



BOSTON COLLEGE

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

University Editorial Style Guide

JUNE 2020



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The Office of University Communications Style Guide was developed to help Boston College communicators produce clear, concise, and cohesive prose that represents the high standards of the University, and the singularity of its mission, goals, and brand.

Like many universities, BC follows the essential grammar, usage, and style rules of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which is available to members of the University community without charge online and in print through the Boston College Libraries.

BC's Style Guide includes a 3,500-word A to Z glossary of frequently raised questions and answers. It also features a punctuation section, and a brief reference guide to Jesuit and Catholic nomenclature.

This compendium will be updated regularly, as new questions about style and usage arise.

Contents

A – Z	4	disabilities	8
A	4	doctoral, doctorate	9
abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms	4	dual degree programs	9
academic courses and names	4	E	9
academic degrees	5	email	9
academic honors	5	emeritus, emeriti, emerita, emeritae	9
academic titles	5	et al. and et cetera	9
advisor, adviser	5	ethnicity, race, and nationality	9
AHANA	5	events	9
alumni	5	F	10
athletics	6	FAQ	10
B	6	first-year	10
baby boom, baby boomers	6	fiscal year	10
Black	6	foreign words and expressions	10
Boston College, BC, the University	6	fractions	10
brand names	6	freshman, freshmen, upperclassman, upperclassmen	10
bullet points	6	fundraising and fundraiser	10
C	6	G	10
campus and building names	6	generations	10
catalog	6	GPA	10
centuries	6	gray	10
chair	7	H	10
class years, advanced degrees, and others	7	health care, healthcare	10
commencement	7	the Heights	11
Common Core, Core Curriculum	7	high school	11
communication department/major	7	homepage	11
Convocation, Reunion Weekend	7	I	11
coursework	7	inclusive language	11
crowdfund, crowdfunding	8	gender pronouns	11
cybersecurity	8	IP	11
D	8	J	12
data	8	Jesuit and Catholic nomenclature	12
dates	8	Jr. and Sr.	12
decades	8		
directions and regions	8		

K	12	spelling	15
Koran, Qur'an	12	state names and abbreviations	15
L	12	STEM	15
Latinx	12	student-athlete	15
LGBTQ+	12	style and usage	15
login, log in	12	T	16
M	12	teenager, teenaged	16
mailing addresses	12	that, which, who, whom	16
media	13	the	16
millennium, millennial	13	theater, theatre	16
money	13	time	16
N	13	titles of publications	16
nonprofit	13	trustee(s)	16
numbers	13	U	17
O	13	under way	17
Office of Undergraduate Admission	13	United States, U.S.	17
offices	13	university, the University	17
online	13	URLs	17
P	14	V	17
program, lecture, series	14	versus, vs., v.	17
PULSE	14	Veterans Day, Veterans Affairs	17
Q	14	vice president	17
Qur'an, Koran	14	voice mail	17
R	14	W	17
re-	14	web	17
Residence Halls	14	web page titles	18
resume	14	weekdays	18
Robsham Theater Arts Center	14	well-being	18
ROTC	14	who, whom	18
RSVP	14	Wi-Fi	18
S	14	work-study	18
said (in dialogue)	14	X	18
seasons	15	x-ray	18
slideshow	15	Y	18
smartphone	15	yearlong, daylong	18
social media	15	years	18
Social Security number	15	Z	18
spacing	15	zip code	18

PUNCTUATION	19	cite / sight / site	23
ampersands	19	complement / compliment	23
apostrophes	19	comprise / compose	23
colons	19	concurrent / consecutive	23
commas	19	connotation / denotation	23
dashes and hyphens	19	conscience / conscious	23
ellipses	20	council / councilor / counsel / counselor	23
quotation marks	20	discreet / discrete	23
“scare quotes”	20	disinterested / uninterested	24
semicolons	20	elicit / illicit	24
spaces between sentences	21	emigrant / immigrant	24
 		eminent / immanent / imminent	24
JESUIT AND CATHOLIC NOMENCLATURE	21	farther / further	24
archdiocese	21	fewer / less	24
Bible, biblical	21	figuratively / literally	24
Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop	21	flammable / inflammable	24
Catholic	21	flaunt / flout	24
Church	21	foreword / forward	24
cura personalis	21	founder / flounder	25
discernment	21	hanged / hung	25
formation	21	historic / historical	25
Ignatian	21	i.e. / e.g.	25
Jesuit, Catholic	22	it’s / its	25
Liturgy, Mass	22	laid / lain / lay	25
Society of Jesus	22	lend / loan	25
titles, religious orders	22	passed / past	25
 		penultimate	25
CONFUSABLES	22	precede / proceed	25
affect / effect	22	principal / principle	25
all right / alright	22	stationary / stationery	26
all together / altogether	22	their / there / they’re	26
allude / elude	22	venal / venial	26
alternate/ alternative	22	who’s / whose	26
beside / besides	23	your / you’re	26
capital / capitol	23		

A – Z

A

abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms

Use periods for most two-letter abbreviations, acronyms, or initialisms, with the exception of BC (for Boston College) and state mailing addresses:

- a.m., p.m., S.J., U.S. (United States)
- BC, MA, NJ, CT

Omit periods in initialisms that consist of three or more letters, except in academic degrees:

- FBI, NBA, STM, ATM
- M.B.A., M.S.W.

Use abbreviations, acronyms, and initialisms sparingly. Parenthetical abbreviations, when overused, add clutter rather than clarity to editorial copy.

- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) representatives will speak at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) about the art exhibition on display at the United Nations (UN) in New York City (NYC).

SCHOOL TITLES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Style preference is to limit use of acronyms for names of Boston College schools and divisions. Spell out the full name of each on first reference, then use shortened forms in subsequent mentions.

Full Title	Abbreviation	Acronym
Boston College Law School	BC Law	N/A
Boston College School of Social Work	School of Social Work	BCSSW
Carroll School of Management	Carroll School; Carroll	CSOM
William F. Connell School of Nursing	Connell School; Connell	CSON
Lynch School of Education and Human Development	Lynch School	LSEHD
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences	Morrissey College	MCAS
School of Theology and Ministry	N/A	STM
Woods College of Advancing Studies	Woods College; Woods	WCAS

academic courses and names

Capitalize the names of courses and disciplines only when they are proper nouns (e.g., English; Spanish; American Studies) or part of the official name of a department or school. Do not use bold, quotation marks, or italics.

- He is taking a history seminar, an English class, and a neurobiology course this semester.
- She registered for advanced courses in the History Department, the English Department, and the School of Theology and Ministry.

Capitalize formal names of courses only.

- She registered for Science and Technology in American Society. Another class she had hoped to take, on living ethics, was full.

academic degrees

Do not capitalize or use possessive pronouns when spelling out names of degrees.

- He/she received a bachelor of science (not “his/her bachelor of science”).
- They were awarded doctorates (not “their doctorates”).

In most writing, use of the general terms bachelor’s or bachelor’s degree, or master’s or master’s degree, is preferred to use of the full name of the degree (e.g., bachelor of arts degree) or the initials (B.A.).

Note that Boston College uses periods in its abbreviations of academic degrees—a departure from *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

- Jane O’Hara, M.A. ’12

For a full list of degree names and abbreviations, see Majors and Minors.

academic honors

Do not set off common Latin words, phrases, and abbreviations in italics or quotation marks.

- Joanna graduated cum laude from Boston College. Two years later, her sister graduated summa cum laude from BC.

academic titles

Capitalize formal and professional titles only when they precede an individual’s name. Lowercase those that follow the name or that stand alone.

- Boston College President William P. Leahy, S.J.; David Quigley, the provost and dean of faculties
- Assistant Professor of Theology Jane Anderson; Jane Anderson, assistant professor of theology

Use surnames only for subsequent references.

Named and endowed professorships are always capitalized.

- Thomas F. Rattigan Professor of English
- Mary Crane, Rattigan Professor of English
- Mary Crane, Thomas F. Rattigan Professor of English

Do not use an academic degree following a name in expository writing.

- Associate Professor John Kearney (not “Associate Professor John Kearney, Ph.D.”).

advisor, adviser

“Advisor” is the preferred spelling.

AHANA

Refers to students of African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American descent.

- The Thea Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center

alumni

From the Latin: alumni is not a singular noun. A male graduate is an alumnus (plural: alumni); the female counterpart is an alumna (plural: alumnae). Collectively, graduates are alumni of a school or other institution.

athletics

Athletic teams are the Eagles, in noun and adjective form.

- The Eagles took the field.
- Eagles skaters won the Beanpot.

B

baby boom, baby boomers

See generations.

Black

Following the leads of major news organizations including the Associated Press (AP) and the *New York Times*—and in concurrence with *Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS)*—OUC now capitalizes the “b” in Black when the word is used in a racial, ethnic, or cultural context. The modification aligns “Black” with long-standing identifiers such as Latino, Asian American, and Native American.

The AP, which declared its policy on upper casing “Black” and “Indigenous” on June 19, 2020, announced the following month it would continue to lower-case “white” in racial, ethnic, and cultural contexts. OUC will now follow this policy.

Boston College, BC, the University

Spell out Boston College on a first mention. Use “the University”—always with capitalized ‘U’ when referring to BC—in subsequent references; for variation, use Boston College or BC.

brand names

Preserve the unconventional capitalization of brand names and trademarks.

- iPhone; iPad; PowerPoint; Wi-Fi; Zoom; etc.

bullet points

Standardize their format: Begin each consistently, with a capital or lowercase letter. If each bullet is a full sentence, use periods to conclude. If not, dispense with final punctuation, or use semicolons for all but the last point. Follow that by a period.

C

campuses and building names

Capitalize official names of Boston College campuses and buildings. See the Fact Book for a complete list.

Boston College has several distinct campuses. Capitalize the official names of the Chestnut Hill Campus, Newton Campus, Brighton Campus, Upper Campus, Lower Campus, and Middle Campus. Lowercase campus when not referring to a specific BC campus.

- Gasson Hall sits at the center of the Chestnut Hill Campus.
- They took the T back to campus from Fenway Park.

catalog

Not “catalogue.”

centuries

Write single-digit names of centuries as lowercase words (first through ninth). Double-digit century names are written as numerals. (Use a hyphen between an ordinal number and “century” only when forming an adjectival phrase.)

- The Roman Empire fell in the fifth century.
- 20th-century technology challenged social class distinctions in American society.
- Digital technology has dominated the first two decades of the 21st century.

chair

Do not use chairman, chairwoman, or chairperson. Do not capitalize unless it is part of an official title preceding a name.

- John Chang, chair of the Metaphysics Department
- Metaphysics Department Chair John Chang

class years, advanced degrees, and others

Always add a space between the surname and an abbreviated form of the undergraduate graduation year; no comma before or after the year. Apostrophes face away from the numerals.

- Jane Harris '99; Joseph Jones Jr., '11

Advanced degrees, on the other hand, should be set off by commas.

- Joseph Lee, M.A. '12, returned to his alma mater.
- Jerome Lee '01, M.B.A. '03, Ph.D. '09

When a speaker has a degree from another school as well as one or more degrees from BC, list first degree (B.A.) without naming institution. Follow it with Boston College years and degrees.

- Lisa Rodriguez B.A. '95, M.S.W '88
- John Parker M.F.A., Ph.D. '93

Recognize an honorary degree recipient with the letter H, followed by an apostrophe and an abbreviated form of the year in which the holder was honored. No extra space or comma.

- Jennifer Park H'10

BC publications that identify parents of Boston College students and alumni by graduation year follow a similar format.

- Cathy Wang P'13

commencement

Commencement should only be capitalized when referring to Boston College's annual exercises.

- Several Boston-area colleges and universities hold their commencement ceremonies in late spring.
- Boston College Commencement is usually held in May.

Common Core, Core Curriculum

Capitalize when referring to the official University Core Curriculum, or to the national K–12 Common Core state standards.

communication department/major

No "s" when referring to the Boston College department/major.

Convocation, Reunion Weekend

Capitalize when referring to these yearly BC events.

coursework

One word.

crowdfund, crowdfunding

Single words.

cybersecurity

Not “cyber-security” or “cyber security.” Exception: The Boston Conference on Cyber Security, held on campus in conjunction with the FBI.

D

data

Data is technically a plural noun, and should be treated as such when it refers to multiple individual data points. When it describes a whole body of data, however, it can be regarded as a singular noun.

- The data were different during the second study.
- The data is questionable.

dates

Capitalize and spell out the days of the week and months of the year, but not the names of seasons. Do not abbreviate months in expository writing.

- The fall semester started on the first Thursday of September.

Per *The Chicago Manual*, do not use ordinal numbers in dates.

- September 1 (not Sept. 1st)

In the traditional month-day-year sequence used in the United States and Canada, commas should appear both before and after the year.

- The Declaration of Independence was signed July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia.

decades

Decades can either be spelled out and lowercased or expressed in numerals. Place the apostrophe before—and pointing away from—the numeral.

- The 1990s; the nineties; the '90s (not the 90's)
- Two people in their 60s led the tournament.
- Their children were in their twenties.

directions and regions

Use lowercase to describe cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) unless they refer to a geographic region (e.g., the South).

- Massachusetts is south of Maine and New Hampshire.
- Louisiana is in the South; Kansas is in the Midwest.

disabilities

Focus on the person before mentioning his or her condition, preferring phrases such as “students with learning disabilities” or a “student with impaired motor function” to “disabled students.”

doctoral, doctorate

Doctoral is an adjective; doctorate is a noun.

- She earned a doctoral degree in physics. Ten years later, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from her alma mater.

dual degree programs

Lowercase “dual degree” unless it is part of a formal name.

- Boston College Law School offers several dual degree programs.

E

email

One word, no hyphen. (Guidelines for abbreviations of electronic media are neither standardized nor consistent: variations include e-book, eBay.)

emeritus, emeriti, emerita, emeritae

These words are not synonyms for retired. They denote distinguished professors whose titles recognize their accomplishments. From the Latin: emeritus and emeriti are the masculine singular and plural forms, respectively, and emerita and emeritae are the feminine forms. Do not italicize.

- Professor Emerita of History Janet Hernandez
- History Professor Emerita Janet Hernandez
- Professor Emeritus of Physics John Wong

et al. and et cetera

Et al. is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase et alii, which means “and other people.” Et cetera refers to things, not people, and should be used sparingly. Precede the abbreviations with a comma.

- The article by Sullivan, et al., was published in *Nature*.
- The items on offer—art, furniture, et cetera—were expensive.
- The items on offer—art, furniture, etc.—were expensive.

ethnicity, race, and nationality

In general, there is no need to mention a person’s ethnicity, nationality, or race unless it is relevant to the editorial content at hand.

Be as specific as possible. To describe a person from Japan, for example, use Japanese rather than Asian. Call someone of Mexican descent living in the U.S. “Mexican American,” rather than “Hispanic” or “Latinx.”

Use hyphens when a two-word identity modifies a noun:

- There are many Italian Americans in Boston (noun, no hyphen).
- There is a large Italian-American community in Boston (adjective, hyphen).

Do not use a hyphen to designate dual heritage, whether the words are being used as a compound proper name or as a modifier.

events

Capitalize—but do not italicize or set off in bold face or quotation marks—the names of large, small, or mid-size lectures, programs, and events within or outside of BC. These may range from Commencement and First Year Academic Convocation, to a Lowell Humanities Series lecture, to BC’s NeuroBoston Fall Symposium.

F

FAQ

Do not add an “s” to this abbreviation for “frequently asked questions.”

first-year

This gender-neutral term is preferred to “freshman.”

fiscal year

Use “FY” and the abbreviated year (no apostrophe, periods, or spaces).

- The results for FY19 were an improvement over the previous year’s.

foreign words and expressions

On first usage, italicize foreign words the reader may not know. On subsequent uses, you need not italicize. Do not italicize foreign phrases commonly used in English when they are used in an English context. Examples:

- *ad hominem*, *pro bono*, *ibid*, *habeas corpus*

fractions

Spell out and hyphenate fractions of less than one: one-half; two-thirds; three-quarters. Use numerals for all fractions larger than one.

- Use one-half cup sugar and 2¼ cups flour.

freshman, freshmen, upperclassman, upperclassmen

Use the gender-neutral terms first-year student(s), sophomore(s), junior(s), and senior(s) instead of “freshman(men)” and “upperclassman(men).”

fundraising and fundraiser

These should always be written as one word, rather than two.

G

generations

Do not hyphenate or capitalize “baby boom,” “baby boomers,” or “millennial.” Do capitalize “Gen X,” “Gen Y,” and “Gen Z.”

GPA

Stands for “grade point average” (no hyphens).

gray

Use “gray” (U.S. spelling) rather than “grey” (U.K. spelling).

H

health care, healthcare

Health care or healthcare, not health-care.

the Heights

A traditional nickname for the Boston College campus is also the name of *The Heights*, the school's independent student newspaper. When writing the nickname, do not capitalize “the” unless it appears at the start of a sentence.

high school

Should not be hyphenated or capitalized unless it is part of a formal name.

- They were high school students.
- They attended Boston College High School.

homepage

Not “home page.”

I

inclusive language

The 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* recently declared that “‘he’ is no longer acceptable as a generic pronoun that refers to a person of an unspecified gender.” *The Chicago Manual* (along with the AP, MLA, and other prominent usage guides), now actively discourages sentences such as this:

- If someone needs your help, give it to **him**.

They and *their* turn up regularly as singular pronouns in informal usage, e.g.: “If someone needs your help, give it to them.” But neither passes muster in formal writing—for now. *The Chicago Manual* suggests nine reasonable techniques for introducing gender neutrality to editorial content, several of which involve re-casting sentences so they have plural subjects.

- “Each child had his toy” = “The children each had toys.”
- “The student should turn in his work” = “Students should turn in their work.”

Chicago Manual also recommends avoiding gender-specific titles and terms wherever possible.

- mankind = humanity
- chairman = chair
- policeman = police officer
- mailman = mail carrier
- stewardess = flight attendant

gender pronouns

Some gender-non-conforming or questioning individuals use the third-person plural pronoun “they/them” and the possessive pronoun “their” to refer to themselves. In this circumstance, it is acceptable to use third-person plural verbs to refer to a single individual.

In addition, writers are advised to maintain sensitivity to economic circumstances—particularly those of Boston College students and populations engaged in various BC service programs. In most cases, avoid adjectives such as “poor” or “needy”; modifiers such as low-income, under-resourced, or “facing economic challenges” are preferred.

IP

Stands for Internet Protocol. It should be capitalized, with no periods.

J

Jesuit and Catholic nomenclature

When referring to Boston College, use a comma between Jesuit and Catholic.

- Boston College is a Jesuit, Catholic university.

Jr. and Sr.

Use abbreviations such as these only when they accompany full names of individuals. Do not precede with a comma unless it is part of an established usage (e.g., Thomas P. O’Neill, Jr. Library).

- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Harry Connick Jr. has recorded more number-one albums than any other artist in US jazz chart history.

K

Koran, Qur’an

Either of these spellings is acceptable in BC publications.

L

Latinx

A gender-neutral term used in place of the description Latino/Latina. The “x” replaces the Spanish-language male and female endings “o” and “a,” as in the School of Social Work’s Latinx Leadership Program.

LGBTQ+

The acronym currently used by Boston College’s LGBTQ+ Student Programs and Resources stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning students.

login, log in

“Login” is a noun; “log in” is the verb.

M

mailing addresses

Do not use postal abbreviations for states (MA, CT) unless they are part of a full mailing address. Use conventional spelling and abbreviations of state names in running text. Do not abbreviate the state name if it is used without a city or town.

- He works in Massachusetts.
- She works in Chestnut Hill, Mass. (not Chestnut Hill, MA).
- *Full mailing address:* Jane Doe, Office of University Communications, Boston College, 140 Commonwealth Ave., Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Use a comma after the state in expository writing.

- The voters in Boston, Mass., turned out in droves that year.

media

“Media” is a plural noun that describes the main means of mass communication—broadcasting, publishing, and the internet collectively. The singular form is “medium.”

- The media were out in force covering every aspect of the event.
- Print is still a powerful medium, even in the second decade of the 21st century.

millennium, millennial

Do not capitalize “millennium” or “millennial” in running text.

money

For any amount of money from \$1–\$999,999, use numerals and a dollar sign. For sums exceeding \$1 million, combine numerals and words. Hyphenate only when using adjectival forms.

- They received \$4.52 million dollars in funding.
- They received a \$2.2-billion grant.

N

nonprofit

One word. Do not hyphenate as non-profit or not-for-profit.

numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine only; use numerals for larger numbers. Apply these guidelines to ordinal numbers as well. Avoid superscript.

- Out of 25 applicants, only three candidates were interviewed.
- Fourth annual BBQ; the 25th Reunion Class (not 25th)

Exceptions: Spell out a number when it is the first word of a sentence unless it is a year.

- One hundred students were awarded scholarships.
- 2001 was singularly memorable for many Americans.

O

Office of Undergraduate Admission

Not “Office of Undergraduate Admissions” (no “s” at the end).

offices

Capitalize the names of offices, buildings, and centers within Boston College when the full name is used. Do not capitalize office, center, institute, etc., when the full name is not used.

- Office of Student Programs
- Staffers in the office respond to numerous inquiries.

online

One word, lowercase.

P

program, lecture, series

Capitalize these words and the like only when part of an official name.

- The Master of Divinity School degree program requires three years.
- The Connell School sponsors the Pinnacle Lecture Series. We've attended two Pinnacle lectures.

PULSE

BC's premier service-learning program...always all-caps.

Q

Qur'an, Koran

Either of these spellings is acceptable in BC publications.

R

re-

When the prefix "re" precedes a word that begins with a vowel, use a hyphen. Otherwise, do not use a hyphen.

- re-open; re-elect; re-educate
- regain; recall

Residence Halls

Boston College dormitories are known as Residence Halls (capitalized).

resume

Use this formatting instead of the accented "résumé."

Robsham Theater Arts Center

Robsham uses the American spelling of theater. The BC Theatre Department does not.

ROTC

Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps

RSVP

This abbreviation translates from the French phrase "please reply." When writing invitations, do not include the redundant "RSVP please."

S

said (in dialogue)

When attributing dialogue, prefer the straightforward "said" (rather than verbs like "shouted," "shared," "asked," "suggested," etc.).

- "The project concluded in June," she said.

seasons

Do not capitalize the names of seasons (spring, summer) unless they are part of an official name. See also dates.

- She'll take Microeconomic Theory next spring.
- She went to the McMullen Museum Spring Celebration.
- He enjoyed the McMullen's special spring exhibition.

slideshow

"Slideshow" is one word.

smartphone

Not "smart phone."

social media

The term "social media" should always be lowercase. The names of social media platforms and apps, however, should be capitalized.

- The meme became popular on social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok.

Social Security number

Only "Social Security" should be capitalized.

spacing

Use only one space between sentences.

spelling

When in doubt concerning the correct spelling of a word, please consult the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (or another Merriam-Webster edition).

state names and abbreviations

See mailing addresses.

STEM

This acronym, which stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, is acceptable to use on first reference.

- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of STEM majors in recent years.

student-athlete

Use a hyphen when referring to student-athletes.

style and usage

Unless otherwise noted, follow language, grammar, and usage guidelines in the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*, available online to all members of the Boston College community through the Boston College Libraries.

T

teenager, teenaged

Never hyphenate these terms.

that, which, who, whom

The most common relative pronouns are who/whom, whoever/whomever, whose, that, and which. Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, which are a type of dependent clause that modify a word, phrase, or idea in the main clause.

If the “which/that” clause changes the meaning of the sentence, use “that.” If the “which/that” clause is subordinate, use “which.”

- The swimming pool, which was occasionally heated, was barely popular with guests.
- The swimming pool that was heated was popular with guests.

the

Do not capitalize “the” before proper names unless it is part of a title.

- the BC Eagles; the Department of English
- *The Hunt for Red October*

theater, theatre

Use the U.S. spelling, “theater,” unless “theatre” is part of a formal name, such as the Boston College Theatre Department; a theatre major.

- Most BC student productions are staged at the Robsham Theater Arts Center or in its Bonn Theater.

time

Write a.m. and p.m. in lowercase, with periods after each letter. When writing times of day, eliminate unnecessary figures and punctuation.

- 5–7 p.m. (not “5:00 to 7:00 p.m.”)

Use numerals when citing the exact time, or when using a.m. or p.m. Use noon for 12 p.m. and midnight for 12 a.m. When listing start-to-end times, use an en-dash (not a hyphen).

- 7 a.m.; 7:30 p.m. (not “seven p.m.” or “seven-thirty p.m.”)
- 2–4 p.m.

titles of publications

Titles of books, periodicals, journals, plays, and other freestanding works are italicized, according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Titles of articles, chapters, and other shorter works, including poems, songs, short films, and TV or radio shows, are set in roman and enclosed in quotation marks.

trustee(s)

Capitalize “trustee” when it precedes a name, and when it is part of the official title “Boston College Board of Trustees.” Otherwise, lowercase.

- Boston College Trustee Mary Stack
- Mary Stack, a member of the Boston College Board of Trustees
- Mary Stack, a trustee of Boston College
- XYZ Foundation board of trustees

U

under way

Two words, per *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

United States, U.S.

Always spell out the country's name on first mention. You may use U.S. in subsequent mentions.

university, the University

Always capitalize "University" when referring specifically to Boston College. Generally, use lowercase.

- The University was founded in 1863.
- He was accepted by three other universities.

URLs

When spelling out URLs in running text, always use lowercase and do not underline or italicize. It is not necessary to include "http://" or "www." If a URL comes at the end of a sentence, place a period after it.

- The article was featured on [change.org](#).
- The Boston College website is [bc.edu](#).

V

versus, vs., v.

When abbreviating the word "versus," use a period after "vs." If referring to a legal case, use the abbreviation "v." and italics.

- Boston College Eagles vs. Notre Dame Fighting Irish
- *Miranda v. Arizona*; *Brown v. Board of Education*

Veterans Day, Veterans Affairs

No apostrophe.

vice president

Boston College uses "for," not "of," in vice presidents' titles.

- Joy Moore is the vice president for student affairs.

voice mail

Two words, no hyphen.

W

web

Lowercase web, web page, website, webcam, webinar, and webmaster (except as part of a formal name).

web page titles

Use capital letters and no italics or quotation marks to denote the names of web pages or publications that appear only online. Do not capitalize prepositions or conjunctions.

- Wikipedia
- How to Clean Your House
- Slate

weekdays

One word.

well-being

Always use a hyphen.

who, whom

“Who” and “whom” should only be used to refer to people. “Who” is a subject pronoun, and “whom” is an object pronoun.

- The woman who plays the flute is a friend.
- The other woman, whom I also invited, is someone I’ve known for years.

Wi-Fi

Capitalize the term and use a hyphen.

work-study

Always use a hyphen to refer to work-study employment.

X

x-ray

Hyphenate, and do not capitalize.

Y

yearlong, daylong

One word, no hyphen.

years

To indicate a range of years, use the full years with an en-dash. When abbreviating years, replace the first two digits with an apostrophe that faces the missing numbers.

- 2019–2020; 1900–1936
- Class of ’56

See also: decades

Z

zip code

Lowercase, two words, no hyphen.

Punctuation

ampersands

Use an ampersand (&) to replace “and” only when the symbol is part of the official name of an office or department.

- Boston College Center for Work & Family
- *U.S. News & World Report*
- Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

apostrophes

Use apostrophes to form contractions and to show possession. If a singular possessive ends in “s,” add an apostrophe and an “s” at the end of the word. If the noun is plural, add only the apostrophe.

- James’s bicycle
- The neighbors’ cars

Never use apostrophes to form plurals.

- We had dinner with the O’Reillys (not the O’Reilly’s).

Omit the apostrophe when a plural noun ending in “s” functions as an adjective, not a possessor.

- Boston College Parents Weekend; Patriots Day; Veterans Day

colons

Much like an em-dash (—) a colon (:) signals the reader to expect additional or more specific information.

- He ate healthy foods every day: cereals, fruits, and vegetables.

Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the initial word of a complete sentence followed by one or more related sentences.

- He ate healthy foods every day: Quaker oats, fruits, and legumes.
- She expressed her belief: Eating healthy is essential to well-being; lack of a healthy diet causes harm.

commas

Because the University follows *The Chicago Manual of Style* grammar and usage guidelines, Boston College style calls for use of the serial comma in editorial content. Also called a series comma, a Harvard comma, or an Oxford comma, the serial comma follows the penultimate item in a list of three or more.

- I’d like to visit Tokyo, Mexico City, or Istanbul on my next vacation.
- Key issues confronting universities include escalating costs, competition for top-tier students, and the need to attract quality faculty.

Exception: For lists in which individual items themselves include commas, see semicolons.

dashes and hyphens

Each of the three most frequently used dashes—the em dash (—), the en dash (–), and the hyphen (–)—performs a different function. Do not use spaces around any of them.

The em dash (—), the longest and most common, sets off a parenthetical word, phrase, or clause from the rest of a sentence.

- On this matter, the pundits—journalists, news commentators, and most of the political establishment—agree.
- There were three people there—Marta, Sylvester, and Jane.

The en dash (–) means “through.” Its principal function is to indicate a range of things, particularly times, numbers, dates, and distance:

- 5–7 p.m.
- The 2020–21 school year
- See pp. 147–150 of Coates’s book.

The hyphen (-) is used between numbers that are not inclusive, such as telephone and Social Security numbers. It is also used in compound adjectives.

- 617-552-3821
- Subject-verb agreement; Pulitzer Prize-winning book; much-needed break

ellipses

Three spaced periods that indicate a suspended thought or omitted content *within* a sentence. Use four periods and a space to indicate words that are omitted *between* sentences.

quotation marks

American English uses double quotation marks (“”) rather than single quotation marks (‘ ’), which are typically used only for quoted words and phrases within double quotations.

- “The Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay’s ‘On Broadway’ has always been one of my favorites,” she said.
- In American English, commas and periods are normally placed inside quotation marks. “Welcome to the workshop,” she said. “Let’s get started.”

Dashes, colons, and semicolons almost always go outside quotation marks, because they aren’t directly quoted.

- “She loves classical piano music,” he marveled—it had moved her from a young age.

Question marks and exclamation points go inside quote marks if they are part of quoted material.

- “Yikes!” he exclaimed. “That was a close call.”
- “I’ve never liked the play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*”, she said.

When quoting a passage that consists of several consecutive paragraphs, put quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph, but at the end of only the final one.

When different speakers are quoted in a text, cite each individually.

“scare quotes”

A word or phrase purposely misused, or intended to convey irony, enclosed in quotation marks that are meant to signal doubt or derision about what is being said or cited.

- She wished the committee chairs would limit the time they spent describing their “brilliant” ideas.

semicolons

The semicolon most frequently links two or more independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction (e.g., “and”; “but”; “so”).

- The weather was ghastly; Jane fretted about getting home in time to meet her sister.

Semicolons are also used in place of commas to separate items in a series in which one or more of the individual items includes a comma.

- Her favorite films included *Moonlight*; *I, Tonya*; and *Monsters, Inc.*

spaces between sentences

Insert one space, not two, between a period at the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next. (People who learned to type on typewriters were frequently taught what some call a “two-space rule.” The advent of the word processor changed the rule.)

Jesuit and Catholic Nomenclature

archdiocese

Capitalize as part of a proper name. Lowercase when it stands alone.

- The Archdiocese of Boston; the Boston archdiocese

Bible, biblical

Capitalize Bible—no quotation marks or italics—when referring to the Scriptures in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Capitalize related terms such as the Gospels, Gospel of St. Mark, the Scriptures. Lowercase bible as a non-religious term. Always lowercase the adjective biblical.

Cardinal, Archbishop, Bishop

Seán Patrick Cardinal O’Malley, O.F.M. Cap., on first reference. Then Cardinal Seán Patrick O’Malley; the cardinal; Cardinal Seán (informal).

Catholic

Always capitalize when referring to the Catholic Church.

Church

Use “Catholic Church” on first reference, and “Church” in subsequent mentions of the Catholic Church or the universal Christian Church. Lowercase the word when used generally.

- Hundreds of Church leaders met at the Vatican.
- My family’s church is on Elm Street.

cura personalis

“Care for the [individual] person,” a hallmark of Ignatian spirituality that adapts the Spiritual Exercises to individual spiritual guidance.

discernment

Making choices, in a Christian context, when the options are neither good nor evil, but among a number of what are likely worthwhile courses of action.

formation

Formation—the growth of the whole human being—seeks to help individuals’ intellectual, social, ethical, and spiritual development.

Ignatian

Refers to the members, practices, and spiritual tenets of the Society of Jesus, founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

Jesuit, Catholic

Always use a comma, rather than a hyphen, between these terms.

Liturgy, Mass

The terms are not interchangeable. Liturgy refers to any public prayer. Mass is a Catholic liturgy that is celebrated, delivered, or said. Always capitalize when referring to the ceremony, but lowercase any preceding adjectives.

- He delivered high Mass.

Society of Jesus

The Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, known as the Jesuits. Boston College was founded by the Jesuits in 1863. The abbreviated form, S.J., takes commas before and after the initials.

titles, religious orders

The first full reference to a member of a Roman Catholic religious order should provide the priest or sister's full name, followed by the initials of his or her religious order.

- John Doe, S.J.
- Lakshmi Patel, C.C.V.I (Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word)

Use a comma after the individual name and, on first reference, the order's initials. Subsequent mentions should refer to "Fr. Doe," "Br. Doe," "Sr. Maria Gonzales," or "Sr. Gonzales."

Confusables

Frequently confused or misused words and phrases that mar your writing—and that spellchecker may not catch.

affect / effect

Affect is most often used as a verb meaning to influence. *Effect*, a noun, means result.

all right / alright

Though widely used, *alright* is still considered nonstandard English.

all together / altogether

All together applies to groups of people or things that are being treated as a group: "We put the holiday decorations all together on one shelf." *Altogether* means entirely: "I am altogether disheartened by the outcome of the contests."

allude / elude

Allude means to make an indirect reference. In his poem "The Second Coming," W.B. Yeats alludes several times to World War I. To *elude* is to evade or escape.

alternate / alternative

Alternate can be a noun, verb, or adjective. As a verb, it means to occur in turn repeatedly. As an adjective, it means every other (as in "alternate Sundays") or taking the place of something ("an alternate route"). An *alternative* suggests another possibility: "He considered veganism a healthy alternative to the standard Western diet."

beside / besides

Beside is a preposition that means next to: “Put the picture frame beside the vase on the shelf.” *Besides* means also or in addition: “Besides, I want to tell you something about that photo.”

capital / capitol

The city or town that is the seat of government is its *capital*: “Boston is the capital of Massachusetts.” The building in which the legislative assembly meets is the *capitol*: “Congress meets in the U.S. Capitol.”

cite / sight / site

Cite is a verb that means to quote or document a source: “She cited more than a dozen references.” *Sight* is a vision or view: “The sight of the Statue of Liberty affects many people deeply.” A *site* is a position or place, e.g., “the site of our future public library.”

complement / compliment

Complement is a noun or verb that refers to something that completes or enhances a whole: “The citrus salad was a delightful complement to the cream soup.” A *compliment* expresses praise or admiration: “Your entire meal was superb; my compliments to the chef.”

comprise / compose

According to the traditional rule, the whole *comprises* the parts, and the parts compose the whole. *Comprise* means to include or consist of: “The exhibition comprises sixteen works of art.” *Compose* means to form the substance: “The exhibition is composed of sixteen works of art.”

concurrent / consecutive

Concurrent means simultaneous or happening at the same time as something else: “The concurrent winter storms developed into a devastating blizzard.” *Consecutive* means successive: “We had seven consecutive weeks of bad weather that season.”

connotation / denotation

A *denotation* describes a word in its literal meaning—what we might call a “dictionary definition.” A *connotation* implies or suggests broader associations we have with a word; what it implies or suggests: “Thoughts of a fireplace connote feelings of warmth for me.”

conscience / conscious

The noun *conscience* refers to one’s moral sense of right and wrong: “Her conscience discouraged her from plagiarizing portions of an obscure text.” The adjective *conscious* usually means awake or aware: “He was stunned but conscious after his fall.”

council / councilor / counsel / counselor

A *councilor* is a member of a *council*—a local government assembly such as the Boston City Council. A *counselor* who gives *counsel*—advice or guidance—might be an attorney, a college admissions advisor, or a supervisor at a camp.

discreet / discrete

Discreet means prudent, circumspect, or modest: “Her discreet handling of an uncomfortable situation put him at ease.” *Discrete* means separate or individually distinct: “Each company in the conglomerate operates as a discrete entity.”

disinterested / uninterested

Disinterested means unbiased or impartial, as on a jury: “We appealed to a disinterested mediator to help settle our dispute.” *Uninterested* means not interested or indifferent to: “They seemed entirely uninterested in our offer.”

elicit / illicit

Elicit is a verb that often means to draw out. *Illicit* is an adjective meaning unlawful. “No matter how hard the reporter tried to elicit a few scandalous stories from her, she kept all knowledge of illicit goings-on to herself.”

emigrant / immigrant

An *emigrant* leaves his or her native country to settle in another: “All her grandparents were emigrants from Hungary.” One emigrates *from* a place and immigrates to another: “Many immigrants to the United States today are native Spanish speakers.”

eminent / immanent / imminent

To be *eminent* is to be outstanding; famous; respected. *Immanent* means inherent. Something *imminent* is impending; about to take place.

farther / further

The former refers to physical distance, the latter to an extension of time or degree. “Those cities are farther apart than I assumed.” “I can’t ponder this problem any further.”

fewer / less

Fewer is an adjective that means smaller in number. It is used with countable objects: “My basket has fewer items than yours.” *Less* means smaller in amount or degree, and used with non-countable nouns (e.g., time; happiness; liquid): “Which bottles hold less liquid?”

figuratively / literally

Figuratively is an adverb that means metaphorically or symbolically: “Frightened, he figuratively jumped out of his skin.” *Literally* is an adverb that means actually: “I’m not exaggerating when I say I literally fell off my chair.” For whatever reasons, “literally” has become so overused as a “sort of vague intensifier” that it is in danger of losing its literal meaning, observes Paul Brians, author of *Common Errors in English Usage*. “It should be used to distinguish between a figurative and a literal meaning of a phrase. It should not be used as a synonym for “actually” or “really.” Don’t say of someone that he ‘literally blew up’ unless he swallowed a stick of dynamite.”

flammable / inflammable

These two words are actually synonyms, both meaning easily set on fire: “The highly flammable (inflammable) fuel was stored safely in a specially built tank.” Use *nonflammable* to mean *not* flammable.

flaunt / flout

To *flaunt* means to show off shamelessly. “Eager to flaunt her sense of style, Helen shopped compulsively, spending much more money than she had.” To *flout* means to show scorn or contempt for: “Lewis joined a fraternity, but soon flouted the house rules.”

foreword / forward

The noun *foreword* means an introductory note or preface: “In my foreword, I explained why I wrote the book.” *Forward* is an adjective or adverb that means toward the front or ahead: “Let’s try to move this conversation forward.”

founder / flounder

Founder means to sink below the surface of the water, out of sight. “The ship foundered after colliding with an iceberg”. *Flounder* means to move about clumsily, or to blunder.

hanged / hung

Hanged is the past tense and past participle of hang, meaning to execute by suspending from the neck: “They hanged the prisoner for treason.” *Hung* is the past tense and participle of hang when the meaning is to suspend from above with no support from below: “I hung the painting on the wall.”

historic / historical

Generally, *historic* refers to what is important in history, while *historical* refers to whatever existed in the past, whether it was important or not: “a historic summit meeting between the prime ministers;” “historical buildings torn down in the redevelopment.”

i.e. / e.g.

Continually confused abbreviations of Latin phrases, *e.g.* stands for *exempli gratia*, or “for example”; *i.e.*, or *id est*, means “that is” or “in other words.” In general usage, both should be followed by a comma.

it’s / its

It’s is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. *Its* is the possessive form of *it*: “The story your book tells is excellent. And its illustrations are superb.”

laid / lain / lay

Laid is the past tense and the past participle of the verb *lay* and not the past tense of *lie*. *Lay* is the past tense of the verb *lie*, and *lain* is the past participle: “He laid his books down and lay down on the couch, where he has lain for an hour.”

lend / loan

Lend and *loan* are both acceptable as verbs in standard English: “Can you lend (loan) me a dollar?” However, only *lend* should be used in figurative senses: “Will you lend me a hand?”

passed / past

Passed is the past tense and past participle of *pass*. If you refer to a distance or period of time before the present, use *past*: “We took a detour so we could drive past our old house”: “We passed several new homes on the street where we lived.”

penultimate

Penultimate means “next to last” or “second to last,” not “the very last.”

precede / proceed

The verb *precede* means to come before. *Proceed* means to move forward.

principal / principle

Principal, a noun, describes someone who holds a top position or plays a singularly important role—the school principal, or a principal partner in a law firm, for example. It can also mean “main” or “chief,” as in: “The principal reason I turned down the job offer was that it would have meant moving to another city.” *Principle* is a noun that means a rule or standard: “They refused to compromise their principles.”

stationary / stationery

Stationary is an adjective that means fixed or unmoving: “The fitness room was packed with stationary bikes.”

Stationery is a noun that refers to paper, pens, pencils, and other writing materials.

their / there / they're

Their is the possessive form of they; *there* refers to place; and *they're* is the contraction of *they are*: “They're going there because their mother wanted them to experience her childhood home, a place she recalls fondly.”

venal / venial

Venal means corruptible; easily bribed. It is an adjective, as is *venial*, which, in Christian theology, describes a slight, pardonable sin. A mortal sin, by contrast, is a serious transgression involving venal or depraved behavior.

who's / whose

Who's is a contraction of *who is* or *who has*. *Whose* is the possessive form of who: “Who's going to figure out whose job it is to clean up this mess?”

your / you're

Your is the possessive form of you; *you're* is the contraction of you are: “If you're planning to spend the night there, be sure to bring your toothbrush.”