



University Public Relations Editorial Style Guide

The following document outlines the standards that will be followed by the Penn State News editorial team as it manages content for the University's central news platforms. These outlets include the Penn State News website (news.psu.edu) and the University's various headlines news publications, including Penn State Today.

This document will be updated on an ongoing basis by the Penn State News editorial team in the Office of University Public Relations.

Associated Press style, and exceptions

As a rule, Penn State News follows the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook, an English grammar style and usage guide created by American journalists working for or connected with the Associated Press to standardize mass communication – with some exceptions, listed below in the following sections:

- Penn State News editorial style preferences
- Exceptions to AP style
- AP style: Common tips

Penn State News editorial style preferences

The following are a few Penn State News editorial preferences:

Penn State — On first reference refer to Penn State as “Penn State.” Subsequently, “the University” or “University” may be used.

In more formal settings, “The Pennsylvania State University” is acceptable. Do not use “Penn State University” unless it is part of a formal title, for example, “The Penn State University Athletic Conference” or “Penn State University Press.” Never use PSU.

academic degrees — Do not use abbreviations (Ph.D., M.D., R.N., M.S., LL.M., J.D. etc.). The preferred form is to avoid an abbreviation and spell out instead. Degrees should be lowercased.

Acceptable forms include:

- associate degree
- baccalaureate degree, bachelor's degree, bachelor of fine arts
- master's degree, master of science
- doctoral degree, doctorate, juris doctor
- MBA, master of business administration

NOTE //

You are currently viewing the editorial style guide for materials intended for Penn State University Public Relations. For editorial guidance on marketing and promotional materials, please refer to the University Marketing Editorial Standards guide on brand.psu.edu.

NOTE //

In all cases, **editorial style decisions** are at the discretion of the Penn State News Editorial Team.

NOTE //

Questions? Email news@psu.edu with subject “Style Guide”

Please note this exception: MBA is acceptable for the master of business administration degree, without periods.

Examples:

He earned a bachelor of science degree in physics.

She earned a bachelor's degree in chemistry.

He received a juris doctor from the University of Neverland.

She received bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in geology from the School of Mines.

He received his MBA from the Penn State Smeal College of Business.

academic and administrative titles — Titles are capitalized when they immediately precede names and are used as part of the names.

Examples:

Penn State Berks Chancellor Peter Parker said...

Associate Professor Hans Ringger said...

Professor of Comparative Literature Neil Samson said...

Distinguished Professor of History Jane Jones said...

Titles are lowercased if they follow names.

Eric Barron, president of Penn State, said...

Jill Johnson, professor of mathematics, said...

Jane Jones, distinguished professor of history, said...

If the person holds a named professorship or chair, capitalize the title whether it precedes or follows the name.

Dan Miller, Evan Pugh Professor of Mathematics, said...

Erwin W. Mueller Professor Jan Smith said...

When the title includes the specific name of an academic or administrative unit, the name of the unit is capitalized.

Wilma Smith, director of Student Affairs, said...

college — When standing alone on second and subsequent references, "college" is not capitalized when referring to an academic college.

Example:

The College of the Liberal Arts, the college.

Commonwealth Campuses, commonwealth — When the campuses are referred to collectively, capitalize Commonwealth Campuses. Otherwise, lowercase commonwealth. Permissible in full name of "Commonwealth of Pennsylvania."

Example:

Penn State's Commonwealth Campuses.

datelines — It is a best practice to include a dateline with all stories. Datelines should contain a city name, entirely in capital letters, followed in most cases by the abbreviated (when applicable) name of the state, and a double dash. CITY IN CAPS, Pa. — is the proper format.

photo/video captions — Should be in past tense, not present tense. If the caption is describing an action that will be taken in the future by a photo subject, future tense is appropriate.

said vs. says — In stories, in general, use the past tense: “said.” Avoid exaggerated substitutes for said such as “he opined” or “he exclaimed.” Terms such as “added” or “explained” are acceptable.

time-date-place — We recommend that any event information should be listed in the following order: time, date, place.

Example:

The recital will be held at 3 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 1, in Eisenhower Auditorium.

Exceptions to AP Style

The following are some Penn State News exceptions to AP style:

alumni and graduation years — Should be written out. Do not use year with abbreviated academic college or major set in parentheses.

Examples:

Smith is a 1994 graduate in English. Smith graduated from Penn State in 1994 with a degree in English.

Not: Smith '94 ENG will be the keynote speaker at the event.

Board of Trustees — Use “Penn State Board of Trustees” on first reference. On second reference, capitalize when using Board of Trustees; lowercase when using “board,” “trustee,” “trustees.”

campus' — When the possessive form of campus is used, do not add 's in any case.

names, first and last — In general, use only last names on second reference. However, clarity is key, and so:

- If a story contains individuals with the same last name, and they are not related: Use both first and last names. This may happen in stories about researchers who have the same last name, but are not related to each other.
- If a story contains individuals with the same last name, who are related: First names may be used on second and subsequent reference. This may happen in stories about gifts to the University.

AP Style: Common tips

The following is a list of common AP Style tips and reminders designed to assist communicators in their daily writing about the University.

adviser — not advisor.

dates — Every story on Penn State News is dated; do not specify year unless the story refers to multiple years, or unless it is imperative for clarity's sake. When referring to a specific date, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Do not abbreviate: March, April, May, June and July.

Examples:

He was born Oct. 15, 1981.

She got married in September 2003.

Never abbreviate the day of the week, and do not use on past events. Year span should be written 2011-12, not 2011-2012.

died vs. passed — Use died.

Dr. — "Dr." should only be used, on first reference, preceding the name of a person with a medical degree. Do not use "Dr." on second reference. "Dr." may be used in a direct quote.

email, smartphone, cellphone — Single words, lower case. No hyphens.

fellow — Lowercase fellow as a title. He was named an AAAS fellow.

hyperlinks — In most cases, link related text to appropriate URLs rather than including a full hyperlink in the body of the story.

Jr., Sr. — No comma before Jr., Sr.

Example:

Martin Luther King Jr.

numerals — Use figures for all numbers greater than nine; spell out all numbers less than 10.

Note the exceptions below:

Always use figures for ages, sums of money, time of day, percentages, addresses, years, days of month, degrees of temperature, proportions, votes, scores, speeds, time of races, dimensions and serial numbers.

Spell out numbers, no matter how large, when they begin sentences; rephrase the sentence whenever possible. Exception: When starting a sentence with a year, use figures. *1999 was a very good year.*

Avoid unnecessary digits. Use 1 p.m., not 1:00 p.m.; \$14, not \$14.00.

Rankings: *Penn State ranks No. 1. The school ranks No. 27.*

Use figures for ordinal numbers greater than ninth; spell out ordinals less than 10th.

Ninth; 21st; 156th; 192nd; 21st century.

For numbers above 999,999, use 1 million, \$39 million, \$22.5 billion. Don't carry beyond two decimals.

Spell out an approximate number if it can be expressed in a few words: Nearly a thousand, more than half a million, about four hundred. BUT: The city's population of about 575,000.

Do not use Roman numerals, except when they are part of a title or a name.

World War I, World War II, King Henry VIII, Rocco Colabella III.

Fractions less than one are spelled out: *One-fourth of the students.*

Use numerals for fractions above one, converting to decimals whenever possible: 5.5, 8.2, 14.9. If conversion to decimals is not practical, use 2 5/8 or 4 15/16, with a full space between the whole number and the fraction.

Insert commas when numbers are greater than three figures, except in dates:

\$5,900, 15,763 skateboards, 1990 was a great year.

periods — Use one space after periods, never two spaces.

phone numbers — 111-111-1111. No parentheses. If extension numbers are needed, use a comma to separate the main number from the extension: 111-111-1111, ext. 111.

room numbers — Use numerals and capitalize "room" when used with a figure.

Examples:

Room 2, Room 211.

Saint — Abbreviate as St. in the names of saints, cities and other places.

Example:

St. Jude; St. Paul, Minnesota.

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U.Ed. SCM 20-49

theater, theatre — Use "theater" in general, unless part of a formal title: Professor of Theatre, or the Pavilion Theatre. But a degree in theater, the theater program.

trademark — Capitalize trademarked brands, but do not use the trademark symbol (™).

ZIP codes — Use ZIP codes only when referencing a mailing address. Otherwise, do not list with addresses.