

Editorial Style

An Overview of Hofstra Law's Editorial Style
and Best Practices for Writing for the Web

Office of Communications
July 30, 2013

What Is Editorial Style?

Editorial style refers to:

- Spelling
- Punctuation
- Capitalization
- Use of abbreviations and italics
- Expression of numbers
- Details of typographical form and practice

Why Is Editorial Style Important?

Your editorial voice can have nearly as strong an effect as the information itself on how readers perceive your organization — on how they judge your

- Credibility
- Point of view
- Understanding of readers' interests and compatibility with their personal sensibilities

In short, your editorial voice affects all the reasons people would read your publications or website and buy from or support your organization, not a competing one.

Bases of Hofstra Law's Editorial Style

Our editorial style is based on two standard references:

- *Associated Press Stylebook* —
www.apstylebook.com/hofstra_edu
For nearly all matters dealing with grammar, spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, usage, titles and the like
- *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th edition —
www.yourdictionary.com
For spelling, style and usage questions not covered in the *AP Stylebook*

Spelling

First check the *AP Stylebook*.

If the word is not listed in the *AP Stylebook*, check *Webster's*. If *Webster's* gives more than one spelling, or more than one form of the plural, choose the first spelling or form listed.

A few exceptions to the *AP Stylebook's* and *Webster's* spellings are listed in *Editorial Style Guidelines: Frequently Occurring Issues* —

law.hofstra.edu/site_support/files/pdf/about/departments/communications/webhelp/editorialstyleguidelines.pdf.

Key Features of Hofstra Law's Editorial Style

- Use one space after a terminal punctuation mark.
- Don't use Oxford, or serial, commas, except when they are needed for clarity.
- Dashes
 - Use the hyphen to join compound words that modify a noun and as a substitute for the word to in spans of pages, time or years.
 - Use the em dash with a space on either side to set off a phrase.
 - Do not use the en dash (the dash that is longer than a hyphen but shorter than an em dash).

Key Features *continued*

- Spell out all numbers from one through nine, and use numerals for the numbers 10 and higher. **Exceptions:** Use figures for academic credits, ages, percentages, ratios and times of day.
- Do not use ordinal numbers for dates:
January 1, May 17, November 22 (not January 1st, May 17th, November 22nd)
- Telephone Numbers
Use hyphens, not periods, and do not use parentheses for the area code: 212-854-2680

Key Features *continued*

- Times of Day
 - Use a.m., p.m., lowercase with periods.
 - Use noon and midnight, lowercase (not 12 p.m. and 12 a.m.)
 - Use figures except for noon and midnight.
 - 11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 9-11 a.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Note that a space is used between the figure and a.m. or p.m.)
- Style degrees with periods:
B.A., M.A., J.D., LL.M., M.B.A., M.P.H., and so on
- Lowercase a person's title when the title appears after the name or without the name.
- Use singular rather than plural pronouns when referring to companies or organizations.

Key Features *continued*

- United States:
 - Modifier, or Adjective: Use the abbreviation U.S.
 - Noun: Use either United States or U.S.; United States is preferred for the first mention.
- Use italics for names of print and electronic media, including newspapers, movies, and television and radio programs (but not for the names of networks).
- Style words beginning with prefixes (e.g., non-, co-, pre-) closed up without a hyphen.

Best Practices for Writing for the Web

- **Keep your valued information at the top.** Content that requires users to scroll vertically loses up to 80 percent of its readership. Your introductory sentences or paragraphs for any key landing pages are prime real estate for your messages.
- **Make your text scannable.** On average, users read about 20 percent of your content per page.
 - Use short sentences and action verbs, and cut inessential text.
 - Highlight essential words.
 - Use bulleted lists to draw out information.
 - Keep paragraphs short.

Writing for the Web

continued

- **Be organized.** Designate a main header for your page that conveys its importance and meaning. Make sure your subheadings clearly indicate the content of each section.
- **Stay fresh.** Outdated Web content will confuse your users and make you look lazy. Make sure your staff and contact information is up to date and remove past events.
- **Embed your links.** Try not to call attention to your links with words like “click here.” Instead, use the relevant descriptive words in your content as links.
- **Use the active voice and the present tense.**