

Editorial Style

Cabrillo College follows Associated Press (AP) style with only a few exceptions in its marketing efforts. Buying the most recent edition of the *Associated Press Stylebook* and keeping it handy will prevent trips over most stylistic hurdles. Here's a link to buy the book at the Associated Press website: <http://www.apstylebook.com/>

Exceptions to AP style

AP style calls for the use of quotation marks for all titles. Cabrillo italicizes the titles of books, films, theatrical productions, and names of paintings, boats, airplanes and other large standalone works. We also use quotation marks around the titles of smaller works such as poems, song titles, articles or chapters.

AP style says "Web site" is written as two words and capitalized, but Cabrillo uses "website" as the standard form for individual sites, as do many new dictionaries, including the *American Heritage* and the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Recognizing an increasing preference for simplified forms, Cabrillo also breaks with AP style in the use of "email," "online" and "homepage." Cabrillo follows AP in the capitalization of "World Wide Web," the "Web" and "Internet."

Common stylistic errors

Overcapitalization — Following AP style, Cabrillo does not capitalize academic departments and campus offices unless they contain a proper noun or unless they are part of the official name.

Examples:

The department of history; the facilities department; the department of English; the Cabrillo College Department of Physics; the office of the president; the college; Cabrillo College; the Cabrillo College Foundation; the foundation; the Cabrillo College Governing Board; the governing board.

Capitalize formal titles (those that indicate authority, usually governmental) used before a name. Lowercase titles set off by commas and titles that refer to occupation.

Examples:

King, the college president, announced the awards.

The California Community College Foundation recognized President King for his outstanding leadership.



Students enjoyed instructor Smith's classes.

Smith, professor of political science and chair of the department, taught two generations of Cabrillo College students. (Note: It's not disrespectful to lowercase titles. Plus, names are easier to read without them.)

Passive construction — Active sentence structure places the subject in the subject position. Passive voice lengthens and confuses the sentence by using phrases to move the subject after the verb. (Clue: many passive sentences hide the subject in a prepositional phrase with "by".)

Examples:

Stevens was appointed director by the committee. (passive)

The committee appointed Stevens director. (active)

The Stevens study was awarded a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation. (passive)

The National Science Foundation awarded the Stevens study a \$1 million grant. (active)

Pronoun reference — Pronoun reference problems occur when the pronoun doesn't agree in number with the noun it references.

Examples:

The department listed a job opening in their marketing office. (Incorrect: department is singular.)

The department listed a job opening in its marketing office. (correct)

Academic degrees — Use an apostrophe in master's degree and bachelor's degree. Doctorate is the preferred form when noting a degree held. None are capitalized.

Wayward modifiers — Place descriptive words and phrases close to the word described to avoid confusion.

Examples:

Bill ran after José pulling a suitcase on the pavement. (Incorrect if Bill is pulling the bag; correct if José is pulling the bag.)

Lucia strolled to the library talking on the cell phone. (incorrect)

Talking on the cell phone, Lucia strolled to the library. (correct)

Tips to ease the way

- One space between sentences. One space after colons. We know your typing teacher told you two, but for layout purposes, one is enough.
- One thought per paragraph. Longer paragraphs appear to take up entire columns when dropped into a layout.
- Numbers one through nine are spelled out. At 10, they turn into numbers.
- When you use “that,” read it again and imagine the sentence without it. Chances are you don’t need it.
- Don’t be afraid to use contractions. Again, we’re not formal, we’re friendly. Contractions help your writing sound conversational, i.e. it makes your “voice” actually sound like one. Copywriting isn’t academic writing, after all.
- Space and attention are limited, so get right to it. And remember the Five W’s — Who, What, When, Where and Why. The first sentence, the “lead,” should tell your reader exactly what to expect from the story without history.
- End of sentence punctuation and commas go inside quotation marks.
- Use commas respectfully — they really aren’t the punctuation for every situation. Sentences do not require several sprinkled about for effect.
- When you start chaining together prepositional phrases at the end of sentences, make sure you really need them.
- Use the ellipsis and dash sparingly. Ellipsis (...) indicates omitted words. The dash (—) indicates an abrupt change or sets off a phrase already dripping in commas.

The best advice if you’re still unsure

Reread your writing aloud. If it sounds stilted and artificial, time to rewrite it. Search for passive voice constructions and make them active. Try using contractions or more words instead of those with five or more syllables to make it sound less formal and more conversational in tone.

When you finish, if you can, put it aside for a day, then read back through it. Root out words you really don’t need such as redundancies and hyperbole and hit the delete key.

Resources to help besides AP

The folks in marketing and communications are available to help. Don’t hesitate to call. Not everyone is — or should be — a word geek.