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Introduction

Purpose

This style guide will help UM writers and editors to write consistently and considerately. Consistency in our word choice, style, grammar, voice and tone contribute to the professionalism and credibility of our work, and helps us to earn readers' trust. We also want our writing to be inclusive and respectful of readers and people we are writing about.

Style and usage guidelines

This style guide is a tool for maintaining consistency and inclusive language across the university. These guidelines outline style for the UM website, our news vehicles and stories, and for formal documents, including event programs, administrative memos and messages from the President.

For spelling, refer to the [Canadian Oxford Dictionary](#).

For items that do not appear here, defer to Canadian Press (CP) style:
<https://stylebooks.thecanadianpress.com/>

Inclusive language

Language is powerful. Inclusive communication respects and includes all communities and is free from sexist, racist, homophobic, and other discriminatory language. An inclusive environment has measures in place to not inadvertently exclude groups, and it avoids stereotypes, loaded words and patronizing descriptors. See the [Inclusive communication](#) section of this guide.

The UM brand

Universities have stories to tell: about who they are, their values and their priorities. At the University of Manitoba, we are all a part of that story.

As a communicator for the university, your visual and written storytelling efforts are vital to the successful implementation of our identity and to inspire alignment across communications. Using these guidelines, you'll be equipped to help our institution stand proudly apart from other institutions.

[New UM logo and refreshed brand identity](#)

Every item we create is an opportunity to build our reputation, and to shape the story we tell about ourselves to the world. As we create marketing and communications materials, it is essential that the visual elements be used consistently to build recognition of our brand while maintaining the integrity of our reputation.

For templates and more on UM logo and brand and how they are employed, please see our [UM brand guidelines](#).

UM Today news site, UM website

As the primary UM news vehicle, along with the new website, *UM Today* the news site comprises a main institutional news channel run by MCO, along with *UM Today* network pages operated by various units, faculties and departments. Unit network pages may feed the main page and website. See also [UM Today the Magazine \(alumni channel voice\)](#).

Audience: Though audience varies by channel, our readers include faculty and staff, students, alumni, the general public and our wider community and stakeholders.

Voice: Welcoming, informative, interesting, intelligent, accessible.

Overall approach is a journalistic one, guided by Canadian Press (CP) style as defined by its style guide: uncluttered and readable, favouring active verbs and streamlined sentences.

Faculty, unit or other PSA/announcements use an objective news story voice rather than “announcement”-type stories from one particular faculty or person. Attitude of faculty towards a new initiative, etc., can be included within the story in a quote from faculty dean or other appropriate official or person.

Example:

Use this: “A new program has been created by Rady Faculty of Health Sciences. Brian Postl, dean of the faculty, says, “We are very pleased that ...”

Not this: “The Rady Faculty of Health Sciences is pleased to announce a new program ...”

Style variations

As outlined in this guide, there are minor differences in style between the UM website, our news vehicles and stories, which generally follow journalistic style and the *Canadian Press Style Guide*, and formal documents, which include event programs, administrative memos and messages from the President. See also [UM Today the Magazine \(alumni channel voice\)](#).

Note on formal documents and announcements

Formal documents and occasional direct messages and formal announcements from the President or a VP addressing the entire university community, alumni or the general public may use an announcement style. Donor Relations and promotional materials are treated as formal documents. For more, see [Formal documents and announcements](#) in this guide.

UM Style Guide

Abbreviations

Use only abbreviations that are familiar to general readers.

For Canadian provinces and territories, use abbreviations after the name of a town or city: Elbow, Sask., River Falls, Man. and Ear Falls, Ont. (same for U.S. towns and cities).

Generally, do not abbreviate names of countries, provinces or states when standing alone or used adjectivally. The abbreviations U.K., U.S., B.C and P.E.I. may be used adjectivally to reflect spoken usage.

Abbreviate numbered addresses: Ave., Blvd., Hwy., Rd., St., etc. Spell out general locations: as on King Street, down Portage Avenue. A single letter is followed by a period: King St. E.

See also [Degrees section](#) in this guide.

Acronyms

Our goal is to be easily understood by a wide audience, which means that specialized acronyms should rarely be used alone. Use the full name of the organization, department or program in the first citation, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Then use the acronym thereafter.

Exception: Acronyms that are well known by the general Canadian public are acceptable and don't need to be spelled in full. Do not use periods within well-known acronyms.

In headlines, avoid all but very familiar acronyms.

Examples: RCMP, CPR, CBC, GPA

Addresses, physical and email

When writing out a full physical address for directions, make it as clear as possible so that anyone inside or outside UM can find their destination. For mailing addresses, add city, province and postal code. Write email addresses in all lower case letters.

Example:

Human Resources
309 Administration Bldg.
University of Manitoba
[204-474-9952](tel:204-474-9952)

Fax: 204-474-7505
hريس@umanitoba.ca

Creating hyperlinks for email addresses and phone numbers

Email address: Highlight full email address text, then click on the hyperlink button and type <mailto:hris@umanitoba.ca> in the field that pops up.

Use a line break (shift-enter) between each line of the address and a paragraph break (enter) between “Canada” and the phone number.

Phone numbers: Highlight full phone number, then click on the hyperlink button and type tel:204-474-7505 in the field that pops up.

Alumni, alumna, alumnus (and emeriti)

“Alumni” is a plural word. For the singular, you may use male and female forms: “alumnus” (male), “alumna” (female). “Alumnae” may be used for a group of female graduates if the gender of the graduates is important to the story.

To align with our guidelines on inclusive language for [gender and sexuality](#), “alum” is a good option as a gender-neutral singular form, even in more formal contexts.

Alum, alums, graduates and grads are acceptable in casual contexts and social media.

“Emeriti” is plural. In the singular, use “professor emeritus” for a male and “professor emerita” for a female, unless “emeritus” has been indicated as a personal preference, since it is frequently used for both.

Ampersands

Do not use ampersands (&), except in proper names. Avoid using ampersands in headlines online, since it will

Proper names at UM that include an ampersand:

English, Film, Theatre & Media

Archives & Special Collections

Awards

Capitalize award names, and use lower case for any generic use of the word.

Examples: Governor General’s Award for Excellence, and “The awards were presented by the Governor General.”

Bison/Bisons

UM uses Bisons, with an “s.” See the [Bisons usage guide \(2019\) for more](#).

Examples: the University of Manitoba Bisons; the Bisons; Bisons Football; the University of Manitoba Bisons football team; Bisons women’s basketball team; the Bisons’ championship (possessive with an apostrophe after the “s”).

Books and movie titles

Books and movie titles are capitalized and in italics. Use quotation marks for song titles.

Examples: the books *Remembrance of Things Past* and *Two Solitudes*; the song, “Happy,” by Pharrell Williams

Capitalization

Use capitalization sparingly. The UM website and *UM Today* use sentence case for all headlines and headings.

We do not capitalize people’s positions or department names in stories, following CP Style.

However, positions and departments can be capitalized in department or faculty email signatures, as well as in department or faculty listings, and in formal documents such as messages from the President or other administrative memos and announcements.

On first reference, use proper name. On second reference, use lower case for words like university, institute, faculty or centre. Exception: [Formal documents and announcements](#).

See also [Departments and units: capitalization](#).

Commas

Use commas between elements of a series, but no final comma before the “and,” “or” or “nor” unless it avoids confusion (CP style). Do not use the serial (Oxford) comma. Retain commas in proper names: “Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources”

Example: She had flowers, books, baskets and radios for sale.

Exception: Breakfast includes juice of your choice, eggs, and pancakes and syrup.

Compound words

Check spelling. Some compound words are written as one word, some as two words, and some with a hyphen.

Computer terms

Capitalize proper nouns: World Wide Web, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter.

Other correct spellings: home page, website, email, chat room, webcast, podcast, internet, tweet.

Dashes

Use an em dash (—) when using a dash in text, rather than a hyphen (-) or the short en dash (–), which is used to represent a span or range of numbers, dates or time. Depending on the context, the en dash is read as “to” or “through.” No spaces before or after dashes.

Dates and times

For specific dates, abbreviate months. Spell out when standing alone or alone with a year.

Examples: The event takes place on Thursday, Jan. 6. January 2014 was cold.

To indicate duration in stories or other contexts, such as office hours in Drupal contact blocks, follow CP style and write it out:

Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Departments and units: capitalization

In stories, to avoid excessive capitalization and following CP style, use lower case for departments.

Examples: the department of anthropology. Capitalize proper nouns; i.e., department of English, French, German, etc.

No capitalization is needed for the department name as part of someone's title/description: professor Lori Wilkinson, sociology; David Churchill, history.

Capitalize associations, institutes and centres as proper nouns. Capitalize departments, units and associations with a physical location or providing a service to students or faculty. These include Student Accessibility Services, First Year Centre.

Do not capitalize internal and administrative units such as security services, physical plant, external relations team.

Exceptions: Departments and programs can be capitalized in formal documents or event programs; program names are capitalized in the UM program finder on the new website. Program names may be capitalized on department and faculty webpages.

Directions (North, South, East and West)

Capitalize when it's a proper non. When using a direction such as "western" adjectivally with a common noun rather as part of a proper noun, use lower case.

Examples: They walked east, but he went to look for work in the East. Eastern Canada. The West, Western Canadians.

Ellipses

Include spaces around an ellipsis unless the ellipsis ends the sentence, in which case it should end with a period.

Examples: "Don't wait ... connect with us today in whatever way suits you."

"Don't wait...."

Exclamation marks

Avoid overusing this strong mark of punctuation. Use it to denote great surprise, such as a command, deep emotion, emphasis or sarcasm.

Examples: We won! Take aim! Fire! Never!

Faculty, school, centre

Capitalize faculties, schools, centres, institutes and quasi-independent units. Lower case for any generic use.

Examples: the Faculty of Law (uppercase), Mauro Centre; the faculty, the centre; law students; a partnership between the faculties of Medicine, Dentistry and Law.

Natural Resources Institute; School of Medical Rehabilitation; the Centre on Aging.

First year

Two words, no hyphen, even when used adjectivally (first year students). Capitalize only in proper nouns such as First Year Centre.

Formal documents and announcements

Formal documents and occasional direct announcements from the President or a Vice-President, addressing the entire university community, alumni or the general public, may use an announcement approach speaking on behalf of UM, or using a formal style with surnames and capitalizing titles and departments. Donor Relations and promotional materials are also treated as formal documents. The word “University” when referring to UM may also be capitalized in these documents. See also [Degrees and citations in formal documents](#) in this guide.

Headlines

Use sentence case. Capitalize only the first word, other than proper nouns.

Health care

According to CP Style, health care is a noun of two words, while health-care used adjectivally should include a hyphen; e.g., “health-care spending.” However, healthcare (all one word) has become common usage in both noun and adjectival forms and is also acceptable.

Hyphens

For easier reading, use hyphens compound modifiers that precede a noun. E.g., a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

Numbers

Spell out whole numbers below 10; use numerals for 10 and above. Use comma for thousands: 1,000.

Example: Of the 5,000 students who attended the climate march, only four thought it was a protest against Winnipeg winters.

Exceptions:

- Always spell out a number at the beginning of a sentence.
- In headlines, numbers below 10 can be written as numerals to save space.
- Use numerals for ages (when following a name), years, addresses, decimals, votes, scores and other measurements.
- Use numerals for credit hours on UM website program pages: 3 credit hours, 6 credit hours.

People

When introducing a person in a story, use their full name on first mention, then the surname (last name) in repeated mentions.

Positions and title

No honorifics; title and positions are indicated in lower case after the name.

No Dr., Dean, etc., before names. Positions are generally indicated in lower case, after the person's name, followed by their department and faculty, with a comma before and after the position. Where the professor is also a CRC (a Canada Research Chair), that designation must be included.

Examples: "Brian Postl, dean, Faculty of Health Sciences, said ..." or "Brian Postl, who is dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences, said ..."

Exception: Presidents/VPs. David Barnard or David Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor. Usually best to use title before name, so as not to break with CP style.

Quotation marks

Use single quote marks in headlines, and regular quotation marks for attributions.

Senate

Capitalize Senate and particular Senate committees: e.g., Senate Committee on University Research. Use lower case for generic/plural use, as in Senate committees.

Spelling

Use Canadian spellings given in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary.

Examples: Flavour, not flavor; honour, not honor; centre, not center, etc. There are some special Canadian idiosyncrasies with certain words (when in doubt, look it up in the COD) For instance, no “u” is required for honorific, and honorary can include or omit the “u.”

See also [UM caps and spelling](#) in this guide.

Tense

Quotes are in the present tense, unless significantly in the past. “Says,” not “said.”

U of M, UM, and University of Manitoba

The informal version of University of Manitoba has traditionally been U of M, but we are now using UM as our standard informal variation. The move towards UM started several years ago with the launch of *UM Today* the news website, and with our social channel naming guidelines. It was reinforced in 2015 with the launch of *UM Today the Magazine*.

With the introduction of our new brand and the launch of the new university website in 2019, UM is being used more consistently across our platforms. Below are some guidelines on how to use UM in copy.

UM usage

- In body copy, after first use of University of Manitoba, use UM as a secondary reference.
- Using “the university” is recommended to avoid repetition or if UM is too jarring or clumsy.
- In headlines and subs where space is limited, use UM.
- Do not use “the UM.”
 - Yes: About UM
 - No: About the UM
- Except where noted above, use UM on all of our platforms.

Verbs

Use active verbs. Go with the leanest, least wordy form:

Use this: “He hoped to work on it over the weekend.” Not this: “He had hoped to get to work on it over the weekend.”

Inclusive communication

Inclusive language

In general, ensure that your vocabulary is respectful of a person or group's preference. Make conscious efforts to reflect diversity in written work and images, taking into consideration the different cultural, ethnic, religious, or racial backgrounds your audience may have, as well as the different ages, gender and sexual orientations, and disabilities, visible or not, of all people.

Avoid descriptors that refer to a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or age, unless those descriptors are relevant to the story. For example, noting that an individual uses a wheelchair is appropriate in a news story on accessibility concerns on campus.

Preferred terms change over time and as language evolves. If you are unsure about how to proceed with a certain text, please seek advice and contact MCO, which can direct you to other resources or the right unit for further consultation.

Below you will find the following topics: abilities/disabilities, accessibility, BIPOC definition, gender and sexuality, Indigenous community.

Abilities/disabilities

Use language that emphasizes the person over the disability. Use the following:

- a person with a disability; persons with a disability (not people)
- students/employees/faculty members with a disability
- a person with cystic fibrosis

The word "disabled" is an adjective, not a noun. Do not use "the disabled." If it is appropriate, explain a person's disability instead of focusing on the descriptor "disabled." For example: "Mary has a neurological condition and uses a wheelchair."

Avoid terms that could be understood as derogatory such as "crazy" or "handicapped." See also the [Words with Dignity resource](#) (pdf) from Accessibility Manitoba.

Accessibility

Taking accessibility into account in our communications practices is part of UM's commitment to creating an inclusive and accessible community for all faculty, students and staff, and a welcoming environment for audiences of our website, news site and materials. This includes the language we use in our writing and digital formats we create for communicating with our audiences.

Below are some guidelines for creating accessible materials. See also [8 tips for writing more accessibly](#) in this guide, and [accessibility and abilities \(additional resources\)](#) .

[Creating accessible documents and materials](#)

Online documents, videos and other communications and training materials should be accessible. Accessible materials can be used by any person, regardless of barriers that may be in place as a result of disability or otherwise.

See [UM Accessibility Supports](#) for more requirements for creating accessible documents and materials, such as properly captioning videos, adding alt-tags to your online images, and applying formatting styles and hierarchies in documents to make them readable by screen readers and other assistive technology devices.

[Alternate formats and active offers](#)

Materials should include alternate formats and/or active offers that let readers or viewers know information is available in other formats, on request. Examples of alternate formats are large print and electronic versions.

[Public Events](#)

Notice of public events should indicate accessibility information about the location, and include active offers such as “Please contact us in advance if you have any particular accommodation requirements [contact information].”

BIPOC

The acronym stands for Black, Indigenous, and People(s) of Colour (BIPOC), a term now commonly used. Concerns have been raised about the term People(s) of Colour because it can erase important differences in the historical and contemporary experiences of the peoples identified with that label, including Black and Indigenous peoples.

[Race and ethnicity](#)

Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, races and tribes: Black, Indigenous, Aboriginal Peoples, Métis, Cree, Inuit, Arab, French-Canadian, Jew, Latin, Asian.

Black is acceptable in all references to people of African descent. In the United States, African-American is used; in Canada, African-Canadian is sometimes used.

See also [equity, diversity, ethnicity, religion \(additional resources\)](#).

Gender and sexuality

In a diverse environment such as UM, don’t assume gender from a person’s first or given name. Check with them and use their preferred pronoun, or use the gender-neutral pronoun “they.” When writing in general terms, consider alternating gender pronouns through the text, using “she or he” (or the gender-neutral pronoun “they”), or rewording phrases when these options make the writing awkward.

See also [“My pronouns” resource](#).

Acronyms

The preferred acronym at UM is 2SLGBTQ+. It stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and any other identities including intersex, straight ally, asexual, agender, pansexual etc. Other acceptable acronyms include LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, LBTTQ*, LBTTQI*.

This information has been verified by UMQueer. See also [gender and sexuality \(additional resources\)](#) in this guide.

Indigenous community

If you have questions on writing about Indigenous matters, people or services at UM, please review this guide and/or connect with your MCO contact. If you have further questions, consult Indigenous Engagement. If you are writing about a specific Indigenous person, consult them about their nation, preferred titles, pronouns, spellings and capitalizations.

Here are some further guidelines, developed in consultation, on how to write respectfully about Indigenous people and matters at UM.

See also [Indigenous inclusive language \(additional resources\)](#) in this guide.

Indigenous

Indigenous includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis. It is interchangeable with only one of these three groups.

First Nations, Métis and Inuit

First Nations, Métis and Inuit are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples.

First Nations

There are 634 First Nations across Canada. Members or citizens of these communities are “status Indians” under the *Indian Act*. Besides First Nations Peoples, there are also non-status First Nations people. It is common for those who are First Nations to identify by their tribal or national identity, e.g., Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, Dakota. Some people identify by this identity in their language. When writing about someone who is First Nations, ask them for their preference.

Métis vs. Metis

The Métis are descendants of Indigenous Peoples and European settlers, but that doesn't mean everyone who is of mixed background is Métis. The Métis are a distinct cultural group. Consult with the person or group you are writing about to determine how they identify.

In consultation with Indigenous students, staff and academics at the university, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, UM has decided to spell Métis with an accent

aigu. Some Métis people don't use the accent, so consult the person or group you are writing about and defer to their preference.

Exception: The Manitoba Metis Federation (no accent).

Inuit

Inuit are the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic. "Inuit" translates to "people," so do not write "Inuit people," which is redundant. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

Aboriginal

"Aboriginal" is the term that was widely used before "Indigenous" became commonplace. It also includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis. It is now only used when it is part of a group or organization's name; otherwise "Indigenous" is preferred.

Native

"Native" is the term that was commonly used before the term "Aboriginal," which has since been replaced by "Indigenous." It is still used in official names like the department of Native studies at UM, one of the first departments of its kind in Canada. The department has kept this as its name to honour those who started it.

Indian

This is an archaic and offensive term. Use only when referring to document titles or when used in historical instances such as the *Indian Act*. Never use when referring to actual Indigenous people.

Pluralization

Peoples should be capitalized in "Indigenous Peoples," but "Indigenous people" remains lower case, following CP style.

Knowledge or knowledges? Use knowledges when referring to a group of cultural leaders or Elders, as well as more than one teaching, to encapsulate a set of knowledges.

Capitalization

Elders, Traditional Knowledge Holders or Traditional Knowledge Keepers, Grandmother, Grandfather, Survivors, Reconciliation and Treaties are all capitalized to show respect; residential schools is written in lower case.

Capitalize "Territory" in "Treaty 1 Territory."

Common mistakes to avoid

Avoid possessives. Do not refer to the "UM's Indigenous community." Instead: "the Indigenous community at UM."

Do not say UM is "proudly located on Treaty territory." Treaties are fraught documents and pride is an inappropriate emotion for UM to express about its situation on Treaty lands.

Spelling and variations

These are the accepted UM spellings of terms in Indigenous-focused content. Often, the words we use at UM are anglicized versions of predominantly spoken languages, so there is variation and fluidity in accepted spelling. Different nations and dialects may also use different spellings. If you are interviewing a specific Indigenous person, always use their preferred spelling. Otherwise use these:

Pow Wow, Anishinaabe (singular), Anishinaabeg (plural), Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language), Teepee, Tipi (Dakota spelling), Oji-Cree or Ojibwe-Cree

Regalia—Always use the word “regalia” in referring to the garments dancers wear at Pow Wows. Never say “costume.”

Accepted hashtags

#Treaty1
MétisNation
#umIndigenous

Additional resources for inclusive language

Other Canadian universities also offer inclusive writing guidelines and resources. Some of the guidelines included in the *UM Style Guide* are drawn with permission from:

- [Inclusive language section](#) in the *Queen’s University Style Guide*
- [Inclusive and Anti-racist Writing Guide](#) by Julia Lane from Student Commons at Simon Fraser University Library

Indigenous (additional resources)

- [Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples](#) (UM Libraries link) by Gregory Younging, media reference guide
- [Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit issues in Canada](#) (UM Libraries link) by Chelsea Vowel, explains Indigenous terms and names based on relations, culture, law and education
- See [additional resources](#) at the Indigenous Student Centre at UM.
- Consult [Indigenous Connect](#) for UM contacts, and guidance on culture and protocols.

Equity, diversity, ethnicity, religion (additional resources)

- Radical Copyeditor’s blog post: [“Black with a Capital “B”](#)
- [New Canadian Media’s Ethnic Media & Diversity Style Guide](#)
- [Diversity Style Guide](#), Society of Professional Journalists, is an American media resource, and may reflect American context and history
- See also [equity, diversity and inclusion at UM](#).

Accessibility and abilities (additional resources)

- [Accessibility for Manitobans Act](#), Province of Manitoba
- [Glossary of accessibility terms](#), Accessibility Manitoba
- [Communications checklist](#) (Word file), Accessibility Manitoba
- [Portrayal of persons with disabilities](#), including [appropriate words](#), media resource, Government of Canada
- [Canada.ca Content Style Guide](#): Writing for the web: accessibility and web content guidelines, Government of Canada
- See also [equity, diversity and inclusion at UM](#).

Gender and sexuality (additional resources)

- [Gender inclusive writing guide](#), Government of Canada
- See also [equity, diversity and inclusion at UM](#).

For more information about the queer community at UM, please reach out to:

UMQueer

UMQueer is a group of faculty, staff and students working together to celebrate advocate for diversity and inclusion at the University of Manitoba. umanitoba.ca/umqueer

Rainbow Pride Mosaic

The Rainbow Pride Mosaic (RPM) is the University of Manitoba's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, queer and straight ally resource centre.

<https://umsu.ca/get-involved/student-clubs/rainbow-pride-mosaic/>

The LGBTTTQI* Interest Group at Rady Faculty of Health Sciences

The student-led LGBTTTQI* Interest Group offers a safe, confidential space for LGBTTTQI*-identified medical students and residents at any stage of training. lgbttqi.mg@gmail.com

Writing guides

Accessibility: 8 tips

Keeping your writing clear, concise and well-organized, and it will be well on its way to being accessible. Here are eight tips.

- 1) **Use plain, succinct language.**
 - Write short sentences and use familiar words. Avoid long paragraphs. Avoid jargon and slang. With abbreviations or acronyms that people may not understand, explain the meaning on first reference.
 - Break complex ideas down into smaller sections with meaningful subheadings related to the content.
- 2) **Employ a hierarchy.**
 - Begin with the most important information. Place similar topics in the same paragraph, and use headings to clearly separate different topics.
 - Ensure a consistent hierarchy of text/font styles and typographic formats.
- 3) **Keep headlines clear and concise.** Also see: [10 tips for improving your headlines](#).
- 4) **Never use ALL CAPS.** Limit the number of different fonts and weights.
- 5) **Use bold for emphasis**, which is easier to read than italics or all caps. Use sparingly.
- 6) **Use alt text on images.** The alt tag is the most basic form of image description, and it should be included on all images. The language will depend on the image's purpose:
 - For a creative photo or an image that supports a story, describe the image in detail in a brief alt tag.
 - If the image serves a specific function, describe in detail. People who don't see the image should have the same information.
 - In addition to alt tags, supplement images with standard captions when possible.
 - Don't include "image of" or "picture of" in your alt text. It's already assumed.
- 7) **Avoid directional language.**
 - Avoid directional instructions and language that requires the reader to see the layout or design of the page. Layout also changes on mobile devices.
 - Use: "Select from these options," not "See the options below" with the steps listed after the title.
- 8) **For forms, follow these guidelines:**
 - Form fields should contain clear error messages and labels.
 - Label inputs with clear names and use appropriate tags. Think carefully about what fields are necessary, and especially which are marked as required. Label required fields clearly. The shorter the form, the better.
 - No: "Select from the options in the right sidebar."

General writing tips

Begin strong, and don't bury the lede

- If you're writing a news or informational story, begin with the pertinent information— aka the lede. Don't bury the lede in long sentences or by starting with too much extraneous information. Read more: <https://style.mla.org/dont-bury-the-lede/>
- To pull your reader along in the story, start sentences with the interesting information rather than with people's position or other necessary, but less interesting, detail.

Example:

Yes: "The holistic approach used by his advisor Suki Berne makes him feel included in the academic community, says Jonathan Cramer, a PhD student in peace and conflict studies."

No: "Jonathan Cramer, a PhD student in Peace and Conflict Studies, values the holistic approach that his advisor Suki Berne uses, which makes him feel included in the academic community."

Add quotes

Readers enjoy quotes from people, which can be used as supporting material and to break up copy.

Avoid misplaced, dangling or ambiguous modifiers

Misplaced and dangling modifiers are descriptive phrases or words that are improperly located in relation to the words they modify or describe; generally speaking, a misplaced modifier is too far away from the word it is modifying. The distance between the modifying word or phrase and its related word make the sentence ambiguous, illogical, awkward or confusing. Rewrite the sentence so that any modifiers are placed as close as possible to the words, phrases or clauses they modify or describe.

Example: In the sentence, "A small book sat on the desk that Sarah had read," the modifying phrase "that Sarah had read" is confusing because it's closer to "desk" than the noun "book" that it's meant to describe.

Correct: A small book that Sarah had read sat on the desk.

Example: "The professor posted the notes for the students covered in class." The modifying phrase "covered in class" is ambiguous because it can be attributed to "notes" or to "students."

Correct: The professor posted the notes covered in class for the students.

Structure can help

Break up copy into digestible chunks with short, clear headings throughout. Organize key points with bullet lists.

For an informational or news story, an inverted pyramid format can work well, with the most important info followed by crucial info, followed by additional details. Use tight opening sentences, and add strong quotes, avoiding repetition.

4 easy ways to tighten your story

1. **Favour strong, dynamic verbs.** Delete passive, extra or unnecessary verb constructions: Rather than “mentoring has a role to play,” write “mentoring plays a role.”
2. **Keep paragraphs short.** Avoid massive blocks of words; two or three sentences is ideal.
3. **Tighten sentences to clarify, inject life and save space.** Edit. Cut repetition and wordiness. Cut vague modifiers such as “fairly,” “really,” “quite.” Replace cumbersome word constructions with active verbs and short, everyday words.

Example: “The bus drivers voted to strike” instead of “Winnipeg Transit workers voted in favour of a prolonged work stoppage.”

4. **Avoid repetition and over-attribution.** Tighten quotes. Are all the words s/he said necessary? Don’t change what people say, but edit for the interesting, succinct bits.

Additional story techniques

1. **Be creative.** Lighten the tone. Add colour. Use formats such as How-Tos and Top 5s to pull in the reader.
2. **Mix it up.** Don’t overuse any particular format, including the inverted pyramid style.
3. **Use signposts to help your reader along.** A longer story works when you engage readers’ interest throughout and use signposts or subheadings to help them through the piece. Profiles or histories are often best told chronologically, with signposts highlighting key developments or turning points.
4. **Proof and re-proof.** Polished, accurate copy demonstrates credibility.

10 tips for improving your headlines

The headline is the biggest hook for your story—even over an image. Simple, informational headlines work well for a clear entry into the story, but a curious headline can also intrigue readers. Read on for headline writing tips, and also see page 82 of the CP Style Guide.

1. **Hone in on key information.** What must be included? Imagine it on a flash card. Try drafting a headline before you write or edit the story—afterward, you may be too familiar with the content to recognize the headline is incomplete or hard to understand.
2. **Use specific language and make it punchy.** Use images or quotes from the story to give your headline flavour. Can you create stronger images? Improve your working headline



- with specific language. Look at words you've used. Try a twist of phrasing. Avoid bad puns, but techniques like rhyming words and alliteration can brighten up a headline.
3. **Avoid long phrases**, which can be hard to absorb, especially without context.
 4. **Avoid ambiguity**, such as headlines that can be read two different ways: e.g., Iraqi head seeks arms.
 5. **Personalize**; speak directly to the reader. This headline on a routine story lifted it above predictable: "Parents, get ready: 'American Idol' summer concert tour will make 50 stops."
 6. **A strong, active verb** can help create a mental picture. Use present tense.
Example: "Defence minister laces up rugby boots for UM Wombats opener" rather than "Defence minister slated to make appearance in rugby game."
 7. **Avoid using name-only** for people who are not well known; a description or title can be better. Try to judge immediate recognizability of a name across Canada.
Example: "Ex-Oilers owner returns Stanley Cup rings" rather than "Pocklington pleads guilty to stay out of jail."
 8. **Handle attribution with care**. It's better to end with attribution; a colon at the beginning may be confusing and hamper immediate understanding.
Example: "5,000 new international students register in 2019: UM external relations" or "5,000 new international students register in 2019, UM external relations reports" rather than "UM external relations: 5,000 new international students register in 2019."
 9. **Optimize your headline with the best search keywords**. Headlines drive search engines, RSS feeds and other content aggregators online. Include keywords in the headline. Think people, places and things—words commonly searched for. Avoid abbreviations.
 10. **Have fun—on lighthearted stories**. But if the content is serious, keep the tone neutral.

Additional writing resources

The [Language Portal of Canada](#) (Government of Canada) offers these resources:

- [Writing tools](#) in English and French, including writing and grammar tips, grammar
- [Language resources](#), including plain language guides, translation tools, Indigenous languages glossaries and dictionaries, miscellaneous glossaries (law, finance, science and technology and more)
- [Writing for the web and digital communications](#), including social media tips

UM Today the Magazine's voice (also alumni channel)

Intelligent, but accessible: The primary readers of the magazine are educated alumni, so the writing should speak to them. Keep the language clear and concise, but never overly casual. Keep in mind the newspapers and magazines that our audience may appreciate such as *Maclean's* or *The Globe and Mail*.

Authentic: Showcasing the stories and success of our students, faculty, staff and alumni should be done objectively to maintain trust with our readers. The writing should be neutral with a storytelling focus.

Bold and surprising: Where possible within the framework of a sophisticated and authentic university magazine, the writing should be different than what our readers expect. Bold and creative writing has the power to surprise. Find the drama and bring it to life. Make the characters and their personalities big.

Inviting: The writing should be friendly and approachable, and free of academic or institutional jargon. Focus on strong headlines that capture attention and curiosity. With profiles, readers should feel as though they are immersed in the story, that they are in the room with the characters in the story. Always use the active voice.

UM caps and spelling

- ARTlab
- enrol (*not* enroll), enrolled, enrolling, enrolment
- Fall Term, Winter Term, Spring Term, Summer Term
- First Year Centre
- Fundraising, one word. Not fund raising or fund-raising.
- Per cent, two words
- Registrar's Office
- Smartpark (not SmartPark)
- Student Accessibility Services
- University is written in lower case when used on second reference, except in formal documents and announcements, where the word can be capitalized. See [formal documents](#).
- University 1 or U1

Degrees

Degrees when written in full are in lower case. Use an apostrophe in bachelor's degree, master's degree, etc. There is no apostrophe "s" in bachelor of arts or master of science.

Abbreviations for common academic degrees generally don't include periods. The first letters are capitalized, except for mixed abbreviations.

Examples: BA, BSc, BComm, BFA, BMus, LLB, PhD, MBA, MMus, MD.

Exception: B.Ed., M.Ed. include periods to distinguish them for online searching.

See also guidelines on Degree citations in formal documents below.

Degree treatment, UM Alumni channel and *UM Today the Magazine*

To indicate alumni degrees from UM, use square brackets and bold (with name), without punctuation or spaces to separate degrees.

Examples: [BAHons/93], [BScHEc/63, LLD/11]. “The Honourable Janice Filmon [BScHEc/63, LLD/11], Manitoba’s lieutenant-governor, is speaking in the spotlight.”

Degrees and citations in formal documents

For formal documents and formal events such as Convocation and Emeriti Awards, we use a formal style for degrees, following Canadian Press (CP) style.

Degrees that end in a lower case letter take periods. Examples: B.Sc., B.Ed., M.Agr.

No periods for those ending in upper case letter. Examples: PhD, MA, MBA, BA, BSN.

Most lower case and mixed abbreviations take periods, and are written without spaces between. Examples: B.Sc., B.A.Sc., B.Comm., D.V.Sc.

Where Bachelor of Science degrees are further specified—such as Med. or Agr.—abbreviations end with a period and can be bracketed without spaces: e.g., B.Sc.(Agr.)

For events such as Emeriti awards or Convocation, where it is important to note the granting institution of individual degrees, add it after the degree in brackets: e.g., M.Mus. (Western).

Examples:

Bachelor’s degrees examples: BA, B.Sc., B.Comm. (for commerce degree), B.Ed., B.Eng. (for engineering), JD (for law), BCL (for civil law), B.Mus., B.Pharm., etc.

Master’s degrees examples: MA, M.Sc., MLS (for library science), etc.

Degree citation examples:

B.Sc. (Queen’s), PhD (Dalhousie)

B. Mus., B.Mus.Ed. (Memorial), M.Mus. (Western), DMA (UBC)

Dip.OT, BOT, M.Ed., PhD (Manitoba)

B.Sc.(Agr.) (Macdonald), M.Sc. (McGill), PhD (Guelph)

MD (Manitoba), FRCPSC, LL.D. (Calgary), D.Sc. (McMaster), LL.D. (Windsor)

B.Sc.(Zoo.) (UBC), B.Sc.(Med.), PhD (Manitoba)