



Editorial Style Guide

Marketing and Communications
News and Public Relations

Last Update: June 2023

Table of Contents

- [Accommodations for Disabilities](#) - in progress, information is not finalized
- [Affirmative Action Statement](#) - in progress, information is not finalized
- [Inclusive Language Practices](#)
- [Race, Ethnicity and Nationality Guidelines](#)
- [Military Guidelines](#)
- [News Media Contact Policy](#)

AP Style Quick Reference

- [UNC's Exceptions to AP Style](#)
- [Common Higher Education Word Use](#)
- [Abbreviations](#)
- [Punctuation](#)
- [Capitalization](#)
- [Numbers](#)
- [Common Mistakes](#)

- [Tips for Writing Effective Copy](#)
- UNC's Voice and Tone – coming soon

The University of Northern Colorado's Editorial Style Guide is the official resource for use in all nonacademic, promotional written communications including marketing materials (brochures, flyers, posters, etc.), news releases, newsletters, web pages, emails, viewbooks and other materials featuring content, narrative or text/copy. This guide is based on the [Associated Press Stylebook](#). For spelling guidance, we refer to the [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#).

The UNC Editorial Style Guide provides guidelines for all campus communicators, marketers and writers on campus. The purpose of having a common style for our marketing and communications is to have consistency and a cohesive, coordinated image to our key audiences and to the public.

An [online subscription](#) to the AP Stylebook is recommended, which includes a summary of [recent style changes](#). **All university units are expected to follow AP style.**

Remember, for editorial issues that can't be resolved by a stylebook, please use common sense, sound grammar and punctuation with an appreciation for the reader as your guide.

Accommodation for Disabilities

Posters, flyers, advertisements and other notices for all campus events must include an accommodation for disabilities statement at the bottom:

- *Accommodation for disabilities may be made by contacting PHONE or EMAIL.*
- When appropriate, use: *Accommodation for disabilities or dietary restrictions may be made by contacting PHONE or EMAIL.*

It is up to the event organizer to provide the phone number and email address for coordinating accommodation requests.

See UNC's [Guide to Planning an Accessible Event](#) for more information.

All printed materials must include the following accommodation for disabilities statement:

- *This publication will be made available in an accessible alternative format upon request. Please contact [sponsoring department contact name], PHONE or EMAIL.*

[Back to top](#)

Affirmative Action Statement

Use of an affirmative action statement is required on all publications intended for external audiences, staff, faculty, students and parents. It is not optional. Do not alter the wording of these statements. For more detail information about the statements, consult University Counsel; for advice on placing the statements, consult Marketing and Communications.

The statement should be set in small Roman type (not italic) and placed at the end of a document with *Affirmative Action* as the paragraph header for the longest version.

Long Version (use in documents such as catalogs and employment applications)
reprint BOT Policy Manual Section 1-1-508(1)

Human Resource Services is responsible for implementation of affirmative action, programs and coordination of Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1973, the Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Act of 1974, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For more information about these provisions or about issues of equity or fairness or claims of discrimination contact the AA/EEO/Title IX Officer, Marshall Parks, Director, Human Resource Services, University of Northern Colorado, Carter Hall 2002, Greeley, CO 80639, or call 970-351-2718.

Medium Version (use in most multi-page publications such as Viewbook and handbooks for students, employees and parents, and other guides)

The University of Northern Colorado has a strong institutional commitment to the principles of diversity, including Title IX, and takes affirmative action to achieve those ends. The university does not discriminate in its educational and employment programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual preference or veteran status. For more information or issues of equity or fairness or claims of discrimination contact the AA/EEO/Title IX Officer at University of Northern Colorado, Human Resource Services, Carter Hall 2002, Greeley, Colorado 80639, or call 970-351-2718.

Short Version (use when space does not allow the use of medium version, such as the bottom of

letterhead and posters)

The University of Northern Colorado is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual preference or veteran status. For more information or issues of equity or fairness or claims discrimination contact the UNC AA/ EEO/ Title IX Officer at University of Northern Colorado, Human Resource Services, Carter Hall 2002, Greeley, CO 80639 or call 970-351- 2718.

[Back to top](#)

Inclusive Language Practices

Avoid all sexual or racial stereotyping and language. Many words now have neutral alternatives: *firefighter*, *police officer*, *chair*, or *chairperson*. Use these rather than assuming a particular gender.

Don't create words such as *s/he*, and use the plural *they* to avoid putting two words together with slashes: *he/she*.

When writing about a specific person, ask what pronouns they use for themselves (e.g., *she/her/hers*, *he/him/his*, *they/them/theirs*).

Identity

LGBTQ+ is acceptable in all references for *lesbian*, *gay*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, and *queer and/or questioning*, plus other sexual and gender minorities. Fewer or additional letters can be used to be more inclusive or in quotations and names of organizations and events, such as LGBT or LGBTQIA.

I stands for *intersex*, and *A* typically stands for *asexual* (a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction).

Use of *LGBTQ+* is best used as a collective adjective: *Walters joined the LGBTQ+ business association*. Avoid using *LGBTQ+* to describe individuals, and don't default to *LGBTQ+* if discussing a more specific population: *a bisexual advocacy group*, *a transgender health program*.

Gender refers to internal and social identity and often corresponds with but is not synonymous with sex. Experts say gender is a spectrum, not a binary structure consisting of only males and females, that can vary by society and change over time.

Transgender is an adjective describing a person whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth. Use the term sex (or gender) assigned at birth instead of biological sex, birth gender, was identified at birth as, born a girl and the like.

Additional AP Stylebook Resources

- See entry under [gender, sex and sexual orientation](#)
- See entry under [Transgender Coverage Topical Guide](#)
- See entry under [Inclusive storytelling](#)

Disabilities

Disabilities are handled according to the preference of the person or group. In writing about disabilities, use person-first language and stress the person, not the disability: *persons with disabilities* rather than *the disabled*.

If you have questions, check with the [Disability Resource Center](#), 970-351-2289. The ADA National Network also offers [Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities](#).

[Back to top](#)

Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality Guidelines

Ethnic designations generally follow the preference of the person or group. Ask the person or group you're writing about how they want to be identified, such as *Black* or *African American*. Keep in mind that many people consider themselves multiracial. The [Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) can help with questions.

- Use racial, ethnic and nationality identification when it is pertinent to a story and use it fairly, identifying white individuals if people of other races/ethnicities are identified.
- Avoid stereotypes.
- If you are including a person's race in the content you're creating, be sure it is necessary to mention it, and ask the person how they prefer to be identified.
- Many BIPOC (*Black, indigenous, and people of color*) are told that their names are too complicated or too difficult to pronounce. Use the name that the subject asks you to use and do not ask to use a nickname instead. Also, be sure to include any accents or diacritics in the person's name rather than removing them to better align with English characters.
- Do not use the term colored person/people. Use a broader term, like people of color, which refers to any person who is not white, especially in the U.S. BIPOC is an emerging acronym that stands for Black, indigenous, people of color. Some feel the term is more appropriate than people of color because it acknowledges the varying levels of injustice experienced by different groups. In these instances, be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified. However, if you are talking about a specific racial or ethnic group, name that specific group rather than generalizing to all people of color. This is especially important when discussing Black people.
- The term people of color is acceptable when necessary in broad references to multiple races other than white. Do not use *person of color* for an individual.
- Understanding the differences between race, ethnicity, and nationality is crucial in nonacademic writing.
 - Race is a social construct based on physical attributes, such as skin color, grouping people into broad categories.
 - Ethnicity relates to shared cultural practices, traditions, language and history.
 - Nationality pertains to a person's legal or political association with a particular country.
- Recognizing these distinctions promotes accurate and respectful representation and helps avoid generalizations, stereotypes and misconceptions.

Below is a list of preferred terms, though it is permissible to deviate from this list based on the person's preferred racial and ethnic identification. Source: Race Forward.

- **African American, Black**
 - a. *African American* and *Black* are not synonymous. A person may identify as Afro-Latino or Afro-Caribbean, for instance, or Haitian American or Jamaican American. A person also may identify specifically as African rather than African American, such

- as Ghanaian or Congolese.
 - b. Capitalize the B in *Black* when referring to people who are part of a shared identity or culture.
 - c. *African American* is not hyphenated. Never use the word *colored* or *Negro* as a descriptor. Likewise, *Afro American* is an archaic descriptor and should not be used.
 - d. In the body of a piece, use *Black people*, not *Blacks*, to refer to a group.
 - e. Do not use *Black* as a singular noun, such as *a Black*.
- **Asian, Asian American**
 - a. Within higher education, it is crucial to recognize and address the differences between Asian American students, who are U.S. citizens, and international students from Asian countries.
 - b. UNC uses the term "Asian American and Pacific Islander," for individuals who are U.S. citizens.
 - c. When writing about someone or a group of this background, it usually makes more sense to refer to a specific background—e.g., Japanese, Korean, Thai, Chinese, Indonesian, Filipino. Use that term rather than a collective noun.
 - d. *South Asian*: This collective term refers to people from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. *Desi American* is a term commonly used by people from India, but not by all South Asians.
- **American Indian, Alaska Native, Hawaiian Native, Native American, Native People, Indigenous People**
 - a. The most inclusive term to use to refer to those who inhabited land that became the United States (or, previously, territories) is *American Indian* and *Alaska Native* (AIAN).
 - b. You may also see the terms:
 - i. *Native People(s)*
 - ii. *First People(s)*
 - iii. *First Nations*
 - iv. *Tribal Peoples*
 - v. *Tribal Communities*
 - vi. *Indigenous People(s)*
 - 1. The person may prefer that you refer to them by their tribally specific nation.
 - c. American Indians and Alaska Natives/Hawaiian Natives have distinct political and cultural identification constructed in and through treaties, executive orders, and the Constitution. American Indian and Alaska Native/Hawaiian Natives' cultural identification is place-based, diverse, and informed by the practices of their culture (e.g., language, singing, dancing, ceremonies).
- **Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, Latin@, Chicano/a**
 - a. Latinx/o/a is increasingly used and is the standard descriptor at UNC, unless the individual or people prefer another term.
 - i. *Latindad*, *Latin@*, *Latinx* and *Latine* are emerging terms that may be favored by younger generations.
 - b. While it is common to see Hispanic and *Latinx/o/a* used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. *Hispanic* generally refers to people with origins in Spanish-speaking countries. *Latinx/o/a* generally refer to people with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean. Hispanic refers to a language heritage while Latino/a/x refers to a geographical one.
 - c. In some cases, Hispanic people also identify as Latinx/o/a and vice versa. Generally,

people from Brazil, Guyana, French Guiana, Suriname, Guadalupe, or Haiti do not identify as Hispanic but may identify as Latinx/o/a.

- d. Avoid the term *Latin* unless it is a reference to Latin America.
- e. *Latina(s)* is appropriate for individuals who identify as a woman/women, unless the person/people prefer *Latinx*. Follow the preference of the person/people in all cases.
- f. Chicano/a is a term that refers to Americans of Mexican ancestry.
 - i. The Chicano movement includes a focus on being of Mexican ancestry *and having indigenous roots*. It's also important to note that Chicano/a isn't merely a term, it's a sociopolitical identity, so it shouldn't be placed on people without them claiming it first.
 - ii. In all, you should practice extreme caution when using Chicano/a. A better term to refer to Americans of Mexican ancestry is simply *Mexican-American*.
- g. Be sure to ask the individual/group how they prefer to be identified. The individual may prefer, for example, a gender-inclusive and neutral term, like *Latinx* or *Latin@*, or the broader term, like *Afro-Latino*. (The person may identify as both African or African American or Black and Latino/a.)
- h. Also, be aware of gender when using *Latino* and *Chicano* in your writing.
- i. Note that federal policy defines Hispanic as an ethnicity, not a race. Hispanics/Latinos can be of any race.

- **Students with Undocumented Status**

- a. Entered the U.S. without inspection or with valid nonimmigrant visas but those visas have expired. For instance, an individual issued a student F-1 visa can become undocumented if they do not fulfill the minimum course of study requirement or if they work without authorization.
 - i. Do not specify a person's immigration status unless it is relevant to the story. Immigration laws are complex. Do not state as a fact that someone has violated the law without sufficient attribution.

- **Students with DACA Status**

- a. DACA is an administrative relief that protects eligible immigrants who came to the United States when they were children from deportation. DACA gives undocumented immigrants: 1) protection from deportation, and 2) a work permit. The program requires that the DACA status and work permit be renewed every two years, and the fee to renew is \$495.
 - i. The term "illegal immigrant" and "illegal alien" are inaccurate
 - ii. The shorthand I-word used as a noun, "illegals," is also problematic grammatically, and, like the other related terms, is dehumanizing and racially charged.

Other derogatory terminology to avoid

- b. **Anchor baby:** Pejorative term used to describe children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. Because they are U.S. citizens, they can later sponsor other family members for U.S. citizenship
- c. **Illegal:** Unlawful or not authorized by law; often used to describe undocumented or unauthorized immigrant.
- d. **Alien:** Often used to describe a person in a country who is not a citizen of that country (legal and unauthorized noncitizens)

- **Biracial, multiracial, and mixed**
 - a. The terms *biracial* and *multiracial* are acceptable, when clearly relevant, to describe people with more than one racial heritage, per AP Style. Avoid *mixed-race*, which can carry negative connotations, unless the subject prefers the term. Be sure to ask the individual/group who they prefer to be identified.
 - b. Be as specific as possible by describing a person's heritage.
 - c. Note that *multiracial* can encompass people of any combination of races.

- **International students**
 - a. The university is proud of its international students, who have chosen to travel great distances to receive their education at UNC. Identifying a student as an international student should be done only when the designation is relevant to the content. If such identification is not relevant, the student should be identified in the same way as domestic students featured in the content.
 - b. Do not assume that all Asian students are international students, or assume that all international students come from Asia.

Editor's note: Given the complexity and evolving nature of this topic, we will continually update this section so it is as current, inclusive, and useful as possible. Please send questions and suggestions for additions and changes to officeof.publicrelations@unco.edu.

The [Diversity Style Guide](#) at San Francisco State University is a useful guide for other inclusive language practices. Also refer to the AP Stylebook guide to [race-related coverage](#).

[Back to top](#)

Military Affiliated Student/Veteran Students

Military titles ([additional information available in AP Stylebook](#))

- Capitalize a military rank when used as a formal title before an individual's name.
 - a. EXAMPLE: Sergeant John Smith

- On first reference, use the appropriate title before the full name of a member of the military.
- In subsequent references, do not continue using the title before a name. Use only the last name.

- Spell out and lowercase a title when it is substituted for a name:
 - a. EXAMPLE: *Gen. John Jones is the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan. The general endorsed the idea.*

- AP style stipulates that **veteran** is not a proper noun and is not capitalized

Military branches

It is generally preferred to spell out the branch name in full on first reference and then use the shortened form in subsequent references.

- Air Force
 - a. Capitalize when referring to U.S. forces: *the U.S. Air Force, the Air Force, Air Force regulations*. Do not use the abbreviation *USAF*.
 - b. Use lowercase for the forces of other nations: *the Israeli air force*.

- Army
 - a. Capitalize when referring to U.S. forces: *the U.S. Army, the Army, Army regulations*. Do not use the abbreviation *USA*.
 - b. Use lowercase for the forces of other nations: *the French army*.

- Marines
 - a. Capitalize when referring to U.S. forces: *the U.S. Marines, the Marines, the Marine Corps, Marine regulations*. Do not use the abbreviation *USMC*.
 - b. Capitalize *Marine* when referring to an individual in a Marine Corps unit: *He is a Marine*.
 - c. Do not describe *Marines* as *soldiers*, which is generally associated with the Army. Use *troops* if a generic term is needed.

- Navy
 - a. Capitalize when referring to U.S. forces: *the U.S. Navy, the Navy, Navy policy*. Do not use the abbreviation *USN*.
 - b. Lowercase when referring to the naval forces of other nations: *the British navy*.

- U.S Space Force
 - a) Capitalize when referring to U.S. forces: *the U.S. Space Force, the Space Force*. Do not use *USSF*.
 - b) People in the U.S. Space Force are called, “Guardians.”

Describing Military Service:

- Clearly describe the military service, such as deployments, roles, and specialties, while avoiding assumptions or generalizations.
- Use phrases like "served in the military" or "served in the Army/Navy/Air Force/Marines" rather than "was in the military."
- Use the term veteran for anyone who has previously served in the military.

Avoiding Stereotypes:

- Portray military students as multifaceted individuals with diverse experiences and interests, avoiding narrow stereotypes like "war heroes" or "damaged veterans."

PTSD and Mental Health:

- Approach discussions about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mental health with sensitivity and accuracy.
- Avoid linking PTSD or mental health challenges to all military students or veterans, as it can perpetuate stereotypes.

Recognizing Diversity:

- Highlight the diversity within the military student population, including race, ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Military affiliated individuals can hold multiple identities and often are navigating intersectionality especially after service and in a school environment.
- Avoid assuming a single narrative or experience for all military students.

[Back to top](#)

News Media Contact Policy

It is university policy that all news sent to the news media, and all media outreach, should be

reviewed and approved by [News and Public Relations](#). All press releases or proactive media contacts by university employees should be routed through, handled by and/or coordinated in advance with News and Public Relations.

[Back to top](#)

UNC's Exceptions to AP Style

Because writing for higher education is sometimes different than writing for the media, there are a few instances where UNC deviates from AP Style.

academic majors

Capitalize the names of academic majors, minors, emphases and concentrations in narrative text. He's majoring in *Business Administration* with an *Accounting* emphasis and minoring in Political Science.

acronyms

UNC style allows for including an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses following the first listing of the full name of an organization or company.

composition titles

Use italics for titles of books, magazines, journals, newspapers, newsletters, plays, operas, movies, television and radio shows, and gallery and museum exhibitions.

Use quotation marks for subsets of these major categories and short works. Examples: short stories, poems, a specific episode of a television show, magazine and newspaper articles, songs and individual works of art.

headlines

UNC's style is to use title case in headlines (capitalize the first letter of every major word, lowercase the first letter of minor words).

lists, bulleted lists

UNC style is to use bullets for lists, rather than the AP recommendation of dashes. Put a space between the bullet and the first word of each item in the list. Capitalize the first word following the dash or bullet. Use periods, not semicolons, at the end of each section, whether it is a full sentence or phrase.

proper names

UNC style allows for using lowercase style for **janine weaver-douglas**, director of the Marcus Garvey Cultural Center, even at the beginning of a sentence.

- Lowercase janine's full name with an asterisk following her name and include a footnote at the bottom of the page/article
 - *janine weaver-douglas has requested that her name be [recognized through the use of lowercase letters](#), in the spirit of bell hooks, an American scholar and activist who assumed her pseudonym to honor the legacy of women. She chose to spell her name in lowercase letters to focus attention on her message rather than herself.

[Back to top](#)

AP Style Quick Reference for UNC

Common Word Use

advisor, adviser

Advisor is the preferred spelling at the University of Northern Colorado.

alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae

- *alumnus* is the masculine singular form;
- *alumni* is the masculine or mixed masculine and feminine plural noun;
- *alumna* is the feminine singular noun;
- *alumnae* is the feminine plural.

If the alumnus only received an undergraduate degree from UNC, listing the degree is not necessary: Klawz Bear, '88, is a loyal alumnus. The two-number graduation year is set off by an apostrophe.

If the alumnus received undergraduate and graduate degrees from UNC, use just the year for an undergraduate degree, followed by graduate degrees in order: Klawz Bear, '88, M.A. '89, Ph.D. '94.

If space is limited, list the years only: Klawz Bear, '88 '89 '94. Use this exception sparingly.

If the alumnus earned degrees from another institution, just list the UNC degrees: Dr. Klawz Bear, '88, M.A. '89.

If you are including an alumnus's degree and major, the order is:

Degree, major and year, set off by commas:

Klawz Bear, B.A. '88, or

Klawz Bear, B.S. '88, MBA '94, or

Klawz Bear, B.S. Chemistry '88, M.S. Biomedical Sciences '89.

This is an EXCEPTION to AP style: UNC uppercases majors

academic degrees

Degree names: Lowercase degree names such as bachelor's or master's and use an apostrophe. EXCEPTIONS: Do not use an apostrophe with associate degree.

- *Example: She earned her bachelor's degree in History at UNC and is now pursuing a master's degree.*
- *Example: He earned an associate degree at Aims and is now pursuing a bachelor's degree at UNC.*

Capitalize the full degree name, and do not use an apostrophe:

- Associate of Arts
- Bachelor of Arts
- Master of Science

NOTE: Regarding doctoral, doctorate. *Doctorate* is a noun; *doctoral* is the adjective. You

may have a doctorate or a doctoral degree, but not a doctorate degree:

- *Example: He received his doctoral degree in English.*
- *Example: He holds a doctorate in English.*

Bears

The mascot of the University of Northern Colorado. Does not need an apostrophe to show possession. Capitalize it but not the rest of the team name if referencing one of our sports teams: *the Bears men's basketball team; the Bears women's cross-country team.*

BearMail

NOT Bearmail or Bear mail

Bear number

NOT BearNumber or Bear Number

Board of Trustees

Capitalize when using full name. Use the board or the trustees (lowercase) for subsequent references:

- *Example: The University of Northern Colorado Board of Trustees met to discuss the proposal.*
- *Example: The board discussed the proposal.*
- *Example: The trustees voted on the issue.*

campus

Capitalize when used with the full name of the campus as a proper noun: *West Campus, Central Campus.* Lowercase when it stands alone.

- *Example: Recruiters from several local companies visited campus.*

Hyphenate as modifier (e.g., an on-campus program)

- *Example: All on-campus classes are canceled.*

campus community/university community

A collective term used for students, faculty and staff at UNC. Avoid use of campus community unless you are only referencing the Greeley campus, otherwise use university community.

coursework

One word. This is a recent change to AP style.

emeritus, emerita, emeriti

The title of *emeritus* is not synonymous with retired; it is an honor bestowed on a small number of retired faculty and should be included in the title. *Emerita* is feminine; *emeriti* is plural. The word may precede or follow professor:

- *Example: John Doe is a professor emeritus of art.*
- *Example: Jane Doe, professor emerita at the university.*

postgraduate

No hyphen; use as an adjective only:

- *Correct: He was a postgraduate student at Yale.*
- *Incorrect: He was a postgraduate at Yale.*

freshman, freshmen

First-year student and first-year students are the preferred terms.

grades

Use the capital letters, A, B, C, etc., with no quotation marks. Plurals are made by adding s, except in the case of A, which has an apostrophe to avoid confusion with the word as:

- *Example: A's, Bs, Cs, etc.*

GPA, grade-point average

Either is acceptable. GPAs normally have two numbers after the decimal, e.g., 3.00, 4.25.

international students

Not foreign students.

off campus, on campus

Hyphenate when using as an adjective, not as an adverb.

- *Example: Off-campus housing is plentiful during the summer.*
- *Example: It's difficult to find housing off campus during the fall semester.*

residence hall

This is preferred to dorm or dormitory when referring to housing units at UNC.

STEM

Acceptable on first reference for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. AP recommends spelling out the full phrase shortly thereafter.

- *Example: Teacher preparation in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences emphasizes the STEM fields — science, technology, engineering and mathematics.*

theater, theatre

Use theater unless theatre is part of the official name or referring to UNC's degrees in Theatre Arts.

- *Example: The School of Theatre Arts and Dance offers numerous theater classes.*
- *Example: At UNC, you can major in Theatre Studies, Musical Theatre or Theatre Education.*

At UNC, our official theater names are:

- Langworthy Theatre
- Little Theatre of the Rockies
- Norton Theatre
- Garden Theatre

work-study

Hyphenate; capitalize only when using the formal designation: Federal Work-Study Program.

Abbreviations

Acronyms

For the most part, always fully spell out the name of an organization or company before using an acronym. UNC style allows for putting an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses following the first listing of the full name of an organization or company., which is an exception to AP Style.

- NOTE: Some entities are widely known by their acronym and may not need to be spelled out on first reference (i.e., FBI, CIA, NSA); let context guide you.

Avoid overuse of abbreviations and acronyms.

Don't use periods for large acronyms. [USPS, NASA, FEMA]

Dates

When a month is used with a specific date, only abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. In most cases, the year is not necessary if the date is within the current year.

Always use the number, but without st, nd, rd or th.

- *Example: Spring semester term begins Jan. 4.*
- *Example: The 2022 Commencement ceremony was held May 6-7.*

Spell out months when using alone, or with a year alone. When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with commas.

- *Example: An ice storm in February 2022 damaged a number of trees on campus.*

When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the year with commas.

- *Example: Andy Feinstein became University of Northern Colorado's 13th president on July 9, 2018.*

Degree abbreviations: Avoid abbreviations of academic degrees in narrative text.

- *bachelor's degree or bachelor's rather than B.A. or B.S.*
- *master's degree or master's rather than M.A. or M.S.*
- *doctoral degree or doctorate rather than Ph.D., Ed.D.*

Use such abbreviations as *B.A.*, *M.A.*, *LL.D.* and *Ph.D.* only when the need to identify many individuals by degree on first reference would make the preferred form cumbersome. Use these abbreviations only after a full name — never after just a last name.

When used after a name, an academic abbreviation is set off by commas:

- *... said John Snow, Ph.D., author of the article.*

When abbreviating degree names outside of narrative text, generally use periods: *B.A. in Psychology*; *B.S. in Chemistry*.

- EXCEPTION: Listings of alumni or programs of study in campus publications.

In features, news stories, etc., omit the periods in degree abbreviations consisting of three or more letters (MBA) unless the abbreviation consists of three or more letters that use a combination of upper and lowercase letters (*Ph.D.*; *Ed.D.*)

Use *Dr.* before a name only when the person in question has a medical degree (M.D., D.O.,

DMD, DDS or DVM).

- EXCEPTION: When a quote references a person.

state names

Always spell state names whether on their own or in conjunction with a city, town, village, etc.

The only time a state is abbreviated is when used in a dateline. Eight states are never abbreviated (Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah)

UNC

UNC follows the AP style for acronyms. The proper acronym for the University of Northern Colorado is UNC.

- *UNC* is acceptable upon second reference.
- UNCO is not an acceptable reference.

Note: National and state media started referring to UNC's intercollegiate athletics teams as Northern Colorado teams to avoid confusion when referring to University of North Carolina teams. UNC's Athletics program has adopted the practice to be consistent. Use of *Northern Colorado* as a shortened form of the university's full name by those outside of Athletics is discouraged.

[Back to top](#)

Punctuation

ampersand

Do not use an ampersand (&) in running text unless it is part of a trademarked or registered business name. *Proctor & Gamble; College of Humanities and Social Sciences.*

An ampersand may be used in specific instances such as campus banners where space for text on a single line is very limited.

commas – AP Style does not subscribe to the use serial commas, also referred to the Oxford comma. Do not use a comma before the final conjunction in a simple series:

- *Example: The color choices for the car were red, green and blue.*

EXCEPTION: A serial comma can be used when an integral element of the series requires a conjunction - *the programs of physics, journalism, recreation, and chemistry and biochemistry* - or in a complex series of phrases.

DATE: Use a comma between a specific date and year: *Jan. 1, 2023*. A comma should follow the year when a specific date is mentioned mid-sentence:

- *Example: May 11, 2020, was the date of the party.*

Do not use a comma between month and year or season and year:

- *Example: I remember that party from May 2020.*

LOCATIONS: When using a city name with a state or country in a sentence, place a comma afterward:

- *Example: She is a Denver, Colorado, sports fan.*

dashes

The dash (-) is used for parenthetical remarks or abrupt changes of thought, epigraphs and datelines. Include one space before and after the dash:

- *Example: Smith offered a plan – it was unprecedented – to raise revenues.*

The en dash (named because it is the width of the letter "n") is wider than a hyphen and is used between ranges of numbers or dates and between adjectival phrases containing two-word concepts: 2001–2004, pages 206–220, Portland–San Francisco flight. There are no spaces before or after the en dash. In text, however, use the missing words instead of a dash: He was at Oregon State from 1993 to 1998. (Not: He was at UNC from 1993–1998.) If the en dash is unavailable, it is acceptable to use a hyphen in its place.

The em dash (named because it is the width of the letter "m") is used to indicate a break in thought or a strong parenthetical phrase: Two professors — what a contrast in styles — share the teaching duties. There are spaces before and after the em dash.

Keyboard shortcuts on a Mac

- en dash (–) Option + Dash
- em dash (—) Option + Shift + Dash

Keyboard shortcuts on a PC

- en dash (–) Ctrl + minus sign on the numeric keypad OR Word will automatically correct a hyphen to an en dash when it has spaces on either side.
- em dash (—) Ctrl + Alt + minus sign on numeric keypad OR Word will automatically make an em dash when you type two hyphens between two words without spaces.

email

Don't use a hyphen. Don't capitalize unless it starts a sentence or is before the email address in a vertical list.

hyphens

Use a hyphen to avoid ambiguity:

- *Example: He was a small-business man.*

Hyphenate modifiers that follow forms of the verb to be:

- *Example: The cancer program is world-renowned for its innovative treatments.*

Hyphenate compound modifiers except when the compound modifier follows the noun:

- *Example: She is a part-time worker.*
- *Example: She works part time.*

EXCEPTIONS: No hyphen is needed for compound modifiers using the adverb very and all adverbs ending in -ly: She was a very qualified candidate. This is not such an easily remembered rule.

However, note that when family (which, of course, is not an adverb) is part of a compound modifier, the modifier is hyphenated: family-owned business.

parentheses

If a dependent clause or other sentence fragment is in parentheses, the final punctuation goes outside the parentheses. If the parenthetical matter is an entire sentence, the final

punctuation goes inside the parentheses.

If parenthetical matter is included within another set of parentheses, brackets [] should replace the inner parentheses.

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 and outside when they apply to the whole sentence.

[Back to top](#)

Capitalization

academic majors, minors, emphases and concentrations

Capitalize the names of academic majors, minors, emphases and concentrations in narrative text.

- *Example: He's majoring in Business Administration with an Accounting emphasis and minoring in Political Science.*

academic units

The University of Northern Colorado has academic *departments* or *programs* within *schools* within five academic *colleges*.

Capitalize the official names of colleges, schools and departments/programs. Lowercase generic references to them.

- *She's dean of the College of Natural and Health Sciences.*
- *She's a professor in the School of Nursing.*
- *The Department of English is offering a new major this spring.*
- *She's the top student in our nursing school.*
- *He's a professor of Anthropology.*
- *He joined the faculty as a professor of Physical Education in 1997.*

Use full names on first reference and acronyms or informal names thereafter whenever possible:

- *the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, HSS;*
- *the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, EBS.*

If the college is named after someone, include the honoree's last name: *Monfort College of Business*. First names and initials need be included only in the most formal settings, such as commencement programs: *Kenneth W. Monfort College of Business*.

On first reference for external communications, preface the name of the school or college with *the University of Northern Colorado's* unless the full university name has been used earlier:

- *The University of Northern Colorado's College of Performing and Visual Arts.*

University, college, school department and *program* are never capitalized unless they are part of the official name or the first word of a sentence.

commencement, Commencement

Uppercase the formal ceremony; lowercase for generic usage:

- *This year's Commencement has been moved to Jackson Field.*
- *The university holds commencements in December and May every year.*

courses

Capitalize specific course titles and put in quotes

- *Bob Smith, professor of Communication, teaches the graduate-level course "Media Relations in Ethical Business."*

federal

Use a capital letter for corporate or governmental bodies that use the word as part of their formal names: *the Federal Trade Commission*.

- (See separate entries for [governmental agencies](#).)

Lowercase when used as an adjective to distinguish something from state, county, city, town or private entities: federal assistance, federal court, the federal government, a federal judge.

Northern Colorado, northern Colorado

National and state media started referring to UNC's intercollegiate athletics teams as Northern Colorado teams to avoid confusion when referring to University of North Carolina teams. Using this as a shortened form of the university's full name by those outside of Athletics is discouraged

The term *northern Colorado* refers to the geographic area of the state that includes Weld and Larimer counties. Do not capitalize *northern* in this geographic reference as it is not yet generally considered a proper noun.

seasons

Always lowercase, even when naming an issue of a publication:

- *Example: The fall 2003 issue of Northern Vision.*
- *Example: He graduated in spring 2022.*

semesters

Academic semesters are lowercase with no comma preceding a year.

- *Example: He graduated in fall 2006.*

state

Lowercase in all state of constructions: the state of Colorado, the states of Colorado and Wyoming.

Do not capitalize state when used simply as an adjective to specify a level of jurisdiction:

- *state Rep. William Smith, the state Transportation Department, state funds.*

Apply the same principle to phrases such as the city of Chicago, the town of Auburn, etc.

Four states — Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia — are legally commonwealths rather than states. The distinction is necessary only in formal uses: The commonwealth of Kentucky filed a suit. For simple geographic reference: Tobacco is grown in the state of Kentucky.

titles

In general, capitalize formal or courtesy titles- president, dean, professor, senator, coach- before names of individuals and lowercase when they follow names.

- *Example: President George Bush...*
- *Example: She is the president of the university.*

Lowercase descriptive or occupational titles except for professor:

- *editor John Doe*
- *Professor Sue Smith*

university

Capitalize only when used as part of a complete formal name or title; lowercase otherwise.

- *Example: She attends the University of Northern Colorado.*
- *Example: The university is providing her with an excellent education.*

[Back to top](#)

Numbers

In general, spell out numbers one through nine; use numerals for 10 and above.

Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence, except for calendar years:

- Five years ago today she graduated from high school.
- 2001 marked the beginning of increased airport security. (Avoid this construction when possible. INSTEAD: The Challenge for Excellence plan began in 1998.)

Always use numerals for

- Academic course numbers – Calculus 2
- Ages – My nephew is 7 years old.
- Credit hours – My History class is 3 credit hours.
- Dimensions – He is 5 feet 2 inches tall.
- Distances – I ran 2 miles today.
- Parts of a book – My favorite part of the book is chapter 2.
- Percents – I received a 2% increase in pay last year.

telephone numbers

The preferred form is to set off the area code with a dash.

- *Correct: 970-555-1212*
- *Incorrect: (970) 555-1212; 970.555.1212*

time a.m., p.m.

Don't use 0s to designate hours and lowercase with periods in narrative text and most promotional materials. Do not use A.M. or P.M.

- *8 a.m. or 11 p.m.*

Noon and midnight are better expressed without the number

- *Noon is 12 p.m.*
- *Midnight is 12 a.m.*

Range of time: When listing a range of time, use an en dash only if the time frame doesn't extend from a.m. to p.m. otherwise, use the word "to" to separate the times.

- The event will take place from 2 – 3 p.m. (use an en dash with a space in between the number and the dash)
- The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

[Back to top](#)

Common Mistakes

annual events

An event cannot be described as an "annual event until it has been held at least two successive years. Do not use the term "first annual." Instead, refer to it as inaugural or note that the sponsors plan to hold the event annually.

compose, comprise

These words are often misused. Comprise means "include" or "encompass." The whole comprises the parts, but the parts are composed of the whole.

- *Example: The College of Performing and Visual Arts comprises three schools.*
- *Example: The College of Performing and Visual Art is composed of three schools.*

farther, further

Use farther to describe a physical distance.

- *Example: C parking lots are farther from the center of campus.*

Use further to describe a figurative distance.

- *Example: Taking on an international internship pushed her further beyond her comfort zone.*

flier, flyer

Flyer is the preferred term for handbills and for a person flying in an aircraft. They put up flyers announcing the event; He used his frequent flyer miles. Use flier in the phrase take a flier, meaning to take a big risk. This is a recent change to AP style.

non

Words with the prefix non are generally not hyphenated unless the prefix is directly before a proper noun: nondegree, nonresident, noncredit, non-English speaking. The dictionary contains a long list of words with the non prefix and their appropriate spellings.

online

One word, no hyphen.

résumé

The preferred spelling includes diacritical marks and helps avoid confusion with resume.

toward

Not towards.

underway

One word.

URLs

It isn't necessary to include `http://` or `www.` in a URL when it is clear that it's a web address. Although programs like Word and PowerPoint will automatically include `https://` when you copy and paste from a web browser, you can delete that from the Text to Display when creating a link in your document.

When listing web addresses, try to get the URL to fit on a single line. If it is necessary to break the URL, try to break it before a slash or period. For long URLs, consider using the [beav.es](#) link shortener. Don't allow the URL to break itself by adding a hyphen because that could change the address. Use appropriate punctuation after a URL. If it finishes a sentence, place a period after it.

Website, webpage

One word, lowercase.

yearlong

One word.

[Back to top](#)

Tips for Writing Effective Copy

Note: Messaging created for UNC's electronic and print communications should support the university's brand identity. Copy should reflect the themes described in the brand messages, while the tone of messages should reflect the qualities described in the brand identity.

- **Active versus Passive Voice:** While both active and passive voice are grammatically correct, active voice is generally preferred as it is shorter, stronger and clearer.
 - In **active voice**, the subject is performing an action: *John Smith wrote the essay.*
 - In **passive voice**, the subject of a sentence receives action instead of performing it: *This essay was written by John Smith.*

While active voice is generally preferred for most writing, there are times passive voice is more appropriate, particularly if the writer doesn't want to or can't assign blame or responsibility for a particular action, or if the focus of a sentence needs to remain on the receiving end of an action rather than on the doer, such as in sentences like *The package was delivered today* or *The building was destroyed by fire.*

[The Grammarist](#) has a good reference for more information about active and passive voice.

- **Know your audience** and write copy that addresses your audience's needs. Are you writing for 18-year-olds? Parents? Graduate students? Regardless, make sure your copy addresses that audience's needs.
- When you've finished writing your copy, pretend you're the audience and ask: "So what?"

Why should I care?" If your copy doesn't pass this test, it won't be very effective with your target audience. If you show the audience how they will benefit from your program, event, etc., it will be effective.

- Write compelling copy that is to the point. We live in a time when audiences are overwhelmed with the amount of information they receive. Writing shorter copy increases the possibility that audiences will read and retain messages. Use bullet points rather than long narrative text for key messages. Break long blocks of copy into several shorter paragraphs.
- Consider all of the media you can use to communicate and use them. For example, all of the information about a program or activity doesn't necessarily need to be included in a print publication. Additional information can be incorporated on a website.
- Use headlines to get the reader's attention and deliver information. Use action words; don't settle for a label. Instead of writing a headline reading "A Message from the Dean" (label), use verbs to highlight a point from the dean's message: "New Program to Meet Needs of Working Law Enforcement Personnel."
- Include a call to action. It's what moves your audience from being passive prospects to taking the next step to becoming a customer. Tell them exactly how they can obtain more information, sign up for a class, or purchase a service.

[Back to top](#)

UNC's Tone and Voice

Coming soon...