Style Guide for CU Custom Courses [1]

The University of Colorado Department of Employee Learning and Development follows the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) [2]. For style issues that are not included in this guide, follow the standards in the CMS.

This guide focuses on guidelines for the writing style of custom courses. For formatting issues, please request a script example by emailing system.training@cu.edu [3].

Punctuation

Colons

A colon is used to give emphasis, present dialogue, introduce lists or text, or clarify composition titles. Capitalize the first word after the colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.

When in doubt, apply this test: to merit a colon, the series stem must constitute a grammatically complete sentence. (The preceding sentence is an example of a correctly used colon.)

Example

> **Correct**
> The menagerie included four species: cats, pigeons, newts, and deer ticks.

> **Incorrect**
> The menagerie included: cats, pigeons, newts, and deer ticks.

Colons are also used before bulleted and numbered lists. In the case of lists, the grammatical rules may be a bit more expansive, as in the example below. In this example, the stem before the colon is not a complete sentence, and the list items do not complete the sentence either.

Example

> **Correct**
> House pets may include (but are not limited to):
>
> - Dogs.

- Cats.
- Parrots.
- Gerbils.

Commas

Items in a series are normally separated by commas. When a conjunction joins the last two elements in a series of three or more, a comma (known as the serial comma or the Oxford comma) should appear before the conjunction.

Example

Correct
She took a photograph of her parents, the president, and the vice president.

Incorrect
She took a photograph of her parents, the president and the vice president.

If the last element consists of a pair joined by *and*, the pair should always be preceded by a serial comma and the first *and*.

Example

Correct
My favorite brands of ice cream are Breyers, Haagen Daas, and Ben and Jerry's.

Incorrect
My favorite brands of ice cream are Breyers, Haagen Daas, and Ben, and Jerry's.

Commas should also be used in the following circumstances:

- To separate independent clauses.
- After an introductory clause or phrase.
- To set off nonrestrictive clauses.
- To set off appositives.
- To precede direct quotations.

Commas may also be used to signify a natural pause. These commas are used according to the writer's discretion.

Dashes

Dashes are horizontal lines used as punctuation. Dashes are typically "em" dashes (dashes equivalent to the letter "m" in width) or "en" dashes (equivalent to the letter "n" in width). In general, avoid the use of dashes in ELD courses if there is any other punctuation or word that could be used in its place.

Commas, parentheses, or colons can often be used in place of em dashes. Use the written word "to," as in 9 to 5 or April to May instead of en dashes (for 9-5 or April-May).

Hyphens

A hyphen is a punctuation mark that's used to join words or parts of words. Use a hyphen in a compound modifier. A compound modifier is made up of two or more words that function as one adjective.

Example

Correct
We need a dog-friendly hotel for our vacation.

Incorrect
We need a dog friendly hotel for our vacation.

Don't use a hyphen when the modifier comes after the noun it's describing.

Example

Correct
That sentence is grammatically correct.

Incorrect
That sentence is grammatically-correct.

Don't use a hyphen when you are combining an adverb and a participle.

Example

Correct
This is a poorly designed website.

Incorrect
This is a poorly-designed website.

It is acceptable to use en dashes as hyphens, as in names (Mr. Kovacs-Tamblin) or other hyphenated words (Asian-American).

Parentheses

Parentheses are used to set off material from the surrounding text. They should be used only sparingly in ELD online courses. In most cases, commas should be used rather than parentheses.

Parentheses should not be used to indicate the plural of a noun. The plural implies the singular, so a parenthetical is not necessary. For example, use *Dealers* and *Installers*, instead of *Dealer(s)* and *Installer(s)*.

Periods

A period marks the end of a declarative or an imperative sentence. Between sentences, it is followed by a single space.

When an entire independent sentence is enclosed in parentheses or square brackets, the period belongs inside the closing parenthesis or bracket. When the matter in parentheses or brackets, even a grammatically complete sentence, is included within another sentence, the period belongs outside.

Quotation Marks

Periods and commas are placed inside quotation marks, whether double or single. Other punctuation, such as colons, semi-colons, and question marks are placed outside of quotation marks, unless that punctuation is part of a quote, such as a quoted question.

Example

Correct
He asked, "what are you doing today?"

Incorrect
He asked, "what are you doing today"?

When a direct quote is included mid-sentence, capitalize the first letter of the quote only if it is a complete sentence.

Example

Correct
My mentor said, "Good deeds are better than wise sayings," and I try to live by this quote.

Incorrect
My mentor said, "good deeds are better than wise sayings," and I try to live by this quote.

Semicolons

Use a semicolon to join two related independent clauses in place of a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet). Also, use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb. Examples of conjunctive adverbs include however, furthermore, additionally, and nonetheless.

Example

Correct

This assignment is not graded; however, we still need to submit it.

Incorrect
This assignment is not graded, however, we still need to submit it.

Slashes (/)

The "forward slash" (/) has many uses. Refer to the <u>CMS</u> [2] for all uses.

For ELD courses, avoid the use of forward slash to abbreviate words (write out "with" or "because" instead of "w/" or "b/c")

Trademarks, copyrights, etc.

Brand names that are trademarks should be capitalized if they must be used. Substitute a generic term when possible (such as "facial tissue" instead of "Kleenex," or "search engine" instead of "Google.")

Although the symbols ® and TM (for registered and unregistered trademarks, respectively) often accompany trademark names on product packaging and in promotional material, there is no legal requirement to use these symbols, and they should be omitted from ELD courses.

Grammar, Spelling, and Syntax

Acronyms

All acronyms should be spelled out at first occurrence as a courtesy to those readers who might not easily recognize them.

When the indefinite article is used before an acronym, the choice of form (a or an) depends on pronunciation, not on spelling; in other words, use a if the acronym begins with a consonant sound, and an if it begins with a vowel sound.

Capitalization (of titles, etc.)

CU branding standards state that university is capitalized when used as part of the name University of Colorado (or the name of another university). However, the university branding standards keep university lowercase in all other uses. (In other words, write "the university," not "the University" in reference to CU.)

ELD courses are not bound by CU branding regulations for color use or fonts, etc., but we generally abide by the university's standards for logos, capitalization, and naming conventions for the campuses.

Lists (ordered, unordered, within a sentence or not)

Lists may be either run into the text or be set vertically (outline style). Short, simple lists are usually better run-in, especially if the introduction and the items form a complete grammatical sentence.

Lists that are relatively long, or that contain items of several levels should be set vertically. In ELD courses, lists that contain key information can be set vertically so they stand out and are easy to read.

List items include closing punctuation if they consist of complete sentences on their own or when added to the stem. Avoid the use of commas and semicolons at the end of list items.

Example

Correct
I love Colorado because of its:

- Scenery.
- People.
- Culture.

Incorrect
I love Colorado because of its:

- Scenery
- People
- Culture

Ordered Lists

Ordered list items are arranged in a specific order. Ordered list items are numbered.

Example

Here are the five largest cities in the United States, in order of size:

1. New York City
2. Los Angeles
3. Chicago
4. Houston
5. Philadelphia

Unordered Lists

Unordered list items can be written in any order. Unordered list items are typically marked with bullets.

Example

Before leaving on the trip, you will need to pack certain items:

- Your identification
- Clothing
- Shoes
- Toiletries
- Gifts for your hosts

Numbers (or numerals)

Always spell out numbers at the beginning of sentences. Within a sentence, spell out numbers zero through nine and use numerals for numbers 10 and above.

- Nineteen shades were ordered for the entire house. Five shades were for the living room.
- Out of the entire order of 19 shades, five were for the living room.

Additionally, avoid stating the number of things when it is not needed for context or understanding. As soon as you state the number, it may change in the future and render the content incorrect.

Example

Correct
Follow these tips for better writing.

Incorrect
?Follow these five tips for better writing.

Pronouns

Unless the subject's gender is specified, use "they" as a singular pronoun. Avoid "he/she" or "he or she." If a name is provided, but the gender is not specified, the pronoun used is at the discretion of the ID.

Example

Correct
If a student does not study, they will likely fail.

Incorrect
If a student does not study, he or she will likely fail.

Spacing for Units of Measurement

The International System of Units (SI) prescribes inserting a space between a number and a unit of measurement and between units in compound units, but never between a prefix and a base unit.

Example

Correct

- 5.0 cm
- 45 kg
- 32 °C
- 20 kNm

Incorrect

- 5.0cm, 5.0 c m
- 45kg, 45 k g
- 32°C, 32° C
- 20kNm, 20 k Nm

The only exceptions to this rule are the SI symbolic notation of angles: degree (30°), minute of arc (30?), and second of arc (30?).

Writing

Active Voice

Active voice is a style of writing that puts the subject at the beginning of the sentence, followed by an action, and then the object that receives the action.

Subject + Action + Object = Active Voice

The point of active voice is to highlight the logical flow of the action, from the subject (or doer) to the object (or receiver) of the action. Using this style in your writing will make your sentences clear and direct, which are important components of academic writing.

Examples

Active

Ben rode his bike to the store.

I completed my novel today.

Passive

The bike was ridden by Ben to the store.
My novel was completed today.

Bold

In the script document, use boldface type to highlight new or important terms on the page, or to provide strong emphasis.

Italics

Italics are used to provide slight emphasis (as opposed to bold, which is used for strong emphasis), titles of works, foreign words or phrases, and stylized text. Italics may be used when appropriate; however, note that their inclusion may alter the meaning of a sentence. For accessibility purposes, do not use italics on blocks of text that are longer than 100 characters.

Emphasis: Italics Versus Bold

Italics symbolize a slight emphasis or a clarification, while bold symbolizes a strong emphasis.

For instance:

- Appropriate use of italics: I have interviewed plenty of babysitters, but I haven't found a *reliable* babysitter.
- Appropriate use of bold: Do **not** touch the hot stove.

Underlining

To avoid confusion, only use underlined text to indicate a link or email in the text.

Example

Correct

"For more information, <u>visit our website</u> or email <u>info@ourwebsite.com</u> [4]." (The underlined segments represent active links.)

Incorrect

"The three types of weapons in fencing are <u>foil</u>, <u>epée</u> and <u>saber</u>."
"<u>Always</u> stop at a red light." (Underlining is used incorrectly in these examples to show key terms or indicate tone.)

Notes, Cautions, and Warnings

Notes are used to add information that is not essential for understanding a main topic's text. A note is a helpful hint, sometimes a tip, to help the reader work more efficiently. Use one convention for presenting a note. If more than one item is included, present them as Notes. See examples below:

Note: It is preferred to have notes presented consistently throughout a document when necessary.

Notes:

- Follow these guidelines.
- Document any exceptions you may find.
- Remember to save your changes.

Cautions are used to advise readers to pay close attention in order to minimize risk or damage.

Warnings are used to indicate impending danger or the possibility of serious harm.

Phrasing

Abbreviations

In general, avoid abbreviations unless the abbreviation is the most commonly used form of the word. For instance:

- AM and PM should be used rather than "ante meridiem" and "post meridiem."
- Mr., Ms., and Dr. should be used rather than "mister," "miss," and "doctor" when used as proper nouns.

Avoid using abbreviations for the Latin expressions of i.e., e.g., and etc. The abbreviation of i.e. means *in other words*, e.g. means *for example*, and etc. means *the rest*. In American English, there is always a comma immediately after the abbreviations i.e. and e.g.

Example

Correct
Before we bake the cake, we need to go to the store to get the ingredients, such as flour and sugar.

Incorrect
Before we bake the cake, we need to go to the store to get flour, sugar, etc.

Avoid the use of "i.e." and "e.g." Instead, use "in other words" and "for example." If these abbreviations must be used, be sure to use the correct form: "i.e." means "in other words" while "e.g." means "for example." These terms and abbreviations are not interchangeable.

Unless specified in this guide, whether an abbreviation is the most commonly used form of a word is up to the discretion of the instructional designer.

Phrases to Avoid

Avoid the use of non-specific words, such as "things" or "stuff." Instead, state the specific items to which you are referring.

Avoid ending a sentence in a preposition.

Style

Write succinctly. If a sentence can accurately be conveyed in fewer words, remove unnecessary words.

Example

Correct
The truth is that I do not like vegetables.

Incorrect
The honest truth is that I really do not like vegetables very much.

Considerations for Second-Language English Speakers

Second-language English speakers often feel intimidated if they do not know the rules. Some things in the English language can be confusing when initially encountered. Such confusion interrupts the reader's focus on the content and switches it to the term or convention being used, making comprehension difficult.

- Use active voice.
- Keep the language as simple and concise as possible.
- Avoid using contractions. Spell words out, such as *do not* instead of *don't*.
- Avoid i.e., e.g., and etc.
- Stick to common English words and avoid phrases, although used in English, that come from other languages, such as *via*, *ad hoc*, and *vis-à-vis*. Use plain English, such as *through, when necessary*, and *face-to-face,* respectively.
- Some words are more complicated than necessary, such as *utilize* where *use* is preferred and often more accurate. You *use* items as they were intended; you *utilize* items when you create a new or nontraditional job for them.

Media Requirements

Choosing Appropriate Media

The media you choose for your course should be:

- **Applicable and relevant to the instructional content on the page** (Clark, 2008). A decorative (extraneous) image, such as an image of a butterfly for a lesson on environmental health, counteracts the learner's ability to comprehend the pertinent content (Mayer, 2009).
- **Enhance the learning topic.** "Meaningful learning occurs when learners build systematic connections between … [words and images]" (Mayer, 2009).
- **Accessibility compliant.** Link to designing and developing accessible content: https://www.w3.org/WAI/design-develop/ [5]. Include descriptive alt tag statements (Webaim, 2015). Include alternatives for time-based media such as video or audio (such as closed-captioning, transcriptions, text alternatives, etc.) (Webaim, 2015). Tool to help create alt tags: https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/ [6]
- **Sized appropriately**. Small images can rarely be upsized to produce a quality image for your course. Oversized images, on the other hand, can be reduced in size with no loss of resolution. Always err on the side of images that are "too big."
- **High quality**. Images that are fuzzy, blurry, or unclear cannot be accepted. Here are some tips for producing higher-quality images:
    - Provide originals whenever possible.
    - Do not reproduce images directly from Microsoft Office (MSO) products such as Word or PowerPoint. (MSO greatly reduces the original quality).
- **Copyright permitted**. Do you have the right to use the audio, image, or video media? Here are some things you can do to ensure you have permission to use the media:
    - Personally create original media.
    - Obtain copyright-free media managed with a Creative Commons permit.
    - Buy a license to use the media.

Images

The images category includes all static visual media types such as photographs, graphics (drawings, illustrations, diagrams), and screenshots (screen captures).

Photographs

- Use the JPEG (.jpg) format for photographs.
- If you "downsize" your original JPEG to conform to our standards, please do so with the highest compression quality available in your software.
- Never save, copy, or send an image that originated in a Microsoft Office application such as Word or PowerPoint. Microsoft applications greatly compress the images imported into them, resulting in a loss of image quality.

Minimum standards for photographs:

- Format: .jpg (highest quality compression)
- Image displayed up to ½ of course page
  - If landscape, then minimum width = 350 px dpi = 72
  - If portrait, then minimum height = 260 px dpi = 72
- Image displayed full size of course page or used as image map
  - If landscape, then minimum width = 880 px dpi = 72
  - If portrait, then minimum height = 260 px dpi = 72
- Clear and sharp quality

Graphics

Graphics such as drawings, illustrations, and diagrams are best displayed in scalable vector graphics (SVG) format. SVG, PNG, and GIF (.gif) all support transparency. SVG provides extremely sharp and resizable graphics. The PNG format produces a clean edge where the image meets the transparency, but it must be sized according to its intended use.

The SVG format:

- Supports a variety of colors, including gradations.
- Creates very small file sizes that are sharp even when zoomed in.
- Yields the highest quality image regardless of screen resolution.
- Supports transparent backgrounds.
- Supports interactive animation.

The 24-bit PNG format:

- Supports CU branded colors (8-bit PNG does not).
- Creates small file sizes when used for graphics.
- Yields higher quality image than GIF.
- Supports photo-quality images.
- Supports transparent backgrounds.

The GIF format:

- The 256-color GIF supports CU branding (other GIF color selections may not).
- Creates small file sizes.
- Yields lower quality image than PNG.
- Supports solid colors and gradations only (unlike photographs).
- Supports transparent backgrounds.
- Supports simple animation.
- GIF edges are jagged.

Minimum standards for graphics:

- Formats:.png (24 bit) (preferred), .gif (perceptual, 256 colors).
- .png or .gif image displayed up to ½ of course page.
  - If landscape, then minimum width = 350 px dpi = 72
  - If portrait, then minimum height = 260 px dpi = 72
- .png or .gif image displayed full size of course page or used as image map.
  - If landscape, then minimum width = 880 px dpi = 72
  - If portrait, then minimum height = 260 px dpi = 72
- Clear and sharp quality
- Includes transparent background when required.

Screenshots and Screen Captures

Though the 256-color GIF format is acceptable, screen capture (or screenshot) images display best in 24-bit PNG format due to their clean edges. The same features apply to screen capture file formats as those listed above for graphic images.

- To get good screen captures: Use a monitor with a clear and sharp display.
- Set your monitor resolution to get the best possible display for your monitor type, CRT or LCD, before capturing screenshots.
- Use a specialized screen capture tool, such as SnagIt (Windows) or Snapz Pro (Mac), instead of standard keyboard shortcuts.
- Save as 24-bit PNG (non-destructive format) – not JPEG (destructive format) (Arandilla R, 2011).
- Save unedited using the ELD naming convention: [my_filename]_orig.png.
- Save the edited version (24-bit PNG), full-sized, as captured using the ELD naming convention: [my_filename]_edit.png.
- Turn off image compression in the MS-Word script.
  - File > Options > Advanced > Image Size and Quality
  - Set "default target output to:" 220ppi
  - Insert the edited version into the context of your course script.
  - Click on the imported image and adjust its sharpness and contrast using MS-Word's Picture Corrections tool in the course script.
  - Send both the original and edited files, along with the course script, to ELD.

Minimum standards for screen captures:

- Formats: gif (perceptual, 256 colors), .png (24 bit).
- 800x600x72dpi minimum (preferably 1024x800).
- Clear and sharp quality.

Video

WCAG2.0 A and AA Accessibility compliance is required for all videos incorporated into custom courses. For details about video description and how to meet compliance criteria, please visit digitalgov.gov.

Minimum standards for video:

- Formats: mp4, .webm, .webmv, .ogg, .ogv
- Widths: 560, 640, 768
- Skillsoft-hosted
- Must include closed captioned file (.src, .vtt)
- Must include associated, time-coded transcript file (.vtt)
- May include audio description file, if required or recommended by law (video or .vtt alternative)

Minimum standards for audio:

- Formats: mp3, .ogg, .oga, .wav
- Must include associated, time-coded transcript file (.vtt)
- May include audio description files, if required or recommended by law (.vtt)

Groups audience:
Employee Services

Source URL: https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/professional-growth-training/training-services/skillsoft/style-guide-cu-custom

Links
[1] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/professional-growth-training/training-services/skillsoft/style-guide-cu-custom [2] https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html
[3] mailto:system.training@cu.edu.?subject=Script%20example%20request [4] mailto:info@ourwebsite.com [5] https://www.w3.org/WAI/design-develop/
[6] https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/