Style Guide for Tallahassee Community College Materials

Introduction

This guide is for use by TCC faculty and staff members who develop content for newsletters, brochures, guidebooks, online materials, news releases and other public information materials. It is not relevant to scholarly, technical or academic work.

Accuracy, consistency and plain language are the watchwords for TCC materials. All products should be developed with a specific purpose and with a specific audience (e.g., prospective students, current students, media, faculty and staff, community) in mind. This helps create more audience engagement.

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Materials for external audiences (e.g., prospective students and families, media, community) must be reviewed by the Office of Communications and Marketing before publication or posting. This includes all news releases.

The purpose of this review is to ensure that TCC materials reflect the College's mission, are consistent with the College's brand, and are easy to use and understand. The goal is a high degree of consistency among all the messages that students and other audiences receive from the College. Such consistency and care promotes trust.

In many cases, materials designed for external audiences such as the media and prospective students will be submitted for review by the relevant department and then revised and formatted by staff of the Office of Communications and Marketing. The Office of Communications and Marketing also determines the best distribution pathways and methods in consultation with the content creator.

Note: Materials intended for internal use within a department or division do not need to be reviewed or approved by the Office of Communications and Marketing. Materials provided to current students generally do not need to be reviewed by the Office of Communications and Marketing, unless they are high-profile materials with long-term use, such as the student handbook and orientation materials.

If you are not sure whether your material needs review, or if you would like to request assistance or advice, contact the Office of Communications and Marketing at communications@tcc.fl.edu or 201-6049.

TCC's "House Style"

When practical, TCC follows the guidelines of the Associated Press Stylebook, the standard used by members of the media. This is because most materials TCC produces have an audience that includes the media either directly or indirectly. AP Style is always used in news releases. The AP Stylebook is available in the TCC library, from the Office of Communications and Marketing, and online at www.apstylebook.com.

However, AP Style does not address every situation that may arise when producing materials for the general public—especially for students. Below is some additional information that relates to publishing for TCC audiences.

Tips for Clear, Concise Writing

- Use **plain language** that is familiar to the target audience. **Avoid jargon, slang** and "education-ese."
- Include only the information needed by the target audience.
- Organize information in a logical sequence.

- Use mostly **short sentences**. However, if the material is long, do use a variety of sentence lengths to make it more interesting to read.
- Use the **active voice** in most cases. The active voice emphasizes the subject of the sentence—a "doer" who is taking an action. Passive voice de-emphasizes the "doer" and can seem as if the action happened without a "doer." Passive voice is characterized by the use of a form of the verb "to be" with a past participle (a verb form typically ending in –ed or –en). Active voice: "He broke the vase." Passive voice: "The vase was broken." Active: The organization gave the College an award. Passive: "An award was given to the College."
- Choose whether to write in **first-, second- or third-person voice** based on your audience and purpose and be consistent throughout the document. Materials addressed directly to students may appropriately be written in second person ("you," "your") and/or first person ("we," "our"). Third person ("the student," "community members") creates a more formal or professional tone that is used in many TCC materials.
- Use the **spelling and grammar check** in Microsoft Word. Read what you wrote and get someone else to read it as well. Nothing beats a second set of eyes for catching those "There car is read" kinds of errors.
- **Use only respected sources for reference**—The Office of Communications and Marketing recommends Webster's New World College Dictionary, thesaurus and other resources at http://www.m-w.com . (Wikipedia can be helpful, but it is not an authoritative source.)

Frequently Used Terms

Academic Degrees

- With a **person's name**: Outside of scholarly journals, it is rarely appropriate to include a mention of the academic degrees held by an individual. If mention of degrees is necessary to establish an individual's credentials for a particular reason, avoid an abbreviation (such as Ph.D.) and use instead a phrase such as: John Jones, who holds a doctorate in psychology. In most cases, the audience for TCC's materials includes current and prospective students, families, and other members of the public—not academics or scholars. In keeping with AP Style, individuals who hold a doctoral degree will not be referred to as "Dr. Somebody" in news releases.
- Use an apostrophe in "bachelor's degree," "a master's," etc. However, use "associate degree" not "associate's degree."

- There is no apostrophe in "Associate in Arts," "Associate in Science," "Bachelor of Arts," or "Master of Science."

Alumni

When referring to a past or present TCC student, include the graduation year, as in "Freda King, '07." "Alumni" is plural, as in "TCC's alumni have been very supportive." "Alumnus" is for a male, singular and "alumna" for a female. The term "alum" can be used for a male or female graduate.

Black or African-American

"Black" is preferred AP style; however, African-American is acceptable.

College or college

Capitalize "College" when referring to TCC specifically. "The College was established in 1966." Use "college" when referring to another institution. Capitalize "District Board of Trustees," "Foundation Board of Directors" and "Alumni & Friends Association" when referring specifically to those at TCC.

Divisions

Capitalize academic divisions, as in "Division of History and Social Sciences." Use lowercase for academic subjects, as in "She teaches history." (Exception: Capitalize the name of an academic subject that is a proper noun: "He teaches English.")

Fractions

Spell out amounts less than one, using hyphens between the words, as in: two-thirds, four-fifths, etc. Use figures for precise amounts larger than one, converting to decimals whenever practical, as in "1.67" (as opposed to "1 and two-thirds").

Grade Point Average

Spell out "grade point average" upon first use in materials for external audiences and then use "GPA" thereafter. "GPA" can be used anytime in internal materials.

Job Titles

Capitalize job titles before a name but not after. "Jim Murdaugh, president of Tallahassee Community College, said that TCC Provost Feliccia Moore-Davis will oversee the initiative."

Publications

Except in news releases, put the names of publications such as The Talon or The Eyrie in italics.

Semesters

Capitalize the name of a TCC semester, as in "Fall 2015," but refer to basketball season in the "spring."

Tallahassee Community College or TCC

Write out the College's complete name on the first reference. Thereafter, use "TCC."

Theatre or Theater

"TheatreTCC!" is the name of the organization. Also, TCC's academic department is called the "Theatre Department." However, "theater" is correct for other uses, such as the name of a place where plays are put on, as in: "I like going to the theater."

Other Grammar and Spelling Hints

Acronyms, Abbreviations

- Avoid abbreviations or acronyms that readers will not quickly recognize.
- Where acronyms are necessary, spell out the full term on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses, and use the acronym thereafter. (This is in contrast to AP Style, which does not place acronyms in parentheses, so TCC news releases will not include acronyms in parentheses. However, they can be helpful in other publications, such as those intended for students.)
- Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms in headlines (though "TCC" is often OK in a heading).
- Generally, omit periods in acronyms unless the result would spell an unrelated word. But use periods in most two-letter abbreviations.

Affect versus Effect

"Affect" is a verb that means: "to produce an effect." In most sentences, the correct choice is "affect" for the verb and "effect" for the noun. The use of "affect" as a noun is uncommon; it refers to a person's facial expression, as in, "He has a flat affect," meaning the person shows little emotion. Likewise, the use of "effect" as a verb is rare, restricted primarily to a construction such as: "This legislation effected a change in our approach to funding."

Ampersands

Do not use an ampersand (&) in place of the word "and" except in the case of an organization that uses the "&" in its official name.

Between and Among

Something may occur between two people, but among three. "There is a strong bond between Dean Finkelstein and Dean Banocy-Payne," but "There is a strong bond among Dean Finkelstein, Dean Stewart and Dean Banocy-Payne."

Capitol or Capital

"Capitol" refers only to a building, as in "The Old Capitol is located at Apalachee Parkway and South Monroe Street," whereas "TCC is located in the state capital." Note that TCC offers classes at the TCCCapitol Center .

Citations

In most cases, materials produced for TCC's primary audiences do not include formal reference citations. However, if a citation to a reference is required, use the MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing. The format for citation to online material is as follows:

Author. "Title Page." Title of Site. Date published. Institution or organization sponsoring site. Date of access.

Handouts of the MLA guide are available in the TCC library.

Commas

A comma is a marvelous punctuation device that separates the structural elements of a sentence into segments. However, it can cause much confusion when misused.

- Use commas to separate independent clauses that are joined by any of these: "and," "but," "for," "or," "nor," "so," "yet."

The student explained his question, but the professor still didn't understand.

- Use a comma after introductory clauses that begin with starter words such as "after," "although," "as," "because," "if," "since," "when," "while."

While I was studying, the phone rang.

- However, do not use a comma after the main clause when a dependent clause follows it, as:

He was late for practice because his alarm clock was broken.

- Use a comma after introductory phrases, as in:
- *To get a ticket to the play, you'd better come early.*

- Use a comma after common introductory words such as "yes," "however," "well."

Yes, the test is tomorrow morning.

- Use a pair of commas in the middle of a sentence to set off clauses, phrases and words that are not essential to the meaning of the sentence.

Clause: *That Thursday, which happens to be my dad's birthday, is the only day I can meet.*
Phrase: *This class is fun. The exam, on the other hand, is really hard.*
Word: *In this case, however, he seems to have missed the point.*

- Do not use commas to set off essential elements of the sentence, such as clauses beginning with "that."

I lost the book that I borrowed from you. He wishes that he could earn a football scholarship.

- Use commas to separate three or more words, phrases, or clauses written in a series. However, do not use a comma before the "and" or the "or" that precedes the final item in the series, unless one of the items in the series has an "and" or "or" within it.

The candidate promised to lower taxes, protect the environment, reduce crime and end unemployment.
The candidate promised to lower taxes, protect the environment, and reduce unemployment and poverty.

- Use commas to separate two or more adjectives that describe the same noun. Never use a comma between the final adjective and the noun itself.

Wrong: That is an exciting, elaborate and enlightening, game you are playing.

- Do not use commas with noncoordinate adjectives. Coordinate adjectives are adjectives with equal ("co"-ordinate) status in describing the noun; neither adjective is subordinate to the other. You can decide if two adjectives in a row are coordinate by asking the following questions:
  - Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written in reverse order?
  - Does the sentence make sense if the adjectives are written with "and" between them?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," the adjectives are coordinate and should be separated by a comma. Here are some examples of coordinate and noncoordinate adjectives:

  - *He was an angry, stubbo rn child. (coordinate—you might say "stubborn, angry child")*
  - *They lived in a gray frame house. (noncoordinate—you would not say "frame gray house")*
- Use a comma near the end of a sentence to indicate a pause or shift.

You're one of the best students in that class, aren't you?

- Use commas to set off phrases at the end of the sentence that refer back to the beginning or middle.

Bob waved at his parents as he received his diploma, laughing joyously.

- Use commas to set off geographical names:

Tallahassee, Florida, is in the north central part of the state.

- Use a comma to set off a quote, as:

Julie said, "We'll go tomorrow."

- Commas in dates: See below.

Contractions

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- "It's" is the contraction of "it is." "Its" is possessive. So: "The committee reached its decision yesterday" but "It's a tight budget year."
- "Who's" is the contraction of "who is." "Whose" is possessive. So: "Who's making this decision?" but "Whose turn is it to chair the meeting?"

Dates

To indicate dates, use numbers without st, nd, rd or th. Capitalize the months.

When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. When naming only a month and year, do not separate them with commas, as in "His best monthly performance was in February 1980."

When a phrase refers to a month, day and year, use a comma to separate the day and year, as in "Aug. 31, 2007, was the day she had waited for."

"Non" Words

Words that take the prefix "non" are typically not followed by a hyphen (e.g., noncredit, nonfiction, nonacademic), unless they include a proper noun, as in The Non-Profit Institute or Non-English speaking.

Numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine. Use figures for 10 and up. Use commas in all dollar amounts of $1,000 or more.

Spell out "percent" as one word.

Do not use a numeral to begin a sentence. Spell out the number, capitalizing its first letter, or restructure the sentence so it does not begin with a number.

Phone Numbers

In a formal setting, give phone numbers with the area code, as in: (850) 201-6100. In an informal setting, such as an inter-office memo, 488-1234 is fine.

Place Names

- United States
    - Either "United States" or "U.S." is acceptable. (Use periods in "U.S." with no extra spaces.)
- Abbreviations for states:
    - Spell out names of states when they appear alone:

Wildfires continued to rage throughout northern Florida.

    - Abbreviate state names that appear in conjunction with a city or military base:

Needham, Mass., Oxnard Air Force Base, Calif.

    - Do not abbreviate Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas or Utah.

Abbreviate state names as follows:

Ala.	Md.	N.D.
Ariz.	Mass.	Okla.
Ark.	Mich.	Ore.

Calif.	Minn.	Pa.
Colo.	Miss.	R.I.
Conn.	Mo.	S.C.
Del.	Mont.	S.D.
Fla.	Neb.	Tenn.
Ga.	Nev.	Vt.
Ill.	N.H.	Va.
Ind.	N.J.	Wash.
Kan.	N.M.	W.Va.
Ky.	N.Y.	Wis.
La.	N.C.	Wyo.

Use a comma between the name of the city and the name of the state and another comma after the name of the state, as in "She traveled from Los Angeles, Calif., to attend Tallahassee Community College."

Technology Terms

Here are the TCC spellings and letter cases for commonly used technology terms:

- internet
- website
- webpage
- webmaster
- the web
- home page
- online
- email

Time

To indicate time of day, use numerals for all but noon or midnight, as in "8 p.m." or "11 a.m." Use a colon to separate hours from minutes, as in "9:07 a.m." Do not use double zeros, as in "9:00 a.m." Avoid "12 noon" or "12 midnight"; use simpl "noon" or "midnight."

URLs

Type URLs in normal font. Do not use boldface or italics. Omit the http:// at the beginning of the URL and the forward slash at the end. If the URL is too long to fit on one line, insert a line break after a forward slash or period.

Which or That?

Which and that are both used to introduce subordinate clauses, but they are not interchangeable. When the clause is not essential to the sentence, use which and set off the clause with commas. When it is essential, use that and do not use commas (unless they are needed for some other reason).

- *"Dogs that bark scare me."*
- *"Dogs, which make great pets, can be expensive."*

To Cap or Not to Cap

Capitalize:

- Proper nouns.
- Most words in the titles of books, newspapers, magazines, computer games, movies, operas, plays, poems, songs, television programs, lectures, speeches and works of art. Do not capitalize articles ("the," "a," "an") or prepositions, unless they are the first word of the title.
- Regions of the U.S.: The Northeast depends on the Midwest for its food supply. We live in the Big Bend." She has a Southern accent.

Use lowercase for:

- Compass directions: *The warm front is moving east.*
- Directions with the name of a city, state or nation: "north Florida," "eastern Canada,"
- Ethnic groups. The preferred usage for "African-American" is "black" and for Caucasians is "white," neither capitalized. The preferred usage for Asian people is "Asian," capitalized. "Native American," capitalized with no hyphen, is preferred.
- Seasons ("spring," "summer," "fall," "winter") unless part of a formal name: "I love Paris in the springtime," but "the Winter Olympics." (Exception is when referring to a TCC term, as in: Fall semester.)

If you have a style-related question, please send it to communications@tcc.fl.edu.