



# Grammar Style Guide

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# Introduction

This style guide is available as a reference for those who create campus publications and materials in both print and electronic mediums. It is not designed as a comprehensive tool but rather a guideline to help provide consistency. The suggested rules and usage included in the *YVCC Grammar Style Guide* address specifics to Yakima Valley Community College.

This guide was developed using the following sources: *The Gregg Reference Manual*, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. The YVCC guide is to be used in conjunction with one of these manuals. Where conflicts arise, refer back to this document.

The Community Relations Office will also use the *The Associated Press Stylebook* when writing for the news media. Press releases, public service announcements, and news posted on the website will reflect this style.

Additional questions regarding this guide may be directed to: [publications@yvcc.edu](mailto:publications@yvcc.edu)

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# I. Punctuation & Grammar

## A. Abbreviations

1. *Abbreviations:* For abbreviations that contain no periods and numerals used as nouns, form the plural by adding a lowercase **s**.
  - RNs, W-2s, FAFSAs, 1980s
  - *Reference Section II Style; A*

## B. Capitalization

1. *Official Names:* Only official names and proper nouns are capitalized. Common nouns and various shortened forms of official names are **not** capitalized.
  - The Larson Gallery contains more than 100 works of art. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday.
2. *Academic Degrees, Departments, Majors, and Programs*
  - *Reference Section II Style, B*
3. *Titles:* Titles are capitalized when they immediately precede a personal name. Titles are normally lowercase when following a name or used in place of a name.
  - Vice President Franklin; vice president for instruction; the vice president
  - Dean Grafton; dean for arts and sciences; the dean
  - Instructor Smith; instructor of chemistry; the instructor
4. *Political Entities:* Various shortened forms of official names are not capitalized.
  - The city of Pasco rarely repairs its streets; the city uses its money for the juvenile justice system.
  - the state of Washington; Washington State; the state
5. *Position and Job Titles:* Official job titles immediately **preceding** a name are capitalized; those **following** a name or set off by commas are not. This rule applies to both academic and administrative titles.
  - The latest report by Vice President Anderson will be presented at the committee meeting.
  - Sally Perkins, instructor of physics, has discovered a new particle.

6. *Locations of Campuses:* Capitalize only the official names of buildings and formally designated places on campus.
  - Yakima Campus
  - Grandview Campus
  - Deccio Higher Education Center; the Deccio building
  - Sherar Gym; the gym
  - Glenn Anthon Hall
  - the clock tower
  - Yakima Valley Community College; YVCC; the college
  
7. *Boards and Committees:* Capitalize only the complete and official names of colleges, schools, divisions, departments, offices, and committees. Lowercase informal and shortened versions of all such names.
  - the Board of Trustees of Yakima Valley Community College; the Board of Trustees; the board
  - the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges; the SBCTC; the community college system
  - the Curriculum Committee; the committee
  
8. *Do not capitalize:*
  - classes: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior
  - commencement
  - quarters: spring quarter, fall quarter, winter quarter, summer quarter
  - seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter
  - most computer terms: web (shortened form of World Wide Web; lowercase this shortened version; do not use when referring to the Internet or to a specific website); webpage; website

### **C. Commas**

1. *Complex and Compound Sentences:* Use a comma before a conjunction (and, but, or) that introduces an independent clause.
  - The band is giving a concert on Friday night, and the chorus is performing on Saturday.
  - The band is giving a concert on Friday night and is performing on Saturday.
  
2. *Dates:* No comma is needed between a month and a year. Do use a comma before and after the year if month, date, and year are used.
  - The deadline is April 1, 2009, for on-campus applicants.
  - A hiring decision will be made in May 2009.
  
3. *Introductory Phrases:* Use commas after short introductory phrases, especially if the main clause begins with a date or proper noun.
  - On July 4, General David McKiernan will address a local veterans group.

4. *Lists:* Use a comma before the conjunction and the final element in a list.
  - Those in attendance included students, faculty and staff, and donors.  
NOT: Those in attendance included students, faculty and staff and donors.
  
5. *Names with Suffixes:* When a person's name ends with Jr., Sr., or a roman numeral such as III, omit the comma before this element unless you know that the person being addressed prefers the use of a comma.
  - Robert Smith Jr. was introduced by Joe Johnson Sr.
  
6. *Nonrestrictive and Parenthetical Phrases:* Use commas to set off nonrestrictive and parenthetical phrases (word groups that are not essential to the meaning of a sentence but provide added information).
  - My alternate route, the one I take when I have time, follows the Greenway.
  
7. *Place Names:* Names of states or countries are enclosed in commas when they are preceded by a city or state. State abbreviations should not be used.
  - The conference will be held in Eugene, Oregon, but the planning meeting will be held in Portland.

#### **D. Diacritical Marks**

1. Consult your software documentation for the keystrokes or menu options used to create diacritical marks for non-English names.
  - Tomás; Nuñez; Gutiérrez

#### **E. Hyphens**

1. *Compound Adjectives:* Use in compound adjectives when used **before** a noun:
  - Students are searching for off-campus housing. BUT: The meeting will be held off campus.
  - Maria is a part-time landscape architect. BUT: Jeff works in the office part time.
  - Jared is a full-time student. BUT: Sarah works full time in the Admissions Office.

**Do not** use a hyphen with compound adverbs or with nouns:

- Decision making is a responsibility of department chairs. BUT: The decision-making process is not simple.
- The wait list will close at the end of this week. BUT: The wait-list closing date is at the end of this week.

2. *Suspended Hyphens:* When the second part of a hyphenated expression is omitted, the hyphen is retained, followed by a space. This suspended hyphen may be used when a single base word is used with separate hyphenated words connected by “and”, “or”, or “to”.
- She wrote to all the full- and part-time faculty members.
3. *Prefixes/suffixes:* In general, do not use a hyphen to set off a prefix at the beginning of a word or a suffix at the end of a word. There are exceptions, when in doubt, refer to a handbook.

- biweekly
- cofounded
- collocation
- commingled
- co-op
- email
- high tech
- log off (verb)
- logoff (noun)
- log on (verb)
- logon (noun)
- online
- on screen
- posttest
- postsecondary
- prerequisite
- reeducate
- rewrite
- self-confidence
- self-help
- self-paced
- self-study

Compound words common to higher education:

- audiovisual
- coursework
- fundraising
- groundbreaking
- healthcare
- homepage

- macroeconomics
- multicultural
- problem solving
- semiannual
- webpage
- website

**Note:** be wary of spell checkers that may urge you to insert hyphens after prefixes. Whenever necessary, use a hyphen to prevent the word from being misread.

Common examples:

- student-athlete
- work-study

### **F. Periods**

- *Reference section II Style; A*

### **G. Slash/Diagonal**

Avoid the slash whenever possible; it is often confusing as it can mean **and** or **or**. Instead, express in words what you mean. If you do use the slash, do not put a space in-between the words and the slash.

- The meeting is for faculty, staff, and students. NOT: The meeting is for faculty/staff/students.

### **H. Verb Tense**

1. *Faculty and staff* are collective nouns referring to an entire group. They take **singular** verbs. To refer to an individual who is part of a faculty or staff, "faculty member" or "staff member" is preferred for clarity.
  - The faculty has formed three committees. Ten faculty members serve on each committee.
  - The staff at YVCC has volunteered to help with the dance. Three staff members have said they will attend.
2. *Media and Data:* Plural nouns.
  - The media have begun to cover educational issues more frequently.
  - Data have been cited incorrectly.

## II. Style

### A. Abbreviations

1. *At First Use:* Explain or spell out an abbreviation at first use. If no subsequent reference, spell out and no abbreviation is needed.
  - Yakima Valley Community College (YVCC) was founded in 1928.
2. *Acronyms:* Periods are not necessary after the letters that form an acronym.
  - NASA
3. *GPA/SAT:* GPA and SAT are not spelled out. In fact, SAT™ is no longer an abbreviation; it is a trademark.
4. *Ampersand:* Use the ampersand when it is part of a company's formal name or composition title. Do not use a comma before an ampersand in an organizations name unless you know it is preferred. The ampersand should not otherwise be used in place of 'and'.
  - Proctor & GambleNOT: Scott is attending the Home & Garden Show
5. *Department Abbreviations:* Use the abbreviations found in the college catalog.

### B. Academic Degrees, Departments, Majors, and Programs

1. *Academic Degrees*
  - a. The preferred style is to lowercase the degree, including the field, in running text and wherever it is used in a general way.
    - His transcript shows that he has an associate in arts degree.
    - Jason Smith earned his bachelor of arts in history from Central Washington University.

Additional examples:

- bachelor of arts degree
- master of science degree
- doctor of law degree
- Mr. Thompson is working toward a master's
- Ms. Smith will soon receive her doctorate
- graduated with an associate degree
- completed her associate in arts degree in English
- received a bachelor's degree in sociology with a minor in psychology

b. The exception would be to capitalize the name of a degree when it is included with a title, displayed on a resume, business card, diploma, or in a list format.

- Claire Johnson, Doctor of Philosophy

**c. Yakima Valley Community College offers the following degrees:**

*Degree names in list format*

Associate in Arts

Associate in Arts DTA, Science Option

Associate in Business DTA<sup>1</sup>

Associate in Science Transfer, Track 1 or 2

Associate Degree in General Studies

Associate Degree in Technology – Servicemen’s Opportunity College

Certificate of Achievement

Associate of Applied Science

Associate of Applied Science Transfer

YVCC/Perry Technical Institute Combined Degree

<sup>1</sup> DTA means Direct Transfer Agreement - for additional information, reference the YVCC catalog.

*Degrees in running text*

associate in arts

associate in arts, science option

associate in business

associate in science transfer, [track 1 or 2] - [substitute with discipline]

associate degree in general studies

associate of applied science - [can include discipline] ex: associate of applied science in nursing

associate of applied science transfer

d. In reference to degrees, the word degree is never capitalized in running text.

e. Capitalize the name of a degree if it is a proper noun or derivative of geographical reference.

- Faculty members in the English department must have a master’s degree.
- Harriet earned a bachelor’s degree in American history.

## 2. *Academic Departments, Majors, and Programs*

a. Capitalize the names of departments, majors, and programs if they are proper nouns, or derivatives of geographical reference.

- The Arts and Science Division offers courses in biology, mathematics, and English.
- YVCC's Agriculture Department offers day, evening, and weekend course offerings.

b. Capitalize the names of specific course titles. However, do not capitalize names of subjects or areas of study (except proper nouns or adjectives in such names.)

- American History 101 meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays. (course title)
- Lucy Anderson earned a master's degree in American history. (area of study)

## 3. *Periods*

a. *Academic degrees and professional designations* require a period after each element in the abbreviation but no internal space.

- B.S.
- M.B.A.
- Ph.D.
- Ed.D.
- R.N.

b. The term M.B.A. is now commonly written without periods when it is used to signify an executive with a certain type of training rather than the degree itself.

- We just hired two Seattle University MBAs and one from the University of Washington.
- BUT: After I get my M.B.A., I plan to go to law school.

c. The term ABD (all but dissertation) is capitalized and without periods. It is used to identify a graduate student who has completed all requirements for a doctorate except the dissertation.

d. Professional designations such as CPA are commonly written without periods when they are used alone, but with periods when they are used with academic degree.

- Anthony Smith, CPA
- BUT: Anthony Smith, B.S., M.B.A., C.P.A.

## 3. *Commas*

Use commas to set off abbreviations that follow a person's name.

- Julie Jackson, Ph.D., announced the grand opening of the new student residence center.

## 4. *Apostrophes*

- Larry Lopez is working on his bachelor's degree
- Carol Thompson earned her master's last spring.

## 5. Titles

When academic degrees follow a person's name, do not use such titles as Dr., Ms., or Mr. before the name.

- Dr. Helen Garcia or Helen Garcia, Ph.D.

Not: Dr. Helen Garcia, Ph.D.

However, other titles may precede the name as long as they do not convey the same meaning as the degree that follows.

- Instructor Annette Bell, Ph.D.

Academic degrees standing alone may be abbreviated except in very formal writing.

- She received her M.A. last year.
- OR, She received her master of arts degree last year.

## C. Emphasis

1. *Use Discretion:* The more things are emphasized, the less effective the emphasis.

- You **must** meet the deadline or your registration will be canceled.

NOT: You **must meet** the **deadline** or your **registration will be canceled**.

2. *One Type Style Only:* Choose only one type style to indicate emphasis.

- Tuition payment is due on **February 15** and **no later**.

NOT: **TUITION** payment is due on **February 15** and **no later**.

3. *All Caps or Underlining:* Do not use all caps or underlining.

- Turn out the lights when you leave.

NOT: TURN OUT THE LIGHTS WHEN YOU LEAVE!

## D. Inclusive Writing

1. *Individuals with Disabilities:* When writing about individuals with disabilities, use "person first" language; e.g., a person who uses a wheelchair, a student who is blind, an individual with a disability. The term disabled is preferable to handicapped.

- YVCC has many students with disabilities.

NOT: YVCC has many students who are afflicted with disabilities.

- She uses a wheelchair.

NOT: Michelle is wheelchair-bound; Jamal is confined to a wheelchair.

2. *Sex and Gender:* Avoid s/he and his/her.

a. The easiest way to write copy that applies equally to men and women is to use plurals.

- Students need to do more than attend classes regularly; they also need to practice good study skills.

- b. If the singular must be used, alternate the pronouns in your text. If necessary, rewrite the text.
- If a student is ill, she should notify the appropriate professors immediately.
  - When he is well, he may return to class.
- c. Use inclusive references.
- John Daly chairs the committee.  
NOT: John Daly is the chairman of the committee.
  - Lance has decided to become a nurse.  
NOT: Lance has decided to become a male nurse.
3. *Stereotypes*: Write about people as individuals, not as members of a stereotypical group.
4. *Race and Ethnicity*: Do not use hyphens in the names of ethnic groups (African American; Arab American), but always respect individual preferences if you know what they are.

### **E. Names**

1. *Last Names*: It is preferable in formal writing to use titles with last names rather than to use last names only.
- Mr. Hernandez has been a member for three years.  
NOT: Hernandez has been a member for three years.
2. *Instructor*: Refer to YVCC teachers as instructors. Do not use professor.
- Dan Jones is the instructor for the surgical technology class.  
NOT: Professor Dan Jones teaches the surgical technology class.
3. *Titles*: Specific to higher education; use the title Dr. consistently, but it is not necessary to use Mr. and Ms. titles within the same sentence or paragraph. Use nonbreaking space between title and name to keep numbers on the same line.
- Dr. Leonard McCoy and Wesley Crusher

## III. Numbers

### A. Dates

1. *Month and Year:* No comma is needed between a month and a year.
  - She began her studies in May 2009.
2. *Month, Date, and Year:* Commas are required before and after a year when month, date, and year are used.
  - She began her studies on January 3, 2008, and completed them on June 1, 2010.
  - Use nonbreaking space between month and day to keep on the same line.
3. *Ordinals:* Do not use ordinal numbers in dates.
  - New parking permits go on sale January 8, 2010.NOT: New parking permits go on sale January 8th, 2010.

### B. Money

Whole dollar amounts are set with zeros after the decimal point when they appear in the same context with fractional amounts; otherwise the zeros are redundant and should not be used. The exception would be in legal documents.

- Parking stickers are \$50.00 for an automobile, \$15.75 for a motorcycle.

### C. Numbers

1. *Spell Out:* Spell out whole numbers from one through nine; use numerals for 10 or greater. Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence or rephrase the sentence to avoid beginning with a number.
  - The book has sold only nine copies. He thought it would sell 500 copies.
  - Forty-nine students received the new degree at the June commencement.
2. *Exceptions:* Numbers in the same category should be treated alike within the same sentence; do not use numerals for some and spell out others.
  - There are nine Running Start students enrolled in SOSCI 101 and twelve in ENGL 101.
3. *Percent:* Use the word percent in formal text. Use the percent sign in tables, charts, scientific and statistical copy. In some informal and promotional copy, the percent sign is also acceptable.
4. *Commas:* Use a comma in numbers with more than three digits unless they represent SAT scores or years.
  - The book, which was published in 2010, has 1,229 pages.
  - His combined SAT score was 1235.

**D. Telephone Numbers**

Use a hyphen or period, not parentheses, for the area code, e.g., 303.735.1079.

Periods are preferred, especially for ADA compatible screen readers.

**E. Years and Decades**

Do not use an 's in numeric decades.

- the 1980s

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## IV. Words & Common Phrases

### A. Word List

Preferred spelling and use of some commonly-used words for YVCC.

**alum:** Abbreviation for alumnus or alumna. Avoid this abbreviation in formal writing.

- alumna: singular, female
- alumnae: plural, women only
- alumni: plural, men only or men and women
- alumnus: singular, male
- alum: singular, male or female; appropriate only in informal contexts

**e.g.** See i.e.

**eLearning**

**email**

**English as a Second Language**

**etc.:** Omit when possible, but if used, don't say "and etc.," since et cetera means "and the rest."

**Hispanic-serving Institution**

**i.e.; e.g.:** The abbreviation i.e. means that is.

- The college's administration, i.e., the executive leaders, attended a retreat on Tuesday.  
The abbreviation e.g. means for example and is like using the phrase such as.
- Several majors (e.g., business, economics, and chemistry) require strong mathematics backgrounds.
- *Note:* Both i.e. and e.g. should be followed by a comma. Do not use etc. at the end of a phrase that begins with e.g.

**Internet:** A proper noun, it is always capitalized.

**login/log in:** This is one word when used as a noun or adjective and two words when used as a verb.

- You must use your login name to log in to MyYVCC.

**student-athlete**

**toward:** Not towards.

**URLs and email addresses:** The preference is to use italics or a blue color designation to highlight these, instead of an underlining. If an address won't fit on one line, break the address after a forward slash. Do not hyphenate.

**Washington State:** the state of Washington; Washington State; the state

**work-study**

**B. Common Phrases**

The YVCC Curriculum Committee has approved common phrases for the academic catalog and class schedule. Reference the document located on MY YVCC. It can be found under:

Instruction and Student Services > Arts and Sciences Division or Workforce Education Division curriculum committee information.