

Central Washington University Editorial Style Guide Cheat Sheet

The CWU editorial style guide is intended to enhance readability, provide consistency, and establish a high standard of communications. We base our style guide on the Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) for all official university content, including the course catalog, brochures, posters, Web sites, postcards, newsletters, and other publications, printed or online. CMOS is one of the most widely used and respected style guides in the United States, and is considered the *de facto* guide for American English style, grammar, and punctuation.

But because we're not all editors, and the CMOS is nearly 1,000 pages long, CWU Public Affairs has created this cheat sheet to answer the most common questions about our editorial style.

If you are writing any kind of content for the university, please refer to this guide.

This guide's entries are bound to be changed or expanded, so check back for updates. If you feel something should be added to the guide, let us know!

For more information about using the style guide, please contact the Content Team at Public Affairs, 509-963-1221.

Overview

Humans now have a shorter attention span than a goldfish. It is up to us as writers to keep the reader focused on our message, and remove any obstacles to comprehension.

First of all, all grammar and spelling must be flawless. For spelling, use *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* in its latest edition. If more than one spelling is given, or more than one form of the plural, choose the first form listed. For grammar and usage, use Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*.

For a clean and modern look, CWU uses the down style—no unnecessary capitalizations, punctuation marks, or other clutter that tends to slow the reader. Shorter words and shorter sentences are easier to read than longer ones. Break up the page into paragraphs, and break up a document into sections.

Remember, the main goal is to be consistent in usage, as it enhances in readability. For example, under our style guide, time is written H:MM p.m. (e.g., 7:00 p.m.). However, if your document has a lot of times, all those zeros become redundant, hard to read, and take up space. So, *in this instance*, you may choose to write all on-the-hour times as H p.m. (e.g., 7 p.m.). Just make sure that all the times in that document are presented the same way. Otherwise, you look sloppy.

MAJOR CATEGORIES

Abbreviations

Capitalization

Numbers

Punctuation

Academic Titles/Degrees

Abbreviations

Abbreviations should be used only in contexts where they are clear to readers.

Abbreviations—other than acronyms—are rarely used in the text, other than in tables, figure captions, in notes and references, or within parentheses. Follow these general rules:

- Never begin a sentence with a lowercase abbreviation. Begin a sentence with an acronym only if there is no reasonable way to rewrite it.
- Use the traditional honorifics and initials, such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr., A.M., Inc., Ltd., and J. S. Bach, E. E. Cummings, C. S. Lewis.
- Abbreviations such as etc., e.g., and i.e. may only be used in parenthetical comments. They are not used outside parentheses; spell them out. For e.g. (*exempli gratia*) use “for example”; for etc. (*et cetera*) use “and so forth”; for i.e. (*id est*) use “that is.”
- Academic degrees do not take a period— BA, MS, PhD, EdD

Acronyms. When first used in the text, an acronym must be introduced by writing out the name/phrase, with the acronym in parentheses after.

- The American Sociological Association (**ASA**) publishes several journals. The **ASA** also publishes a newsletter.
- Plurals. Write the plural form of an acronym without an apostrophe. For example, GPAs *not* GPA's

Geographical Terms: Within the text, spell out the names of countries, states, counties, provinces, territories, bodies of water, mountains, and other known features. In running text, the names of states, territories, possessions, [Canadian provinces and territories, and foreign countries] should always be spelled out.

- Prefixes. Most prefixes to places, such as Fort, North, Port, South, are spelled out in the text; as are suffixes such as Peak or Fork.
- Postal Abbreviations. Use postal and other abbreviations only on envelopes and mailing labels.
- Adjectives. The abbreviation “US” and “USA” may be used as an adjective in running text, but not as a noun.

Capitalization

Generally speaking, capitalization is used only for the first word of a sentence, proper nouns, and headlines/titles of works.

Note: Capitalizing every letter in a word is generally avoided since it looks like SHOUTING. Unless it is a design feature, nothing should be written in all caps.

Headline or heading caps capitalize the first and last words and all nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and subordinating conjunctions.

Otherwise, do not capitalize:

- Articles: a, an, the
- Prepositions, including: against, between, in, of
- Conjunctions: and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet
- Infinitive: to

Job/Department Titles

Generic titles like dean, professor, president are lowercase when they follow a person's name: Barack Obama, president of the United States. When they precede the name, they are capitalized: President Barack Obama.

Department titles are trickier. The art department or the Department of Art? Our fallback position is if it is a proper name of a program or department, not a generic reference to the subject being taught, then it is capitalized.

Books and Articles. Titles of books and the names of journals always use heading caps in the text, titles of articles, and documents.

Ethnic/Racial Groups. Generally the names of ethnic or racial groups are capitalized if they represent a geographical region or language group. For example, Hispanic, Asian, African American, Appalachian.

- Generic terms. Designations based only on color, size, habitat, customs, or local usage are often lower cased.
- White & Black. Usually lowercased. [Some publishers capitalize it and some don't. Most news organizations, including the *Associated Press* and the *New York Times*, do not. The *Times* style guide calls for lowercasing "black," "white," and all other "racial designations derived from skin color."—from *Grammarphobia*, by Patricia T. O'Conner and Stewart Kellerman]
- Compound ethnics. Do not hyphenate compound nationalities and ethnic or regional terms: African American, Anglo German, Middle Eastern.

Geographical Names. Capitalize place names when these terms are accepted as proper nouns. When a name applies to a well-recognized specific place, it should be capitalized as a proper noun.

- Geographical terms. Lowercase terms for abstract geographical measures, such as equator, equatorial Africa, prime meridian, tropic of Cancer, west, east, south, north.
- Regions. Capitalize Central America, but not central Europe, or central Asia. Capitalize North Africa, West Africa, and East Africa, but not western, eastern,

central, or southern Africa. Capitalize Midwest, West, South or Southwest, but generally write westerner, midwesterner, southerner.

- **Compounds.** When a capitalized geographical term with more than one word is used as an adjective before a noun, the term should not be hyphenated, since there is no risk of misreading: Middle Eastern journey, North Atlantic fog, Gulf of Mexico oil spill.
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Internet Terminology.

- Lower case and hyphenate e-mail.
- Web page, Web site. “Web” is a proper noun, referring to the World Wide Web.
- webmaster, web_. Most other Web terms are spelled lowercased and closed (without a hyphen): webcam, webcast, webhead, webmail, webzine.

Italics & Quotation Marks

Numbers

Whole numbers from one to nine are spelled out. Numerals are used for numbers 10 and larger. The exceptions are:

- Spell out any number that begins a sentence. If it is cumbersome, rewrite the sentence.
- Do not mix numerals with written numbers when they refer to similar things. For example, write “Only 9 of the 150 tourists were willing to visit the city after the riot,” *not* “Only nine of the 150 tourists . . .”
- Generally, spell out symbols used with numbers. For example 45 percent, the temperature was 45 degrees. However, monetary symbols can be used: \$20.
- Any number that denotes a percentage is indicated by a numeral (e.g., 9 percent)
- When writing a date, do not add -th or -st at the end: July 21, March 9. However, do use 21st century or 18th century (no superscript)
- Exact time is represented by numerals: 9:00 a.m. There is a space between the numerals and a.m. and p.m.

Punctuation

Punctuation should promote clarity. Too many commas, parentheses, ellipses and other punctuation marks in a document act as barriers to reading comprehension. The key is readability.

Commas

We are devout proponents of the serial comma, which tidily separates words or phrases by individual commas. Take this famous headline: “Rachel Ray finds inspiration in cooking her family and her dog.” They *probably* meant “Rachel Ray finds inspiration in cooking, her family, and her dog.”

Too many commas in a sentence usually means you have a run-on sentence and should probably break it up.

Italics. Only add italics to a word or phrase the first time it is used, thereafter use plain text.

- Keywords. Emphasize a keyword or phrase in your text by placing it in italics. The next time the term or phrase is used it should be in plain text.
- Titles. The titles of books, plays, periodicals, CD/music albums, art exhibits, are italicized; titles of the works/chapters/songs are in quotation marks. For example, The Beatles' album *Revolver* contains "Eleanor Rigby" and "Yellow Submarine."
- Words as words. Words and letters that are referred to as words or letters are set in italics. For example, "the term *American Indian* is inclusive of more than 500 ethnic communities."
- Non-English words or terms are set in italics. For example, "*Ya-tehay* is a form of greeting in the Diné (Navajo) language." This practice excludes those words that have become incorporated in the English language, such as *laissez-faire*, or *arroyo*.

Quotation marks. Use quotation marks other than for quotes only in the following circumstances:

- Place quotation marks around a word or phrase given in a special sense or purposefully misused. For example, The Population Council criticized the "outrageous" position of the Church on birth control. Chicago calls these "scare quotes." Use sparingly.
- Single quotation marks are used to indicate a quote within a quote. For example: "He told me, 'Go get the water'," said the rancher.

Periods and ellipses

- Use periods at the end of a complete sentence.
- Use only one space after a period at the end of a sentence.
- Use periods with a.m. and p.m.
- If a sentence ends with an abbreviation that has a period, such as p.m., it doesn't need another period. For example, "I met her at 7 p.m."
- Ellipses are used to indicate that text is missing from quoted material. In literary works it also conveys a pause or a hesitation. Use sparingly. Ellipses are three periods with a space before and after each one . . .

Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to indicate possession and in contractions to indicate letter/numbers are missing. They are not used to form plurals.

- Possession: That is Jim's coat. Plural: Jim has many coats.
- Contraction: don't, can't, couldn't, shouldn't. Also used with numerals: the swinging '60s. Note there is not apostrophe before the 's' in '60s.

Academic Titles

CWU uses Doctor or Dr. to indicate medical doctors only (in line with most other universities). In most cases, we refer to our faculty as professors, without distinguishing assistant, associate, and so on, unless the exact title is pertinent, such as on business cards or signature blocks.

On business cards:

Firstname Lastname, PhD

Associate professor

Department of Knowledge

Generic titles like dean, professor, provost, president are lowercased when they follow a person's name: Barack Obama, president of the United States. When they precede the name, they are capitalized: President Barack Obama.

*The hardback version of the CMOS is at the Wildcat shop. It's also available online through a subscription at www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.