

Communications and Content Style Guide for Tallahassee State College Materials

Introduction

This style guide is offered to bring consistency to publications and communications written for and about Tallahassee State College. It is for use by Tallahassee State College faculty and staff members who develop content for newsletters, brochures, guidebooks, online materials, web pages, news releases, and other public information materials. It is not relevant to scholarly, technical, or academic work.

Writing Goals and Principles

We write for many audiences: current and prospective students, parents, media, faculty and staff, policymakers, and members of the community. All communications should be developed with a specific purpose and audience in mind.

With every piece of content, we aim to:

- **Educate.** Tell readers what they need to know by giving them the exact information they need, along with opportunities to learn more.
- **Empower.** Help people understand by using language that informs them and encourages them to make the most of the opportunities and resources available at the College.
- **Guide.** You are a tour guide for our readers. Whether you're leading them through a process or telling them about a resource, communicate in a friendly and helpful way.

To achieve those goals, we make sure our content is:

- **Useful.** Always consider what purpose the content will serve, who is going to read it, and what they need to know.
- **Clear.** Use plain language with familiar words. Avoid jargon and slang. If you need to use an abbreviation or acronym that people may not be immediately familiar with, explain what it means in the first reference.
- **Appropriate.** Write in a way that suits the situation. A press release will be more formal than a caption on social media. Adapt your tone depending on your audience, what you're writing, and what you're writing about.

Voice and Tone

One way we write compelling content is to be aware of our voice and tone.

The words we use help us showcase Tallahassee State College. Our copy should be direct, conversational, and to the point. Our words should convey our commitment to access and affordability, a vibrant student experience, and service to our community.

House Style

This section includes guidelines for grammar, punctuation, and commonly misspelled and misused words.

Academic Degrees

- Academic degrees are capitalized only when the full name of the degree is used, such as Bachelor of Arts in Communications.
- There is no apostrophe in Associate in Arts, Associate in Science, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, or Master of Science, Doctor of Philosophy, or Doctor of Education
- General references are not capitalized: associate, bachelor's, master's, doctoral
- Use an apostrophe (possessive) with bachelor's degree and master's degree. Do not use an apostrophe for an associate degree or doctoral degree.
- When used with a person's name, never use both a courtesy title and a degree
 - Preferred: Dr. Sara Stone
 - Acceptable: Sara Stone, Ph.D.
 - Do not use: Dr. Sara Stone, Ph.D.
- 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 a phrase such as "John Jones, who holds a doctorate in psychology."

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Avoid acronyms and abbreviations to the greatest extent practical. Some readers, especially those outside the realm of our institution and the higher education sector, find unfamiliar acronyms confusing. Therefore, we use them sparingly.

- Where acronyms are necessary, spell out the full term on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses, and use the acronym thereafter. This applies to both common and specialized acronyms. On the website, this means you must do this on every page.
- Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms in headlines (though "TSC" is acceptable in a heading).
- Generally, omit periods in acronyms unless the result would spell an unrelated word. But use periods in most two-letter abbreviations.

Alumni

- "Alumni" is plural. (*TSC's alumni have been very supportive.*)
- "Alumnus" is for a singular male and "alumna" for a singular female. The term "alum" can be used for a singular male or female graduate.
- When identifying someone as an alumnus or alumna of TSC, immediately follow their name with a space, an apostrophe, and the two-numeral class year. (*Sara Stone '04 received the award.*)
- Do not use the slash form alumnus/na. Use alumni to refer to all.
- You are never wrong using alumni for groups, even when only women are included. The use of "alumnae" is generally limited to references to members of women-only organizations, such as sorority alumnae, but even then it is perfectly acceptable to use alumni.

Ampersand

Do not use ampersands (&) in place of “and” except when it is a part of a company’s legal name, such as Proctor & Gamble.

Awards

Capitalize the name of the award. (*Eagle Award*)

Capitalization

- Capitalize “District Board of Trustees,” “Foundation Board of Directors” and “Alumni & Friends Association” when referring specifically to those at TSC.
- Capitalize academic divisions. (*Division of Workforce Development*)
- Use lowercase for academic subjects. (*She teaches history.*) The exception is when the academic subject is a proper noun. (*He teaches English.*)

Certificate

- Capitalize specific certificate program names. (*Sara earned a Certificate in Applied Cybersecurity.*)
- Do not capitalize when using it in a generic manner. (*Sara will receive her certificate from Tallahassee State College.*)

College or college

- Capitalize “College” when referring to TSC specifically. (*The College was established in 1966.*)
- Use “college” when referring to another institution.

Contractions

- “It’s” is the contraction of “it is.” (*It’s a tight budget year.*)
- “Its” is possessive. (*The committee reached its decision yesterday.*)
- “Who’s” is the contraction of “who is.” (*Who’s making this decision?*)
- “Whose” is possessive. (*Whose turn is it to chair the meeting?*)

Dates

A variety of different styles may be used for formal invitations. The following applies to all other print and electronic communications:

- Use 1, 2, 3, and so on rather than using ordinals such as 1st, 2nd, 3rd
 - Correct: *Classes start on August 19*
 - Incorrect: *Classes start on August 19th*
- Do not abbreviate months of the year when they appear by themselves or with a year (August 2024). March, April, May, June, and July are never abbreviated in text, but the remaining months are when they are followed by a date (Jan. 25) and are correctly abbreviated (Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec.).
- If only the month and year are used, do not use commas or the word “of” between the month and the year.
 - Correct: August 2024
 - Incorrect: August of 2024
- Dates within sentences should always be closed by a comma, or a period when at the end of a sentence. (*Convocation will take place on Friday, August 19, on the main campus.*)
- For academic and fiscal years, use 2024-25, not 2024-2025. The single exception to this rule is at the end of a century, such as 1999-2000.

- Decades are plural, not possessive. Use 1990s, 2000s, 2010s or use '90s, '00s, '10s for a shortened version.

Ethnicity

Below is a list of preferred terms, though it is permissible to deviate from this list based on a person's preferred racial and ethnic identification. It is critical to note that these terms should only be used when critical to the content and context.

- Black is preferred and is capitalized. African American and Black are not synonymous, as a person may identify as African, Afro-Latino or Afro-Caribbean, or Haitian American for instance. (*We looked at how to remove barriers for Black students.*)
- Hispanic is preferred but Latinx, Latino, and Latina are also acceptable. While it is common to see the terms used interchangeably, they are not synonymous. Hispanic generally refers to people with origins in Spanish-speaking countries. Latinx, Latino, and Latina generally refer to people with origins in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Asian is preferred and is capitalized. When writing about someone or a group of this background, it usually makes more sense to refer to a specific background, such as Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, or Thai, rather than using the collective noun.
- Biracial and multiracial are acceptable, when relevant, to describe people with more than one racial heritage. When referring to a specific person, be sure to ask how they prefer to be identified.
- International students. The College is proud of its international students who have chosen to travel great distances to receive their education here. Identifying a student as an international student should only be done when relevant to the content.

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

- When used in text, titles are capitalized only if they precede the name of the individual. A title following the name of an individual or a title by itself is not capitalized. (*Jim Murdaugh, president of Tallahassee State College, said that TSC Provost Calandra Stringer will oversee the initiative.*)
- It is preferable for the title to follow the name in text, therefore, the title would not be capitalized.
- Titles are not capitalized when used in conjunction with the name of an office, department, or program. (*John Jones, dean of Communications and Humanities*)

Me, Myself, and I

Each word is a different part of speech and has a different role to play in a sentence.

- When you have a double subject and are going to use the "I" pronoun, always use "and I."
 - Correct: *John and I attended the meeting.*
 - Incorrect: *I and John attended the meeting.*
- When you aren't sure if to use "I" or "me" when you have a double subject, remove the other person from the sentence.
 - Example: *Sara and I like to eat lunch together.* OR *Sara and me like to eat lunch together.*

- Removing Sara: *I like to eat lunch.* OR *Me like to eat lunch.*
- Correct use: *Sara and I like to each lunch together.*
- While “myself” and “me” are both objects, “myself” is what’s called a special object. You should only use “myself” when you are the subject of the sentence. (*I bought myself a snack.*)
 - Correct: *Contact John or me with any questions.*
 - Incorrect: *Contact John or myself with any questions.*

Names of Publications

The names of publications, such as *The Talon* or *The Eyrie*, should be in italics.

Numbers

- In general, spell out numbers one through nine. Use figures for 10 and greater.
- Numbers beginning a sentence should always be spelled out unless they represent a calendar year. Spell out the number, capitalizing its first letter, or restructure the sentence so it does not begin with a number.
- Use commas in all figures and dollar amounts greater than 999.
- Use the words million, billion, and trillion for numbers of one million or greater, unless precise figures are critical. (*The cost of the program is \$2.8 million.*)
- For 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, such as 1.67 rather than “1 and two-thirds.”

Phone Numbers

The format for phone numbers is (850) 201-6200. Use parentheses around the area code. Use a hyphen between the exchange and number.

Punctuation: Commas

Use commas to separate:

- Three or more items in a list. At TSC, we use the Oxford comma, which is the final comma in a list of things. (*Please bring me a pencil, eraser, and notebook.*)
- A series of adjectives of equal importance. (*TSC is a highly ranked, student-centered institution.*)
- Complete sentences that are combined with a conjunction. (*The event is free to attend, but reservations are required.*)
- An introductory phrase from the rest of the sentence. (*While I was studying, the phone rang.*)
- Direct quotes. (*“We are honored to receive this recognition,” Murdaugh said.*)
- Yes, no, and names in a direct address. (*Yes, Mom, I will be home this weekend.*)

Commas should also be used:

- To set off phrases at the end of the sentence that refer back to the beginning or middle. (*John waved at his parents as he received his diploma, laughing joyously.*)
- To set off geographical names (*Tallahassee, Florida, is in the north central part of the state.*)
- To separate independent clauses that are joined by: and, but, for, or, nor, so, and yet. (*The student explained his question, but the professor still didn’t understand.*)
- After introductory clauses that begin with starter words such as: after, although, as, because, if, since, when, and while. (*While I was studying, the phone rang.*) Conversely, do not use a comma after the main clause when a dependent clause follows it. (*He was late for practice because his alarm clock was broken.*)

- After introductory phrases. (*To get a ticket to the play, you'd better come early.*) Use a comma after common introductory words such as *yes, however, and well.* (*Yes, the test is tomorrow morning.*)
- 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.*

Punctuation: Exclamation Points and Question Marks

- An exclamation point (!) is used to end a sentence expressing a strong emotion or command. Exclamation points should be used very sparingly.
- Never end a sentence with more than one exclamation point or question mark.
- Put a question mark inside closing quotation marks when the punctuation applies to the quotation itself (Who said, "Four score and seven years ago"?) and outside if it applies to the whole sentence (She asked, "Who is your professor?").

Punctuation: Quotation Marks

- Double quotation marks are used for direct quotations and titles of compositions such as books, plays, movies, songs, lectures, and TV shows. They also may be used to introduce an unfamiliar term or nickname.
- Single quotation marks are used for a quote within a quote
- Quotation marks are not used for:
 - Taglines
 - Names of events, even if it is a unique event with a proper name
 - Names of magazines, newspapers, handbooks, or reference books
- A period or comma always goes inside closing quotation marks.

RSVP

This is an abbreviation of the French, "repondez s'il vous plait," which means "please respond." Therefore, "please RSVP" is redundant. Just use RSVP with no periods.

Seasons and Semesters

- Capitalize when referring to a specific term (Spring 2024)
- Do not capitalize when referring to the season in a generic manner (*Our enrollment is typically higher in the fall than in the spring.*)

Sports

- Do not capitalize the names of sports such as baseball and basketball, even if the sport is preceded by the name of the school or the school nickname. Examples: TSC baseball, Eagles basketball.
- For sports in which both men and women compete, such as basketball, the gender of the team must always be specified on this first reference. Examples: men's basketball, women's basketball.
- Never use girls or ladies to refer to women's teams. Use women.
- Never use boys to refer to men's teams. Use men.

Tallahassee State College or TSC

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

Technology Terms

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

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

Theatre or Theater

"Theatre TSC!" is the name of the organization. TSC'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. (*I like going to the theater.*)

Time

A variety of styles may be acceptable for formal invitations. For text in print and electronic communications, the following applies:

- Use numbers for times except for noon and midnight, which should be lowercase
- Use a colon to separate hours and minutes
- Do not use ciphers (double zeros) with whole hours
- Use lowercase a.m. and p.m. and always use periods
- Do not use dashes in place to "to" or "through" or "and" or "until" with times of day or days of the week.
 - Correct: The meetings are 9 to 11 a.m., Monday through Friday
 - Incorrect: The meetings are 9-11 a.m., Monday-Friday
- When listing a beginning and ending time separated by the word "to" or when writing a series of times that are all a.m. or p.m., use a.m. or p.m. only once, following the final time listed
 - Correct: Sessions begin at 9:30 a.m and 2 p.m.
 - Correct: Sessions begin at 9:30 and 11:30 a.m.
 - Incorrect: Sessions begin at 9:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

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. (*Dogs, which make great pets, can be expensive.*)

- When it is essential, use that and do not use commas unless they are needed for some other reason. (*Dogs that bark scare me.*)

Additional Word List

These words can be tricky. Here's how we write them.

- add-on (noun, adjective), add on (verb)
- back end (noun), back-end (adjective)
- best seller (noun), best-selling (adjective)
- email
- hashtag
- homepage
- integrate
- internet (never capitalize unless it begins a sentence)
- login (noun, adjective), log in (verb)
- nonprofit
- OK
- online (never capitalize unless it begins a sentence)
- signup (noun, adjective), sign up (verb)
- tweet, retweet
- username
- voicemail
- web address (preferred over URL in College communication)
- website
- WiFi (no dash)

Avoiding Gender Bias in Writing

They, their, and there are generally plural, but are acceptable for use as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun. "They" always takes a plural verb, even when used in a singular context. (*They are planning to transfer to Florida State.*)

We use gender-neutral terms whenever possible.

Use: workforce, employees

Not: mankind

Use: to staff, to run, to operate

Not: to man

Use: caring, nurturing

Not: mothering

Use: police officer, public safety officer

Not: policeman

Use: firefighter

Not: fireman

Use: chair

Not: chairman, chairwoman (unless chairman or chairwoman is in the person's official job title)

Choose words that apply equally to men and women. For example, the definition of an actor is "one who acts," therefore it is not gender-specific.

Instead of: Student actors and actresses will perform the play.

Write: Student actors will perform the play

Instead of: Each alumnus is invited.

Write: All alumni are invited.

Avoid writing that is awkward for the sake of gender equity. This could mean writing in the plural.

Instead of: Each student can choose his/her major.

Write: All students can choose their majors.

Instead of: Each student must meet with his professor.

Write: All students must meet with their professor.

Writing for Accessibility

We are always working to make our content more accessible and usable by the widest possible audience. We write for a diverse audience of readers who interact with our content in different ways.

As you write, consider the following:

- Would this language make sense to someone who doesn't work here?
- Would this language make sense to someone who doesn't go to school here?
- Could someone quickly scan this document and understand the material?

Approval Processes

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 all 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.

In many cases, materials designed for external audiences, such as the media and prospective students, will be submitted for review by the relevant department which will then be edited and formatted by

staff of the Office of Communications and Marketing who will also determine the best distribution pathways and methods in consultation with the content creator.

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@TSC.fl.edu or (850) 201-6049.

This section will be updated when the Student Communications Platform is back in working order.

Additional Questions

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