

University Communications Style Sheet

The following guidelines are used by the University Communications Office to enhance the effectiveness of written publications produced by or in cooperation with the communications staff. Publications are defined as things made public and include magazines, newsletters, brochures, articles, advertisements, media releases and web pages.

Effective publications communicate, and clarity of language and consistency of style are critical to communication. Clarity and consistency allow readers to concentrate on content, thereby increasing understanding.

Most guidelines are based on the *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual*. University communications staff selected this manual due to its almost unanimous acceptance by the news media to which we send releases and other materials. For questions not addressed by the AP manual we turn to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th Edition, the other major authority in the field. Our authority on the Internet and related subjects is *The Web Content Style Guide*.

Because language changes over time and standard English is determined solely through usage, dictionaries sometimes differ. Office standards are based on *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* and *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. The best source for instruction on writing well for the general audience is *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk and E.B. White. *The Gregg Reference Manual* is helpful for esoteric grammar and usage questions.

This style sheet is a working document meant to help those wishing to write, edit or proofread text for university publications. Please contact Wayne Steffen, university editor, with any suggestions or questions.

The following pages contain many of the common usage questions brought to university communications.

Capitalization

When to capitalize is the question most often brought up in editing university publications. Capital letters are meant to call attention to certain words, hence capitalization infers importance. While academia is a field that grants importance to as many words as possible, capital letters impede the flow of text and are harder for the eye to read. In addition, a page full of capital letters defeats the purpose of conferring importance to words (and what they refer to) because busy readers are not likely to expend the energy necessary to sort out what is “really” important. Since readability is our goal, and since American English tends toward informality, university publications use capital letters sparingly.

Titles

Capitalize formal titles before a name, but not after.

FPU President Harold Haak

Harold Haak, president of FPU

Proper names

Capitalize the names of offices and departments as geographic entities since that’s what makes them unique entities (see generic terms, below).

The Undergraduate Admissions Office

Admissions or college admissions

Centers, like offices, are considered locations.

Center for Degree Completion and Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies

Departments, divisions, programs and schools are not.

the music department (but the Music Office), the library media teacher program and the division of pupil personnel

Schools are capitalized in their full title, which includes the name of the university, is used.

Fresno Pacific Graduate School

the graduate school

Academic subjects

Languages are the only academic subjects capitalized when not used as a part of a proper name.

English, Spanish

business, biblical and religious studies

Generic terms

Do not capitalize words such as “university,” “college,” “campus,” “office,” “department,” “division,” “center” and “program” when used alone to refer to a specific place.

Fresno Pacific University

the university

McDonald Hall Atrium

the atrium

EXCEPTION: It is so common in this area to refer to “the Valley” or “the Central Valley” when referring to this section of the San Joaquin Valley, that not to do so would confuse probably the majority of readers.

Degrees

Dr. before a name is reserved for physicians. In other uses note the kind of degree after the name.

Harold Haak, Ph.D., is president of Fresno Pacific University.

Since doctorates are common in higher education, do not use any designation unless it is necessary to the written piece.

Commas

Do not use serial commas (commas in a series before “and” and “or”) unless necessary for understanding.

The flag is red, white and blue.

He specializes in the history and development of Anabaptism, evangelism and believer's baptism, and peace and justice issues.

Internet references

“email” not “e-mail”

homepage

Internet or Net (capitalize; there's only one)

intranet (don't capitalize; there are many)

Web (Short for World Wide Web. The term is generally capitalized when used as a noun, but not when used as an adjective.)

The Web is a powerful research tool.

There are millions of web users.

Web address

Web browser

Webmaster

Webpage or page

website or site

World Wide Web or Web (same as Internet)

Quotation marks

Periods and commas always go within quotation marks. Dashes, semicolons, question marks and exclamation points go within quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence.

Miscellaneous

Use one space, not two, after a period to introduce a new sentence.

Use hyphens to separate all parts of telephone numbers.

559-453-3677

Sentences may end with a preposition.

Infinitives may be split by a single word *only*.

Advisor is spelled “or.” We make this exception to the style book and dictionaries due to common academic practice.

Proofreading suggestions

1. Always proof read (don't depend on spell check or grammar check).
2. Proof more than once.
3. Read backwards to catch mechanical errors, such as spelling. This is especially helpful when checking your own writing, the hardest writing for you to edit since you know what it's supposed to mean.
4. Set work, especially your own, aside before proofing.
5. Have someone else look at your work. Two sets of eyes are better than one, and yes, three sets are better than two.

Compiled May 2001 (last updated September 2003) by Wayne Steffen, university editor