



Council Writing Guide

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Council Writing Guide

Communications intended for Council audiences should follow the agency's writing guidelines, which are in large part based on Associated Press (AP) style. These guidelines help standardize the language and presentation of our mass communications, which appear in online, print and social media outlets.

The exception to following these guidelines would be publications intended for external resources, which may have their own style parameters.

For questions about style beyond that listed here, contact the Communications unit, refer to [Purdue University's online AP style reference](#) or use [Merriam-Webster Online](#).

General Grammar, Punctuation

Word Strings using "And" or "Or"

Avoid the Oxford comma (comma placed before "and") in a simple series, unless the string of phrases has several "ands." (red, white and blue; red and white stripes, blue and white stripes, or red and blue stripes).

Bulleted Items

When selecting a bullet, use the standard "•" symbol for first-level lists in documents. However, use the dash, "-" for news releases. For sub-bullets, refrain from using special characters that may not be available on other computers unless distributing the document in .pdf format.

After each bullet or dash, capitalize the first letter and use periods at the end of each item.

Spacing after Punctuation

Use one space after a period, semicolon or colon.

The two-space rule evolved during the typewriter era to accommodate variances in typeset letter width. This rule may remain in keyboarding curriculum today. However, computers have standardized letter widths, making the two-space rule moot.

Hyphenating Adjectives

Use hyphens to link all the words in a compound adjective, but do not use a hyphen if the phrase includes very or an adverb ending in -ly. (The well-known college is also popular for its biology degrees. The college, also well known for its biology degrees, is popular. The Council's priority is on-time graduation. Students who do not graduate on time are a Council priority.)

"Is" or "Are" after a Collective Noun

Nouns that denote a unit take singular verbs and pronouns: class, committee, crowd, family, group, herd, jury, orchestra and team.

"Staff" is a collective noun and necessitates singular verbs. (CPE staff manages data collection.) However, when usage is not generic but specifying people, use "staff members" or "staffers" (Staff must submit timesheets. Staff members who submitted timesheets are....)

"Data" is a plural noun of "datum," and needs plural verbs and pronouns when use of "data" is relating to pieces and parts. (The data submissions are complete.) However, when using "data" as a collective noun, as the product of a compilation of the pieces and parts, it takes a singular verb. (The data is sound.)

Passive Voice

Avoid passive voice; rewrite to use active. Passive voice occurs when whoever or whatever is performing the action is not the subject of the sentence. The key to identifying the passive voice is to look for both a form of “to be” and a past participle, which usually, but not always, ends in “-ed.” (Passive version: The report was written by Lee. “Lee” is the actual subject. Active version: Lee wrote the report.)

How to set MS Word to check for passive voice

- Select the File tab, then Options.
- Select Proofing on the left side of the dialog box.
- If not already selected, click on Check grammar with spelling and Show readability statistics in the When correcting spelling and grammar in Word section. Under this, click on the Settings button.
- Select Passive Voice under “Clarity and Conciseness.”

Academics

Degree Names

Spell out degree names (doctorate, instead of Ph.D.; Master of Science, instead of M.S.).

When referring to generic degrees, the correct spellings for singular/plural are:

- associate degree/associate degrees
- bachelor’s degree/bachelor’s degrees
- master’s degree/master’s degrees
- doctorate/doctorates

When referring to specific degrees, leave off the “s” and capitalize them, but not the major. (He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.)

Majors

Except for languages or proper nouns, do not capitalize the names of academic disciplines, majors, minors, programs and courses of study. (She is a history major at Western Kentucky University. He majored in education and English.)

Degree Abbreviations

Use periods for degrees abbreviated with two capital letters (B.A., B.S., Ph.D. Ed.D., J.D. and R.N.); degrees with more than two capital letters do not take the periods (MBA, MSN, BSN, MFA, MS-FIN, MS-MKT, BSBA, and MABA).

Honors Designations

Use lowercase. (He graduated cum laude from the Eastern Kentucky University.)

Course Titles with Numbers

Capitalize only; do not italicize or use quotation marks. (His first class of the day is English 101.)

Course Titles without Numbers

Use lowercase, unless the course deals with a language or includes a proper noun. (His first class of the day is humanities. His first class of the day is English. His first class of the day is American Sign Language.)

Special Programs

Unless the word "program" is part of the official name, do not capitalize it after the proper noun. (KHEAA manages the Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship program.)

Council References

Agency

Use Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) on first reference if written for external audiences. Council and CPE are suitable for second reference.

Members

When referring to members of the Council, capitalize "Council" and lowercase "member." If the member is also serving as chair or vice-chair, use the rules applied to job titles. (Council Chair Sherrill Zimmerman and Council member Donna Moore supported the proposed change.)

Dates and Time

Days of the Week

Capitalize days of the week; do not abbreviate.

Months

Always capitalize and spell out months, unless used with a date. When used with a date, abbreviate only the following months: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.

Numerical Dates

Always use numbers without "st," "nd," "rd," or "th." (The Council met Feb. 2 in Frankfort.)

References to Dates in Narrative

When describing events occurring within a seven-day period of the writing of the story - such as a media advisory or weekly newsletter - use days of the week along with the date. (The Council will meet Wednesday, Sept 5 in Conference Room A.)

When describing events occurring within the same year, use the month and date. (The Council met June 21-22 in Frankfort.)

When a phrase refers to a specific date (month, day and year), set off the year with commas. (Building completion was July 1, 2010.)

When describing an event without a specific date, using only the month and year, do not separate with commas. (The Council conducted several meetings during February 2017.)

Time

If an event occurs on the hour, omit the colon and double zeroes. When designating a.m. or p.m., use lowercase, with periods. Always indicate the time zone. EST is for standard time; EDT is for daylight savings time. (The Council will meet at 10 a.m. EST.)

Multiyear Periods

Use the four-digit year, a hyphen and the end two digits of the period such as 2011-12, not 2011-2012. An exception to this rule is at the end of a century--1999-2000.

Academic Year

Academic years run fall through summer semesters. Reference academic years by the fall semester's four-digit year, followed by a hyphen and the next year's two-digits. (The numbers are for the 2012-13 academic year.)

Fiscal Year

Reference fiscal years by their end date or end year. (For a fiscal year running July 2016 to June 2017, refer to it as FY 2017.)

In text, use "Fiscal Year" (capitalized) and the year on the first reference (Fiscal Year 2016). For subsequent references, use "FY," a space and the year (FY 2016; not FY2016). "FY" and the year without the space are acceptable in charts or Twitter (where spacing is tight).

Semesters

Lowercase spring, summer, winter and fall as descriptors of semesters unless part of a formal name or a publication. (The data is from the spring 2016 semester. The Spring 2016 Semester Headcount report is ready.)

Year Graduated

To indicate degrees earned at an institution, place a comma immediately after the person's name, and follow it with a space, the degree, an apostrophe, the degree's two-numeral year-when awarded, and a comma. (John Smith, B.A. '97, is one of Morehead State University's distinguished alumni.)

If more than one degree from the same institution, list both the degrees and the years earned in succession (John Smith, B.A. '97, M.A. '00, Ph.D. '04, is one of the University of Kentucky's distinguished alumni.) If the degrees are from multiple schools, only include the degree, not the year.

Elected Government Officials

Titles

Capitalize formal titles when they appear before a name. On first reference, abbreviate these governmental titles when appearing before a name: Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen. and certain military ranks. However, use the last name for the remainder of the narrative.

On first reference for all other formal titles, Spell out the formal title. Refer to the person by only last name for the rest of the narrative. (President Mike Benson spoke today.)

Use lowercase when not preceding the name or referring to a specific person. (Matt Bevin is governor of Kentucky. The senator explained the bill. When referencing a person, after first reference, use the person's last name. (Gov. Matt Bevin spoke at the news conference. Bevin expressed concern for the bill.)

"Congressman" and "congresswoman" are options for U.S. House members in subsequent references if not following the individual's name, just as senator refers to members of the Senate. (The congressman spoke on Friday. Rep. Barr spoke on Friday.)

Abbreviated Titles

Use Rep., Reps., Sen. and Sens. as formal titles when appearing before one or more names. (Sens. McConnell and Paul were in Kentucky. Rep. Graham voted against the bill.) When referencing both state and national seats in the same paragraph, precede national seats with "U.S." (Sen. Carroll and U.S. Sen. McConnell spoke at the Capitol.)

Political Party

Capitalize parties when they refer to a specific party or its members. Lowercase these words when they refer to a political philosophy. (Governor Bevin is a Republican. She advocates a democratic approach.)

Capitalize the name of the party and the word "party" when used as part of the organization's proper name. (The governor is a member of the Republican Party.)

Political Affiliation

Most times, denoting political affiliation is irrelevant, unless the reader needs it for understanding an issue. When using party affiliation, use a party letter (D, R), a hyphen and the state abbreviation following the name. (Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. announced his campaign.)

Former Officeholders

Lowercase the use of "former" before a job title.

- When to use "former" before a title: Officials elected to positions where only one person can serve at a time (governor, president and secretary of state). To describe them, use the title preceded by "former" as in former Governor Paul Patton.
- When not to use "former" before a title: Officials who hold a position of which there is more than one person serving at a time (retired judges, retired ambassadors, retired generals and retired senators). Use the "title" without "former" as in retired Gen. Colin Powell.

"The Honorable"

Use "The Honorable" only as part of the title when the name is in a formal list or when addressing an envelope.

Institution Names

The Preceding "The"

Use lowercase for a preceding "the," unless it is part of the company's formal name. (He works for the University of Louisville. He works for The Honest Company.)

"And" or "&" in a Proper Name

Use an ampersand only if it is part of the entity's formal name; in every other case, use "and." (M&M's candies are wonderful. Ferrero and Rocher candies are divine.)

"Kentucky," "KY" and "Ky" in a Proper Name

Spell out Kentucky (instead of KY), especially in a proper name (Western Kentucky University; not Western KY University). If an institution's name needs to be shortened, use its official acronym.

Regional Campuses

Uppercase the "c" in "campus" whenever referring to particular locations. (The event will occur at the Somerset Campus.)

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Leave out parenthetical school abbreviations after an institution's proper name. Your audience is familiar with these entities. Use them only for groups unknown to the general audience, or if similar to a well-known acronym, and if you are going to refer to them later in the text. (The Committee on Equal Opportunities (CEO) met with provosts. The results of the CEO's meeting include....)

Referencing Entities within an Institution

Lowercase departments, unless it is the name of the official college/entity. (He is a professor of communications, in the department of communications. Alternatively, the University of Kentucky's Department of Communications.) Do not capitalize general descriptors such as provost's office, the center, the college. (See next page for examples.)

Hints for when you should capitalize – the name begins with

- Office of the
- Department of
- School of
- College of
- Division of
- Center for

Hints for when you should not capitalize – the name is a general descriptor, such as

- provost's office, academic affairs, the office
- biological sciences, the biology department
- the school, the music school
- health and human services, the college
- intercollegiate athletics, athletics, the division
- the center, the institute

People's Names, Titles, Credentials

Names

Use first and last name at first reference. For following references, do not use the first name; use the last name (Robert King became president of the Council in January 2009. King's contributions to the Council include....)

Courtesy Titles

In general, do not use courtesy titles except in direct quotations. When it is necessary to distinguish between two people who use the same last name, as in married couples or brothers and sisters, use the first and last name. (Gov. Matt Bevin congratulated Dr. and Mrs. Smith on their work for the charitable campaign.)

Degree Designation

If mention of degrees is necessary to establish someone's credentials, the preferred form is to avoid an abbreviation and use instead a phrase. (John Jones, who has a doctorate in psychology, served as keynote speaker.)

When referring to a degree in a person's name/signature: do not use both the title and degree credential – choose either Dr. or Ph.D. Also, precede a suffix with a comma such as Aaron Thompson, Ph.D., or Dr. Aaron Thompson.

Job Titles

Capitalize and spell out formal titles when they precede a name. Lowercase if the title follows the name, or if it is set off from the name by commas. (Council President Bob King; Bob King is the Council president; The Council's former president, Tom Layzell, was in Frankfort.)

If the title is a general descriptor of an occupation, do not capitalize, whether it precedes or follows the name. (writer Jane Smith; Jane Smith is a writer. The writer, Jane Smith, was in attendance.)

Places

States

If a state's name is standing alone or following a city or town, spell out the entire state's name. (The Council members traveled to Evansville, Indiana.) The exception is for cities in Kentucky when the meaning is clear, leave off "Kentucky." (The Council traveled to Louisville.)

"KY" or "Ky."

"KY" is acceptable in data tables and charts as an abbreviation for the state. Do not use "KY" in narrative or to shorten the name of an institution or other entity; use instead the official abbreviation or acronym. (Not KY Dept. of Education, but rather KDE.)

Use "Ky." in datelines for news releases (e.g., *Frankfort, Ky.*), photo captions, and to address letters.

Regions

Use lowercase to indicate compass directions and capitalize regions. (Graduation rates for southeastern counties in Kentucky increased. Graduation rates for the South increased.) When not sure, look for an article (a, an, the) in front of the word in question.

Cities

These well-known cities do not require states to follow them in text: Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Milwaukee, New York, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, Seattle, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Miami, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Phoenix, San Diego and Washington.

Addresses

If a street name is a number, spell out First through Ninth and use figures for 10th and higher.

"Capital" or "Capitol"

Capital is the city; Capitol is the building. Use lowercase when referring to the capital unless it is part of a title. (Frankfort is the capital of Kentucky. Frankfort's nickname is "Kentucky's Capital City.") When referring to a specific capitol building, capitalize. (The senator spoke at the Capitol yesterday. Senators across the nation spoke at their respective capitols.)

Citing Publications

The following applies to albums, articles, books, computer games, lectures, movies, plays, poems, radio shows, songs, speeches, TV shows and works of art:

- Use quotation marks (except for the Bible and works categorized as reference materials).
- Capitalize the principal words; also capitalize prepositions and conjunctions if four or more letters.
- Capitalize the first and last word in the title if it is an article (the, a, an) or words fewer than four letters.
- Translate foreign titles into English, unless well known by its foreign name.
- Capitalize “the” in the name if that is the publication’s formal title.
- For websites, computer programs or applications:
- Capitalize only; no quotes.