



WAC Clearinghouse Website Design and Style Guide

Last Updated August 2024

The WAC Clearinghouse offers these guidelines to those who engage in editing and updating its website. We do so for several reasons:

- to ensure consistency across all pages and subpages,
- to maximize accessibility for those employing adaptive technologies, and
- to provide a useful resource for members of the editorial team.

Through this guide, we hope to provide clear information about our site's intended look, feel, navigability, and accessibility. We hope you find it helpful.

Style and Mechanics Basics

For any matters of style not explicitly covered by this guide, the WAC Clearinghouse depends on APA style, available at <https://apastyle.apa.org/>.

For any matters of spelling and mechanics not explicitly covered by this guide, the WAC Clearinghouse depends on the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary*, available at <https://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/>. Those without a subscription can find similar information on the *Merriam-Webster.com* open access dictionary at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

Using MASA

We publish our website using the MASA CMS platform. MASA is an open source platform, and as an open access publisher we are pleased to use an open source CMS platform.

Upon request, we will grant members of the WAC Clearinghouse community editing privileges on the website. To obtain an account that allows editing, please contact one of the associate publishers for design and production or the publisher for a username and password. Contact information is available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/about/editorial-team/>.

When editing the site, please refrain from making any changes to the page layout. Feel free, though, to use the front-end toolbar to edit and publish content. Details about doing so can be found at the following pages:

- Front-end toolbar: <https://docs.masacms.com/getting-started/basic-concepts/front-end-toolbar/>.
- Editing content and publishing via inline edit: <https://docs.masacms.com/getting-started/basic-concepts/editing-content-publishing/>.

- Editing content and publishing via full edit: <https://docs.masacms.com/content/adding-content/via-administrator/>.

Language

Varieties of English and Other Languages

In general, as a website based in the United States, we use American English as our default language.

Some areas of our website contain information in languages other than English. In those instances, questions about spelling, punctuation, usage, etc., are resolved through consultation with native speakers of the languages being used, often, though not always, native speakers who are members of our editorial board.

Language Free of Bias and Stereotypes

Please follow commonly accepted practices for nonbiased use of language, which apply to but are not limited to the following:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender identity
- Racial or ethnic groups
- Sexual orientation
- Socioeconomic status

Resources addressing how use non-biased language include the following:

- The APA's *General Principles for Reducing Bias*: <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/general-principles>
- The APA's *Inclusive Language Guide*: <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>
- The National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE's) *Statement on Gender and Language*: <https://ncte.org/statement/genderfairuseoflang/>
- The United Nations' *Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language in English*: <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>
- Transformation Journeys Worldwide's *Transgender Terms, Definitions and Proper Usage*: <https://www.transformationjourneysww.com/copy-of-resources/>
- TSER Trans Student Educational Resources' *Definitions*: <https://transstudent.org/definitions/>

Capitalization

Except for headings and subheadings, which use title case capitalization, we aim for minimal use of capitalization. Thus, please observe the following:

- Field names, such as “rhetoric and composition,” “writing studies,” and the like, should be in lower case. Exceptions are fields that use proper nouns for their names, such as “English,” “French,” or “Spanish.”
- Names of institution-specific bodies, such as departments, programs, committees, etc., should be in lower case (e.g., use “university library” instead of “University Library”).
- Titles should be in lower case unless used as part of the person’s proper name (e.g., “I spoke to the provost” but “Provost Esmeralda Hernandez announced...”).

Punctuation

Hyphens

In general, use hyphens to create compound modifiers when doing so improves clarity (e.g., “large-animal veterinarian,” in which the veterinarian tends to large animals, vs. “large animal veterinarian,” in which the veterinarian who tends to animals is large).

Hyphens are not used with –ly adverbs (e.g., use “wildly inaccurate” rather than “wildly-inaccurate”).

Apostrophes

When a noun ends with an s, use only the apostrophe (e.g., Jess’ instead of Jess’s). This applies to both common and proper nouns.

Commas

Please use the serial comma (sometimes called the Oxford or Harvard comma), which is placed after the next-to-last element of a series of three or more items (e.g., “Pencils, pens, and keyboards are all effective writing tools.”)

Dashes

Two types of dashes are commonly used:

- Use em dashes to separate asides (e.g., “More specific information—including how to use a dash—can be found at...”)
- Use en dashes to separate page numbers, dates, or the like (e.g., “pp. 321–340” or “2020–2021”)

Numbers and Dates

We follow some practices that differ from commonly used style manuals when it comes to numbers and dates. Please note the following:

- Use words to start a sentence (e.g., “Ten people stood up...” rather than “10 people stood up...”)
- Use words for numbers smaller than 11, unless you are presenting a series of numbers in which some of the numbers are smaller than 11 and some are larger; in that case, use all numbers (e.g., use “2, 15, and 48 students” rather than “two, 15, and 48 students”)

Symbols

Use the “%” symbol in tables or when percentages are presented in parentheses (e.g., “A large percentage (85%) of our readers expressed...”). Otherwise, use the word “percent” in body text (e.g., “Over 70 percent of all respondents...”).

Common Spelling, Capitalization, Punctuation, and Terminology Corrections

Most questions about spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and terminology can be resolved by referring to the resources listed in the Style and Mechanics Basics section. Some common corrections we make include the following:

B

- Use “blog” when referring to an entire blog
- Use “blog entry” when referring to a single entry in a blog

D

- Use “doctoral candidate” rather than “Ph.D. candidate”

E

- Use “ebook” rather than “e-book”
- Use “Ed.D.” rather than “EdD”
- Use “email” rather than “e-mail”
- Use “ePortfolio” rather than “e-Portfolio”

I

- Use “internet” rather than “Internet”

M

- Use “Master” (upper case) when referring to a specific degree (e.g., Master of Fine Arts, Master of Rhetoric and Composition)
- Use “master’s” (lower case) when referring more generically to one degree (master’s degree) or to more than one degree (masters degrees)

P

- Use “Ph.D.” rather than “PhD”
- Use “Professor” rather than “Full Professor”

S

- Use “smartphone” rather than “smart phone”

W

- Use “web” rather than “Web”
- Use “website” rather than “web site”
- Use “wiki entry” rather than “wiki post”

Headings and Subheadings

Style

Headings and subheadings should be creating using the “format” options in the MASA toolbar, and they should appear sequentially on each page (i.e., Heading Level 2 should appear nested under Heading Level 1; Heading Level 3 should appear nested under Heading Level 2; etc.)

Capitalization

In all headings, please use title case capitalization (e.g., “News and Information Updates” rather than “News and information updates”). (This guideline differs from our typical minimal use of capitalization.)

Links

Please ensure all links are live. This applies not only to explicit URLs (i.e., links starting with https:// or http://) but also to embedded links (i.e., words not formatted as a URL but that will open a website).

Whenever possible, embed links into the structure of the sentence rather than appending them at the end (e.g., use “The WAC Clearinghouse is pleased to be a sponsor of the [Seventeenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference](#), which will be held...” rather than “The

WAC Clearinghouse is pleased to be a sponsor of the Seventeenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, with information available at <https://iwac.colostate.edu/>.)

In all cases, avoid using constructions like “click here” to designate links (e.g., avoid “To find information about the Seventeenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, [click here](#).”)

Paragraphs

Research shows short chunks of text are best for reading comprehension on the web. Therefore,

- Please aim to limit paragraph length to no more than four sentences each.
- Please aim to limit consecutive paragraphs to three, after which a heading or an image can be inserted to break up the text length.

Images

Please provide ALT text for each image used.

- You can find guidance for creating alt text on the WebAIM site at <https://webaim.org/techniques/alttext/>.
- To add an image with ALT text, follow these steps:
 - Click the image icon in the MASA toolbar
 - Click the “Browse Server” button in the dialogue box
 - Upload a file into the top area of the dialogue box
 - Scroll through the list of images, click the three dots to the left of the image you uploaded, and choose “Select”
 - Insert ALT text in the next dialogue box and click “OK”

Changes to the Guidelines

These guidelines will be reviewed by the publisher and associate publishers for design and production once per year for possible revisions. All those affiliated with the WAC Clearinghouse are invited to suggest changes. It is hoped that these guidelines will not only be organic and responsive to the needs of those affiliated with the WAC Clearinghouse but also collaboratively constructed by the WAC Clearinghouse community over time.

Acknowledgments

This guide was adapted in part from the WAC Clearinghouse Guide for Authors and Editors (available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/guide.pdf>), which was itself adapted from the guide for authors used by Parlor Press with permission from its creator David Blakesley, and which also benefitted from input by Tony Mangialette on the use of terminology related to

gender, Asao Inoue on the use of language related to race and ethnicity, and Sam Maloney on images and styles.

Contact Information

For suggestions or comments about these guidelines, please contact either of the WAC Clearinghouse associate publishers for design and production or the publisher. Contact information is located at <https://wac.colostate.edu/about/editorial-team/>.