

NOVA EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDELINES

WHAT ARE EDITORIAL GUIDELINES?

Consistency is an important element of branding. Along with tone, voice, and visual guidelines, NOVA’s editorial style is part of how we achieve the same language across all channels and in every context — in ways that resonate with NOVA’s many audiences.

Think of these editorial guidelines as the rulebook for writing about NOVA. And as with any rulebook, there may be situations where you can’t find the answer you’re looking for. When in doubt, contact the [NOVA communications office](#).

Brand Pillars

As a reminder, NOVA’s six brand pillars are our foundation and provide a guide for your content when creating copy and/or visuals. As you develop written content for NOVA, aim to bring at least one of these pillars to life.

- **A Springboard to Opportunity.** We offer more than 130 degree and certificate programs.
- **Experts in the Classroom and in the Field.** Our award-winning faculty are highly qualified and credentialed by some of the top universities in the nation.
- **Relevant and In-Demand.** Programs in sought-after industries such as Cybersecurity, Healthcare and Information Technology showcase our commitment to evolving with the needs of today’s workforce.
- **Big School Experience, Small School Feel.** As a multiple campus institution, we offer a large number and variety of excellent programs, substantial services and resources.
- **Real-World Diversity.** We are the ninth most internationally diverse college in the nation with students from more than 180 countries.
- **Outstanding Value.** Low tuition rates and transfer opportunities allow students to save thousands on their educations.

AP Stylebook

The AP Stylebook, or “AP Style” for short, is the official editorial standard that NOVA follows. It’s a large and comprehensive guide that spells out all the fine details of editorial style. It’s worth having a copy for your unit or office to share for a reference, but here are some of the most common elements of AP style to keep in mind:

NUMBERS AND NUMERALS

- In general, spell out numerals one through nine, use the actual digits for 10 and above.
Example: *The basketball team finished second in the league, winning 12 of its last 14 games.*
- In a series, write about the biggest items to smallest in descending order.
Examples: *We added three parking spots and two benches in front of the building. We have a fleet of 10 buses and two golf carts for campus use.*
- Use actual digits whenever preceding a unit of measure or referring to ages of people, animals, events or things. This also goes for numbers in tables, and when listing out statistics and sequential forms.
Example: *Tanya, a 4-year-old girl in the child development center, needs 6 ounces of medicine each day.*
- Do not use digits to begin a sentence, unless you’re referring to a year.
Examples: *Twelve days were added to the semester. 2016 was a historic year for NOVA.*
- Add an ‘s’ but no apostrophe to make a number plural.
Example: *NOVA was founded in the 1960s.*
- Use the % sign when paired with a numeral, with no space, in most cases.
Example: *Rachel received a 90% on her final exam.*

AGES

- If age is used as an adjective before a noun or as a substitute for a noun, use a hyphen.
Example: *An 18-year-old student.* But, *The student is 18 years old.*

ACADEMIC DEGREES

When referring to a generic degree:

- The correct term is associate degree; in short form, associate isn’t used as a possessive.
Example: *Many students complete an associate degree in two years.*
- The guidance is different for bachelor’s or master’s degrees. They are used as a possessive.
Examples: *He has an associate degree in computer science, a bachelor’s in cybersecurity and a master’s in computer networks and systems.*

- If mentioning a degree is necessary to establish someone's credentials, AP preference is to avoid abbreviations:
Example: *Alexander Brown, who has a master's degree in organizational development, contributed to the research study.*
- If you must use abbreviations such as B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. use it only after a full name, never just after the last name.
Example: *Malia Tompkins, Ph.D., will retire in December.*
- When used after a name, use commas to set off an academic abbreviation.
Example: *Andrea Wise, Ph.D., spoke at the conference.*
- It is acceptable to use either bachelor's degree or bachelor's.
Example: *She plans on earning a bachelor's in math education.* OR *She plans on earning a bachelor's degree in math education.*
- It is acceptable to use either master's degree or a master's.
Example: *Some states require counselors to complete a master's.* OR *Some states require counselors to complete a master's degree.*
- The correct punctuation is Ph.D. for singular and Ph.D.s is the plural.
Example: *More students are considering earning a Ph.D. in computer science. The country needs more Ph.D.s in computer science.*

BULLET POINTS

AP uses dashes in a list, but many organizations substitute bullet points instead. Punctuation for lists is: Capitalize the first letter after the bullet or dash and use periods at the end of each item whether or not it is a complete sentence.

Example:

- *Try to use this construction every time.*
- *Not just sometimes.*
- *Every time.*

COLONS, COMMAS AND QUOTATIONS

- Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence.
Example: *The professor reiterated: No excuses will be accepted for late submission of the final paper.*
- AP style has many specific guidelines for the use of commas but clarity is the paramount rule: If a comma does not contribute to the clarity of a sentence, it does not belong there. If leaving out the comma leads to confusion or misinterpretation, use the comma. (See NOVA internal guidelines for serial comma usage.)
- Sentence-ending punctuation has a number of rules. When punctuating a quotation, the period and the comma go inside the quotation marks. Always.
Example: *"I am excited to begin class," the professor said. "I believe we will all find it very rewarding."*
- The dash, the semicolon, the colon, generally go outside the quotation marks.
Example: *After a difficult first day of class the teaching assistant told himself "Stay calm"; after all, it was just the start of a long semester.*
- The question mark and the exclamation point go inside the quotation marks when they are part of the quoted material.
Example: *I heard the student ask, "When does registration start for next semester?"*
- But they go outside when they apply to the entire sentence.
Example: *I was so excited to hear the professor say "I am canceling the final exam"!*

NAMES

AP style is to use only last names on second reference. However, if you are writing about two people with the same last name, use the first and last names to distinguish between the two on subsequent references.

Example: *Javier Espinoza is no stranger to NOVA. In 2012, Espinoza completed his associate degree in accounting.*

Example: *Javier Espinoza believes his advisor Julieta Espinoza, no relation, played a key role in his success at NOVA. Julieta Espinoza says that it was a team effort.*

SPACING

Forget the old two-spaces rule from typewriter days. There is only one space between sentences.

TITLES

- In general, AP confines capitalization to formal titles used directly before a person's name.
Example: *Vice President Mary Jones was recently named to the board of directors.* Lowercase otherwise: *He is vice president of Widgets International.*
- When it comes to academic titles, the rule is to capitalize and spell out when they precede a name.
Example: *Chancellor Sara Adams delivered the convocation address. We spoke about the event with department Chairman Chris*

Jones. Lowercase otherwise: *He remained department chairman for many years.*

A FEW TECHNOLOGY TERMS

- It's iPhone unless it starts a sentence; then it's iPhone.
- Smartphone and smartwatch are one word; but smart home and smart car remain two.
- Cellphone is one word.
- It's iPad unless it starts a sentence; then it's iPad.
- It's iOS unless it starts a sentence; then it's iOS.
- It's eBay unless it starts a sentence; then it's eBay.

NOVA Style

The NOVA Style is our customized supplement to AP guidelines. Sometimes, these guidelines may deviate from AP style. All content published on NOVA's website must adhere to these references in order to present a consistent voice. (The NOVA home page and Events Calendar are exceptions.)

Achieving the Dream

When used in abbreviated form ATD is all uppercase.

Example: *ATD*

Capitalization of Campus

When used with a specific location the term "campus" is a formal designation and should be uppercase.

Example: *Alexandria Campus*

Capitalization of College

When used alone "college" should be lowercase unless it is part of a proper noun.

Examples: *he is going to college; the College; Northern Virginia Community College*

Capitalization of Words in Headlines and Headings

All words should be uppercase except: *a, an, and, as, at, but, by, for, if, in, of, on, or, the, to.*

Case Style

When referencing these college services use the following case style - NOVA all uppercase, one word:

eMEETING

eNOVA

myNOVA

NOVAaccess

NOVACard

NOVAConnect

NOVATrak

Name of College:

Never use "NVCC" when referring to the college; use "NOVA" or "Northern Virginia Community College."

Commas in a Series

Do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series.

Dates

Spell out days of the week, abbreviate months.

email

Lowercase, no dash.

EMPLID

All uppercase, it's considered a reference not an actual word.

Faculty and Staff Web Pages Categories to Include

Name (hyperlink to their personal NOVA website if they have one) | Discipline | Phone | Email

* Group people by Discipline

FAQ not FAQs

It is an abbreviation for Frequently Asked Questions (the “s” at the end is implied).

Guaranteed Admission Agreements

Accepted form with an -s on the end of Agreements, NOT on the end of Admission.

home page

Two words, not one.

More Than vs. Over

AP lifted the ruling on the use of “more than” versus “over”; choose whichever term you prefer as long as you use it consistently throughout the same story.

Names

Do not use titles like Mr. and Mrs. in front of names, and do not use middle initials. The use of Dr. before a name is an exception.

PDF

All uppercase; an abbreviation for Portable Document Format. It is a file format that allows a document to be shared among several types of computers without losing its formatting.

Example: Faculty Handbook (PDF); File requires Adobe Reader to open.

Semester/Sessions

Use Uppercase.

Example: Fall Semester 2010; Spring Semester 2010; exception Summer Session (not Semester).

Spacing

Use single spaces after punctuation. The practice of using two spaces after punctuation was a technique used when text was written on a typewriter. Computers have made the use of two spaces obsolete.

Student ID

Use in place of the term EMPLID.

Telephone Number

Use periods between the numbers, not dashes.

Example: 703.323.3000

Time Reference

Use noon and midnight, not 12 noon, 12:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. Do not use “o’clock.” Lowercase and use periods with a.m. and p.m.

Use a single dash between times.

Example:

HOURS

Monday – Thursday: 9:00 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Friday: Noon – 5:00 p.m.

Wait List

Two words.

website

One word, all lowercase