

Editorial Style Guidelines for the Florida State University Division of Student Affairs

Grammar and Language Use for Clear and Consistent
Communications with Stakeholders

Updated 11/3/21

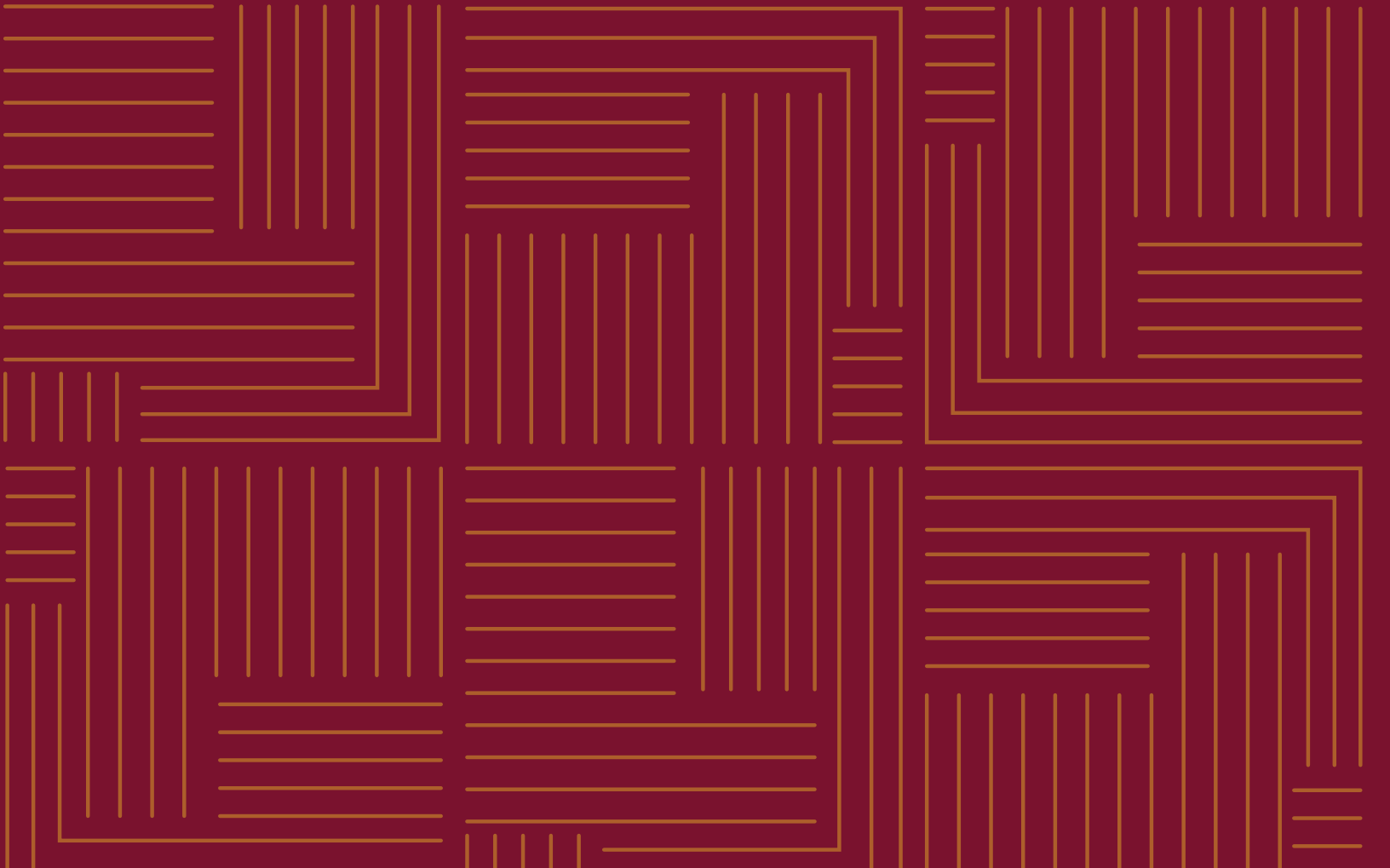


This document is a product of a collaboration between the FSU Division of Student Affairs (FSU DSA) Marketing and Communications Office and the FSU Office of University Communications.

Each year the Florida State University Division of Student Affairs (FSU DSA) communicates with stakeholders through hundreds of print and digital promotional and marketing materials and messages. Although the division's primary audience is current FSU students, our communications also reach families, employees, the community, alumni and prospective donors. Considering the wide reach of our communications, it is important that staff members and students who write for DSA publications use consistent and clear language and uphold high standards for accuracy. Our goal is to achieve a high degree of consistency among all the messages that students and other audiences receive from DSA so we can better build familiarity, engagement and trust.

All materials produced by DSA should uphold the [FSU brand](#) and convey the university's brand promise, which is a simple, powerful statement that declares our commitment to constituents. University Communications has defined our brand promise for future and current students as, "An extraordinary and diverse educational experience that inspires creativity, self-discovery and leadership to empower you throughout your life." This promise to our students also aligns with DSA's mission to empower and support all students to achieve their full potential. Our written communication should embody this promise and mission.

This guide is for use by the FSU DSA staff members who develop content for publications, newsletters, web content, social media, e-mails to students and other public information materials. This style guide is not relevant to academic work.



Contents

<i>Our Style</i>	4
<i>Academic Terms and Titles</i>	5
<i>Acronyms</i>	5
<i>Inclusive Language</i>	6
<i>Times and Dates</i>	6
<i>Numbers</i>	7
<i>Citations</i>	7
<i>Technology</i>	7
<i>Tips for Clear and Concise Writing</i>	8
<i>More Hints</i>	8

Our Style

FSU University Communications and the Division of Student Affairs follows the guidelines of the Associated Press Stylebook with a few exceptions. As AP Style does not address every situation, the university has created some “house style” guidelines. The information below highlights some notable writing style guidelines that we should adhere to when possible:

- **Write out Florida State University** on first reference, **Florida State** or **FSU** on second reference. If the message is intended for an internal audience and not a formal communication such as a flyer or social media post, it is acceptable to refer to the university as “FSU” on the first reference.
- Refer to FSU as **the university** not the University or The University.
- Use **Noles** not ‘Noles.
- The first letter of the term can be capitalized if it is followed by the year.
For example: Spring 2022
- Phone numbers should be typed out as **(850) 445-1220** not 850-445-1220 or 850.445.1220.
- For **academic departments**, use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives, or when the word “department” is part of the official and formal name.
- For **building names**, use the proper official title of the building on first reference. Second reference can be shortened version or building acronym.
- Kick off versus kickoff - Use **kick off** as a verb and **kickoff** as a noun or adjective.
- Per AP Style, use commas to separate three or more words, phrases or clauses written in a series. However, **do not use a comma before the “and” or the “or” that precedes the final item in the series**, unless one of the items in the series has an “and” or “or” within it.
For example: She is in the Student Government Association, Lady Spirithunters and FSU Ad Club.
- AP style says: Use a **single space after a period** at the end of a sentence.
- Capitalize the first letter of a **full-sentence quote**. When a full-sentence quotation is introduced or followed by attribution, place a comma between them, unless the quote is a question.
For example: “We were all at the meeting,” Smith said. “Were we all able to share our thoughts?” Smith asked.
- No hyphen with the suffix **-wide**. So campuswide, collegewide, statewide, worldwide.
- Use **who and whom** for references to students, employees and all people. Use that and which for inanimate objects and animals without names.
Who is a subject. *For example:* Who is the person handling homecoming? Whom is an object. *For example:* To whom should I ask about homecoming events? Generally, a sentence will still make sense if you can replace who with he or she such as: Who handles homecoming? She does. Whom can be replaced by him or her such as: To whom should I ask about homecoming? To her.

AP style says: Use a **single space after a period** at the end of a sentence.

Academic Terms and Titles

- The following formal names of specific degrees should always be capitalized: **Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts, Master of Science and Master of Business Administration.**
- However, the forms **bachelor's degree, bachelor's, master's degree, master's, doctorate and doctoral degree** are acceptable as general terms (**Bachelor of Arts in Communication vs. bachelor's degree in communication**).
- Do not precede a name with a courtesy title for an academic degree and follow it with the abbreviation for the degree in the same reference (**B.A., B.S., M.S., MBA, Ph.D.**).
- Use **Dr.** in first reference as a formal title before the name of an individual who holds a doctor of dental surgery, doctor of medicine, doctor of optometry, doctor of osteopathic medicine, doctor of podiatric medicine, or doctor of veterinary medicine.
- For all people, use **full names** on first reference. On second reference, use only the **last name**. If two people with the same last name are quoted in a story, use first and last names.
- **Capitalize formal titles** that **come directly before a name** but **lowercase titles that appear on their own or follow** a name.
For example: Foundation Coordinator Bob Jones met with Grace Smith the director of Public Health Programs.
- Freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior are lowercase unless at the start of a sentence.
- Use **adviser** not advisor.
- For **course/class titles**, capitalize and **do not** italicize or use quotation marks.
For example: Art Contemporary & Historical Issues will be taught next fall.
- When referring to a past or present FSU student, **include the graduation year**.
For example: John Smith, '22. **Alumni** is plural, **alumnus** is for a male, singular and **alumna** for a female. **Alum** can be used for a male or female graduate.
- Spell out **grade point average** upon first use in materials for external audiences and then use **GPA** thereafter. GPA can be used anytime in internal materials. Note there are no periods in GPA.

Use **Dr.** in **first reference as a formal title** before the name of an individual who holds a doctorate degree in a field of medicine.

Acronyms

- **Avoid abbreviations or acronyms** that readers will not quickly recognize. To help build an inclusive environment, we should write as if we are explaining something to someone new to our campus and avoid writing with insider language.
- Where acronyms are necessary, **spell out the full term on first reference**, followed by the acronym in parentheses, and use the acronym thereafter.
As a reference, please see the [FSU Lingo document](#) that the New Student & Family Programs office has created to help demystify FSU acronyms.

Avoid abbreviations or acronyms that readers will not quickly recognize.

Inclusive Language

The FSU Division of Student Affairs is committed to cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusion while respecting our differences and celebrating our diversity at our university and in our community. We recognize that the **words we use really do matter. Intentionally using inclusive language in our written (and verbal) communication** will help members of our campus community **feel more valued, recognized and invited to contribute.**

Here are a few considerations for inclusive language:

- As **identity is personal**, when interacting with people for the first time, describe your intention to use respectful language and ask, **“How do wish for me to refer to you?”**
- **Always emphasize the person, not specific traits.** Avoid referring to someone's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability or age unless the information is relevant to the story.
- **Use asset-based** not deficit-based language that **focuses on strengths** not perceived weaknesses.
- **Language** is changing and **will continue to evolve** to be more inclusive. A very thorough [Inclusive Language Guide](#) from the Oregon Health & Science University Center for Diversity and Inclusion, shares that “The goal of using inclusive language is not transactional – **it is not about getting it right or wrong as much as it is about a paradigm shift.**” This guide not only has a glossary of terms and definitions, it is also an **excellent resource** for anyone searching for inclusive language regarding:
 - Race and ethnicity
 - Immigration status and language proficiency
 - Sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation
 - Ability (physical, mental and chronological attributes)

Times and Date

- Per AP Style, use a.m. and p.m. without :00

For example:

10 a.m. not 10:00 a.m. or 10am or 10AM

10:30 p.m. not 10:30pm or 10:30PM

Avoid 12 noon, 12 midnight or 9 a.m. in the morning, just say noon, midnight or 9 a.m.

- **For dates**, always use Arabic figures, **without st, nd, rd or th.**
- When a month is used with a specific date, **abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.** Spell out when using alone, or with a year alone.
- **Capitalize** the names of months in all uses.

Per AP Style, use a.m. and p.m.
without :00

- When a phrase lists only a month and a year, **do not** separate the year with commas.
- Use **hyphens** or **“to”** for ranges of dates and times. **Never use a dash.**
- When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas.
For example: Oct. 21, 2021
- For **decades**, do not use apostrophes
For example: She graduated in the 1990s.

Spell out numbers one through nine.

Numbers

- **Spell out numbers one through nine.** Use figures for 10 and up. Use commas in all dollar amounts of \$1,000 or more. However, \$1,000,000 can be written as \$1 million.
- Spell out **percent** as one word or use %.
- If a number must start the sentence, spell out the number, capitalizing its first letter.
- When referencing **fractions**, spell out amounts less than one in stories, using hyphens between the words: **two-thirds, four-fifths, seven-sixteenths, etc.** Use figures for precise amounts larger than one, converting to decimals whenever practical. In tabular material, use figures exclusively, converting to decimals if the amounts involve extensive use of fractions that cannot be expressed as a single character.

Citations

- **Use quotation marks for:** books, games (video, computer, board), movies, operas, plays, poems, albums, songs, radio programs, TV programs, lectures, speeches or works of art.
- **Do not use quotation marks for:** mobile apps, social media platforms, courses/classes, The Bible, newspapers, magazines, catalogs of reference material, almanacs, directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, gazetteers, handbooks or computer software.

Technology

- Do not tell someone to “find info on the web”; instead **give the reader the web address** to easily find the info so they do not have to hunt for it. Keep the web address as short as possible. If the URL is too long to fit on one line, insert a line break after a forward slash or period or use the [FSU URL link shortener](#).
- Use **website** not web site or Website.
- The word **internet** is lowercase.
- Use one word, no space or hyphen, for **login, logon** or **logoff** as a noun. But use as two words in verb form: *I **log in** to my computer.*
- Use **email** not e-mail or E-mail.

Use **website, internet** and **email**

Tips for Clear and Concise Writing

- **Keep it simple.** Write in a way that your target audience will easily understand what you are trying to convey. Do not use insider information such as acronyms or jargon.
- Remember, effective messages are **student-centered** and student-friendly. The message's call to action is critical to capturing attention and action.
- Think of how to best organize content in a way that will be easy to digest. **Organize** it in a logical sequence.
- Write in the **active voice** whenever possible.

Keep it simple.

More Hints

- Both **more than** and **over** are acceptable in all uses to indicate greater numerical value
- When used to describe a new business venture, **startup** is one word (n. and adj.)
- **Groundbreaking** is one word.
- **Spell out** the names of the **50 U.S. states** when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base. No state name is necessary if it is the same as the dateline.
- **Toward** not towards.
- **Under** can also mean **less than**.
- **It's** is the contraction of it is. **Its** is possessive.
For example: It's a new year with more meetings. The department had its meeting last week.
- **Who's** is the contraction of who is. **Whose** is possessive.
For example: Who's going to the game? Whose turn is it to buy tickets?
- Do not use an ampersand (&) in place of the word "and" except in the case of an organization that uses the "&" in its official name such as Center for Leadership & Social Change.
- Exclamation points can be a nice way to show enthusiasm; however, an overuse of exclamation points can take away from the intended message. Use them sparingly!

This document was created with information provided by the FSU Office of University Communications as well information from the following online resources:

www.apstylebook.com

pages.eab.com/rs/732-GKV_655/images/Optimize%20your%20student%20communications%20strategy_Toolkit.pdf

<https://dsst.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu1476/files/media/slides/FSU%20Lingo%20-%202021.pdf>

media.clemson.edu/studentaffairs/fb/vis/#20

www.tcc.fl.edu/media/divisions/communications-and-marketing/TCC-Style-Guide.pdf

https://www.ohsu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/OHSU%20Inclusive%20Language%20Guide_031521.pdf