Miss.	South Dakota	S.D.
District of Columbia	D.C.	Missouri	Mo.	Tennessee	Tenn.
Florida	Fla.	Montana	Mont.	Texas	Texas
Georgia	Ga.	Nebraska	Neb.	Utah	Utah
Hawaii	Hawaii	Nevada	Nev.	Vermont	Vt.
Idaho	Idaho	New Hampshire	N.H.	Virginia	Va.
Illinois	Ill.	New Jersey	N.J.	Washington	Wash.
Indiana	Ind.	New Mexico	N.M.	West Virginia	W.Va.
Iowa	Iowa	New York	N.Y.	Wisconsin	Wis.
Kansas	Kan.	North Carolina	N.C.	Wyoming	Wyo.

United States / United States of America

Only abbreviate United States when it is used as an adjective.

- Examples: U.S. history; history of the United States

Use periods when abbreviating United States (U.S.).
Do not use periods when abbreviating United States of America (USA).

Academic Degrees

Do not capitalize the names of degrees.

- Examples: He earned a bachelor of arts degree in English. She will graduate with a master of science in nursing. He received a doctor of philosophy degree in history.

Use bachelor of, master of, and doctor of when using the name of a degree as a noun (see examples above). Use bachelor's degree, master's degree or doctorate when the degree name isn't specified or when the level of degree is used as an adjective.

- Examples: His bachelor's degree helped him get the job. Her master's thesis took nine months to write. A doctorate is required in order to teach. Incorrect: She's working on a master's of architecture.

The University of Colorado does not award associate degrees; however, employees may still need to reference this level of education. NOTE: Associate degree is never plural (associates)

or possessive (associate's).
Abbreviating degree names is encouraged; use periods if fewer than three letters are abbreviated: B.A., BFA, M.A., Ph.D., M.D., etc.

- Example: He earned a Ph.D. in immunology.

Areas of study (e.g. music, genetics, physical therapy, electrical engineering) are not capitalized unless used as part of a proper name.

- Examples: He's studying toxicology on the University of Colorado Boulder. She has an internship in the theater department.

Addresses and Telephone Numbers

Addresses

Use abbreviations for Ave., Blvd. and St. with numbered addresses. Spell out and capitalize them when referencing a formal street name without a number.

- Examples: She lives at 123 Main St. The building is on Grant Street between 18th and 19th avenues.

When referencing two street names without a numbered address, spell out the type of street but do not capitalize it.

- Example: 14th and Lawrence streets

Abbreviate compass points when used with a number address. Spell out compass points in other uses.

- Examples: He works at 4321 E. Main St. He drove down East Main Street.

Always use figures for an address number.

Spell out and capitalize First through Ninth when used as street names. Use figures and two letters for 10th and above.

- Examples: 4200 E. Ninth Ave. or 13120 E. 19th Ave.

Use capital letters and periods with no space when abbreviating post office box (P.O. Box).

Campus Addresses

Spell out building names.

When referencing a specific room, write the building name followed by a comma and the room number.

- Example: Old Main, Room 316

Telephone Numbers

Use dashes, not periods. Do not put parenthesis around the area code.

- Examples: 303-315-3716, 202-456-1111

The “1” is not necessary when writing long-distance or toll-free telephone numbers.

Board of Regents

The Board of Regents consists of nine members serving staggered six-year terms, one elected from each of Colorado's seven congressional districts and two from the state at-large. The members select their own chair and vice-chair.

The board is charged constitutionally with the general supervision of the university and the exclusive control and direction of all funds of and appropriations to the university, unless otherwise provided by law.

- Board of Regents is capitalized; regents on second reference, lower case
- Regent is capitalized before the full name of a regent:
    - Example: Regent Michael Carrigan.
- Second reference to the regent is last name only.
    - Example: Carrigan was present at the board meeting.
- When using a regent’s full title, place the district after the name separated by commas: Regent Sue Sharkey, Fourth Congressional District, voted in favor of the measure.

Capitalization (titles, departments, units, etc.)

General Rules

Proper nouns and official names are capitalized.

Common nouns and informal forms of official names are not capitalized.

Academic and Nonacademic Units and Bodies

Capitalize only the official and complete names of colleges, schools, departments, divisions, offices and official bodies.

- Examples: Department of Aerospace Engineering; Colorado Center for Policy Studies [2]; Office of Admissions; School of Education & Human Development; Board of Regents

Do not capitalize informal and shortened versions of schools, colleges, departments, divisions, offices and official bodies.

- Examples: developmental biology department; education policy analysis center; admissions office; school of education; regents

Committees, Groups, Centers, Programs, Initiatives and Institutes

Avoid capitalizing a committee, center, group, program, institute or initiative unless it is officially recognized and formally named.

- Examples: search committee, admissions committee, doctoral review committee

Capitalize the official, proper names of long-standing committees and groups and formally developed programs and initiatives.

- Examples: Blue Ribbon Commission, Executive Committee of the Faculty Assembly

Course Titles

When referring to official course titles, use initial caps. Do not use quotation marks, italics or any other formatting with course titles.

- Example: She was required to take Fundamentals of Nursing during her first year.

When referring to a course using the course title and course number, use commas to set off the course title.

- Example: Six students who registered for CMMU 4760, Computer Mediated Communication, were placed on a waiting list because the course was full.

Degrees / Programs of Study

Do not capitalize degree names when spelled out.

- Example: She earned a bachelor of science degree from UCCS.

Capitalize degree abbreviations.

- Example: He has a Ph.D. in toxicology.

Do not capitalize major names, minor names or programs of study.

- Example: He studies biology and math, but his minor is music.

Job Titles

Capitalize a job title if it immediately precedes a name.

- Examples: Professor Ann Jones; Dean and Vice Chancellor of Health Affairs Richard Krugman

Do not capitalize titles that follow names or stand alone.

- Examples: John Smith, professor in biology; the chancellor of the university

Placing the title after the name, lower case, is preferred.

Publication and Presentation Titles

Which words should not be capitalized in a title?

- Articles: a, an, & the.
- Coordinate conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet & so (FANBOYS).
- Prepositions [3], such as at, around, by, after, along, for, from, of, on, to, with & without. (According to the Chicago Manual of Style, all prepositions should be uncapitalized in a title. NIVA and I recommend capitalizing prepositions 5+ letters long).

Which words should be capitalized in a title?

- The first and last words should always be capitalized, even if they're in the above list.
- All nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs should be capitalized.
- Subordinate conjunctions, such as after, as, because, how, who, if, than, what, why, that, when, where, whether & while.
- Commonly missed words: it (pronoun), is (verb), be (verb) and their/our/my (adjective) should all be capitalized.

Via Superhero Nation *[4]*

Schools and Colleges / Department Names

Capitalize only the official and complete names of colleges, schools, departments, divisions and offices.

- Examples: Department of Biology, School of Dental Medicine

Do not capitalize informal or general references.

- Examples: biology department, dental school

Seasons and Semesters

Do not capitalize semester names or seasons.

- Examples: spring semester, spring 2008, fall commencement

Structures and Places

Capitalize the full, official names of buildings and places on campus. Examples: Old Main, North Classroom, University Center

University References

Do not capitalize university unless using the complete proper name of the university. See university references for a list of proper names.

- Examples: He is a senior at the University of Colorado Boulder. There are more than 70,000 university alumni in the Denver area.

NOTE: This rule also applies to schools, colleges, departments, centers, institutes, etc.

Dates and Time

Dates

Always spell out names of months when it stands alone, with specific years and when space allows. If necessary, only use abbreviations when used with a specific date.

- Examples: She graduated in December 2011. She graduated on Dec. 14, 2011.

Always use numerals as dates. Do not add suffixes (th, st, etc.) to numerals unless used for street names.
When using a specific date in running text, use a comma after the year. However, do not use a comma to separate the month and year when there is not a specific date.

- Examples: She graduated on Dec. 14, 2002, from the University of Colorado Boulder. She graduated in December 2002.

Use four digits when referencing a specific year (2008).

When referencing a range of years, it is acceptable to use a two-digit year (2008-09).

If using numerals for the month, day and year (only recommended for informal documents) the format is as follows: MM/DD/YYYY, MM-DD-YYYY or MM.DD.YYYY.

If the date referenced occurs in the current year, the year is not necessary.

Time

Use figures for time, except for noon and midnight.

Use a colon to separate hours and minutes. Do not add a colon and zeros for on-the-hour times

- Example: 10 a.m., not 10:00 a.m.

Specify the time of day by using a.m. or p.m. (lower-case letters with periods and no spaces between).

Avoid redundancies such as 10 a.m. in the morning.

FERPA and HIPAA guidelines

When writing articles for publication or content for the web, be aware of federal privacy laws concerning patient and individuals' health records and students' academic records. The FERPA and HIPAA laws make it illegal to disclose personal information without the individual's consent.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [5] (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level.

Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students." ~ U.S. Department of Education

HIPAA

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 [6] (HIPAA) provides federal protections for personal health information and gives patients an array of rights with respect to that information. At the same time, the permits the disclosure of personal health information needed for patient care and other important purposes. The rule specifies a series of administrative, physical and technical safeguards for covered entities to use to assure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of electronic protected health information. ;~ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Legislature

The Colorado legislative body is called the General Assembly, not the Colorado Legislature. If you refer to it as the Colorado legislature, it's in lower case.
Most other states go by legislature as part of the proper name. It should therefore be capitalized when presented as the formal name. Example: The Kansas Legislature; the legislature in Kansas.

Legislative titles

First reference, use Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens. as formal titles for one or more names. Do not capitalize the title when it follows a person's name or stands alone.

- Sen. Darth Vader, R-New Hampshire, confronted Rep. Luke Skywalker, D-Michigan, in a heated debate.
- Darth Vader, the senator from New Hampshire, was last seen driving a white Ford Bronco.

Examples (acceptable):

- The vice president for budget and finance will issue new funding figures this month.
- Interior Secretary Ken Salazar will speak to CU Law School students.

Hyphenation

Hyphenate compound modifiers—two or more words that modify the same noun.

- Examples: world-class university, full-time student

Hyphenate phrases to avoid ambiguity.

- Examples: small-business owner, special-education teacher, etc.

In general, do not hyphenate words with prefixes and suffixes (non, pre, wide, etc.).

- Examples: nonresident, prearrange, campuswide

Hyphenate to avoid triple consonants and double vowels.

- Examples: pre-election, pre-establish, pre-existing, pre-eminent
- Exceptions: cooperate, coordinate

Hyphenate if the word that follows a prefix begins with a capital letter.

- Examples: un-American, mid-March

Lists

Vertical Lists

Use vertical lists for lists that are long or contain items on several levels.

Use vertical lists for quick-reference items or for visual prominence.

Use numbers when items on a list follow a specific order.

Use bullets as visual markers for each item.

If the introductory statement is a complete grammatical sentence, end it with a colon. List items do not begin with capital letters and do not carry closing punctuation unless they are complete sentences.

- Example: Include the following documents in your application:
    - completed application
    - personal essay
    - three letters of recommendation

If the introductory statement is not a complete sentence, use the punctuation mark that's appropriate for the context (comma, semicolon, dash, or nothing). List items do not start with capital letters and have no closing punctuation.

- Example: The final report outlined the company’s
    - increased fundraising efforts
    - stabilized employee retention
    - increased recruitment efforts

Numbered Lists

Numbered items begin with a capital letter.

Do not use closing punctuation unless the item is a complete sentence.

Series

Separate items in a series with a comma. Do not use a comma before the conjunction.

- Example: The students came from California, Colorado, Maryland and Nebraska.

If the series contains lengthy elements or elements that require separation with a comma, use semicolons to avoid confusion. Use a semicolon before the conjunction in a series.

- Example: Faculty conduct research in molecular and cellular pathology and toxicology; drug delivery systems; protein structure and delivery; cancer, heart, lung and blood

diseases; and alcohol and drug abuse.

Numbers

Spell out numbers under 10 (one through nine).

- Example: Students were divided into four groups of nine.

Use figures for numbers 10 and up.

- Example: There was one group of 10 students.

Spell out a numeral at the beginning of a sentence.

- Examples: Nine students earned an A on the exam. Twenty-five faculty members retired this year.

Do not spell out numerals that identify a calendar year.

Decimals

Decimals should not exceed two places in textual references, except for in special circumstances.

Be consistent with the number of decimal places used—if one number has two decimal places, all numbers should have two decimal places (2.25, 2.50, etc.).

Millions and Billions

Use figures with million or billion in all uses.

- Example: More than 1 million people access the Internet every day.

Percentages

Always use numerals when referencing percentages.

- Example: Close to 9 percent of students are from foreign countries.

Spell out percent unless it is included on a quick-reference list.

Composition Titles, Periodical Names

In general, follow AP style.

For titles of compositions (books, movies, music, etc.), follow AP style and place in quotation marks: “Gone With the Wind,” “South Park,” “How to Save a Life”

For names of periodicals, including academic journals, follow AP style; use italics: *The Denver Post*, (Boulder) *Daily Camera*, *New England Journal of Medicine*

For names of articles in academic journals, use quotation marks and sentence case, rather than title case: “Characteristics of black carbon aerosol from a surface oil burn during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill” appeared in Geophysical Research Letters.

Punctuation

Comma

In a series or list, do not use a comma before the conjunction.

- Example: The students came from California, Colorado, Maryland and Nebraska.

Do not use a comma to separate two independent sentences; use a semicolon.

- Example: The snow started to fall during the night; the morning commute was awful.

Use a comma before a conjunction when it connects two independent sentences.

- Example: A typical master’s degree takes two years, but many universities offer accelerated master’s degree programs.

Do not use a comma before a conjunction connecting a dependent clause to an independent clause.

- Example: Some people complete their master’s degree in one year because of the program’s structure.

Colon

Use a colon to introduce lists.

- Example: Include the following documents in your application: completed application, personal essay and three letters of recommendation.

Capitalize the words immediately following the colon only if it is the beginning of a complete sentence or proper noun.

- Example: The professor promised this: If every student earned a B on the exam, there

would be no final report due at the end of the semester.

Use a colon to introduce long quotes.

Do not use a colon with a verb.

- Example:
  (Incorrect) Admission requirements are:
  (Correct) Admission requirements: -or- The admission requirements are as follows:

Semicolons

Use a semicolon in a series or list when items in the series are long or contain material that must be set apart by commas.

- Example: Faculty conduct research in molecular and cellular pathology and toxicology; drug delivery systems; protein structure and delivery; cancer, heart, lung and blood diseases; and alcohol and drug abuse.

Use a semicolon to connect two independent sentences without a conjunction.

- ○ Example: The paper is due next week; she submitted it today.

Dashes

Use an em dash (longer) to mark a break in thought.

- Example: He will travel to Europe this summer – if he passes all of his classes. Insert space on each side of the em dash.

Use an en dash (shorter) to indicate a range (it replaces the word through).

- Example: 1–10. Do not insert spaces on either side of dashes.

Hyphens

See the hyphenation [7] section in this style guide for usage and rules.

Periods

Use a period at the end of a sentence.

Quotation Marks

Punctuation always goes inside quotation marks.

- Example: Professor Smith said, “Classes are canceled next week.”

Web and Internet References

email is no longer hyphenated

internet is no longer capitalized

online is one word

website (single word, no space or hyphen), webpage

World Wide Web is the formal, proper name for the web and is rarely used; when used, however, treat as a proper noun

Common questions and errors

Affect / Effect
Affect, as a verb, means to influence.

- Example: The winter weather negatively affected traffic.

Affect, as a noun, is used in psychology to describe an emotion.

- Example: The student's affect remained stoic as he was expelled from the university.

NOTE: Affect is rarely used as a noun.
Effect, as a verb, means to cause.

- Example: Hiring new faculty effects changes in the curriculum.

NOTE: Effect is rarely used as a verb.
Effect, as a noun, means result.

- Example: The effect of the poor test scores was a higher grade curve.

Due to
Use due to only when the phrase can be substituted with caused by.
Avoid using due to in place of because. If used in place of because, the phrase should follow a form of to be and must modify a noun.

- Example: Instead of writing "He resigned due to personal problems," write "His resignation was due to personal problems."

Farther / Further
Farther refers to a physical distance.

- Example: She walked farther into the city.

Further refers to an extension of time or degree.

- Example: He will further explore his degree options.

i.e. / e.g.
i.e. is an abbreviation for “that is” and is always followed by a comma.

- Example: Students who attend the evening lecture will receive extra credit, i.e., five points on the next exam.

e.g. is an abbreviation for “for example” and is always followed by a comma.

- Example: There are many options for students interested in drawing (e.g., art, graphic design and architecture).

Just / Only / Precisely
Avoid ‘just’ because of its secondary meaning as ‘rightful.’ Preferred use is ‘only’ when meaning a mere amount; ‘precisely’ when meaning exact.

- Examples: He published his first book when he was only 16 years old. That is exactly why she decided to attend CU-Boulder.

In general, ask yourself whether the sentence can stand go without the adverb.

- Stronger: He published his first book when he was 16 years old. That is why she decided to attend CU-Boulder.

More Than / Over
In 2014, the Associated Press Style Guide began allowing for the use of "over" when referring to numerals and amounts, where previously it was only allowed when describing the state of being physically "above" something. The previously preferred use of "more than" is still desirable.

- Example: More than 60 students failed the exam.

Use over when referring to spatial relationships

- Example: The car drove over the bridge.

That / Which
Use that in essential clauses—those that are important to the meaning of the sentence—without commas.

- Example: Professor Smith returned the test that we took last week.

Use which with nonessential clauses and set off the clause with commas.

- Example: Professor Smith administered a pop quiz today, which prompted groans from all of the students.

Who / Whom

Use who as a pronoun referencing humans and animals with a name. It is never the object of a sentence, phrase or clause.

- Example: Who is the guest of honor at the award ceremony?

NOTE: Use who when you could replace it with he or she: Who is the guest of honor? He is the guest of honor.
Use whom when someone is the object of a verb or preposition

- Example: With whom will you be attending the dinner?

NOTE: Use whom when you could replace it with his or her: With whom will you be attending the dinner? I'll attend the dinner with her.

Trademark and Registered Marks
A trademark is associated with a brand, symbol or word; there is no legal registration required to use a trademark.
The federal registration symbol (the circle-r) is used with goods or services that are officially registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
When using the name of a federally registered item or service, use the circle-r (®) mark on first use.

Common words, commonly spelled/used incorrectly

- advisor (not adviser)
- campuswide (no hyphen)
- first-professional degrees
- fundraising (no space or hyphen)
- health care (two words unless part of a proper noun)
- semester hours (not credit hours)
- *U.S.News & World Report*
- universitywide (no hyphen)
- University is lower case on second reference: *The University of Colorado comprises four campuses. The university has more than 50,000 students.*
- President is lower case unless it's before the president's full name.
- No serial commas. In other words, seldom use a comma before the word "and" unless the sentence would be confusing otherwise
    - Example: The university focuses on research, health and wellness, and community service.
- An article is not 'entitled' to anything. Say titled or don't say anything: His scholarly work, "Riding the Storm Out," has garnered national attention.
- The panel is composed of three men and four women. Or, the panel comprises three men and four women. Nothing is "comprised of."
- It's the "yin and the yang," not the "ying and the yang."
- Principle (a fundamental, primary, or general law or truth from which others are derived: the principles of modern physics [8]) vs. principal (first or highest in rank, importance, value, etc.; chief; foremost. of the [9] nature [10] of, or constituting principal or capital: a principal investment).

Use American English spellings and not British English spellings:

Examples:

- Canceled, not cancelled
- Traveled, not travelled
- Color, not colour
- Defense, not defence
- Normalcy, not normality
- Toward, not towards
- Gray, not grey
- Theater, not theatre

Source URL:https://www.cu.edu/university-relations/style-guidelines

Links
[1] mailto:jay.dedrick@cu.edu [2] http://www.uccs.edu/%7Eccps/
[3] http://www.englishclub.com/grammar/prepositions-list.htm
[4] http://www.superheronation.com/2011/08/16/words-that-should-not-be-capitalized-in-titles/#:~:text=The%20first%20and%20last%20words,%2C%20where%2C%20whether%20%26%20while.
[5] https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html [6] https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/index.html
[7] https://www.cu.edu/university-relations/hyphenation [8] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/physics
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