



# Style Guide

Administration and Finance Division

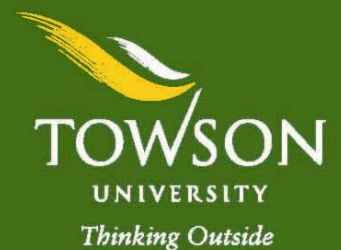


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## INTRODUCTION

Both internal and external communications have become increasingly fast-paced in today's dynamic workplace. The myriad of omnipresent e-mails, forms and Web sites have caused many to become skilled speed-readers. These communications have only a few glances to grab our attention and convey information.

In this accelerated environment it is more important than ever to demonstrate clear and consistent style in your formal and published documents. Following established guidelines on grammar and punctuation will give your communications a cohesive voice that is easy for others comprehend. This consistency can be the difference between a message that connects with your colleagues and customers, and one that gets lost in the pack.

In adherence with Towson's University Relations Department, the Division of Administration and Finance follows Associated Press (AP) style for all publications. This guide is an abbreviated version of the AP stylebook focusing on the tenets most pertinent to writing in the university setting. The guide is broken into two sections—one on style and one on punctuation—that contain information on spelling, capitalization, abbreviation, grammar and punctuation. It is organized alphabetically to serve as a quick reference with the intent of eliciting quality communications throughout our division.

The goal of the stylebook is to improve divisional writing, and this guide is meant to be a resource toward that end. This is not a list of rules you must memorize but a reference for your benefit. Please feel free to direct any questions about the guidelines to me. I am familiar with AP style and available to help with editing whenever necessary.

Regards,

Pamela Gorsuch  
Communications Specialist  
410-704-2790

*This document adapted from:*

*The 2007 Associated Press Stylebook Editor: Norm Goldstein. Associated Press, New York: 2003.*

*Some rules are exceptions to AP standards and follow Towson University's Office of University Relations' style.*

**A NOTE ON DAILY DIGEST**

Towson University's Daily Digest is our institution's primary communications tool which contains news and announcements in e-mail format with the goal of decreasing the necessity for all-campus e-mail messages. Content submitted to the Daily Digest is channeled to other university communications outlets, including the staff and student intranets, and a searchable archive of Daily Digest messages is maintained.

The broad, temporal nature of the Daily Digest necessitates a clear and concise writing format that is easy for viewers to quickly read and understand. Due to the volume of announcements posted in the Digest, repeat messages are discouraged unless absolutely necessary, or to convey a hard deadline. Additionally, the Digest's plain text format does not accommodate embedded links, attachments, tables or other types of special formatting. These formatting specifications should not be included in Daily Digest submissions.

University-wide policies and procedures for the Daily Digest are available by selecting the "Policies" link on any Daily Digest e-mail, or going directly to <http://wwwnew.towson.edu/applications/dailydigest/Documentation/Policy.htm>. Divisional Daily Digest procedures are listed below.

1. The primary Daily Digest contact for Administration and Finance is Pamela Gorsuch. Secondary contacts, to whom Daily digest submissions should be sent in Pamela's absence, are Amie Voith and Diane Hammer.
2. Daily Digest submissions should be sent no later than 2 p.m. on the business day preceding the announcement run date to allow adequate time for entry and review. Attempts will be made to enter last-minute submissions with the understanding that their contents may not have an appropriate amount of time for review.
3. Individuals who submit announcements to the Daily Digest will receive an e-mail previewing the final announcement content. It is the submitter's responsibility to reply to this e-mail with any edits or corrections by the close of business on the work day preceding the announcement run date.
4. Revisions to Daily Digest messages cannot be made after the digest e-mail announcement has been distributed. If necessary, a correction announcement may be posted.

Additional questions or concerns about Administration and Finance Daily Digest submissions should be directed to Pamela Gorsuch at x4-2790 or [pgorsuch@towson.edu](mailto:pgorsuch@towson.edu).

## STYLE GUIDE

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

See general tips for abbreviations and acronyms on the right.

## Academic Degrees:

Spell out and use lowercase for *bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctoral degree* or *doctorate*.

Use upper case for specific degrees such as *Master of Arts, Master of Science*, etc.

If abbreviations must be used, capitalize and place periods after each letter: *B.A., M.S., Ph.D.*

## Academic Departments

Capitalize only if using the complete and official name. Lowercase informal and shortened versions of all such names.

*The College of Liberal Arts has more than 2,500 undergraduates.*

*The college has more than 2,500 undergraduates.*

*Enrollment Services' offices are located on Osler Drive.*

*The Department of Mathematics has a calculus club.*

*The math department has a calculus club.*

Capitalize department names when they carry a proper noun, such as a language.

*English department, science department*

## Alumna, Alumni, Alumnus

*Alumna* is singular for a female graduate; *alumnae* is the plural when referring to only female graduates. *Alumni* is plural for a combination of male and female graduates or male graduates. *Alumnus* is singular for a male graduate.

## And, &amp;

Do not use the ampersand (&) as a replacement for *and*. The ampersand should be used only when it is part of an official name of a company, product or other proper noun.

## Buildings

Capitalize only when using proper names.

*The Help Center is located in Cook Library.*

*The Help Center is located in the library.*

**General Tips for  
Abbreviations and Acronyms**

Do not use periods in abbreviations.  
*Right: SCS Wrong: S.C.S.*

Use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly unless your readership is familiar with them.

Write out the acronym on the first use with the acronym in parentheses following it. Use the acronym in all subsequent uses.

Use *the* before acronyms that are read as individual letters rather than a word. *Call the OTS Help Center if you experience additional problems.*

## Between, Among

*Between* shows a relationship between two objects only. Use *among* when it's more than two. *I am choosing between the Mac and the PC. The funds were divided among the president, vice president and director.*

## Board of Regents

Use the full name for the first reference. Subsequent references may be the regents or the board.

## Campuswide

One word, no hyphen.

## Contractions:

For academic writing, do not use contractions, but for other pieces, such as works related to marketing, contractions can make your text easier to read with a more conversational tone.

## Dates/Years

Only abbreviate months followed by specific dates. Spell out months that are used alone or with a year but not a date. Never abbreviate March, April, May, June or July.

*The conference will be held Jan. 1.*

*The project will be complete in January 2008.*

*Let's meet May 1.*

*We will reevaluate in October.*

Do not use suffixes with dates.

*Right: Oct. 14 Wrong: Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>*

Do not use *on* before a date or day of the week unless its absence would lead to confusion.

*Right: The meeting will be held Monday, March 10.*

*Wrong: The meeting will be held on March 10.*

No comma is needed between a month and a year.

*The building opened in October 2007.*

Commas are required before and after a year when the month, date and year are used.

When used with a date, commas always follow the day of the week.

*The building opened Oct. 3, 2007, with much fanfare.*

*The meeting is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 17, 2007.*

Days of the week are never abbreviated when used in conjunction with a date. If the date is used in a tabular format, an abbreviation is okay.

*Right: The meeting is scheduled for Friday, Oct. 17, 2007.*

*Wrong: The party is set for Fri., Oct. 17, 2007.*

## Dollars

Use the dollar sign and numerals. Avoid decimals if possible.

*Right: \$150*

*Wrong: 150 dollars*

*Wrong: \$150.00*

Use a comma for dollar amounts in the thousands.

*Right: \$1,000*

*Wrong: \$1000*

For dollar amounts beyond thousands, use the dollar sign, number and appropriate word.

*Right: \$14 million*

*Wrong: \$14,000,000*

## E-mail

Lowercase and add a hyphen after the e.

## Every day, everyday

Every day is an adverb, as in: Every day students use the computer lab. Everyday is an adjective, as in: Checking e-mail is an everyday occurrence for me.

## Faculty

A collective noun referring to the university's teaching staff. Do not use uppercase. *Faculty* takes a singular verb. To refer to an individual who is part of a faculty, use *faculty member*. *The faculty was present at the president's installation. Several faculty members were present at the president's installation.*

## GPA

Does not need to be spelled out on first use. Periods are not needed after each letter.

## Internet

Always capitalize. See general tips for internet addresses in the box above.

## Its / It's

*Its* is the possessive pronoun; *it's* is the contraction of "it is."

*Right: It's available in the Office of Human Resources.*

*Wrong: Its available in the Office of Human Resources*

*Right: Its hard drive is broken.*

*Wrong: It's hard drive is broken.*

### General Tips for Internet

- If an Internet address falls at the end of a sentence, you must still include a period.

- Always use the *http://* protocol at the start of the Web address.

- Always include the Internet address when mentioning a Web site or Web page. If it makes for awkward syntax, try rewriting so that the address falls at the end of the sentence.

- Avoid URLs that are particularly lengthy and complicated, unless essential to guide the reader to a particular document.

## Job Titles

Capitalize only when they immediately precede the individual's name.

*Towson University President Robert Caret was installed November 7.*  
*Robert Caret, president of Towson University, was installed November 7.*

Place lengthy job titles after the individual's name to avoid confusion.

*Jane Doe, special assistant to the president and director of special university projects, is moving to a new office.*

## Login, logon, logoff

All are one word, lowercase, without hyphens. Use two words in the verb form: *Go to the login page.* vs. *I log in to my computer.*

## Majors and Programs

Use lowercase for majors, specializations or concentrations unless dealing with a language.

*He is a history major.*  
*He is a Spanish major.*

## Midnight, noon

Use instead of 12 a.m. and 12 p.m., respectively. Do not put a 12 in front of either one.

## More than/over

More than is preferred with numerals. Over generally refers to spatial relationships. More than 50 students attended the training session. The plane flew over the city.

## Numbers:

Spell out numbers one through nine. Use numerals for numbers above 9.

*There were four people in the computer lab yesterday.*  
*There were 14 people in the computer lab yesterday.*

### **Exceptions:**

Always use numerals for ages, page numbers, sums of money and credits (including 1-9).

*She is 4 years old.*  
*The data is on page 6.*  
*The salad costs \$5.*  
*It's a 6-credit course.*

Avoid beginning a sentence with a number. If necessary to begin with a number, spell out the number unless it's a year.

*Twenty-five people attended the event.*  
*2007 was a great year.*

### Off campus/Off-campus

Off campus (no hyphen) is an adverb. The meeting will be held off campus. Off-campus is an adjective. Older students like off-campus housing. (The same rules apply to on campus and on-campus.)

### Offline

One word, no hyphen, lowercase. Also applies to online.

### PDF

Acronym is acceptable in all cases. Do not use periods after each letter.

### Percentages

Always use numerals (including 1-9) and spell out the word *percent*.

*Only 8 percent of the class voted.*

### Plurals:

Add an s after abbreviations. Do not add an apostrophe. *All of the PCs will be fixed by noon.*

### Race

Only capitalize official names of races. *African American, Caucasian, Asian, Native American, black, white.*

### Residence Hall(s)

Preferred over dorm(s).

### Rooms

Never use uppercase for rooms.

*My office is in room 12.*

*We'll be in the training room.*

In combination with a building name, use the number only.

My office is in Cook 12.

### Seasons and Semesters

Do not capitalize seasons or semesters.

*It is currently the fall semester.*

*The project will be implemented in fall 2003.*

## Staff

Do not capitalize unless part of a formal title.

*Right: You are invited to the faculty/staff picnic.*

*Wrong: All Faculty and Staff are invited.*

*Right: I am going to join the Towson University Staff Council (formal title).*

## Telephone Numbers

For internal publications you may use an extension number in replacement of the full phone number. Use an x to denote it is an extension, and a hyphen between numbers. Note: There is not a space between the x and the number or before/after the hyphen.

*Please contact Jane Doe at x4-5555.*

If the publication will be read by individuals beyond the campus community, include the area code as part of the complete number. Use a hyphen between numbers.

If you have any questions, please contact Jane Doe at 410-704-5555.

If a preposition is needed before a telephone number, use the word *at*, not *on*.

*Right: Please contact Jane Doe at x4-5555.*

*Wrong: Please contact Jane Doe on x4-5555.*

## Titles

Always include an individual's title in publications that will be read by individuals beyond the campus community. A title is not necessary for internal publications. See Job Titles.

## Time

Use lowercase and periods for *a.m.* and *p.m.* and always use numerals. When writing a time that falls on the hour, do not use *00*. Use *midnight* and *noon* in replacement of *12 a.m.* or *12 p.m.*, respectively.

## United States:

The two-letter abbreviation uses periods, while the three-letter one does not. *U.S.*, *USA*

Abbreviate the United States only when it is used as an adjective. Spell it out when it is used as a noun.

*The U.S. government is based in Washington, D.C.*

*The government of the United States is based in Washington, D.C.*

## University:

Do not capitalize the word *university* when it stands alone.

*The university is highly regarded.*

Always use *Towson University* on first reference. Use *TU* as an adjective only.

*I went to the TU football game on Saturday.*

**Web site**

Two words, capital *W* (exception to Webster's preference). See general tips for Web addresses on page 5.

**Web page**

Two words, capital *W* (exception to Webster's preference).

## PUNCTUATION GUIDE

## Apostrophes

Used to denote possession or the absence of a letter (for contractions). Refer to Webster's Dictionary.

## Capitalization

Capitalize a word if it begins a sentence, is a proper noun or part of a proper noun, is part of the official name of a book, play, movie or TV show, or is an official title preceding a person's name.

## Commas

**City, State**

Place a comma between the city and the state name.  
Note: In running text, use Md. instead of MD.

**Lists**

Do not use a comma before the conjunction and the final element in a simple list. You may do this in a longer list if necessary for clarity.

*Right: The upgrade will affect Sharepoint, Blackboard and Peoplesoft.*

*Wrong: The upgrade will affect Sharepoint, Blackboard, and Peoplesoft.*

## Dashes

**En dashes**

Use en dashes between inclusive numbers or to indicate an elapsed period of time.

*The exercise is found on pages 23 – 25 of your textbook.*

*Parking will be available from 5 – 7 p.m.*

**Em dashes**

Em dashes are used to denote a sudden break in thought such as in the case of the next sentence. The em dash is set without a space on either side.

*He listed the qualities—intelligence, humor, conservatism, independence—that he liked in an executive.*

**Hyphens**

Hyphens are used primarily as part of a word.

*All on-campus student activities should have proper security.*

## Quotation Marks

Periods and quotes always go inside the quotation marks.

**General Tips for Punctuation**

Use only one space after end punctuations (periods, exclamation points, question marks) and after commas, colons and semi-colons.

Avoid overusing commas. If there more than two commas in a sentence, consider rewriting it in a more concise manner.

Avoid using quotation marks unless denoting irony, a direct quote, the title of a composition (including movies, books and plays), or a word unfamiliar to your audience.