University of Memphis Writing Guidelines

Introduction

The University of Memphis provides the following writing guidelines to help build consistency in University printed and electronic communications materials produced by different individuals and departments with the goal of enhancing the overall professionalism of the UofM brand.


When it comes to style, there can be many correct ways of doing things. This guide is meant to summarize the majority of stylistic and grammatical questions you may have, as well as pointing out any style variations that differ from AP Style. This guide is not intended for academic or scientific writing for publication in journals or the like.

Proper Names at UofM

The University of Memphis, UofM, the University of Memphis, the UofM

The word “UofM” should appear as one unit with no spaces between the letters.

1. Capitalization: “The” in the University of Memphis or the UofM is only capitalized at the start of a sentence.

Example: The University of Memphis football team takes the field Friday night.

Before becoming president, Dr. Rudd served as the University’s provost.

2. Possessive

   a. Use an apostrophe only with the word “Memphis” Do not add an extra “s.”

Example: Memphis’ engineering department was founded in 1960.

Do use an apostrophe when using the word UofM.

Example: UofM’s new branding campaign has been launched.

   b. When used as a possessive, i.e., with an apostrophe after the “s,” the word “Memphis’” is never preceded by “the.”

   c. When used as an adjective, the word “Memphis” may or may not be preceded by “the,” depending on the noun it modifies and the meaning of the sentence.
Examples: You’ll find that Memphis students are very friendly. The Memphis students excelled in the competition. Memphis’ music students have wonderful opportunities to perform all over the city.

**UofM Locations**

1. University of Memphis Lambuth, UofM Lambuth
2. University of Memphis Millington, UofM Millington
3. University of Memphis Collierville, UofM Collierville

Example: We invite you to plan your visit to UofM Lambuth today.

**School and College Names**

1. The word “Memphis” may be placed before the name of the college or school.

2. School names do not include “The” (cap “T”) as part of their official name, but often “the” (lowercase “t”) precedes the name of schools in text.

3. The word “Memphis” before the name of a school or college may or may not include an apostrophe depending on the writer’s preference.

Examples: Memphis’ College of Communications and Fine Arts. The professor presented his seminar at the University of Memphis FedEx Institute of Technology.

4. It is preferable to use the full name of the school or college on first reference. On second reference and thereafter, it is advised to use “the school” or “the college,” or to use acronyms, abbreviations or initialisms on the second, and later, references.

Examples: On second reference, Loewenberg or LSON is acceptable for the Loewenberg School of Nursing. Scheidt School is acceptable for the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music.

If you use an acronym/initialism in text for brevity’s sake, reference the full name at the first mention, followed by the acronym/initialism in parentheses.

Example: The Herff College of Engineering (HCOE) is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

**City of Memphis, State of Tennessee**

1. When referring in general terms to a city or state, the words “city” or “state” are not capitalized. Typically when “city” or “state” precedes a place name (city of Memphis), it remains lowercase, however there might be instances where capitalizing feels more appropriate. Use your best judgment.
Examples:
Visitors to the city of Memphis will notice new tourism banners hanging from utility poles. The state of Tennessee is proud of its musical heritage. The State of Tennessee recently issued new guidelines for mobile device usage in moving vehicles.

Capitalization


2. Academic Subjects: Lowercase the names of subject areas in text, unless the name is a proper noun, such as French. Capitalize a subject when used as the name of a specific course or with its subject code or curriculum code.

Examples: Students taking Audiology 221 this year will meet in the new Community Health Building.

He double-majored in art and psychology.

3. University: We capitalize University when used as an abbreviation for the University of Memphis. References to university as a generic term should always be lowercase.

4. Titles of Organizations: Capitalize the formal, full names of centers, bureaus, institutes, academic departments, administrative offices and other formal groups, such as boards or committees. Lowercase shortened names or casual references. Always capitalize proper nouns in formal or casual references. Department and administrative office names at UofM are almost always “Department of” or “Office of.”

Example: the Department of History, but the history department; the Department of English, but the English department; the Office of the Dean, but the dean’s office; the Board of Visitors, but the board.

5. When multiple departments appear in a sentence, lowercase “department” but uppercase the unit names.

Example: The center facilitates interdisciplinary research among the departments of Earth Sciences, Geography and Archaeology.

6. Academic Years: A specific class, treated collectively, can be considered a formal group and therefore capitalized.

Example: the Class of 1946
7. Academic Degrees: The preferred style is to spell out degrees or use abbreviations without periods: BA, MS, MBA, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, doctoral degree. Degrees and the fields of study are lowercase (bachelor’s degree in engineering from the University of Memphis).

Note: Use either doctorate or doctoral degree, never doctorate degree.

Use italics for *summa cum laude, magna cum laude, cum laude.*

8. Titles of Persons: It is a matter of preference in deciding whether or not to capitalize titles. It is preferable to capitalize titles only when preceding the name as an honorific, however, one might choose to capitalize all titles, no matter the placement.

Example: the dean of students; professor of English John Smith, Dr. Smith

9. Lowercase the four seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter. However, when using the season with a year, it can either be capitalized or should be reworded to retain lowercase lettering.

Example: Spring 2016 Campus Tours require an appointment. The new facility is scheduled to open in spring of 2016.

**Electronic Media**

1. Use “memphis.edu” when referring to the university web address, not www.memphis.edu.


3. Do not underline URLs. To draw attention to a URL in a printed piece, consider using bold or a color. URLs should be lowercased; check the URL to be sure it is not case-sensitive.

4. Rewrite the text to avoid breaking a URL.

5. When a URL falls at the end of a sentence, it should be followed by a period. It is common knowledge that the period is not part of the URL. Should you wish to emphasize this and your URL is formatted in bold or in a color, then the period should revert to the previous (often regular/roman or black) type.

6. eWords: When you have an expression in your text using the letter “e” before a familiar word, preference is to close and lowercase the entire word.

Example: ebusiness, ecommerce
It is preferable for the “e” in such expressions to remain lowercase even when appearing in a headline at the beginning of a sentence.

Example: eBay announces massive layoffs.

**Numbers**

1. Academic credits are always expressed in numerals.

Examples: This is a 3-credit course. The major requires a total of 36 credits.

2. Percentages are expressed with numeric values, and the word “percent” is spelled out. It is acceptable to use the percent sign (%) symbol in graphs and charts.

Example: The professor passed 80 percent of the class.

3. Use numerals in ages: a 3-year-old girl, she is 32 years old

4. Decades: the 1980s, the ’80s

**Telephone Numbers**

The preferred form for listing telephone numbers is the following: 901.678.3576

**Preferred Spellings, Capitalizations and Usage**

Always use the preferred spelling (the first entry in the dictionary) when there is more than one acceptable spelling listed. Examples: toward, not towards; adviser, not advisor.

**Punctuation**

*Commas in a list* – Use commas for separation in a list. Do not use a comma before the conjunction at the end of the list, unless it is needed to clarify understanding.

*Bulleted and Numbered Lists*

1. One has flexibility in choosing styles for punctuating lists. The goal should be to punctuate lists with style consistency throughout a document.

In vertical lists it is best if the listing is first introduced by a complete grammatical sentence, followed by a colon. After each bullet or number, each entry should start with a capital letter. The entries should carry no punctuation at the end, unless they are complete sentences.
Example:

Other online innovations have also been developed:

• Financial aid application
• Web-based class schedule
• Financial aid awards

_Dashes and Hyphens_

There are three common dashes of differing lengths used in formatted copy: em dash (—), en dash (–), and hyphen (-). The em dash is the longest (the width of an uppercase “M” in the typeface and size being used, which is usually also the point size). The en dash is half the length of the em dash. The hyphen is the shortest.

1. Em dash: Use this dash in most print publications and brochures and online where appropriate to denote an abrupt change in thought or to set off an element added for emphasis, explanation or digression. The em dash should be typeset with a space before and after the dash.

Example: His start-up company uses medical-grade honey — a major breakthrough in the biomedical world — to create membranes for tissue regeneration far superior to anything currently in use.

2. En dash: The en dash is another option to denote an abrupt change in thought or to set off an element added for emphasis, explanation, or digression. The en dash is more typically used in text prepared for the media and in some online text. The en dash should be typeset open, i.e., with one space before and after the dash.

Example: For the study, researchers used a variety of techniques – including ground-penetrating radar and 3D laser scanning – to create a highly detailed subsurface map of the area.

An en dash is also normally used to separate inclusive dates and numbers. For this use, en dashes should be typeset closed.

Example: February–April, 1989–1995, pages 21–55, a score of 1–4

3. The hyphen is typically used to form compound words, e.g., long-term commitment, self-study, part-time student, spin-off company, screen-saver.

_Hyphenation_
1. In general, modern usage tends toward the closing of prefixes and of compound words that used to be hyphenated. First check the Associated Press style guide. Then check the dictionary.

2. A hyphen is used after the first of two prefixes or after the first element in a “double” compound adjective.

Example: Macro- and microeconomics, fourth- and fifth-century art (but “established in the fifth century”)

3. Do not hyphenate an adverb ending in “ly” before an adjective.

Example: highly popular musician

4. Compound adjectives where the second adjective ends in “ed” are hyphenated.

Example: good-natured professor

5. Other compound adjectives may or may not be hyphenated. Check the dictionary, as many are listed there.

a. Hyphens should definitely be used to avoid ambiguity. Example: personal-computer program, fast-moving car

b. However, if the meaning of the compound adjective is a universally understood expression, no hyphen is needed.

Example: the health care system, a high school classroom
c. Other less common expressions are better hyphenated. Example: joint-degree program, advanced-technology center

6. Use hyphens with nouns that represent different and equally important functions when they form a single expression.

Example: city-state, student-athlete

7. Compounds with “well” are hyphenated before the noun unless the expression carries a modifier. Do not use a hyphen if the compound appears after the verb.

Example: well-intentioned person, but very well known professional. She is well known.

**Type Formatting**

Between sentences, use only one space after the period, question mark and exclamation point.