Style and writing guide for Source contributors

September 2017

<u>What is style?</u>
"Style" refers to guidelines for newswriting, including grammar, punctuation and usage.

<u>Why do we care about style?</u>
Most professional newsgathering organizations use Associated Press style, better known as AP style. Adhering to a style promotes credibility, consistency, professionalism and clarity. Your web copy will be cleaner and easier to read. Your stories will be more likely to get picked up by media outlets, either to cover the story themselves, or to re-publish a story. Writing with a consistent style also makes it more likely for your college Source story to be elevated to university Source.

Here is a succinct blog post that outlines why we use AP style for news writing:
http://www.axiapr.com/blog/what-is-ap-style-and-why-is-it-important-to-pr

Many organizations deviate from AP here and there for their in-house style. Colorado State University is no exception. For example, CSU capitalizes "University" when referring to itself. *The New York Times* rather famously uses courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs. etc.), while AP does not.

A CSU Style Guide exists. It can be found here: http://creativeservices.colostate.edu/style-guide/
It generally aligns with AP Style, with some in-house deviations. If in doubt, look it up. If you cannot find a specific answer, defer to AP Style, or ask Kate Jeracki or a member of the public relations team.

Common style issues that come up in Source copy

Academic degrees: Capitalize full names of academic degrees. Do not capitalize the field of study. Example: Bachelor of Science in psychology
Lowercase degrees in generic form. Example: bachelor's degree in psychology. This format is preferred.
Use periods in abbreviations. Example: B.S. in psychology. Ph.D. in math.
MBA, rather than M.B.A., is OK to use, per the preference of our College of Business.

Addresses: Abbreviate only Ave., Blvd, or St., but spell out Drive, Road, and all similar words when an address is written out as a full numbered address. Spell out all words when it is just the street name.
Examples: The house is at 123 Main St. The house is on Main Street.

Alumni: Alumna for a woman, alumnae for a group of women; alumnus for a man, alumni for a group of men or a group of men and women. Avoid "alum" except in headlines.

When Identifying alumni, state the individual's name, the degree abbreviation and/or major, and the year of graduation. Enclose the year within commas or parentheses following the name.

Other examples: John Doe, computer science, '71, resides in Denver.

Mary Smith (B.S., '65, M.S., '68) has been voted this year's president.

You can also use a narrative format to describe a person's degree year, such as, "Joe Shmoe received his master's degree in physics in 1997."

Colleges, departments, offices: Capitalize full official college, department or office names. In all other instances, do not capitalize.

Examples: The Department of Biology had its annual meeting.

The biology department had a picnic for freshmen.

Colorado State University: Always spell out on first reference. The logo doesn't count as first reference. After that, CSU or Colorado State are acceptable.

Commas: On Source and in news releases, we generally do not use the serial comma, otherwise known as the Oxford Comma - per AP Style. However, CSU style does prefer the serial comma, so you will see it in things like brochures and magazine copy.

Example with serial comma (CSU style): Her course load was biology, chemistry, math, and English.

Without serial comma (Source and AP style): Her course load was biology, chemistry, math and English.

If the last item in the list is a compound phrase, use the serial comma. The idea here is to maintain clarity of meaning.

Example: Her course load was biology, chemistry, math, and writing and editing for scientists.

Composition titles: Italicize titles of larger works like books, magazines, newspapers, movies, plays and TV shows. The smaller parts within these larger works, like chapters, articles or episodes, are enclosed in quotation marks.

Examples: The study was published in the journal *Science.* The researcher's chapter, titled "Where the Wild Things Are," was published Aug. 31.

Dates: Correct usage is May 10, not May 10th. When months are used with dates, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. Spell out all other months. But when the month is used only with the year, it is always spelled out.

Examples: The reception took place Aug. 11, 2016. The solar eclipse was in August 1979.

Put a comma after the year if it's in the middle of a sentence.

Example: The first Fall Address was held on Sept. 1, 1997, after the Spring Creek Flood.

Don't include the year if the occurrence has happened, or will happen, within the current calendar year.

Example: The solar eclipse was on Aug. 21.

Hyphens: Hyphenate when you have two or more words that are used together as an adjective, to describe another word that follows. This is especially important when the lack of a hyphen could change the meaning of the sentence.
Example: She turned in a six-page document.
The clean-energy executives arrived for the meeting. (Without the hyphen, they'd be energy executives with good hygiene.)

Numbers: Lots of rules about numbers. In general, spell out numbers one through nine, and use figures for 10 and above. But always use figures for specific quantities like dimensions, percentages, weights, distances, addresses, room numbers.
Examples: He had nine months to go. She had 10 months to go. She was a 6-year-old girl.
For dimensions, use these formats: He is 5 feet 6 inches tall. He was a 5-foot-6-inch man. The car is 17 feet long. The building has 6,000 square feet of floor space. It is a 6,000-square-foot building. It was a $5 billion project.

Unless at the beginning of a sentence, use figures for thousands, millions, billions, but no hyphens.
Examples: Fifty thousand people showed up for the parade.
At the parade, there were 50,000 people.

Percent: It's one word, lowercase: percent. Do not use the % sign.
Example: It was a 4 percent increase over the previous year.

State names: The names of the 50 U.S. states are always spelled out in the body of a story. (This is a change AP Style made in 2014.)
Right: Fort Collins, Colorado
Wrong: Fort Collins, Colo.

Telephone numbers: Use area codes with all phone numbers. Use parentheses and hyphens.
(970) 491-7099

Times: Use figures with a.m. and p.m. and do not capitalize. Eliminate the ":00." Use noon and midnight in place of 12 p.m. and 12 a.m. When stating a range of times, use a.m. and p.m. as needed for clarity. If separating times with a dash, do not use "from;" using "from" and "to" with no dashes is acceptable.
Examples: The event starts at 5 p.m. The event starts at noon. The event will take place 9-11 a.m. The event will take place 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The event will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Titles, including academic titles: A title should be capitalized only when it appears before a person's name. If it appears after a name, it should be lower case.
Examples: Professor of Economics John Smith.
John Smith, professor of economics.

John Smith, a professor in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology
I asked Professor John Smith what he thought about the problem.

Whitney Houston is an associate dean.
Associate Dean Whitney Houston said she would be late for the meeting.

In general, if a title is used descriptively, rather than formally, lowercase it.
He told CSU librarian Joe Shmoe to get more books.

Never use "Dr." before the name of someone who only has a Ph.D. Only use the courtesy title
"Dr." on first reference for someone with a medical, dental or veterinary degree.
Examples: Dr. Jonas Salk invented the polio vaccine. Salk saved many lives.
Amy Prieto, a professor in the Department of Chemistry, made a foam copper battery.

University: Uppercase when it stands alone if it is referring specifically to Colorado State
University.
Example: The University issued a statement about something.

Tips for basic writing and editing, inspired by E.B. White and the AP Stylebook

I don't need an editor. I'm the goodest writer!
Everyone needs an editor. If you think you don't, and all your copy is flawless, you need one
more than anyone else. Have at least one other person read over your copy.

Lede
Your lead sentence, called a "lede" in news writing, is the most important sentence of the story.
It will make or break whether the reader continues. Lead with your best stuff.

Nut graph
Your "nut graph" is a paragraph 1-2 down from the lede that functions as the concise "What's
this story about?" paragraph. In theory, the reader only needs to read the lede and nut graph to
know exactly what the story is about, and what major points will be covered.

This format is the classic "inverted pyramid" method of news writing. Put the most relevant info
at the top, and proceed to back into the less important details, paragraph by paragraph. This is
pretty much the opposite of academic writing, in which you have to flip to the end
"Conclusions" to figure out what the story is.

Example of an effective headline, lede and nut graph:
HEADLINE: Collaborative for Student Achievement moving to new home
LEDE: You might think the football team and coaches are the most excited people on
campus about the new stadium, but Gaye DiGregorio and the staff at the Collaborative for
Student Achievement have their own reasons to celebrate.

NUT GRAPH: The Collaborative for Student Achievement, formerly known as the Center for Advising and Student Achievement, has vacated its spaces at The Institute for Learning and Teaching (on the Oval) and Aylesworth Hall for more space and more possibilities at the new stadium. The new office will be open beginning Sept. 5.

AND THE STORY CONTINUES: "It will be great to get all of our staff in one location," said DiGregorio, executive director of student achievement. "We have a lot more space to serve students and tremendous classroom space that simply was not adjacent to our current locations. We're really excited."

...And so on. At the end, you might add the least important information, like the year the Collaborative for Student Achievement was founded.

Run-on sentences

Avoid run-on sentences. If you read it out loud and it feels too long, or you get confused and need to read it again, break it up into two sentences.

For editors, and for those being edited

Don't take editing personally. Push back if you need to. Editing can be a negotiation, but some things are non-negotiable.

If you are editing someone else's work, don't change things just to change them. Good editors do no harm. They ask, "Does this make sense? How can I help make this clearer?" If you don't know the answer, ask the writer to clarify. Before making a substantive change to the meaning of the sentence, check with the writer.

Keep it tight

Omit needless words. Less is more. Active voice is usually better than passive voice.
Example: Biology researchers are working to develop a new device.
Better: Biology researchers are developing a new device.
For a headline: New device may cure cancer, researchers say

Example: There are currently many students who are going to have to re-park their cars.
Better: Many students will need to re-park their cars.

Capitalization

In headlines, do not capitalize every first word. Only capitalize the first word, along with proper nouns.
Wrong: President Tony Frank Delivers Rousing Speech
Right: President Tony Frank delivers rousing speech

In a story, if it's not a proper noun, don't capitalize it to give it more gravitas.
Wrong: Many Business Schools offer online degrees.
Right: Many business schools offer online degrees.

Acronyms

Any bureaucracy has its own special brand of acronym soup, and CSU is no exception. In good news writing, we avoid acronyms whenever possible including – and especially – in headlines. If you need to use an acronym, be clear about defining it high in the story by setting it off in parentheses if you absolutely have to (AP Style doesn't like this, but we allow it because it's practically impossible to avoid). When possible, on second reference, don't use the acronym, but rather a generic, clear identifier.

Example: The Center for Materials Research is on University Avenue. The center houses six labs and four offices.

Avoid this headline: VPUO and VRR invest in research facilities
Try this instead: University invests in research facilities upgrades

Avoid this: ACE fellow comes to CSU for insight into academic partnerships
Try this instead: Education fellow to get insight on academic partnerships

Some common acronyms that are OK to use because they are universally recognizable: CIA, FBI, NASA.

<u>Commonly overused words and phrases in Source stories</u>
These come up a lot. There are likely others, and they are OK to use in moderation. If you can think of a different word, use it instead.

prestigious
unique
hands-on
real-world experience
groundbreaking
game changer
cutting edge

<u>Quotes</u>
Commas go inside quotation marks.

Example: "It's a beautiful day," said Professor John Smith. "It's not cloudy at all."

Break up a long quotation with "s/he said." It's generally preferable to insert the attribution after the first sentence of the quote, to tell the reader who is speaking as soon as possible.

Example: "I believe the children are our future," Houston said. "Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside."

<u>Avoid first person</u>

In Source stories, avoid using first person. No "we," "us" or "I" – try to keep everything to third person. Even avoid second person – "you," "your" – to the extent possible.

Tips for formatting Source stories

For every story, insert at least one subhed within the copy, ideally two. Subheds are shorter headlines within the body of the text. We generally like to have a subhed every four to five paragraphs. It breaks up large blocks of text and improves readability. Choose "heading 2" for subhed style.

Keep headlines short and to the point, and catchy. Headlines are what make people click. Avoid obscure acronyms in headlines.

Every story requires a headline and excerpt. The excerpt, like an abstract, is a one-sentence description of the story. It should not exactly mirror the information in the headline, because it is usually read in conjunction with the headline. It displays in some sections of the homepage and in the archives. You can't publish without it. It is often the snippet that appears on social media posts by default.

Example of an effective headline/excerpt:
Headline: All-gender restrooms are for everyone
Excerpt: Standardized signage will make single-stall restrooms on campus easier to find

In general, use Visual Composer to add photos and video to stories. Do not use "add media" in WordPress, because it is not mobile friendly.

Italicize photo captions.

Every story requires a featured image, which is a smaller version of the main image in the story. If the featured image looks funny or pixelated, use a different one. In general, strongly horizontal logos don't work.

Input alt-text for every single photo you place in the media library. This is a simple description of what is in the photo. It is required by university policy, to make our content accessible to those with visual disabilities.

If you're posting the story to Facebook, use the Yoast SEO/share module to input a Facebook headline, abstract and image. The Facebook image should be about 1200x630 pixels.

If your Facebook share module is not refreshing, use the Facebook debugger, found here: https://developers.facebook.com/tools/debug/