

McHenry County College Style Guide

Preface

The ultimate goal of the Office of Marketing and Public Relations is to ensure that a positive image of MCC and its identity is represented clearly and consistently.

These guidelines will help make certain that both internal and external communications employ consistent grammar and usage.

Guidelines are consistent with those found in *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law** but will be highlighted here to address the most commonly found errors. All other questions regarding style and usage should be directed to the Office of Marketing and Public Relations.

*This manual was selected for use because it is the clearest and easiest to reference quickly. Where possible, it also matches preferred style and usage by local media.

Accent Marks

The MS Word shortcut for accent marks is <control> + apostrophe, then type the letter you want accented. Please note, we've elected to forgo the accent marks in the word "resume," because both accented and unaccented versions have been deemed correct, and the marks don't always show up correctly or translate in electronic formats (you end up with weird characters). Should you need to include the accent marks, sources appear to indicate that you should have both accents vs. only one over the last e.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

The full meaning of an acronym or abbreviation should be spelled out on first appearance with the acronym initials following, without periods, in parentheses. Thereafter, just the acronym may be used. Do not put an acronym or abbreviation in parentheses after the full name if it's not going to appear again in the document.

Example: *Administrative Office Management (AOM) classes are offered in the evening to accommodate students' work schedules.*

In general, two-letter abbreviations are set with periods, three or more letters without periods. E.g., a.m., p.m., U.S., vs. RAP, GPA, SAT, GPA, JTPA. MCC is always written with no periods. ID (identification) is written with no periods. Note that CEUs has no apostrophe.

Do not use periods for all degrees, certificates and licenses: AS, AA, AAS, BA, MS. Ph.D. and Ed.D., however, should include periods.

In keeping with the AP Stylebook, a.m. and p.m. are lower case, not A.M. and P.M. and never AM/PM or am/pm.

Academic Degrees: Mention a degree only if it is necessary to establish someone's credentials. The preferred form is to avoid abbreviations and spell it out, e.g., *Barb Smith, who has a master's degree in biology...*

Use an apostrophe in *associate's, bachelor's, master's*, etc.

Generic references to degrees should be lower case: *He has a bachelor's degree.*

A specific degree should be capitalized: *She just earned an Associate in Applied Science.* Note that in this case, there is no 's after Associate if used with a specific degree.

Use such abbreviations as *AAS, AS, AA, BA, Ph.D.* when the need to identify many individuals by degree on first reference would make the preferred written-out form cumbersome. Use these abbreviations only after the full name, not after just a last name.

When used after a name, an academic abbreviation is set off by commas: *Samantha Stevens, Ph.D.*, spoke about...

Also, capitalize and spell out formal titles when they go **before** a name, but don't capitalize modifiers: *journalism Professor Bill Chamberlin*.

Lowercase academic subjects like *microbiology, journalism* and *political science*. Languages, of course, should be capitalized: *Japanese, English, Spanish*.

Don't use the title Dr. unless the person is an MD. Rather, list their name and degree: *Samantha Stevens, Ph.D.*

If this guide is overridden and Dr. is used, then don't precede a name with a courtesy title for an academic degree and follow it with the abbreviation.

Wrong: *Dr. Samantha Stevens, Ph.D.*

Right: *Dr. Samantha Stevens, a chemist...*

Active vs. Passive Voice

Writing in an active voice is usually more direct and lively. "There is" or "could be heard" are good examples of passive phrasing.

Consider the following examples:

The reason he left college was that his health became impaired.

Failing health compelled him to leave college.

The formula was solved by the winning team.

The winning team solved the formula.

The bell could be heard ringing at dawn.

The bell rang at dawn.

There were many papers lying on the floor.

Papers covered the floor.

The first day of class is often stressful for freshmen.

Freshmen often feel stress on their first day of class.

Note that in the examples above, brevity becomes a by-product of vigor.

There are occasions when it's appropriate to communicate in the first person, especially in materials given to students. You can often rectify stuffy-sounding writing simply by changing the voice or putting your prose into first person. E.g., *You shouldn't assume your teacher likes reptiles in her classroom* vs. *The student should not assume...*

Also note, when referring to yourself (I, me) there is seldom a need for "myself." Use "myself" only when you have used "I" earlier in the same sentence: *"I am not particularly fond of goat cheese myself."* *"I kept half the bagels for myself."* If you're not sure whether to use "I," "me," or "myself," just remove the second party from the sentences. You wouldn't say, *"The IRS sent the refund check to I,"* so you shouldn't say *"The IRS sent the refund check to my wife and I"* either. And you shouldn't say *"to my wife and myself."* The only correct way to say this is, *"The IRS sent the refund check to my wife and me."*

Affect/Effect

Affect is a verb that means "to influence."

The free throw will affect the score.

Effect is used as a verb to mean "to bring about" or "to accomplish."

She will effect change in the company.

As a noun, effect signifies a result.

The effect was clear.

Attribution

The preferred and most objective attribution you can use when quoting someone is "said." In most cases, your attribution should be in the past tense (as opposed to "says"). Do not use "stated" as an attribution. Unless you are writing a fictional account, you should avoid attributions such as laughed, mused, wondered, grinned, etc. In some cases, it may be appropriate to note your subject was laughing or smiling. If that is the case, you still need to use the word said.

Example: *"Apparently my shoe size was the deciding factor when they picked the winner,"* she said, laughing.

Bullet Lists

Many grammar rules go out the window when you use bullet lists. The first letter of the first word should be capitalized in each bullet. Bullets don't need to be complete sentences, in fact, they seldom are. You don't need punctuation (commas, semi colons)

after each bullet; just let the reader keep going. Periods should not be used after each bullet, *unless* one of the bullets does require a period (for example, if one bullet is a complete sentence or contains two sentences). In that case, the other bullets get periods, even if they're fragments. The best solution is to make sure that all of the items in the list are parallel – all fragments or all complete sentences.

Capitalization

You may capitalize the C in college when “the College” can be used interchangeably with MCC. Note the T in “the” is not capitalized. Do not capitalize the C when referring to attending college or other general references to college in general.

Capitalize the official/formal names of MCC offices, classes, committees, programs and course titles.

Stop by the MCC Registration Office for the appropriate forms. The lines at registration can get quite long during peak hours.

You'll need to take Calculus II as a prerequisite. Most of the calculus classes fill quickly.

Capitalize the word “program” in formal names and certificate programs that lead to employment such as *Honors Program, Nursing Program, Automotive Technology Program*. Don't capitalize “program” when it is used in a more general sense such as *a financial aid program, a degree program*.

Lowercase general references to areas of study, majors, minors, and subject areas such as a degree in *philosophy, theatre education, a marketing degree*.

The English department is part of the Humanities Division. At many schools, humanities encompasses several departments, including English, art, music and foreign languages.

Capitalize academic semesters or sessions: *Spring 2001, Summer 1986*. General references to seasons are not capitalized.

When referring to the Shah Center, note that the t in “the” is not capitalized.

Always capitalize a grade, but do not put single or double quotes around any grade.

Commas

Commas almost always go inside quote marks.

We do not use the serial comma (the comma before “and” in a list) unless it’s needed for clarity or if the list is complicated and/or contains long descriptions.

Red, white and blue.

There’s something odd about a man who wears a yellow tuxedo, sneakers and spats, and a bright blue top hat.

Note: you should use a semicolon in lists of names with titles or addresses and in other lists that would not be clear if separated by commas.

The contestants for the pie-eating contest came from Woodstock, IL; Lompoc, Rhode Island; Gravona, New Shropshire; and other places we had never heard of.

Dashes

Use a hyphen to separate numbers, dates, times, places, or anything that separates limits.

The play runs from 7-9 p.m.

Jan. 1-Feb. 2.

Use an em dash (the width of a capital M) to set off an abrupt break or insert an appositive or summary. Type it as two hyphens. In general, an em dash is a mark of separation that’s stronger than a comma, less formal than a colon, and more relaxed than parentheses.

Violence—the kind you see on television—is not honestly violent, and therein lies its harm.

Her suspicions were well founded—it was not Edward she cared for, it was San Francisco.

Days/Months

We usually use standard three-letter abbreviations, with periods, for days of the week when appropriate. In schedules, where space is limited, you can use double letters (Th for Thursday, Su for Sunday), no periods needed.

Months that have more than two syllables plus August may be abbreviated. *Jan. Feb. Aug. Sept. Oct. Nov. Dec.*

Write out March, April, May, June, July.

Note: Web guidelines dictate that days and months be spelled out to accommodate accessibility requirements (e.g., reader software for vision impairment).

Directions

Compass directions (north, south, east, west, northwest) are not capitalized; however, you should capitalize the compass directions when they are truly proper nouns, as in *She took the next plane back to the East this morning*, meaning to the East Coast or to the eastern states. A directional region such as the *Midwest*, *Northwest suburbs* or, “They moved to the *Southwest*,” should be capitalized.

Eastern, western, northern, southern do not need to be capitalized unless they designate world divisions.

eastern Wisconsin vs. Eastern Asia
Eastern and Southwestern Europe vs. southern Illinois

While we’re on the topic, you should also capitalize political divisions.

Orange County, Ward Ten, the Nineteenth District, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Thirteenth Congressional District

Doctoral Degrees

See Academic Degrees above.

Use Dr. for the first reference as a formal title before the name of a medical doctor only. If the person is not an MD, list his/her name and degree: Samantha Stevens, Ph.D.

Do not use Dr. before the names of individuals who hold honorary doctorates. Do not continue the use of Dr. in subsequent references.

Hyphens

Hyphens usually appears between compound adjectives (i.e., when two words modify one noun). For example: *new-student orientation, non-credit class, well-known scholar, small-business owner*.

But a hyphen is not needed for -ly adverbs or when the compound adjective comes after the noun.

Her neatly organized notions of animal magnetism were summarily reviled in the classroom.

The mannerism was well studied (vs. It was a well-studied mannerism).

A hyphen also joins compound numbers when they are written out and is used to express fractions: *thirty-two, eighty-seventh, two-thirds*.

The rule of prefixes calls for no hyphen for “non” and “re.”

Non is typically not hyphenated unless it’s an awkward combination. *Non-nuclear* vs. *Drop for nonpayment*.

Re is hyphenated if the word that follows it begins with the same vowel.

Re-elect, re-emerge, re-enter, etc.

In some cases, you will need to hyphenate for clarity

Re-cover vs. *recover, re-form* vs. *reform, re-sign* vs. *resign*.

Self is always hyphenated in a compound usage.

Self-assured, self-defense, self-governed

Internet Terms

See Web Guidelines below.

There are differing styles when it comes to Internet terms, and, unfortunately, no one authority on what’s correct. Therefore, MCC will adopt the most commonly used style in an attempt to at least maintain consistency. Here are some of the more frequently used terms. You’ll find a good list of additional terms at <http://www.netlingo.com/inframes.cfm> or www.webopedia.com.

email

homepage

http (leave it off unless there’s no www in the address)

Internet (note cap.)

online

web-based

web

website

webpage

web address

the web

Note capitalization and that online is one word vs. on-line.

MCC

When referring to McHenry County College, use the full name; it is then acceptable to subsequently use MCC or the College. Do not refer to MCC as a junior college.

MCC is District #528 of the Illinois Community College System.

Name Usage

Both first and last name (with any appropriate titles, etc.) should be used when referring to someone for the first time; thereafter, just the *last* name should be used.

Numbers, Times and Dates

Use figures and capitalize “room” when used with a figure: *Room A213*. Do not abbreviate the word room in a sentence. Use Rm. in a table if necessary. Note, classrooms should be denoted with no space between building letter and number: *A127* (not *A 127*).

There is a space between course abbreviations and numbers. E.g., *DGM 100*, not *DGM100*.

Spell out numbers one through nine, use numerals for numbers 10 and above. Use numbers with decimals.

For sums of money, delete .00 unless the figure is aligned in a table with other figures.

For phone numbers, use parentheses around the area code and a hyphen between the first three and last four numbers: *(815) 455-8699*. This same rule applies to 800 or other toll-free prefixes.

Use noon instead of 12 p.m. Never use 12 noon.

When writing the time of day, delete the :00 unless the time is aligned in a table with other times.

Incorrect: *8:00 a.m.*

Correct: *8 a.m.*

Denote morning and afternoon/evening with lowercase letters a.m. or p.m.

An event cannot be described as annual unless it has been held at least two successive years. So don’t say an event is “first annual,” though it is appropriate to note that the event sponsors plan to hold an event annually.

When writing dates, use Arabic figures without “*st*,” “*nd*,” “*rd*” or “*th*.” *Classes start September 3.*

It is not necessary to spell out a number and then follow it with that number in parentheses.

Correct: We have two computers.

Incorrect: We have two (2) computers.

When a phrase lists only a month and a year, do not separate the year with a comma: *June 1992 was one of the colder months.*

When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, set off the day with a comma: *January 2, 1996 was the target date.*

Use an *s* without an apostrophe to indicate spans of decades or centuries: *The 1990s, the 1800s, the '90s.*

Years are the lone exception to the general rule that a number should not be used to start a sentence: *1776 was an exciting year.*

Phi Theta Kappa The international offices of Phi Theta Kappa adopted their own official policy in regard to the proper use of the honor society name. Do not use any abbreviation such as PTK, as these are not the equivalent letters for the Greek words meaning wisdom, aspiration and purity. The full name of the organization is the *Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society*. Members of the organization should be referred to as “Phi Theta Kappa members” or “Phi Theta Kappans.” “Kappans,” “Phi Thetas,” and any other abbreviated version of the name are incorrect references.

Spacing In all MCC writing, use just one space at the end of a sentence after a period instead of two spaces. This can actually save us considerable space (and pages) in longer documents.

Titles and Names In keeping with AP style guidelines, capitalize titles used directly before an individual’s name. *President Francis A. Butterworth, Dean Longbottom, Vice-president McDonald.*
Lowercase titles following a name or standing alone. *Francis A. Butterworth, executive dean of Career and Technical Education.*

Use of individuals’ names in brochures and webpages should be avoided unless a publication is for short-term use. Whenever possible, substitute a position or title.

When listing an institution, don’t use location unless it’s part of the title or it’s outside Illinois: *University of Wisconsin-Madison; University of Arizona, Tucson; Waubensee Community College.*

Use alumna (alumnae in the plural) for a female who has attended a school. Use alumnus when referring to a male.

Use alumni when referring to more than one male or a group of men and women.

Titles of Works Italicize titles of books, magazines, computer games (but not software titles), movies, plays, poems, songs, and television programs. Put quotation marks around titles of lectures, articles in magazines or anthologies, speeches, and works of art, except the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material. In addition to catalogs, this category includes almanacs, directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks and similar publications.

E.g., *The Star-Spangled Banner*, *Gone With the Wind*, “Whistler’s Mother,” Encyclopedia Britannica.

Trademarks/Legal When including a TM, ©, ®, etc., you only need these symbols if included in a title/header and only once for first appearance in the body copy.

A Few Additional Notations – Non Errors for the Detail Oriented:

from *Common Errors in English Usage* by Paul Brians

see <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/errors.html> for the full online text

Split Infinitives For the hyper-critical, “to boldly go where no man has gone before” should be “*to go boldly...*” It is good to be aware that inserting one or more words between “to” and a verb is not, strictly speaking, an error, and is often more expressive and graceful than moving the intervening words elsewhere. However, so many people are offended by split infinitives that it is better to avoid them except when the alternatives sound strained and awkward.

Ending a Sentence With a Preposition This is a fine example of an artificial “rule” that ignores standard usage. The famous witticism usually attributed to Winston Churchill makes the point well: “*This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.*” It is perfectly OK to end a sentence in a preposition except in very formal writing.

Beginning a Sentence with a Conjunction It offends those who wish to confine English usage in a logical straitjacket that writers often begin sentences with “and” or “but.” However, depending on usage and “voice,” there are many effective and traditional uses for beginning sentences. Promotional or advertising is but one example. Another is the reply to a previous assertion in a dialogue: “*But, my dear Watson, the*

criminal obviously wore expensive boots or he would not have taken such pains to scrape them clean.” Make it a rule to consider whether your conjunction would repose more naturally within the previous sentence or would gain useful emphasis by being sent to the head of a new sentence.

Forward vs. forwards

Although some style books prefer “forward” and “toward” to “forwards” and “towards,” none of these forms is really incorrect, though the forms without the final “s” are perhaps a smidgen more formal.

“None” singular vs. plural

Some people insist that since “none” is derived from “no one” it should always be singular: *“none of us is having dessert.”* However, in standard usage, the word is most often treated as a plural. *“None of us are having dessert”* will do just fine.

“Like” as a preposition

Prepositional or conjunctive uses of “like” are not incorrect, they are simply less formal. “Like” has played these roles for centuries, so really the question isn’t whether it’s right or wrong, it’s whether it is appropriate for a given context. In many cases, “like” can replace “for example” or “such as” in a sentence, so don’t be afraid to use it. Likewise, “like” as a conjunction is also correct, though more informal. E.g., *Live every day like it’s your last. It sounds like you’re having second thoughts.* Just bear in mind the effect such use will have on tone. “As if” and “as though” require the subjunctive, the use of which will remove any sense of informality. And sometimes that’s OK too.

Website Guidelines

The MCC website (www.mchenry.edu) is considered an official College publication. As such, the website adheres to the same standards established for other forms of published information. Design, graphics, and content must be aesthetically pleasing, well written, well organized and comply with appropriate legal and college guidelines.

Online Documents and the MCC Website

Official MCC webpages provide information relating to an office, department, official service or functional unit of the College. Webpage content should be consistent with the mission and goals of MCC and in compliance with Illinois Web Accessibility Standards.

MCC owns the copyright to content created for the MCC website, including reader-created content. Reader-created content includes mailing lists, discussion boards, forums, online chat, etc. As part of the Office of Marketing and Public Relations, the MCC web team reserves the right to regulate access to links, other servers, and the content of its website. The web team also reserves the right to remove from its server(s) any materials that are outdated, not properly maintained, or not in compliance with established policies and technical standards. The web team may also remove materials that are deemed erroneous, misleading, illegal, potentially illegal or detrimental to the mission or operations of the College.

When Planning Web Content

Identify a publication schedule for the information on your webpages. How long will this information be relevant? How often will this information need to be updated or replaced?

Whenever possible, provide the web team with a monthly/annual calendar of events for your area to track the content that needs to be created for important events. Include event name, brief description of what content is required, number of words required, writer/contact person responsible, extra material required (images), and due date for copy.

Identify your target readers. How many types of readers is your information relevant to? Who they are? Prioritize them.

To Ensure Readability of Webpage Content

- Write simply and clearly.
- Avoid typing in all capital letters. All capital letters slows the reader down by 10 percent.
- Write for your reader –the reader wants to know “What’s in it for me?” as soon as possible.

- Keep sentences between 10-15 words, paragraphs about 50 words, documents between 500–700 words.
- Write short, clear summaries that answer the where, when, what and why.
- If you can't avoid writing a long document, provide a table of contents including headings and subheadings.
- Don't present your reader with a long list of links--show the reader only the very best links.

The content author (not the web team) is responsible for obtaining and providing written proof of copyright permission from a third party to use and quote from third-party content. This includes text, logos and permission to link to other sites as needed.

- When linking to third-party websites, review the site carefully before linking. Be sure the site has the content that your reader requires before advising your reader to spend time going to another site.
- Don't over-link to one website--creating a series of links to another website may be seen as a copyright infringement.

Naming of Webpages

The web team, in conjunction with the Director of Marketing and Public Relations, determines the appropriate name (alias URL) of a webpage. At all times, it is the goal to develop a name that is **simple, appropriate and memorable to the end user. When using** web addresses in copy, they must always be lower case, such as *www.mchenry.edu/advising*

Digital Signage Guidelines

The College has installed digital signage in various locations around the main campus and Shah Center. Both LED (scrolling signs) and LCD (flat-panel screens) are being used to convey key messages to students, employees and visitors. Overall, when using digital signage as a successful communication tool, every message must be clear, concise and compelling (call to action).

Use of Digital Signage

The purpose of use for LED signs is to provide direction to highly-visited locations on campus (i.e. Financial Aid Office, Registration Office, etc.). These signs may also be used to give succinct instructions in case of an emergency.

The purpose of use for LCD signs is to act like a billboard, providing high-level, promotional information for College (or College-hosted) programs and services. We are also exploring use of these displays for emergency situations.

Appropriate uses:

- Promoting an upcoming event open to students and/or community members
- Recruiting participation for an MCC program (i.e. athletics teams)
- Highlighting achievements of the College (award-winners, recognition of departments)
- Timely info, such as weekly cafeteria menu
- MCC news updates
- MCC Promise updates
- Emergency information (when applicable)

Inappropriate uses:

- Personal promotion
- Promoting job openings
- Promotion of non-College related programs
- Classified advertising

LCD Message Guidelines

To ensure consistency of messages displayed on LCD monitors, a team of people across various departments at the College (including Student Life, Athletics, Events/Continuing and Professional Education, and IT) have been identified to post content. Employees may also request information to be posted on these monitors by submitting a project request through the Office of Marketing and Public Relations (found on InsideMCC) and selecting the “Digital Signage” option.

The following is a recommended layout for all digital signage postings. Remember, short, simple phrases are easier to read quickly--and to remember.

Title

- Five words or less
- Always use sans serif font, such as Arial or Trebuchet
- Bold
- 45-60 pt. size
- Title should explain the program/event
- Actionable and explain the benefit (example: “Get Involved with Athletics” vs. “MCC Athletics”)

Event Listing

- Use sans serif font
- Bold
- 40-45 pt. size
- Date/Location
- Time
- 2-3 **short** bullets on why someone should attend
- Contact information (call to action--drive to either phone number, office location or web address)

Other Listing

- Use sans serif font
- Bold
- 40-45 pt. size
- One sentence description
- 1-2 bullets answering “what’s in it for me?”
- Contact information (call to action--drive to either phone number, office location or web address)

Use of Photos/Images

on LCD Monitors The Office of Marketing and Public Relations does not recommend using photos/images, unless they are directly related to adding value to a specific promotion being communicated. When using an image, please do not use clipart or PDFs as images.

Further research on best practices in this area is being conducted.