

Southwest Minnesota State University Style Guide

There is a distinction between style and grammar. Grammar involves rules that we rarely (if ever) break, but style often is a matter of choice. The key to adopting an effective style is to choose one prevailing guide and apply it across the board consistently.

The Office of Communications has chosen the Chicago Manual of Style, which is published by the University of Chicago Press, as our style guide because it is the preferred style guide for most academic institutions and academic presses. We follow Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary on questions of spelling, hyphenation, capitalization, and foreign words. Because not everyone has a copy of Chicago and because even those of us who do often find it cumbersome to use, we have identified the following items that come into question frequently. In addition, we have listed some Southwest-specific terms. In some cases, we reference the Associated Press Stylebook, mainly for the abbreviation of states and newspaper-specific style questions.

This style guide is intended to evolve, as the English language does, to reflect current usage and to embrace new terms as they come into common use. Please contact the University Relations office with your suggestions for making this guide more helpful and more inclusive or to request a paper copy of the style guide.

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abbreviations

- * Generally, no periods with abbreviations: IQ, IOU, VCR, HMO
- Exceptions: U.S., U.N.
- * Form the plural by adding an s (no apostrophe): VCRs, HMOs, CD-ROMs.

academic degrees

- * Abbreviations: BA, PhD, MD, RN, MBA, MFA. (See Chicago 15.21 for a more complete list.)
- * Use lowercase and, where appropriate, possessive in text:
"master's degree in business administration"; "doctorate in political science."
- * A degree takes the indefinite article a: "He earned a PhD."
- * Form the plural by adding s: BAs, PhDs, MBAs.

acronyms

- * No period, put in small caps: CARE, VISTA, AIDS

admission

- * admission counselor, admission office, Office of Admission (not Admissions)

adviser

- * Not advisor

African American

- * No hyphen

ages

- * Spell out one through nine; use numerals for 10 and up: "a six-year-old boy," "a 47-year-old man."

alumni relations office

* Use lowercase for informal usage; capitalize formal name only: Office of University Relations; no hyphen.

Alumni Annual Fund

* Capitalize for clarity. For the same reason, capitalize related entities: Parents Fund.

Alumni Association of Southwest Minnesota State University

* Capitalize the formal name of this group, which includes all people who have attended Southwest.

alumni board

* Use lowercase for informal usage; capitalize formal name: Alumni Board of Directors.

alumnus/alumna/alumni

* Alumna is a female graduate; the plural is alumnae. Alumnus (plural: alumni) is, strictly speaking, the masculine form, but it's still gender-inclusive and we use it most often. Avoid alum. Never alumn.

birth name

* Do not set off a birth name in parentheses or quotation marks: Jane Doe Smith. In publications with alumni as the primary audience, use a female graduate's birth name followed by her married name: Stacy VanderHamm Frost '93.

Board of Trustees

* Capitalize when it refers to MnSCU's governing body: "the Board of Trustees." But: "the board." Trustee, however, is lowercase: "trustee chair John Doe." (See also titles, personal.)

brackets

* Use square brackets, not parentheses, to add words to quoted material (see Chicago 6.104).

campus names

* When a college or university has more than one campus, separate the campus name from the institution's name with an en dash: University of California–Berkeley, Cal State–Fullerton, State University of New York–Buffalo.

capitalization

* See Alumni Annual Fund; Board of Trustees; class year; college; departments; reunion; titles, personal; and titles of works.

captions/cutlines

* End with a period if caption/outline is a complete sentence. No period if it is not a complete sentence. Length is not the determining factor.

cities

* See state names.

class titles

* See course titles.

class year

* No comma before it, no parentheses around it, and make sure that the apostrophe that takes the place of the "19" or "20" is a real apostrophe, not a single open quote, and should be a right apostrophe: Bob Smith '89 not a left apostrophe: Bob Smith '89.

* Capitalize the word class when it refers to a specific year:

"The Class of '56 presented a gift to support science technology."

comma

* Use the serial comma: "Abe, Bob, and Camille." In a series consisting of three or more elements, the elements are separated by commas. When a conjunction joins the last two elements, use a comma before the conjunction. (See Chicago 6.19–6.20.)

* Follow Chicago 6.31 on punctuating nonrestrictive clauses—for example, “My husband, Gabe, liked touring the campus” (since the speaker has only one husband, the construction is “nonrestrictive” and the name is set off with commas), but “My three girls, including my daughter Kate” (Kate is one of several, thus “restrictive,” thus no comma).

* See also Jr., Sr.

Commencement

* Capitalize when it refers to the Southwest event in May.

compound words

* In general, use Merriam-Webster's to determine whether or not to hyphenate or to spell solid or open: clear-cut, workweek, chain saw.

* To avoid ambiguity, hyphenate compound modifiers preceding a noun: “the compound-modifier issue.” If the compound is in the dictionary, ambiguity is unlikely: “a high school student.”

* Do not hyphenate when the first word of a compound modifier is an adverb ending in -ly: “a badly remembered past.”

convocation

* Capitalize only when it is modified by an equally important adjective, transforming it into a special event: Freshmen Convocation, for example. Otherwise, use lowercase: “The convocation speaker was Thomas Jackson ’78.”

course titles

* Capitalize and use quotation marks: His course “Bandits, Outlaws, and Other Rebels” was offered last fall. (Exception: In a long list of courses, e.g., the course catalog, omit quotation marks.)

dates

* Use month-day-year sequence (omit the year if it’s obvious).

* Use cardinal, not ordinal, numbers: June 30, not June 30th.

* Do not separate month and year sequence with a comma: September 2003.

dean’s list

- Lowercase

Deans’ Office

- Use capitalized Deans’ when referring to the office of both deans.

departments

* Use lowercase—except proper nouns: English department, science department, social science department.

* Capitalize a department’s full, formal name: Department of Business and Public Affairs. (Follow Chicago 8.73.)

* Administrative departments: Unless it is the name of a publication (like the President’s Report) or a building (like the McFarland Alumni & Foundation Center), lowercase the informal usage of all campus offices:

admission office, alumni affairs office, dean of students’ office, advancement office.

* Capitalize the formal name: Academic Commons, Student Center, William Whipple Gallery, the Fitness Center, the Office of University Relations.

electronic addresses

* Never any spaces between characters; no period at end unless it’s the end of a sentence; all lowercase

* Break an electronic address on either side of a slash (keep two slashes together) or at a period, which goes at the beginning rather than at the end of a line. Don’t break at a hyphen (or, if necessary, break before, not after, a hyphen), and never add a hyphen.

ellipses

* Use periods separated by spaces on all sides except when ending a sentence: “The class . . . read Dickens enthusiastically.” “The class, as sophomores, read Dickens. . . . As seniors, they read Joyce.”

* Do not use the Microsoft Word version of ellipses.

e-mail

* Use the hyphen. It is preferred to capitalize: SMSU.edu. Usernames may also be in Upper/lower case: Marcy.Olson@SMSU.edu

em dash

* No spaces around an em dash (—): “He knew—or thought he knew—he was right.”

en dash

* Follow *Chicago* 6.83–6.86: New York–style hot dog, post–Civil War, 1979–83.

faculty/staff

* These are singular nouns, referring to groups en masse: “The faculty is granted certain privileges under the charter.” To make it plural, or to refer to individual professors, use “faculty members”: “Faculty members expressed concern over the proposal.” The same is true of staff: “the staff is,” but “staff members are.”

FOCUS

* Italicize the formal name of the University’s alumni magazine.

foreign words

* Use italics for words not listed in Merriam-Webster’s.

fractions

* Spell out fractions: two and a half years; one-fifth. (See also percent.)

full time/part time

* Use as a noun: “I work full time.”

full-time/part-time

* Use as an adjective: “I have a full-time job.”

geographical terms

* The West, the Western world, Western civilization; the Midwest; the East; the industrialized North; the developing South; the third world. Follow *Chicago* 8.46–8.50.

library

* The formal title of SMSU’s library is the McFarland Library at Southwest Minnesota State University (capitalize). Other references include: McFarland Library (capitalize) and the library (lowercase).

graduated

* “He graduated from college,” never “He graduated college.”

hyphens

- Follow *Chicago* 6.82 (on hyphen use with numbers) and 7.82–7.90 (on compound words).
 - Pre-student teaching, not Prestudent teaching.

initials

* Use a space between initials: R. S. Smith, W. E. B. DuBois.

italics

- * Court cases: *Roe v. Wade*
- * Foreign words not listed in Merriam-Webster’s
- * See also titles of works.

Jr., Sr.

* In contemporary usage, no longer necessary to be preceded by a comma: Robert A. Oden Jr. but Robert A. Oden, Jr. is still acceptable.

liberal arts

* No hyphen, even when it’s used as an adjective: “a liberal arts environment”

maiden name

- * See birth name.

majors

- * See departments.

Mattke Field at the Southwest Minnesota State University Regional Event Center

- Acceptable abbreviations: Mattke Field

middle initials

* Not necessary except in formal usage, or where someone with a common name (say, John Smith) might otherwise be confused with someone else. Be alert to cases in which a middle initial stands in for a woman's birth name, and substitute the full name for the initial. (See also birth name and initials.)

months

- * Spell out in text. (See also dates.)

names, personal

* In text, first reference should include full name; later references last name only. Repeat first name only to avoid confusion with someone else with the same last name.

newspaper names

* If the name of a newspaper you're citing includes the city but not the state, and the city is not on the Associated Press Stylebook's list of stand-alone cities (see Associated Press Stylebook under "Datelines"), use the following style: "Oberlin (Ohio) News-Tribune." Note that the name of the Star Tribune, which is published in the Twin Cities, does not include a city name.

nicknames

- * Use quotation marks, not parentheses, for nicknames: John "The Claw" Doe.

numbers

* Spell out one through nine. Use numerals for 10 and up. Follow style for ages as well: "a six-year-old boy," "a 47-year-old man."

- * Exceptions for consistency: "five or ten years from now"

percent

- * In text, spell out and always use a numeral: 7 percent.

photo captions

- * See captions/cutlines.

possessives

- * Singular common nouns that end in s: add 's
"the class's graduation party"
- * Singular proper nouns that end in s: add 's
Davis's book, Texas's laws, Congress's deadline
- * Plural common nouns that end in s: add only an apostrophe
"the three dogs' bowl"
- * Proper nouns with plural form: add only an apostrophe
Los Angeles', United States', General Motors'

prefixes/suffixes

- * Follow Chicago 7.90.

president of SMSU

* In a first reference to President Doe, give his title and full name: “President John A. Doe.” Thereafter, refer to him as “President Daoc.” But, “John Doe is the president of Southwest Minnesota State University” (lowercase “president”). (See also titles, personal.)

quotation marks, punctuation with

* Always place commas and periods inside quotation marks. Follow Chicago for the use of exclamation points (6.79), question marks (6.75), and semicolons (6.9) with quotation marks.

quotes or italics

* Follow Chicago 8.164–8.208: titles of poems, short stories, and short musical compositions in quotes; titles of periodicals, books, plays, movies, paintings, and long musical compositions in italics. (See also titles of works.)

resumé

* Use the accent to refer to the document included with job applications. Resume is a verb. “Students may resume their regular schedule.”

reunion

* To avoid ambiguity, capitalize only in references to the official SMSU-sponsored events held at Homecoming: “She came back to campus for the Class of 1993 Reunion,” but “He enjoyed a quick reunion with friends after Thanksgiving,” “the 40th-reunion class.”

Schwan Community Center for the Performing Arts at the Marshall High School

- Acceptable abbreviations: for the first appearance in a list use Schwan Community Center for the Performing Arts, and for subsequent appearances within a calendar list: SCCPA (NOT Schwan’s)

SMSU Student Association

* Capitalize the formal name of the student governing body; no periods in SMSUSA.

sports

* Use en dashes, not hyphens, in scores: “Southwest defeated Wayne State 49–6.”

* In describing events that include distance, add a hyphen for compound adjectives (“the men’s 100-meter dash”), but not when the phrase is used as a noun (“He ran the 100 meters”). Note, too, that “meter” (or “yard”) is singular in the former instance, plural in the latter.

* Lowercase names of individual sports: rugby, men’s cross-country, volleyball

Exception: Ultimate Frisbee

staff, staff members

* See faculty/staff.

state names

* Spell out in text. When indicating the hometown of a student, use the Associated Press Stylebook abbreviations usually four letters long (Ariz., Iowa, Minn.). Use two-letter postal abbreviations (no periods) only in addresses, with zip code.

* There is no need to use state names with the cities listed in the Associated Press Stylebook under “Datelines.” To this list, we add Marshall.

student organizations

* See SMSU Student Association.

telephone numbers

* Use hyphens between sets of numbers: 507-555-1234. Do not use periods in telephone numbers.

television/TV

* Spell out as a noun; OK to abbreviate as an adjective.

terms, academic

* Lowercase: fall term, spring term, summer break.

theatre

* Spell it theatre when referring to the SMSU Theatre Program or the SMSU Theatre facility, in all other cases spell theater. “Student Activities Committee is sponsoring Movie Theater Night.”

The Centers @ SMSU

* This name refers to both the Student Center and Conference Center at SMSU. The “@” symbol is part of the name for these facilities when referencing them collectively, e.g. “The University Gala will be held in The Centers @ SMSU.”

The Spur

* Italicize the formal name of the University’s student newspaper.

titles, personal

* Capitalize when they precede a name as a courtesy title; use lowercase when they follow the name or stand alone. Always place long titles after a name. Use lowercase for descriptive titles (“history professor Harry Williams”) before or after a name; consider former titles to be descriptive. Follow Chicago 8.21–8.35.

Examples: “Nancy Drew, associate professor of English,” but “Professor Drew” (note that the honorific doesn’t distinguish between professorial ranks); “development officer David Jones”; “Dean Don Smith”; “Bob Johnson, dean of admissions”; “trustee William Wilson”

* Capitalize named endowed professorships and place them after the name:

“Perry Mason, John E. Sawyer Professor of Philosophy and Liberal Learning”

* Emeritus professors use their last active title followed by emeritus or emerita:

“W. Hartley Clark, professor emeritus”; “John Smith, professor emeritus of history”; “Bardwell Smith, John W. Nason Professor of Religion and Asian Studies, emeritus”

* Spell out titles preceding names:

“Senator [not Sen.] Norm Coleman visited Southwest.”

“General [not Gen.] Colin Powell was a member of the Bush administration.”

* Avoid honorifics like Dr., Rev., and Esq. (Dr. does not distinguish between PhD or MD there for the degree is used instead of Dr.)

titles of works

* Titles in italics: book, magazine, online magazine, newspaper, movie, play, long poem, work of art, opera or other long musical composition, television program or series, art exhibition, record album (vinyl, tape, CD), video, radio program

* Titles in quotes: comic strip, short story, short poem, song or other short musical composition, episode of TV series, college course (quote marks are not necessary in college catalogs or as part of a long list of course titles)

* Titles roman (no quotes or italics): newspaper/magazine column, computer program, computer game, Web site

trademarks

* Capitalize trademarks (trademark symbol is not necessary in written text but with the Graphic Logo the ™ is required). For more information on SMSU’s trademarks and licensing, see the LogoViewer on our webpage.

T-shirt

* Always capitalize the T.

Ultimate Frisbee

* Capitalize (Frisbee is a brand name).

United States

* Spell out as noun, abbreviate as adjective: “She returned to the United States,” but “the U.S. representative to Japan.”

University

* When referring to Southwest, capitalize the word University: “the University’s policy is”; “the University archivist.” But: “one of the crucial questions facing every university.”

Web site

* Two words, Web always capitalized. See Merriam-Webster’s for other Web-related words.

which/that

* That is a restrictive, or defining, pronoun; it introduces a phrase or clause that is essential to the meaning of the sentence. Which is a nonrestrictive, or descriptive, pronoun; the phrase or clause it introduces, which is usually set off by commas, could be eliminated without changing the meaning of the sentence.

World Wide Web

* Capitalize: the Web, Web site, Web page. But: webcam, webcast, webmaster.

DESIGNING YOUR OWN:

All posters and publications must include the official SMSU logo in accordance with the Visual Identity Standards. Publicity must also include a contact person/office and phone number and/or email. Ask yourself these questions, does your poster answer them: who, what, why, where, when, how?

Poster data should read as follows and always include Date, Time, Place:

Monday, September 15, 2015
7:00 p.m.
Charter Hall 201

Other information to include:

Free and open to the public (or info about admission charges)
Sponsoring department/program/group/student organization

ADA/Section 504: Individuals with a disability who need a reasonable accommodation to participate should call SMSU at 1-800-642-0684 or through the Minnesota Relay Service at 1-800-627-3529. Please call at least 5-7 days in advance of the performance.

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