

What Is Style?

Every writer makes choices about word usage, spelling, punctuation, and use of acronyms, among other things, to make documents easily readable and professional in appearance. Sometimes these choices are governed by strict rules of grammar and punctuation. Other times, the choices are stylistic and a matter of editorial judgment.

Most publishers choose from one of several standard stylebooks to guide writers and editors in making some of these editorial choices. These stylebooks are also useful for looking up standard rules of grammar and punctuation and other information. George Mason University uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition) and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th edition). *The Mason Style Guide* supplements these references and addresses points on which Mason style may differ from *Chicago* and *Merriam-Webster*. In some cases, *The Mason Style Guide* indicates which of several options presented by *Chicago* or *Merriam-Webster* should be used in Mason publications.

The Mason Style Guide will be revised as needed. Please ask Creative Services about any phrase or usage not addressed in this resource. Your feedback will help us make additions or changes that will benefit all our faculty, staff, and researchers.

Please submit your comments and queries to Colleen Kearney Rich, Editorial Director, Creative Services, 703-993-8805; ckearney@gmu.edu.

A

abbreviations

- Avoid in running text (*Professor Yoonmee Chang, not Prof. Yoonmee Chang*). Exceptions:
 - U.S. is acceptable as an adjective **but** use United States for the noun. (*Hillary Clinton was a U.S. senator.*)
 - Abbreviations are acceptable as part of a formal name (*A. G. Edwards, IBM*).

See also *acronyms, addresses, dates, Inc., names, and time*.

academic departments—An academic department is a division of a [university](#) or [school](#) devoted to a particular [academic discipline](#). Capitalize the formal and informal names of Mason academic departments. Lowercase the department names of other universities.

Department of Climate Dynamics/Climate Dynamics Department

Department of Theater/Theater Department

Department of English/ English Department

But:

He works in the chemistry department at James Madison University.

academic majors

Lowercase academic majors except when using proper nouns.

dance

Asia Pacific studies

English

applied computer science

academic programs

Capitalize the formal names of programs.

New Professional Studies Program

Cultural Studies Program

Early Identification Program

Do not capitalize when writing about the program in descriptive terms.

teacher education program

interdisciplinary studies program

academic units—On first reference, use the unit's full name, then immediately follow it with the abbreviation in parentheses if the unit will be mentioned again in the document. On all subsequent references, just use the abbreviation. Capitalize only when using the full and official name of the unit: College of Visual and Performing Arts. *University, college, and department* are never capitalized unless they part of the official name or the first word of a sentence.

academic unit

College of Education and Human Development

College of Health and Human Services

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

abbreviation

CEHD

CHHS

CHSS

College of Science	COS
College of Visual and Performing Arts	CVPA
Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution	ICAR
School of Management	SOM
School of Public Policy	SPP
School of Law	SOL

Note: The Volgenau School of Information Technology and Engineering is not abbreviated. Use *the Volgenau School* for subsequent references.

academic years—Academic levels are not capitalized (*senior, freshman, doctoral candidate*). Use *freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior* as opposed to *first year, second year, and so forth*. When referring to students in Mason’s School of Law, use *first year, second year, and third year*.

acronyms

- Do not use GMU when referring to the university; use George Mason University or Mason.
- Spell out title on first use with the acronym in parentheses directly after it. Acronyms may then be used on second and subsequent references. If the title is not repeated in document, do not include acronym with first use. Certain widely recognized acronyms are acceptable on first reference without spelling out the full name (*GPA, CEO, SAT, NCAA, AIDS, HMO, NASA, FBI*). Use in a headline is not considered a first use. Avoid use of acronyms in headlines.
- These acronyms take no periods (*TA, FDR, JFK, CUE, IBM, RSVP, TRW*). Commonly used credentials that do not require a degree are used without periods (*RN, LPN*).
- PhD, MA, BA, and BS do not require periods. *See degrees, academic.*

acting, former

Do not capitalize. *The provost spoke with acting Dean Maria Rodriguez. The vice president introduced former Mason President George Johnson.*

addresses, university

- Do not use the four-digit extension on the Fairfax Campus zip code.
- In running text, spell out North, South, East, and West before the street name (*400 North Maple Drive*). Also spell out Street, Avenue, Road, Drive, Boulevard, and the like.
- In return addresses, state names should be abbreviated to suit two-letter U.S. Postal Service preferences. Otherwise, spell out the name of the state. *See also states.*
- Use formal names of offices: Office of the Provost, not Provost’s Office.
- Spell out numbers in street names (*25 Fifth Avenue*).

Mason addresses generally follow this order:

George Mason University
 Name of department/school
 Building name, room number
 Street address, MS
 City, VA Zip code

For units on the Fairfax Campus, use the following address:

George Mason University
 4400 University Drive

Fairfax, VA 22030

Example:

George Mason University
Creative Services
Mason Hall, Room D217
4400 University Drive, MS 2F7
Fairfax, VA 22030

For units on the Arlington Campus, use the following addresses:

Original Building
George Mason University
3401 Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22201

Hazel Hall
George Mason University
3301 Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22201

Truland Building
George Mason University
3330 Washington Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201

For units on the Prince William Campus, use the following address:

George Mason University
10900 University Boulevard
Manassas, VA 20110

For units at Mason in Loudoun, use the following address:

George Mason University
21641 Ridgetop Circle, Suite 210
Sterling, Virginia 20166

administrative

- **offices**—When referring to Mason offices, capitalize administrative offices, even when the complete title is not used. (*Meet him in the Admissions Office at 10:30 a.m.*) Use lowercase for office titles when referring to offices outside Mason. (*Virginia Tech's office of university relations*).
- **titles**—Do not abbreviate administrative titles. When listing administrative officers, follow the university's organizational chart [INSERT LINK FOR ELECTRONIC VERSION—Rick to do]. Capitalize when used before the name, **but** lowercase when used alone or following the name. On second reference, use last name only. (*Senior Vice President Maurice Scherrens will attend the conference. Maurice Scherrens, senior vice president, enjoys attending Mason basketball games. Scherrens gave a lecture.*)

admission/admissions—When referring to the various kinds of admission (freshman, transfer, readmission, provisional, nondegree, etc.) in a collective sense, use *admissions*. *Admissions* can also be used when referring

to the fact that many students are admitted: *the admissions of thousands vs. the admission of one student*. Use *admission* to refer to a single type of admission (*freshman admission, transfer admission*). Use an *s* for admissions counselor and Office of Admissions.

adopt, approve, enact, pass—Resolutions, rules, amendments, and ordinances are adopted or approved. Laws are enacted. Bills are passed.

advisor—Use *advisor*, not *adviser*.

affect, effect—affect, as a verb, means to influence. (*The president's decision will affect the election.*) Affect, as a noun, refers to a set of observable manifestations of a subjectively experienced emotion. Effect as a verb means to cause. (*He will effect many changes in the company.*) Effect as a noun means result. (*The effect was overwhelming. He miscalculated the effect of his actions. It was a law of little effect.*) Avoid using *impact* to mean effect. See *impact*.

affirmative action statement—“George Mason University is an equal opportunity employer that encourages diversity.”

African American—Do not hyphenate.

age—Do not include a person's age unless relevant to the story. Use numerals when it comes to specific ages; when referring to decades, spell them out. (*He is 5 years old. But: He started running in his fifties.*) For ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun, use hyphens. (*A 28-year-old man. But: The man is 28 years old.*)

allot, a lot, alot—*Allot* means to assign as a share or portion. *A lot* means many. *Alot* is not a word.

alma mater—When referring to the college one attended, *alma mater* is lowercase; when referring to the official song of the institution, *Alma Mater* is uppercase and italicized.

alumnus, alumni, alumna, alumnae—Use *alumnus* when meaning a man who has graduated, *alumna* for a woman. Use *alumni* for an entire group of graduates and a group of men graduates; use *alumnae* for a group of women graduates.

For the treatment of alumni names in text, please identify them on first reference when possible:

Lionel Forrest, BA English '96, MEd Counseling and Development '05,

Johanna Luke, PhD Environmental Science and Policy '12,

For degrees such as MPA, JD, and MSN, that have what their descriptor as part of the name (Public Administration, Nursing) we normally leave as is: Roberta Reese, MPA '05

a.m., p.m.—See *time*.

ampersand—Do not use an ampersand (&) unless as part of an official title or trademark. No Mason department, office, or academic unit is to use the ampersand in its name.

and/or—Avoid when possible. See *also slashes*.

anti—This prefix usually does not require a hyphen (except when it precedes a word beginning with *i* or an adjective or noun referring to ethnicity or religion. Example: anti-institutional, anti-American, anti-Catholic).

apostrophes

- Do not use apostrophes to form plurals (*1940s* not *1940's*) unless it would be confusing without (thus A's, not As; p's, not ps). To work around the issue with A's, rewriting is preferable. (*Hatef is a straight-A student.*) Other letter grades should be written as Bs, Cs, Ds, Fs, Ws, and I's.
- Possessives of singular nouns are formed by adding 's (*the school's mascot*).
- Possessives of plural nouns are formed by adding an apostrophe only (*The dogs' dishes*).
- Possessives of proper nouns that end in *s*, *x*, or *z* are formed by adding 's (*Dave Andrews's blog*).
- Note that there is no apostrophe in University Speakers Bureau.

area codes—See *telephone numbers*.

Asian American—Do not hyphenate.

athletics—The department is formally referred to as *Intercollegiate Athletics* without mentioning the word *department*. For informal use, refer to the department as the *Athletics Department* or *Department of Athletics*.

author—Use as a noun, not as a verb.

audiotape—Not audio tape.

audiovisual—Not audio visual.

B

between, among—Use *between* to represent a one-to-one or a close relationship; use *among* for a relationship involving more than two parties or one that is less formal. (*The discussions between the president and the faculty were productive. The candy was distributed among the children.*)

bi-

- Biannual—twice each year. *Semiannual* is also acceptable.
- Biennial—once every two years.
- Bimonthly—every other month. *Semimonthly* means twice a month.

black—lowercase. Avoid word *race*.

Board of Visitors—The Board of Visitors is an *it*, not a *they*. Board members are *they*. The same holds true for other titled groups. Use BOV to abbreviate Board of Visitors on second reference. When the word *board* is used alone, it is lowercase. (*The board decided against it.*)

book titles—See *titles, publications*.

brackets

- Use brackets if an explanation or modification is inserted in a quotation. (*Mr. Graham has resolutely ducked the issue, saying he won't play the game of rumor mongering, even though he has "learned from [his] mistakes."*)
- Brackets follow the same format as the copy contained within them. If the copy is italicized, the brackets will be italicized and so forth.

buildings, rooms, and spaces on campus

- Capitalize the names of campus buildings.
- The room name and number follow the building name, separated with a comma. Alpha characters in the room number are capitalized. Never abbreviate the word *room* to *rm* (*Mason Hall, Room D217*).
- It is acceptable to omit the first name of the person for whom a building was named (*Johnson Center* as opposed to *George W. Johnson Center*). Follow the lead of the lists at the front of the Mason Telephone Directory. Note: For some formal publications such as Development pieces, you might have to use the full name.

C

campuses—Capitalize Fairfax Campus, Arlington Campus, and so on. Never use *main campus* to refer to the Fairfax Campus. Capitalize campus after listing the three campuses (*Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William Campuses*). The Mason in Loudoun location is not called a campus.

campuswide—Not campus-wide but university-wide. See *Chicago Manual of Style* 7.90.

capital vs. capitol—Capital refers to the city where the seat of government is located. (*Alma visited the nation's capital.*) Use lowercase. *Capital* can also be used as a financial term. (*He needed to raise capital to start his business.*) Capitol refers to the site of legislative activity. Capitalize U.S. Capitol and the Capitol when referring to the building in Washington. Follow the same practice in referring to state capitol buildings.

capitalization

- As a general rule, capitalize sparingly. Lowercase is preferred in modern usage.
- Lowercase *the* in front of all formal titles. (*Scott attended the Ohio State University. He then went on to the School of Public Policy for his graduate degree. He reads the Washington Post.*) See *Chicago Manual of Style* 8.73. For more information on official university names, visit <http://www.collegesource.org>.
- Lowercase the names of subject areas in text, unless the name is a proper noun, such as French. Academic majors, minors, concentrations, and certificates are not capitalized. (*Mary was a double-major in English and sociology.*) Capitalize a subject when used as the name of a specific course (*Theories in Communication*).
- Lowercase university, college, and school unless they are used as part of a formal title. (*The College of Visual and Performing Arts is an academic unit at Mason. The college is one of 10 academic units.*)
- Lowercase academic degrees, except when using the abbreviations (*A bachelor's degree, a bachelor of arts degree, BA*).
- If a title comes after a person's name, it is lowercase. If a title is used before the person's name, it is uppercase (*Steve Klein, professor of communication. But: Provost Peter Stearns, Professor Steve Klein, or President Alan G. Merten*).
- Lowercase descriptive adjectives that are not part of a recognized name. (*The northern United States is quite cold in winter. But: Mason is in Northern Virginia.*)

centers/institutes—Capitalize proper names: Center for History and New Media. *The center* or *the institute* are acceptable on subsequent references if it is clear there is only one. For a full list, see <http://www.gmu.edu/research/centers/>.

chair—Use instead of chairman (*chair of the English department*). Capitalize when part of the formal name (*Northern Virginia Chair*).

cities

- Major U.S. cities do not need state identifiers in running text, except for cities of the same name in different states (*Portland, Kansas City*). See also *states* for a partial list. Foreign cities commonly associated with a country do not need a country identification (*London, Bangkok, Tokyo, Toronto*).
- Place a comma both after the city and state names in running text. (*Fairfax, Virginia, is where Amaro works.*) Place a comma both after the city and country names in running text. (*Cambridge, England, is Mariama's hometown.*)

classes

- Freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, entering class, sophomore class, and such. **But:** Class of 1995.
- Note: The 2006 entering class is the Class of 2010. *Entering class* always refers to the year corresponding to the fall that the class matriculated. If the students' first school year was 2007–08, they were in the entering Class of 2007. (*The 2006 entering class had the highest average SAT score of any entering class in the previous 20 years. Nearly 25 percent of the Class of 2006 graduated with honors.*)
- If a student has been enrolled full time at Mason for more than four years, he or she is called a senior.
- For undergraduate and graduate students, do **not** use first year, second year, and so on; however, for Mason law students, use first, second, or third year.
- People enrolled in a PhD program who are still completing course work are generally referred to as doctoral students. People working on their dissertation are generally referred to as doctoral candidates.

co-

- Do not hyphenate the prefix co-. Example: coequal, costar. Only hyphenate when the next letter is an *o* or the word would be confusing if not hyphenated. Example: co-opt, co-worker. See *Chicago Manual of Style* 7.90 for a complete list.
- Be careful when constructing verbs with the co- prefix: You may coedit and co-write, but you never coauthor, although you may be a coauthor. In addition, you cannot cosponsor something with someone. You sponsor something with someone; that makes you a cosponsor.

colons

- A colon is commonly used to introduce a list, quotation, statement, or summary. (*All those attending the meditation retreat should bring the following items: comfortable clothing, a blanket, pillows, and a journal.*)
- A colon should not be used after an incomplete sentence. (*All those attending the meditation retreat should bring comfortable clothing, a blanket, pillows, and a journal.*) See also *lists*.

comma

- Serial comma. Use a comma before *and* in a series (*Red, white, and blue*; not *red, white and blue*).
- Clauses that serve to add information (nonrestrictive clauses) are set off by commas. (*The wine glass, which is broken, is on the table.*) This adds a fact about the only wine glass in question.
- Clauses that serve to define (restrictive clauses), as opposed to add information, are not set off by commas. (*The wine glass that is broken is on the table.*) This tells us which glass is broken.

commencement—Capitalize only when referring to Mason's ceremony.

committee/task force—Full names of committees and task forces that are part of formal organizations should be capitalized. (*The Institutional Biosafety Committee is an advisory committee dedicated to excellence in the science and practice of biological safety.*) Use lowercase for shortened and informal versions of committee and task force names. (*The committee on biosafety will meet Tuesday.*)

Commonwealth—Commonwealth is uppercase only when referring to the government of Virginia (*the Commonwealth of Virginia*). If used alone, lowercase commonwealth.

communication—Mason’s Department of Communication, **not** Mason’s Department of Communications

compose, comprise, constitute

- *Compose* means to form by putting together.
(*The task force is composed of staff members only.*)
- *Comprise* means to contain, embrace, or include all.
(*The task force comprises staff members. Not: The task force is comprised of. . .*)
- *Constitute* means to make up the elements of the whole.
(*Staff members constitute the task force.*)

conferences, lecture series, symposia—Capitalize formal names (*The Networked Economy Summit*). Use quotation marks for the title of a conference, but not for an annual conference (“*The Call for New Thought*.” **But:** *fifth annual AFCEA Conference*). If the conference is being referred to informally, it should be lowercase. (*He presented a paper at the annual conference of the Audubon Society.*) Also, use quotation marks for titles of delivered papers or lectures, theses, dissertations, and published papers. For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 8.75.

contact information—To avoid dating a publication, use a job title rather than a name in the contact information unless there’s a compelling reason for using a name. (*Contact the office manager.*)

computer terms—*See electronic media terms.*

corporations—Use the name used by the company, including abbreviations and ampersands. Abbreviations are acceptable (e.g., *Co., Corp.*) in notes, bibliographies, and lists. *Inc.* should be eliminated in running text but can be included when listing companies or corporations. No comma precedes *Inc.* Full company names should be kept when writing or editing Development pieces.

course titles—Capitalize exact title of the course but not the subject (*Course: 19th-Century American History. Subject: American history*). Do not use quotation marks for course titles.

course work—Two words.

credentials, nonacademic—Do not use periods in abbreviations of credentials.

credential	abbreviation
Registered nurse	RN
Licensed practical nurse	LPN
Certified financial planner	CFP
Certified public accountant	CPA
Licensed social worker	LSW

credits—Use figures, even for numbers below 10. Use the term *credits*, not *credit hours*.

cum laude—“With distinction”; italicize and lowercase: *cum laude*

- magna cum laude—“With high distinction”; italicize and lowercase: *magna cum laude*

- *summa cum laude*—“With highest distinction”; italicize and lowercase: *summa cum laude*

D

dashes

- People often confuse the en dash (–), the em dash (—), and the hyphen (-). Each one serves a specific purpose.
- Use en dashes (–) to denote a range (*pages 40–48*) and to join adjectives when one of the adjectives is already a compound (*New York–Boston route*). For further information, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 6.83–6.86.
- Em dashes (—) may be used for material that amplifies, explains, or digresses. Because em dashes are often used to express emphasis, they should be used sparingly. Commas often may be used for the same purpose, but they are less emphatic than the em dash. For further information, see the *Chicago Manual of Style* 6.87–6.94.
- Do not use spaces around em or en dashes. (*There are four states—Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan—that border Lake Michigan.*)
- Hyphens, not en dashes, should be used in sports scores.

data—Use the plural form with a plural verb. The singular form is datum. (*The data are now available.*)

database—One word.

dates

- In text, years are set apart from days and following text by commas. (*July 4, 1976, was one of the happiest days of my life.*)
- Use an en dash (–) to show a range of dates (*March 5–7*) and do not repeat the century (*2001–02, not 2001–2002*) except at the change of century (*1988–2001*).
- Use the year with the month to avoid confusion. (*His book will be published in October 2009.*)
- Do not use *st*, *nd*, *rd*, or *th*, even if dates are adjectives (*March 1 event, not March 1st event*).
- Times come after days and dates (*on Friday at 4 p.m.; on Monday, June 7, at noon*).
- Months are not abbreviated except where space is limited.
- Use numerals for decades (*1960s or the '60s*).

days, months

- Do not abbreviate days of the week or names of months unless space is limited. (*The test was Monday, September 25.*)
- Do not use a comma when only the month and year are used. (*The book was published in September 1992.*)

D.C., District of Columbia—Use Washington, D.C.

- When the term appears in the middle of a sentence, use a comma after D.C. (*The Washington, D.C., area conference starts Tuesday.*)
- Use Washington, D.C., the District of Columbia, or metropolitan Washington, D.C. Do not use Metro unless referring to the transportation system.
- Washington metropolitan area is acceptable.

Dean’s List—Capitalize.

degrees, academic

- In abbreviated form, capitalize and **do not** use periods (*BA, MS*). Lowercase when using spelled-out version (*bachelor of arts, master of science*). The abbreviated plural forms **do not** require an apostrophe (*BAs, PhDs*).
- The word *degree* should not follow an abbreviation. (*She has a BA in English literature. She has a bachelor's degree in English literature.*)
- Do not capitalize bachelor of science, master of arts, and such. Likewise, do not capitalize the field (*bachelor of arts in philosophy*) unless it is a proper noun (*bachelor of arts in English*).
- In narrative text, for people with PhDs, do not use PhD after the name or Dr. before it (this rule also applies to MDs).
- Use an apostrophe in bachelor's degree and master's degree. When mentioning multiple degrees, add an *s* to *degree*. (*Arpi holds two bachelor's degrees and two master's degrees.*)

Formal Use

Bachelor of Arts

Bachelor of Science

Master of Arts

Master of Science

Doctor of Philosophy

Bachelor of Individualized Study

Bachelor of Music

Master of Music

Master of Social Work

Master of Business Administration

Executive Master of Business Administration

Master of Public Policy

Master of Public Administration

Bachelor of Science in Education

Master of Education

Master of Science in Accounting

Bachelor of Science in Nursing

Master of Science in Nursing

Juris Doctor

Juris Master

Bachelor of Fine Arts

Master of Fine Arts

Master of Arts in Teaching

Doctor of Arts

General Use

bachelor's degree

bachelor's degree

master's degree

master's degree

doctoral degree

Abbreviated Use

BA

BS

MA

MS

PhD

BIS

BM

MM

MSW

MBA

EMBA

MPP

MPA

BSEd

MEd

MSA

BSN

MSN

JD

JM

BFA

MFA

MAT

DA

departments, offices—Names of Mason departments are capitalized when referred to as a particular department (*the Department of Music; Kyoko Okamoto, Music*). Names of disciplines alone are not capitalized when used for identification (*philosophy courses, a biology professor, students majoring in history*). Exceptions are languages (*English, Spanish, Chinese*). Names of specific Mason offices are capitalized (*Office of the Registrar, Registrar's Office*).

dorm—Use residence hall or student housing instead of dorm.

E
e.g.—Use in parentheses and tables, but not in text—use *for example*. Do not italicize.

electronic media terms

- blog
- cablecast
- dial-up
- download, upload
- e-mail, e-business, e-commerce
- home page
- HTML (Hypertext Markup Language)
- Internet
- intranet
- log on
- online
- podcast
- RSS (Rich Site Summary)
- screen saver
- user id
- web
- webcast
- web page
- web site
- wiki
- World Wide Web (*See also web*)
- URL (Uniform Resource Locator; also known as an individual web address)

ellipses

- Use when breaking off a quotation. (“*I really don’t feel like going, but I guess I have no choice . . .*”)
- Use sparingly if at all.
- Use three dots with spaces around each (. . .), but close up the space between an ellipses point and a quotation mark (“ . . .”).
- If a sentence ends with ellipses, also use a period (. . . .).
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 10.36.

e-mail

- Hyphenate e-mail; lowercase except at the start of a sentence.
- If an address does not fit on one line, do not use hyphenation when breaking it.

See also electronic media terms.

emeritus, emerita, emeriti—Follows *professor* (*professor emeritus, professors emeriti, not emeritus professor, emeriti professors*). Use *emerita* for a woman. Use *emeriti* for the plural.

ensure, insure, assure—Ensure that, insure something, and assure someone. (*Ensure that you lock the door when you leave. You should insure your car in case it gets damaged. I assure you, it won’t take long.*)

entitled, titled—*Entitled* means a right to do or have something; *titled* refers to the title of something. (*She was entitled to the promotion. The book was titled Gone With the Wind.*)

et al.—Use in parentheses, tables, and citations. In text, use *and others*. Do not italicize.

etc.—Use in parentheses and tables. In text, use *and so on*. Do not italicize.

ethnic and racial designations—National-origin identifiers such as Chinese American, Japanese American, Italian American are acceptable. Do not hyphenate, even when used as an adjective. (*They opened an Italian American restaurant.*)

exclamation point—Use sparingly. At the end of a sentence, never use more than one. (*Graduation is right around the corner!*)

F

faculty—Use faculty as a singular noun; use faculty members to denote individuals. (*The faculty has grown 20 percent this year. Faculty members are voting on the motion tomorrow.*)

Fairfax Campus—Not main campus.

fellowships and other awards—The formal reference is capitalized (*Academy Award, ADVANCE Award, Fulbright Fellowship, MacArthur Fellowship, Pulitzer Prize*), but informal references (*Fulbright grant, Guggenheim fellow*) are not. For a full list of awards, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_prizes,_medals,_and_awards.

foreign words—Use italics for foreign words unless they are listed in the dictionary (e.g., *al dente, faux pas, per diem*).

fractions—Spell out fractions in text and hyphenate them (*one-half, two-thirds*).

freshman—Do not capitalize, do not use the term *first-year student*. Freshman class, not freshmen class.

FTE—FTE means full-time equivalent. (*A person who is 1.0 FTE is a full-time employee; a person who is 0.5 FTE is a half-time employee.*)

full-time, full time—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier. (*Edgardo applied for the only full-time position. He works full time.*)

fund-raising, fund raising, fund raiser—When used as an adjective, hyphenate. When used as a noun, do not hyphenate. (*The fund-raising campaign was a success. Fund raising is challenging. A fund raiser came to the meeting.*)

G

games/athletics—Use a hyphen when pairing the names of two competing schools (*the Mason-Old Dominion game*).

gender

- Use nonsexist language whenever possible (*chair, police officer, etc.*). Although board chairman may be used, board chair is preferable.
- One way to get around the his or her dilemma is to recast in the plural. For example, “Let the student know when he or she is ready to move to the next level” should be changed to “Let students know when they are ready to move to the next level.”

- “When an individual advances, his self-esteem is greatly improved” could be rephrased as “When an individual advances, that individual’s self-esteem is greatly improved.”
- “A professor should avoid letting his biases get in the way of grading” should be changed to “A professor should avoid letting biases get in the way of grading.”

general education—Use lowercase. Do not use gened or GenEd.

geographic terms

- Certain nouns and adjectives designating parts of the world or regions are capitalized (*Deep South, Northern Hemisphere, East Coast, Northern Virginia, the West*). Use lowercase letters when referring to a locality or compass direction (*eastern, western, central Asia, south of Fairfax*). See *Chicago Manual of Style* 8.47.

GIS—geographic information system.

GMU

- Never use GMU. Use Mason if you are not using the university’s full name. See <http://www.gmu.edu/alumni/spirit/winter06/names.html>.
- George Mason University is used to formally reference the university in external materials, including publications, press releases, invitations, messages from the president, and departmental publications.
- While George Mason University is preferred, Mason can be used in publications for and about students, athletics, and less formal publications.
- In formal documents, use George Mason University on first reference; use George Mason on second reference, and in all subsequent references, the university may be referred to as Mason.
- George Mason refers to the man.

government

- Lowercase federal government, government.
- Congress is capitalized when referring to the body. Lowercase congressional.
- The United States Senate, the Senate, senatorial, the upper house of Congress
- The House of Representatives, the House, the lower house of Congress
- The General Assembly of Virginia, the assembly, the Virginia legislature, the Senate of Virginia, the House of Delegates

grades, GPA—Do not put grades in quotation marks. Do not use an apostrophe for plurals (Bs, not B’s) unless it would be confusing without (thus A’s, not As). In such cases, it would be preferable to reword: a straight-A student. Use GPA, not grade point average.

graduation years—*Jeff Wood, BS Finance ’03*

H

half-time, half time, halftime—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier (*Selena is looking for a half-time position. She’s in school half time.*) When halftime is one word, it refers to sports. (*The Super Bowl halftime show was quite a spectacle.*)

handicapped, disabled

- Use the expression *a person with disabilities* as opposed to *a disabled person* or *a handicapped person* in university publications.

- Use *a person who uses a wheelchair* instead of *a person confined to a wheelchair* or *a person who is wheelchair bound*.
- When discussing people with learning disabilities, do not use the expression *the learning disabled*. Instead, state the specific learning disability in question. (*Children with ADHD tend to have more difficulty focusing than other children.*)
- Note the spelling and capitalization for the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities (KIHd)
- See the American Psychological Association web site for more information on preferred language regarding disabilities: <http://www.apastyle.org/apa-style-help.aspx>.

headlines—Every word is capitalized except articles (*a, an, the*), coordinate conjunctions (*and, but, or, for, nor*), prepositions, and the *to* in infinitives. Note that the last word of a title is always capitalized.

health care—Not healthcare. Do not hyphenate, even as an adjective.

historic/historical—*Historic* is used to describe an event that makes history. *Historical* is used to describe something that is based on history. Both take the article *a*, not *an*. (*The 1969 moon landing was a historic event. Sir Walter Scott's historical novel Ivanhoe renewed interest in the Middle Ages.*)

historical terms

- Certain historical and cultural periods and events are capitalized (*Enlightenment, Roaring Twenties, Age of Reason, the Great Depression*).
- Ordinal numbers should be used when denoting centuries (*18th century*). Do not spell out centuries over the ninth century; use figures (*20th century*).
- Centuries can also be expressed in numerals (1700s).
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style*, 8.77–8.84, 9.33–9.37.

Homecoming—Capitalize when referring to Mason's event.

home page—Two words.

honorary degree

- Lowercase in informal references. (*She received a honorary degree for her humanitarian work in Africa.*)
- Capitalize official honorary degrees. (*Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Honorary Doctor of Laws, Honorary Doctor of Science. The Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters will be awarded to Governor Timothy Kaine.*)

honors—Capitalize when using the formal name of the university program (*Honors College, George Mason University Psychology Honors Program*). Lowercase in informal use (honors courses, honors program, honors student).

hopefully—Hopefully means *with hope*, not *I hope* or *it is hoped*. Correct: *We hope President Merten will be able to speak at the event*. Incorrect: *Hopefully, President Merten will speak at the event*.

hyphenation

- General Guidelines
 - Hyphenate when the second element of a compound begins with a capital letter or numeral (*pre-1914, anti-Semitic*).

- Hyphenate when the last letter of the prefix is the same as the first letter of the following word (*anti-inflammatory*). Exception: coordinate, preempt
- Compounds must be distinguished from homonyms (*re-cover, recover, re-sent, resent, re-create, recreate*).
- In general, do not hyphenate words beginning with the prefixes *co, non, pre, post, or re* unless there is a possibility of confusion (*co-op, post-master's*) or the root word begins with a capital letter (*post-Renaissance*).
- Hyphenate an adjective-noun modifier if there is a possibility of confusion (*high-level class*). It is not necessary to hyphenate when the pair is familiar (*high school student*).
- Hyphenate compounds used as adjectives (*decision-making*) but not as nouns (*decision maker*).
- Do not hyphenate compounds with vice (*vice chair, vice president*).
- Hyphenate university-wide but not campuswide.
- Do not hyphenate freelance, yearlong, health care, African American, Asian American.
- An en dash, not a hyphen, should be used with a range of dates (*1967–69*) or times (*5–7 p.m.*) or to join adjectives where one of them is already a compound (*post–Civil War*).
- Words ending in *-ly* are never hyphenated (*highly difficult, nationally ranked*).
- Compound modifiers: when two or more words that express a single concept are used before a noun, use a hyphen to link them with the exception of the word *very* and adverbs that end in *-ly* (*a full-time job, a poorly performed play*). These combinations usually are not hyphenated after a verb. (*She works full time.*)
- Compound nouns: Many noun compounds are hyphenated (*brother-in-law, well-being, 18-year-old, student-athlete*).
- With numbers: Hyphenate the written form of compound numbers and fractions. (*One-fifth of my income is spent on rent.*)
- Between a prefix and proper name (*mid-Atlantic*).
- Capitalization: When hyphenated words are used in headlines, both words should be capitalized (*Blue-Green*).
- Suspensive hyphenation (*He received a 10- to 20-year sentence in prison.*)
- Sports scores take hyphens. (*Mason won 25-2.*)

Hyphenated Prefixes

all (*all-encompassing*)

anti (*anti-federalist*)

cross (*cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary*)

ex when compound means former (*ex-president*)

high, low (*high-level, low-tech*)

non when word that follows begins with *n*
(*non-native*)

noun + noun (*scholar-poet*)

number + unit of measurement when used as adjective (*six-foot pole*)

self (*self-restraint*)

well (*well-trained*) adjectival form only

Closed Prefixes (not hyphenated)

bi (*bivalent*)

co (*cowrite, exception: co-worker, co-opt*)

infra (*infrastructure*)

inter, intra (*interstate, intramural*)

macro, micro (*macroeconomics, microcomputer*)

mid (*midlife, midweek*)
mini (*miniskirt, minicourse*)
multi (*multicultural*)
non (*nonsmoker*; hyphenate words that begin with *n* such as *non-native*)
pre (*prefabricated, preveterinary*)
pro (*progovernment*)
re (*reinvent*)
For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 7.84–7.85.

I

ID—When referring to a student ID, capitalize and do not use periods.

i.e.—Use in parentheses and tables. Use “that is” in text. Do not italicize.

imply/infer—To imply means to suggest. (*Her fingerprints on the gun strongly implied her involvement in the crime.*) To infer means to draw from. (*The detective inferred from the evidence that she was involved.*)

importantly—Do not use. Use *important* instead. (*More important, the student’s grades have improved dramatically.*)

in, into—*In* denotes position; *into* denotes movement. (*There were leaves in the pool. She jumped into the pool.*)

Inc.—Should be eliminated in text, but can be included when listing companies or corporations. No comma precedes Inc. (even if the company uses a comma preceding the word *Inc.* in their official company name).

initials—Mason’s style does not use middle initials unless it is necessary to avoid confusion (*John L. Jones*) or unless the publication is formal. Be consistent from person to person in use of the middle initial. Two initials should be separated by a space (*C. S. Lewis*).

institutes—See [*centers/institutes*](#).

interim—Lowercase in all instances. In academia, an interim job title refers to a position to which a person is appointed between the time the incumbent steps down and a new person fills that position permanently. (*The interim dean of music begins Monday.*)

International Baccalaureate—Use IB on second reference.

international students—Preferred over *foreign students*.

Internet—Capitalize the word Internet in all cases. See also *electronic media terms*.

invitations—If the invitation is to a Mathy House event, the invitation should read “Alan and Sally Merten cordially invite you to....” Since the event is at their house, they are the official hosts. If the event is on campus or at a location other than Mathy House, the invitation should read, “Please join Alan and Sally Merten at” This is preferred because in this case although President Merten is not the event sponsor this wording still lets people know that he will be there and hosting in his capacity as president.

irregardless—Use *regardless* instead.

it/they

- Use *it* when referring to a group, use *they* when referring to group members. (*The committee met off campus, but it usually meets on campus. Committee members were not happy about this change, and they complained about having to drive.*)
- The possessive is *its*, not *it's*. *It's* is the contraction for *it is*. (*The house is old. Its shutters are falling off. It's time to fix them.*)
- *They* is a plural pronoun for *it*, *he*, or *she*, meaning *those ones*. *They* is often used with an indefinite third person singular antecedent. (*Everyone knew where they stood; nobody has to go to school if they don't want to.*)

italics—Using italics for emphasis in text should be avoided as much as possible. Italics are used for the following:

- Titles of books, magazines, newspapers, films, and collections of poetry. (Article titles are placed in quotes.)
- Titles of long musical compositions, such as operas. (Titles of songs and short compositions are set within quotation marks in roman type.)
- Titles of paintings, drawings, sculpture, and other art.
- When a word or term is not used functionally but is referred to as the word or term itself, it is italicized. (What is meant by *neurorobotics*?)
- Letters used in algebraic equations should be italicized.
- Names of ships and other vessels are italicized. Note that such abbreviations as USS (United States ship) and HMS (Her [or His] Majesty's ship) are not italicized. (USS *SC-530*, *Apollo II*, HMS *Frolic*)

See also *foreign words*.

Ivy League schools—Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, Yale

J

Jr., Sr., III in names—See *names*.

junior—Do not capitalize and do not refer to as *third-year student*.

K

kickoff, kick off—One word acts as a noun, two as a verb. (*Kickoff will be at noon. The directors will kick off their film festival with a special presentation by Al Gore.*)

L

laptop—One word, no hyphen.

last, past—Use *last* when referring to something that has not recurred or will not happen again. (*Inga took the last ferry to Stockholm on that ill-fated, misty night. The last time she saw Anders, he was leaving for good.*) Use *past* when referring to something that might continue. (*He has spent the past two years in complete isolation.*)

lay, laid, laid, laying—Use as the transitive verb that requires an object. (*She laid the rug on the floor.*) See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/learnit/learnitv59.shtml> for more information.

lecture titles—Put quotation marks around the formal title of lectures.

less/fewer— Use *less* when referring to amount, degree, quantity, or value. Use *fewer* when referring to things that can be counted individually. (*Fairfax got less snow this year than last year. Fewer people showed up than expected.*)

libraries—Capitalize George Mason University Libraries, University Libraries, Arlington Library, Fenwick Library, Johnson Center Library, Prince William Library, but not *the libraries*. (*University Libraries recently acquired a new collection. Visit the libraries on Wednesday for more information.*)

lie, lay, lain, lying—Use as the intransitive verb that does not require an object. (*They were lying on the floor listening to the sound of raindrops hitting the tin roof.*) See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/youmeus/learnit/learnitv59.shtml> for more information.

like-
Hyphenate when the word is used as a prefix meaning *similar to* (*like-minded, like-natured*). Do not hyphenate with words that have their own meaning (*likeness, likewise*).

-like
Do not hyphenate unless trying to avoid a triple *l* (*ball-like*).

- lists**
- Do not use a colon after a verb or a preposition introducing a list. (*The list includes Ines, Julie, and Ming.* **Not:** *The list includes: Ines, Julie, and Ming.*)
 - Maintain parallel construction in listed items. (Use either phrases or complete sentences throughout the list when possible.)
 - In vertical lists, use a period after each item if one or more is a complete sentence. In that case, the first words should be capitalized. Otherwise, capitalization of the first words depends on the context. If none of the items is a complete sentence, use no punctuation at the end of each item.
 - Avoid numbering unless there will be a reference to the numbers in later text. If you must number a list in running text, place numbers (without periods) in parentheses. Exception: use numbers in a list format if writing out instructions.

listserv—Lowercase.

log in, log out (v.)

login, logout (n., adj.)

log on, log off (v.)

logon, logoff (n., adj.)

Loudoun—A county in western Virginia. It is not a campus; refer to as Mason in Loudoun.

M
man, mankind—When referring to men and women, use *human* or *humanity*. See *gender*.

Mason—Use in place of George Mason or GMU. See *GMU*.

measurements— In text, spell out *percent*, *degrees* (temperature), *feet*, and *inches*. In tables, the symbols for these words (% , ° , ' , ") may be used. *See symbols*.

media—Plural form of *medium*, so be sure to use a plural verb or pronoun with it.

Correct: The local media are focusing heavily on missing persons stories.

Incorrect: Some believe that the media is fair and balanced.

medieval—Lowercase except when referring to the languages Medieval Greek and Medieval Latin.

mentor—A person who has a mentor is a protégé. Mentor can be used as a transitive verb. (*Professor Baruti mentored his students.*)

metropolitan area—Do not use. Use Washington, D.C., the District of Columbia, or metropolitan Washington, D.C. Do not use Metro unless referring to the transportation system.

mid-

Do not hyphenate unless followed by a capitalized word or figures: midsemester, mid-Pacific, mid-80s. Note: the geographic region Midwest is capitalized.

millions, billions—Use figures (*\$7 million, 5 billion trees*).

minorities—Avoid using the term *minority* when referring to people who are not Caucasian. *See ethnic and racial designations*.

money—Amounts of money are written in these ways depending on the context: \$5, five dollars, \$2 million. Be consistent if listing several amounts. If the number in a reference to an amount of money is spelled out, so is the unit of currency. If numerals are used, use symbols such as \$ (*five dollars, \$5,325, seventy cents, \$3.25*). For foreign currency, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 9.25–9.27.

months, days—Do not abbreviate days of the week or names of months unless space is limited. (*The test was Monday, September 25.*) Do not use a comma when only the month and year are used. (*The book was published in September 1992. The conference will be in November.*)

more than, over—Use *more than* when referring to numbers. (*The Development Office raised more than \$200,000.*) Use *over* when referring to spatial relationships. (*The cow jumped over the moon.*)

N

names—No comma before Jr. or Sr. or III. Space between initials (*T. S. Eliot*). *See also professional titles*. Middle initials are not used unless the piece involves two individuals whose names cannot be otherwise distinguished.

National Institutes of Health—Remember to add an *s* to *Institute*.

nonprofit—One word, no hyphen.

not only, but also—Should be used to join parallel structures. **Correct:** *The provost not only met with John, but also praised his work.* **Incorrect:** *The provost met not only with John, but also with his family.*

numbers

- One through nine are spelled out; 10 and above in numerals. If a series of numbers contains a number that would normally be used as a numeral, all numbers in that series should also be numerals, even if they normally would be spelled out. (*She lost 7 of her 10 nickels, leaving her with 3.*) In more technical matter, a numeral may be used with units of measure (*5 cm; 6"*).
- First through ninth are spelled out; thereafter, 10th, 11th, and so on.
- Use two letters with 22nd, 23rd, and so forth .
- Use numerals with percent (*7 percent*), dollar sign (*\$3*), temperature (*8 degrees*), scores (*7-3*), page (*page 2*), room (*room 9*), and chapter (*chapter 6*).
- Numbers beginning a sentence are always spelled out.
- For figures greater than 999,999, use million or billion (*2.3 million, 4 billion*).
- Use a comma in a figure greater than 1,000, unless it's a year.
- Dashes should not be used as a substitute for "to" in a range of time (*from 1967 to 1983, not from 1967–83*).
- Note there is a space between the number and the measurement (*10 cm*), and there is no period after measurement abbreviation.

O

off campus—(preposition + noun) No hyphen required if it doesn't immediately precede a noun. (*The administration will attend a conference off campus.*)

off-campus—(adjective) Hyphenate when it immediately precedes a noun. (*The freshman refused to live in off-campus housing.*)

offices—Capitalize formal and informal names (*Office of the Provost, Provost's Office*).

on campus—(preposition + noun) No hyphen required if it doesn't immediately precede a noun. (*The Dalai Lama's lecture will be held on campus.*)

on-campus—(adjective) Hyphenate when it immediately precedes a noun. (*Any on-campus event needs to be approved by administration officials.*)

online—Do not hyphenate. *See also electronic media terms.*

outside vs. outside of—Use *outside*, not *outside of*. (*We are reaching out to departments outside the university.*)

over, less than, under—When referring to a lesser number of things or people, use *fewer* rather than *less* or *under*. (*Fewer than a dozen people made it to the movie last night.*) Similarly, when referring to a greater number of things or people, use *more than* rather than *over*. (*More than 10 classes were canceled.*)

P

parentheses—Put a comma after a set of parentheses, never in front. For example: *The new lab, funded in part by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), will open next week.* See the *Chicago Manual of Style* 6.97–6.103.

part time, part-time—Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier. (*Jasveer works part time. He works as a part-time florist.*)

passive voice—In most instances, the active voice is preferable to the passive voice. For example, “Students discovered graffiti on the campus grounds” is preferable to “Graffiti was discovered on the campus grounds by students.” There are instances where the passive voice is preferable to the active voice. Passive voice is acceptable when the agent executing the action is obvious, insignificant, or unknown or when a writer wishes to delay identifying the agent until the last part of the sentence or to avoid identifying the agent altogether. (*The wall was vandalized in the middle of the night.*) It is also effective when the acting agent does not want to claim responsibility for the action. (*New regulations were passed last week, so employees must act accordingly and complete their salary reduction forms.*) The passive voice is effective in such circumstances because it highlights the action and what is acted upon rather than the agent executing the action.

Patriots Day—No apostrophe.

Patriot’s Lounge

percent—Use numerals and spell out the word *percent* (*2 percent, between 5 percent and 10 percent*).

phone numbers—*See telephone numbers.*

p.m. —*See time.*

pre-, post-

Do not hyphenate words that take the prefixes *pre-* or *post-* unless the first letter of the second word is capitalized or the last letter of the prefix is the same as the first letter in the second word.

- postbaccalaureate
- postdoctoral
- postgraduate
- postsecondary
- pre-Columbian
- pre-enrollment
- preregistration

Exception: post-master’s

prefixes—*See hyphenation.*

presently—One possible meaning is *in the near future*. If this is the meaning you wished to suggest, try to substitute the word *soon* for *presently*. If that construction makes sense, you can safely use *presently*. But if you wish to refer to what is going on in the here and now, use *currently*.

president—On first reference, use President Alan G. Merten; on subsequent references, Merten or *the president*. When the title is serving the function of a description, it is lowercase. (*He gave the letter to university president Alan Merten.*) *See also academic titles.*

Presidents Park— Not President’s Park.

principal, principle—Use principal (n., adj.) when referring to someone or something first in authority or importance (*principal investigator, principal issue, school principal*). Use principle (n.) when referring to an essential truth (*principle of trust*).

principal investigator—Lowercase and do not refer to as PI on first reference. Also note the spelling of *principal*.

professor, professorship—The three standard academic ranks are assistant professor, associate professor, and professor (sometimes called *full professor*).

- A named professorship is called a chair. It is often, but not always, created by and named for the donor of the funds setting up the endowment that supports it. Capitalize the titles of named professorships (*Robinson Professor of Earth Sciences, the Drucie French Cumbie Chair*); lowercase regular professorial positions (*an assistant professor of foreign languages*).
- Note that there may be people teaching who are not professors of any kind. Check to see whether they are an adjunct, instructor, or lecturer.
- If someone is a visiting professor, they need to be referred to as such.
- University Professor, which is the highest ranking professorship, is capped.

publication titles

- Italicize titles of books, magazines, newspapers, films, plays, albums, musical compositions, and works of art.
- Titles of articles, lectures, and research projects are enclosed in quotation marks.
- The Bible, Qur'an, and Torah are not italicized and not enclosed in quotation marks.
- When a book title appears as part of the title of a paper, enclose the paper in quotation marks and use italics for the book title.
- For the possessive form of a title, the 's is not italicized. Example: *U.S. News & World Report's* ranking....
- Do not italicize *the* in newspaper titles (*the Washington Post*).
- When someone is writing a book, place the title in quotation marks. When the book is published, italicize the title.

Q

quotation marks

- Commas and periods are kept within end quotation marks—whether single or double; other punctuation remains outside them unless part of the quotation.
- Quoted words, phrases, and sentences run into the text are enclosed in double quotation marks. Single quotation marks enclose quotations within quotations; double marks, quotations within these; and so on. (“*Don’t be absurd!*” said Henry. “*To say that ‘I mean what I say’ is the same as ‘I say what I mean’ is to be as confused as Alice at the Mad Hatter’s tea party. You remember what the Hatter said to her: ‘Not the same thing a bit! Why you might just as well say that “I see what I eat” is the same thing as “I eat what I see”!’*”) See *Chicago Manual of Style* 11.33–34, 6.8–10.

R

race—Avoid using the word *minority* when referring to people who are not Caucasian. See *ethnic and racial designations*.

regard—Use the phrase *in regard to*; **not** *in regards to*. *With regard to* is also acceptable.

resident advisor, RA—Spell out *resident advisor* in first reference; use *RA* thereafter. No periods in *RA*. No apostrophe in the plural (*RAs*).

residence hall—Not dorm or dormitory.

résumé—So as to avoid confusion with *resume*, use diacritical marks.

room—Capitalize as part of a building address; also capitalize alpha characters that are part of the room number (*Mason Hall, Room D217*).

S

sabbatical—A sabbatical is a break from routine employment obligations. Do not use the expression *sabbatical leave because* it is redundant.

school and college names and abbreviations—See *academic units*. Capitalize individual colleges (*College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the college; School of Law, the law school*).

scientific names—The scientific names for animals and plants are composed of two words, the genus and the species. The domestic dog, for example, is *Canis familiaris*. The genus is always capitalized. The species is always lowercase. Both words are italicized. See *Chicago Manual of Style* 8.128 for further guidance.

seasons—Names of seasons are lowercase, even when referring to a specific academic semester (*winter, spring, summer, fall, fall semester, spring semester*). Note: summer term is lowercase.

semester—No caps. Mason has two semesters: a fall semester and spring semester. But Mason has a summer term.

semicolon—When items in a series involve internal punctuation, they should be separated by semicolons. (*They will honor Mian M. Saeed, professor emeritus of history; Yakir Aharonov, Distinguished Professor of Theoretical Physics; and Charlene Douglas, associate professor of nursing.*)

senior—Do not capitalize; do not use the term *fourth-year student*.

September 11, 2001—Spell out September.

slashes—Avoid when possible; use *and* instead. For example, *faculty/staff* should be written as *faculty and staff*.

sophomore—Do not capitalize; do not use the term *second-year student*.

spacing—Use single spaces after most punctuation, including periods and colons. Do not use spaces before or after hyphens, en dashes, or em dashes. In a list, do not use a double line space between the introductory phrase and the first item of the list.

special-needs (adj.)

staff—Use *staff* as a singular noun; use *staff members* to denote individuals. (*The staff gets larger every year. Many staff members like to telecommute.*) See also *faculty*.

states

- Do not abbreviate state names in running text. Exceptions may be made when states appear with city names in class notes, tabular material, and mailing addresses (use U.S. Postal Service codes).
- State names are not required for major cities. State names should follow smaller and lesser-known cities.

- A comma always follows the state name in text, except at the end of a sentence.
- Use commas before and after state names when they appear with cities in text. **Correct:** *Fairfax, Virginia, is southwest of Washington, D.C.* **Incorrect:** *Fairfax, Virginia is southwest of Washington, D.C.*
- When the name of a lesser-known city appears in the name of a newspaper, include the state in parentheses after the city. The state is italicized as is the newspaper name [*Aurora (Illinois) Beacon News*]. Do the same for counties.

students—Identify students by department, major, or status. (*A graduate student in the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, a doctoral candidate in public policy.*) A student’s major is not capitalized.

study abroad—Always two words when used as verb. When used as an adjective, hyphenate (*study-abroad program*).

subject-verb agreement—Many nouns (including staff, faculty, committee, board, team, class, public, and group) can be both singular and plural. Deciding on a singular or plural verb depends on whether the intent is to refer to the group as a whole or to the members of the group. For clarity, it helps to add *members of*. (*Many members of the Mason faculty are world-renowned scholars. The staff at Mason is top notch.*)

symbols

- In text, spell out *percent*. In tables, % may be used, but not in a header. *See also percent.*
- In text, spell out “degrees” (temperature), *feet*, *inches*, and *cents*. In tables, the symbols for these words (°, ', ", ¢) may be used, but not in a header. *See also measurements.*
- In text, spell out *cents*. In tables, the symbol ¢ may be used but not in a header. Amounts greater than 99 cents should be in numerals and preceded by a dollar sign (\$4). *See also money.*

T

task force—Two words.

telephone numbers—Use hyphens between the numbers and not periods (*703-993-9000 or 800-555-2700*).

test names

- Abbreviate without periods (*SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, TOEFL, IELTS*).
- If a test is widely recognized, do not spell out first occurrence in text.
- Be sure to avoid redundant language. For example, TOEFL is the acronym for the Test of English as a Foreign Language; to refer to it as the TOEFL exam would be redundant. (*Odval took the TOEFL and exceeded her expectations.*)

that, which—Use *that* for restrictive (essential) clauses and *which* for nonrestrictive (nonessential) clauses. Restrictive: *The book that I wrote in 1981 is about French politics.* (With this wording, the author distinguishes this book from ones he wrote in other years.) Nonrestrictive: *The book, which I wrote in 1981, is about French politics.* (With this wording, the author merely gives the reader some extra information.)

the

- Lowercase *the*, no matter how a corporation, organization, or publication uses *the* in their own publications.
- In text, *the* at the start of titles or works of art is generally capitalized (*The Canterbury Tales*) but not at the start of titles of newspapers or periodicals (the *Washington Post*).
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style*, 8.73.

theater—Always use the American spelling (theater) unless the British spelling (theatre) is used in a proper noun.

time

- The time of day is written as simply as possible (*4 p.m.*, *4 to 5 p.m.*). Use noon and midnight, not 12 noon, 12 p.m., or 12 a.m.
- Unless the context is a formal publication do not use *:00* or *o'clock*. For formal invitations, use *o'clock*, not *:00*.
- Lowercase a.m. and p.m., and use periods.
- List time after dates. (*Thursday, January 1, 2004, at 3 p.m.*)
- Do not use an en dash in place of *to* in a range of times introduced by *from* (*from 5 to 7 p.m.*, not *from 5–7 p.m.*).

titles (dissertations, theses)—Use initial caps and set in italics. *See also titles (professional), publication titles.*

titles (legal citations)—Italicize the case name and abbreviate *versus* with *v.* (*Brown v. Board of Education.*)

titles (organizations)

- Names of associations, organizations, conferences, meetings, and such follow the same guidelines used for corporations, except that the article *the* preceding a name is lowercase even when it is part of the formal title and the organization capitalizes it.
- Use *Company* when a business uses the word as part of its formal name. *Incorporated*, *Corporation*, and *Limited* are usually not needed but when used after the name of a corporate entity, they should be abbreviated, even at the first mention.
- Such words as *center*, *team*, and *conference* that are part of an organization's name are lowercase when used alone. (*New members of the Center for Social Complexity attended the event. The center aspires to contribute to the excellence, discovery, and invention in the international computational social science community.*)
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style* 8.73–8.75.

titles (people)

- Civil, professional, military, and religious titles appearing before a person's name are capitalized. (*General Eisenhower, President Alan Merten*). After or without a name, lowercase the title (*Linda M. Parsons, assistant professor of accounting; the president; the director*).
- On second reference, use last name only. When listing administrative officers, follow the university's organizational chart and list officers in descending order based on titles.
- Capitalize endowed professorships whether before or after a name (*Michael Bronzini, the Dewberry Chair of Civil, Environmental, and Infrastructure Engineering*). *See University Factbook for a listing at <http://irr.gmu.edu/factbooks/index.html>.*
- A person's title may be abbreviated if followed by their first and last names (*Rev. Henry Brown*). Do not abbreviate the title if only their surname is given (*the Reverend Brown*). Faculty members are referred to by full name without title (*Laurie Ann Schintler, not Dr. Laurie Ann Schintler*).
- For deans, capitalize when used before a name, lowercase in all other references. (*Dean Jack Censer. Jack Censer is a dean.*)
- Dean of students—capitalize when used before a name, lowercase in all other references. (*Dean of Students Pam Patterson. Pam Patterson is the dean of students.*)
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style*, 8.21–8.23, 8.31.

titles (professional)

- In general, in less formal text, avoid titles such as *the Honorable* and *Dr.* PhDs are not called *Dr.* and do not have PhD listed after their names.
- Faculty members are generally listed with a title after their name. In more formal publications (commencement program, invitations, promotional programs), if we are promoting a professor from somewhere else, we can refer to them as they wish (PhD, etc.)
- Titles appearing before the name are capitalized. If the title appears after or without the name, the title is lowercase. (*Cindy Lont, professor of communication.*)
- On second reference, use last name only.

titles (publications and creative works)

- Italicize titles of books, newspapers, magazines, television shows, films, plays, albums, musical compositions, and works of art. For the possessive form, the apostrophe and “s” are not italicized (*Evita’s* music). Do not italicize “the” in newspaper names (the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*).
- Titles of lectures, speeches, episodes of television and radio series, songs, poems, articles from newspapers and periodicals, chapters, short stories, essays, and individual parts of books are in roman type and within quotation marks.
- Lowercase articles (*a, an, the*), coordinate conjunctions (*and, or, for, nor*), prepositions regardless of length, and *to* in infinitives.
- Capitalize everything else, including those parts of speech if they appear as the first or last word in a title (*On the Waterfront*).
- For further guidance, see *Chicago Manual of Style*, 8.164–8.208.

toward, towards—Use *toward*. *Toward* is American usage; *towards* is British usage.

trademarks

- Trademarks must be capitalized. Some trademarks have become so common it is often overlooked that they are indeed trademarks. Some examples are Academy Award, Band-Aid, Breathalyzer, Dumpster, Frisbee, Heimlich Maneuver, Jacuzzi, Jell-O, Kleenex, Laundromat, Mace, Magic Marker, Muzak, Photostat, Rolodex, Scotch Tape, Styrofoam, Xerox.
- Trademarks should be followed by the word it often replaces, when appropriate (*Rolodex watch*). In some cases, it may be best to avoid using the trademark altogether and just use the generic term as long as it is easily understood. For a more complete listing of trademarks, visit the [International Trademark Association](#)’s web site.
- Unless you are the company that holds the trademark, you do not need to use a trademark symbol. (®, ™)

trustees—Capitalize Board of Trustees, but not trustee. BOT is the acronym.

U

under way—Spell out as two words in nearly all uses. According to AP style, *underway* is used as an adjective before a noun only in a nautical sense (*an underway flotilla*).

unique—Do not use as a synonym for unusual. *Unique* means one of a kind.

United States—Spell out United States when used as a noun. (*The United States is a diverse nation.*) Abbreviate as U.S. (periods, no spaces) when used as an adjective. (*A basic course in U.S. history is being offered this semester.*)

universities (other)—Be respectful of how other universities write about themselves, instead of trying to apply our style guidelines to their official names. For a complete list of university names, see www.collegesource.com.

university—Always lowercase unless it is part of a proper noun (*George Mason University, the university*).

university-wide—Not universitywide, but campuswide.

V

versus—Abbreviate as *vs.* in all uses except for law references, where it is *v.* (*Brown v. Board*)

vice prefix—Open compounds; do not hyphenate. Example: **vice president**.

videotape—Not video tape.

virtual—Does not mean *actual* or *nearly*. It means something has the effect, but not the form. (*After David's mother passed away, his oldest sister became the virtual head of the family.*)

voice mail—Two words, do not hyphenate.

W

Washington, D.C. —Use the full name, not *D.C.* or *the District*. Use *Metro* only when referring to the Washington, D.C., area transportation system.

web and web addresses

- Lowercase web.
- World Wide Web is not needed; web is sufficient.
- <http://> is not needed.
- Lowercase website (one word).
- Do not use < > around a web address.
- Web addresses do not get underlined in publications. They may be underlined online to indicate an active link.
- Italicize the titles of online publications (*HotWired*).
- Check all web addresses to ensure accuracy and live links.

See also electronic media terms.

webmaster—One word and lower case.

web page or web site—Two words (same for home page).

-wide—University-wide, campuswide.

workforce—One word.

workload—One word.

workplace—One word.

work-study—Hyphenate.

Y

years—*See numbers and dates.*

Z

zip codes

Do not use the four-digit zip code extension for the Fairfax, Loudoun, or Arlington addresses.

Fairfax 22030

Arlington 22201

Loudoun 20166

Prince William 20110-2203

See also addresses.

Resource Materials

The *University Catalog* is a good resource for confirming the spelling of professors' names and course titles.

The People Finder section of the university website contains updated information on academic ranks and named professorships.