

**CONTENT STYLE GUIDE**

Rev 07/16



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## **INTRODUCTION**

In writing and editing communication materials for digital, web, or print publication, Integrated Marketing & Communications relies on a combination of Associated Press and American Psychological Association styles. The Auraria Higher Education Center Content Style Guide provides direction and support for writing and formatting with the goal of producing consistent and accurate materials.

Style

## VOICE AND TONE

### Overview

The Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC) “voice” is the personality of our services; “tone” is the way our voice speaks. The voice doesn’t change, but the tone varies depending on context (e.g., a welcome message vs. responding to a customer service issue).

### Voice

AHEC’s voice is human and conversational. Imagine us as a trusted friend greeting a student on campus, helping her locate a classroom in a difficult-to-find building.

Our communication outlets (social media, newsletters, signage, website, brochures, correspondence, etc.) are tools. They exist to help students, faculty, and staff have a more successful experience on campus. Thus, we use plain, concise language that helps them do that with as little effort as possible, without patronizing or frustrating them.

#### Auraria Higher Education Center is...

##### **Service-oriented**...but not servile

*“We’re here to help you”* instead of *“We’ll meet your every need”*

##### **Colloquial**...but not slangy

*“We’ve got you covered”* instead of *“We’re totally on top of it”*

##### **Concise**.. but not curt

*“We’ve let Facilities Services know”* instead of *“Done”*

##### **Friendly**...but not chummy

*“Thanks for letting us know”* instead of  
*“Awesome, you rock for telling us!”*

##### **Helpful**...but not bossy

*“The ACPD is on their way. Next time, please try their text-a-tip line or call them directly”* instead of *“You should contact the ACPD directly by calling them or by using their text-a-tip line”*

##### **Lighthearted**...but not silly

*“Grab a coffee and take a study break on the Tivoli Starbucks Patio”* instead of *“It’s not procrastinating when you’re drinking coffee, it’s ‘procaffinating’”*

##### **Professional**...but not formal

*“You could upgrade to the Parking Passport, which offers flexible parking options at a discounted rate”* instead of *“Our records indicate you do not currently have a Parking Passport. Upgrade by...”*

##### **Simple**...but not dumbed down

*“Select the emergency preparedness seminar you want to take”* instead of *“Select the checkbox next to the emergency preparedness seminar you want to take, and then click enter”*

##### **Smart**...but not arrogant

*“We updated our website”* instead of *“We updated our website, how about that?”*

## Tone

Our communications voice is conversational, and so too is the tone that we use. The tone should reflect the context: Use a tone of warmth when greeting students; a tone of guidance in instructional copy; a tone of concern when handling customer service complaints, etc.

Write as if you're having a conversation with the user, tailoring the tone to whatever it is they're doing.

## Style/Usage Guidance

Use the following guidelines to ensure that the tone of the content matches the voice of AHEC:

- Use an active voice, rather than a passive voice, to keep content energetic and engaging.
  - The Tivoli Book Club is reading a new book.  
*(Not: A new book is being ready by the Tivoli Book Club.)*
- Use first- and second-person pronouns (we, you) to engage the user and show that AHEC is a team, not a singular person.
  - We encountered an issue.  
*(Not: The system encountered an issue.)*
  - We'll contact the ACPD for you immediately.  
*(Not: I'll contact the ACPD for you immediately.)*
- Use contractions to create a more human, natural tone.
  - We'll help you find the answer.  
*(Not: We will help you find the answer.)*
- Use "want" instead of "would like"
  - Join us if you want to learn more.  
*(Not: Join us if you would like to learn more.)*
- Use humble language. Don't let pride come across as arrogance. When pointing out a measure of success, keep it honest and go easy on the superlatives.
  - We're excited to announce that the long-awaited Tivoli Quad opens next week!  
*(Not: Our extremely hard work on the Tivoli Quad will pay off when it opens next week!)*
- Be careful with imperative wording. It's easy to sound overbearing or heavy-handed when writing about tasks that a user is required to complete. Use "have to" instead of "must" (heavy) or "need" (connotations); or better still, reword the copy so you don't "need" to use such wording at all.
  - Fill out the paperwork, and we'll get you going.  
*(Not: You need to fill out the paperwork before proceeding.)*
- Avoid negative construction (no, not, don't, etc.) when possible.
  - This service is unavailable.  
*(Not: This service is not available.)*
  - Get started without waiting in line.  
*(Not: You don't need to wait in line to get started.)*

# Writing Style Guidelines

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Use abbreviations and acronyms in moderation.

An abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase used to represent the whole.

- CCD, ABOD, NCAA, IMC

An acronym is an abbreviation that is read as a word.

- AHEC, NASA, STEM

When using uncommon abbreviations or acronyms, define them on first use—spell out the abbreviation or acronym followed by the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses.

- The Integrated Marketing & Communications (IMC) office is hiring a marketing student assistant. Applications should be directed to the IMC email address at [imc@ahec.edu](mailto:imc@ahec.edu).
- *NOTE: If the abbreviation or acronym is not used after the first mention, do not abbreviate it and define it in parentheses.*

Common-knowledge abbreviations and acronyms do not need to be defined on first use.

- GPA, GMAT, ACT, SAT

### State Abbreviations

- Use two-letter postal state abbreviations in mailing addresses only.
- When referencing a state in prose, spell out the whole name of the state; do not abbreviate.
  - The new AHEC custodian is from Mobile, Alabama.
- When referencing the United State of America, abbreviate it when it is used as an adjective.
  - According to U.S. history...
- Do not use periods when abbreviating United States of America (USA).

### Ampersand

Only use an ampersand in headlines and titles, not as an abbreviation for “and” in general prose.

- Integrated Marketing & Communications

### Percent or %

- Spell out percent in general text.
- In tabular material or bullet points on advertising copy, use the % symbol.

### Spell out pages

- pages 36–37, not pp. 36–37

### Academic Degrees

Include periods within degree abbreviations.

- B.A., M.A., M.F.A., Ph.D., M.D.

Degree names, when spelled out, should contain apostrophes.

- master’s degree, not master’s degree

When spelling out full degree names, don’t capitalize them, unless they contain proper nouns or adjectives.

- She earned a bachelor’s degree in English literature and a master’s degree in criminal justice.



## Addresses

When referencing a specific room, use the building name followed by a comma and the room or suite number.

- Tivoli Student Union, Suite 325

Spell out building names.

- North Classroom, not NC

Use abbreviations for Ave., Blvd. and St. with numbered addresses. Spell out and capitalize them when referencing a formal street name without a number.

- She works at 1444 Lawrence St.
- The building is on Larimer Street between 18th and 19th avenues.

When referencing two street names without a numbered address, spell out the type of street but do not capitalize it.

- 14th and Lawrence streets

Abbreviate compass points when used with a number address. Spell out compass points in other uses.

- He works at 4321 E. Main St. He drove down East Main Street.

## Capitalization

Use title case (Capitalize Every Word) in titles and headers (except for articles, prepositions, etc.—see below).

In titles and headings, cap all major words in hyphenated compounds unless they are preceded by a prefix. Proper names are always capped.

- Long-Range Development Plan
- Pre-collegiate Academy
- Non-Christian Religions

Do not capitalize:

- Articles (*a, an, the*), unless they are the first word in a sentence
- Prepositions and conjunctions of three or fewer letters (*and, of, in, to, for, by, as, or, but, yet, etc.*)

Use lowercase for state when used as an adjective or common noun.

- A state map
- The state economy
- The people of the state of Colorado

Capitalize state when writing about the state government.

- The State of Colorado's business offices are in Denver.

Capitalize compass points when referring to a place and lowercase when referring to a direction.

- Settlers from the East went west in search of new lives.

Lowercase compass points when describing a section of a nation, state, or city.

- eastern Denver
- Exceptions: when denoting widely known sections: Southern California, Northern California

Avoid excessive capitalization; sentence-style capitalization enhances readability.

## Colons

Use a colon to introduce lists.

- Include the following with your scholarship application: three letters of reference, completed application, and a personal statement.

Capitalize the words immediately following a colon ONLY if it is the beginning of a complete sentence, a proper noun, or a long quotation.

- She reminds her daughter of her favorite Emerson quotation: "The only way to have a friend is to be one."
- The director promised his staff this: If all employees complete their goals, there will be an end-of-year reward lunch.

Do not use a colon with a verb.

- (Incorrect) The supplies are
- (Correct) The supplies: -or- The supplies include:

## Commas

Use serial commas in all writing. A serial comma (sometimes referred to as the Oxford comma) precedes the conjunction before the final item in a list of three or more items.

- The Auraria Campus is home to the Community College of Denver, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and University of Colorado Denver.

## Dashes (Hyphen, En Dash, Em Dash)

### Hyphen (-)

Use a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun.

- short-term parking
- family-owned restaurant
- state-of-the-art design

### En Dash (–)

Use an en dash in place of “to” for connecting numbers in ranges. There should not be spaces before or after an en dash.

- 9 a.m.–10 p.m.
- June–August
- Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)

How to make an en dash:

- PC: control + numeric hyphen
- Mac: option + numeric hyphen

### Em Dash (—)

Use an em dash to take the place of commas, parentheses, or colons, mostly in informal writing. There should not be spaces before or after an em dash.

- When the pizza was finally delivered—nearly two hours after it was ordered—they decided they were no longer hungry.
- Mary bought three things at the mall—a shirt, a skirt, and a necklace.

How to make an em dash:

- PC: ctrl + alt + numeric hyphen
- Mac: shift + option + numeric hyphen

## Dates and Times

### Academic or fiscal year

- 1994–95, 1999–2000, or 2000–01, using an en dash (see dashes)
  - Not 1994-1995, 1994/95, '98-'99, or 98-99
  - Not 1999-00, '99-'00, or 99-00

### Semester and year

- fall semester 2016 or fall semester (no caps)

### Month and year

- September 2000 (no comma)

### Month, day, year

- September 10th, 2009
- Exception: headlines do not use the -nd, -th, -st after the number

### Decades

- 1980s (no apostrophe)
- the nineties (not 90s or 90's)

## Informal usage and abbreviated text

- '90s, '00s

## Seasons are not capped.

- the spring of 2000, spring 2000

## Time (a.m. and p.m.)

- Use a.m. and p.m.
- Not A.M., pm, PM, or other variations
- Do not precede noon or midnight with 12

To indicate duration of time, use to between the hours in text, but an en dash in calendar, headline, or tabular entries

- The employee appreciation picnic will run from 1 to 3 p.m.
- The class times are 11 a.m.–noon, 4–5 p.m., and 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m.
- Do not use :00; only the first number is needed
  - 10 a.m., not 10:00 a.m.
- Leave space after the number, but not on either side of the en dash

## Gender

Do not use he, she, his, or her unless gender is essential to meaning

Do not use s/he or his/her; avoid the use of “he or she” or “his or hers” if possible.

*Note: A plural construction is better*

Students may pay by credit card if they so choose.

Be careful not to mix singular and plural.

- Incorrect: Every student has their preference.
- Correct: All students have their preferences.

Use gender-neutral nouns such as chair instead of chairman, chairwoman, or chairperson.

## Hyphenation

Compound adjectives that precede the noun they modify are hyphenated unless they are easily recognized as a single concept.

- lower division or upper division class
- computer science field
- private sector contributions
- real estate markets

Use a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun.

- off-campus housing
- part-time employment
- decision-making skills

Use a hyphen to tell the age of people and things.

- I have a three-year-old child.

When a compound modifier comes AFTER the noun, it is NOT hyphenated.

- Her housing is off campus.
- She works more than part time.
- He greatest strength is decision making.
- The child is three years old.

Compound adjectives with -ly are not hyphenated.

- privately funded
- highly regarded

Compound adjectives with numerals should not be hyphenated.

- The \$40 million building is located on the east side of campus.

## Letter Spacing

Use one space after a period in printed and online materials.

Do not use spaces on either side of an em dash.

## Numbers

Spell out zero through nine in ordinary text; for numbers 10 and higher, use numerals.

- There were nine employees recognized for high achievement.
- The Auraria Early Learning Center has 24 children in Room 120.

Spell out any number that begins a sentence.

- Twelve students are employed by Event Services.
- Exceptions: course numbers, grade-point averages, room/suite numbers, unit and monetary values, scores, percentages, compound numbers, and decimal fractions—all of which may be indicated with numerals.

Use commas with all numbers above 999.

- 1,000
- \$13,500
- 500,000

For amounts of a million or more, use figures when referring to monetary amounts, but follow the regular rule for other quantities.

- \$6 million, but six million people
- \$17 million, 17 million people
- \$4 million campaign, 4 million marbles

Spell out ordinals through ninth.

- first grade
- 21st century
- 50th anniversary

In a series, treat all numbers the same, even if some of the numbers are above nine.

- The landscaping plan includes 4 shrubs, 15 perennial flowering plants, 3 native grasses, and 9 flowering trees.

## Plurals

Single or multiple letters or numbers used as nouns form the plural by adding s alone without an apostrophe.

- There are three YMCAs in Denver.
- Split the group into twos and threes.
- The student is in his 20s.

Faculty is singular when referring to an academic body.

- CU Denver's biology faculty is ranked highly for pre-med instruction.

Faculty is plural when referring to several individuals.

- MSU Denver and CCD faculty are working in collaboration to develop pipeline programs.

A single professor is a faculty member.

- She is a faculty member in the English Department.

## Possessives

Use only one apostrophe for plural nouns ending in s.

- the cats' food
- the VIPs' entrance
- states' rights

Use 's for singular nouns ending in s.

- The campus's parking garages are full.
- James's friends went camping.

## Quotation Marks

### Punctuation always goes inside quotation marks.

- In her column for the employee newsletter, the CEO said, “I thank you for your ideas and for your unrelenting spirit to serve!”
- The five Guiding Principles represent “One Auraria.”

### Question Marks and Exclamation Points

Question marks and exclamation points follow a different rule: where they go depends on the sentence. If the question mark or exclamation point is part of the quotation, it stays inside; but if the question mark or exclamation point are not part of the quotation, they go outside the closing quotation mark.

When the terminal punctuation is part of the quotation, it stays inside the final quotation mark.

- Bob asked, “Who would like to volunteer?”
- Missy held up her hand and shouted, “I will!”

When the terminal punctuation is not part of the quotation (it applies to the whole sentence), it goes outside the final quotation mark.

- Did you like “Finding Dory”?
- I can’t believe the ending of the movie “Gone Girl”!

## References (First and Second References)

### Auraria Board of Directors

- Second reference: ABOD

### Auraria Campus

- Refer to Auraria Campus as the place and Auraria Higher Education Center as the entity.
- Campus is lower case on second reference.
  - The Auraria Campus is home to four institutions. The campus has more than 40,000 students.

### Auraria Higher Education Center

- Second reference: AHEC
- Not AHEC Campus

### One Auraria

- “One Auraria” is a term used internally regarding AHEC staff pride. It is not a term that is used for marketing the agency to the general community.

## Semicolons

Use a semicolon in a series or list when items in the series are long or contain material that must be set apart by commas.

- Trevor considered several career paths: public relations and outreach; marketing and communications; strategic planning; and digital marketing and advertising.

Use a semicolon to connect two independent sentences without a conjunction.

- The proposal is due today; he worked on it all weekend.

## Telephone Numbers

Use dashes, not periods, in telephone numbers. Do not use parentheses to off-set the area code.

- 303-556-1234
- *Note: Periods are only used stylistically as part of the corporate identity (business cards, letterhead, etc.)*

## Titles (Composition and Periodical Titles)

For titles of compositions (books, movies, music, etc.), follow AP style and place in quotation marks.

- “Gone With the Wind”
- “The Walking Dead”
- “Star Spangled Banner”

For names of periodicals, including academic journals, follow AP style and use italics.

- *The Denver Post*
- *Washington Post*
- *New England Journal of Medicine*

For names of articles in journals or magazines, use quotation marks.

- “French President Says Brexit Won’t Affect E.U. Expansion” appeared in the July 2016 issue of *Time*.

## Web and Internet References

### Email

- no capital E
- no hyphen

### internet

- not capitalized

### website

- one word
- not web site or web-site
- not capitalized

### WiFi

- not wi-fi
- not Wi-Fi

## Words Commonly Misused

### Affect / Effect

As a general rule, if you’re looking for a noun, you’re probably looking for effect. If you’re using a verb, you’re safest with affect.

Affect, as a verb, means to influence.

- Enrollment affects the student bond fund.

Effect, as a noun, is used in psychology to describe an emotion.

- We were deeply affected by the president’s speech.

Effect, as a noun, means result.

- The updated smoking policy went into effect in 2016.

Effect, as a verb, means to cause.

- The student organization hopes to effect policy change through demonstrations.
- *Note: Effect is rarely used as a verb.*

### Between

Between is a preposition, which must be followed by an indirect object pronoun. Indirect object pronouns include me, her, him, and them.

- “Between you and me” is correct
- “Between you and I” is incorrect

### Compliment / Complement

Compliment means to give praise.

- The student was complimented for a professional presentation.

Complement means to complete something or supplement something.

- The new Tivoli Quad complements the architecture of the Tivoli Student Union.

### **Entitled / Titled**

Entitled means having the right to something.

- She is entitled to a work more hours.

Use titled to introduce the name of a publication.

- The article, titled “Systems,” gives an overview of how to stay organized in today’s busy workplace.

### **Farther / Further**

Farther refers to physical distance.

- The light rail stop is farther from the Tivoli than the Auraria Parkway bus stop.

Further refers to an extension of time or degree.

- The staff will discuss options further at their next meeting.

### **i.e. / e.g.**

i.e. is a Latin abbreviation for “that is” and is always followed by a comma.

- Linda prefers to study in a place where she can concentrate, i.e., the Auraria Library.

e.g. is a Latin abbreviation for “for example” and is always followed by a comma.

- SONO! serves an eclectic mix of ethnic food, e.g., sushi, Hawaiian BBQ, and curry.

### **Lay / Lie**

Lay means to place something or someone down. It must be followed by a direct object.

- She usually lays the book on the table, but I don’t know where she laid it this morning.

Lie means to rest or recline. Lie is not followed by a direct object.

- When he is sick he likes to lie on the sofa. When he had the flu last week, he lay there for three days straight.

The tenses of these two verbs can be confusing, especially because the simple past form of the verb lie (which is lay) is the same word as the simple present lay. The tenses are as follows:

- lay (simple present)
- laid (simple past)
- laid (past participle)
- laying (present participle)
- lie (simple present)
- lay (simple past)
- lain (past participle)
- lying (present participle)

### **May / Can**

Can means able to do something.

- You can visit the Tivoli Student Union for myriad student services.

May suggests possibility or permission.

- You may go on vacation in July.

### **Me / Myself**

Me is the objective case of I. Myself is used reflexively or as an emphatic pronoun. These are the only times myself can be used. Do not use myself because it sounds more formal or polite (e.g., please contact Steve or myself if you have any questions.)

- It’s between you and me. (Not it’s between you and myself.)
- You can call Marty or me. (Not you can call Marty or myself.)
- I’m going to treat myself to a latte at Starbucks.
- I did it myself.

### Setup / Set-Up

When used as a noun, “setup” is one word.

- The event setup required 500 chairs.

When “set up” is used as a verb, it is two words.

- Alyssa set up 500 chairs for the event.

### Sign-In, Sign-Out, Sign-Up / Sign In, Sign Out, Sign Up

When used as a noun or adjective, include the hyphen.

- The sign-in sheet only had one signature.

When used as a verb, do not use a hyphen.

- Melissa signed up to volunteer.

### That / Which

Use “that” in essential clauses—those that are important to the meaning of the sentence—without commas.

- Lattes that contain whole milk are richer in flavor.

Use “which” with nonessential clauses, and set off the clause with commas.

- The student ordered a latte, which was her favorite coffee beverage.

### Way / Ways

The word “way” is singular.

- Washington, D.C. is a long way from Denver.

The word “ways” is plural.

- There are several ways to travel from Washington, D.C. to Denver.

### Who / Whom

Use “who” as a pronoun referencing humans and animals with a name. It is never the object of a sentence, phrase, or clause.

- Who is the guest of honor at the award ceremony?
- *NOTE: Use “who” when you could replace it with “he” or “she.”*
  - Who is the guest of honor? She is the guest of honor.

Use “whom” when someone is the object of a verb or preposition.

- With whom will you be attending the meeting?
- *NOTE: Use “whom” when you could replace it with “him” or “her.”*
  - With whom will you be attending the dinner? I’ll attend the dinner with him.

### Words Commonly Misspelled (American Versus British English)

- Canceled, not cancelled
- Traveled, not travelled
- Color, not colour
- Defense, not defence
- Normalcy, not normality
- Toward, not towards
- Gray, not grey
- Theater, not theatre



# Formatting Guidelines

## Bullets and Lists

Do not capitalize single words in bulleted lists.

Do not capitalize the first word of sentence fragments appearing in bulleted lists.

When a list consists of complete sentences, punctuate each sentence as though it stands alone.

When a list consists of sentence fragments or phrases, do not use a period or semicolon at the end of each entry, including the concluding entry.

## Captions

Use captions to reiterate a marketing message or interest readers in the text of the accompanying article.

Use present tense and active constructions.

- In this photo from 2016, CEO Barb Weiske presents awards to the outstanding staff during Winterfest.

Be consistent in caption style throughout a document or publication.

Use either full sentences with punctuation, or phrases without punctuation.

Do not mix the two.

In group shots, identify people from left to right and according to rows.

## Headlines and Subheads

When writing headlines for newsletters:

- Use a traditional style that helps readers scan for specific information.
  - “Agency Recognizes Outstanding Staff at Winterfest”
- Use present simple tense for past events.
  - “Agency to Recognize Outstanding Staff Tomorrow”
- Leave out articles (a, an, the).
  - “CEO Attends Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony”  
(not The CEO Attends the Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony)
- Use figures for numbers.
  - “8 Recognized at Gala”

Use title case (Capitalize Every Word) in headlines, with some exceptions.

- Do not capitalize the following unless they are the first or last words of the headline:
  - articles (a, an, the)
  - coordinating conjunctions and prepositions of fewer than four letters
  - the infinitive marker (to)

Capitalize subordinating conjunctions.

Capitalize prepositions of four or more letters.

Capitalize any word that follows a colon, dash, or beginning quotation mark.