



Writing style guide

Editorial version

A Brief Note on Style

In the Davenport University style guide, we provide a reference point for the writing standards that help produce a consistent, branded voice across all channels. This guide is intended to clarify any style choices of the Davenport brand that might contradict the recommendations of popular dictionaries or style guides.

Our guidelines are based on Associated Press (AP) style, so if you cannot find an answer to your question in this guide, please consult the AP Stylebook. Some styles may be broken on a case-by-case basis and only when the design or user experience would be improved by the change. Contact ducomm@davenport.edu for any writing style questions.

Voice and Tone

Davenport University strives to produce fresh, relevant and instructive content. Here are a few notes on voice and tone that will assist you in your writing. Use your best judgement when applying this advice.

Elevator Pitch

Career-centered curriculum and real-world experience

For 150 years, Davenport has stood apart from other universities because of its unrelenting focus on ensuring its graduates rise to the top of the job market. Its unique approach to education offers students a career-centered curriculum and empowers them with real-world experience.

You'll find Davenport provides an education that works for you with its more than 60 bachelor's and master's degree programs, small class sizes, seven-week courses and classes held online or on campuses across Michigan. As a private, not-for-profit university with accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, you can be assured Davenport will deliver a quality education that's focused on your success.

Voice

The following contains general advice.

- Address the audience as *you*
- Write in the first person; use *I* or *we*

- Refer to an outside company as a singular entity; use *it*, not *they*
- Answer the question, “Now what?” — always provide a next step

Use your best judgment when applying this advice. For instance, if you are writing a sentence that directly compares our offerings to a competitor’s, you may deviate from the pronoun guidelines, as in the following example.

CORRECT: We provide online classes, but they do not.

AVOID: We provide online classes, but it does not.

In all written pieces, incorporate a specific call-to-action for the audience. Send them where we want them to go or instruct them on what we want them to do next. Be very clear.

Ex. For more about Davenport’s study abroad programs, [visit davenport.edu/study-abroad](https://davenport.edu/study-abroad).

Be discreet when using competitor data. In general, avoid citing competitors. If it is unavoidable, make sure the evidence isn’t prominent.

CORRECT: According to a recent study, 73% of students take at least one class online.

AVOID: According to a study by Grand Valley State University, 73% of students take at least one class online.

Do not use partners’ or individual’s names unless given explicit permission to do so. Instead, use a brief descriptor of the partner or individual. In general, work to gain permission to use names.

CORRECT: (w/o permission): We oversaw a recruiting event for one of our university partners this weekend. A senior from Davenport University reported receiving a job offer after the event.

INCORRECT: (w/o permission): We oversaw Mott Community College’s recruiting event this weekend. Rachel Baker, a Davenport senior, reported receiving a job offer after the event.

Take care not to overuse sentences that start with “According to” or “[...] has found.”

Avoid heavy, overwhelming paragraphs. Break them into short chunks that are easy to scan, providing frequent breaks with concise headings and subheadings that summarize content. Quick takeaways and short bullet points can help readers scan too.

Starting a sentence with a coordinating conjunction, such as *And* or *But*, is OK in moderation.

Ex. Our team offered an attractive salary package, substantial benefits and extra perks to recruit a dean with great experience. But, ultimately, the candidate decided to accept a different position.

Tone

In general, use a friendly and conversational tone.

- Accessible, plainspoken and optimistic
- Helpful and knowledgeable, not salesy or pushy
- Expert, but not know-it-all; free of jargon

Contractions: Unless writing a formal document, we prefer to take a more conversational, less formal tone; feel free to use contractions such as *it's*, *you're*, *they're* and *she's*.

Callouts: Do not add periods after callouts that occur throughout a piece when they are set apart using design, even if they are complete sentences.

Calls-to-action: Do add periods after calls-to-action but only when they form complete sentences.

Davenport University Specifics

Davenport University and DU

When writing about Davenport University on any external-facing pieces, do not refer to Davenport as DU. Instead, refer to the school as one of the following: *the university*, *Davenport University* or *Davenport*.

Campus Names

W.A. Lettinga Grand Rapids Campus

Regional Campuses

Lansing Campus, Warren Campus, Midland-Great Lakes Bay Campus on first reference

Student Activity Center

When writing about the Student Activity Center, capitalize all three words – Student Activity Center is the formal name of the building. The acronym *SAC* can be used after the full name is spelled out once.

CORRECT: The Student Activity Center (SAC) is fun. The SAC even has a rock climbing wall.

INCORRECT: The student activity center is fun. The SAC even has a rock climbing wall.

Donald W. Maine College of Business

When referencing the Donald W. Maine College of Business and/or its building, always spell out the full formal name; DON'T say the *CoB*, *College of Business*, or *Maine College of Business* in any formal or external-facing work.

CORRECT: The Donald W. Maine College of Business is housed in Davenport's newest building.

INCORRECT: The College of Business is Davenport's newest building.

Peter C. Cook Center

Similarly, when referencing the Peter C. Cook Center, always spell out the full formal name; DON'T say the *Cook Center*. Also, be sure to refer to the building as a "center" – it's not the *Peter C. Cook Building*, it's the *Peter C. Cook Center*.

Farmers Insurance Athletic Complex

When referencing the Farmers Insurance Athletic Complex, always spell out the full formal name; DON'T say *Farmers Complex* or *Farmers Athletic Complex*. If you want to shorten, you can use an informal, general name like the *athletic complex* or the *Panther football field*. DON'T use an apostrophe in Farmers.

INCORRECT: The Farmer's Insurance Athletic Complex houses our football field.

CORRECT: The Farmers Insurance Athletic Complex houses our football field.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King

Davenport University always spells out Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's full name and title; never use *MLK* or any other variation of his name.

Academics

“The University”

When writing about the university, do not capitalize the word *university* unless it’s written as part of a formal name, such as *Davenport University*, or when it begins a sentence.

CORRECT: The university had a great year. / Davenport University had a great year.

INCORRECT: The University had a great year.

Exception: Capitalize university only when written in front of the word President and without Davenport in formal communications or policies, when names are not used.

Ex. The Officer of Campus Security and the University President will determine campus closures for inclement weather.

Grants

Any promotional materials that have to do with a grant must include key grant language. You must send all grant-related materials through ducomm@davenport.edu to obtain the required language and approval.

Academic Degrees

In general, if mention of degrees is necessary to establish someone’s credentials, the preferred form is to avoid an abbreviation and use instead a phrase such as: *John Jones, who has a doctorate in psychology*.

Use such abbreviations as *B.A.*, *M.A.* and *Ph.D.* only when the need to identify many individuals by degree on first reference would make the preferred form cumbersome. Use these abbreviations only after a full name — never after just a last name.

Associate/associate

- Use *Associate* when spelling out the full formal degree name; capitalize the degree name but not the specialty.

CORRECT: She has an Associate of Business Administration in management.

INCORRECT: She has an Associates of Business Administration in Management.

- Use *associate* for informal or abbreviated uses; do not capitalize unless it is the first word in a sentence.

CORRECT: He got an associate in business last year.

INCORRECT: He got an associates in business last year.

Bachelor/bachelor's

- When writing out a formal degree name, use *Bachelor of [...]* and capitalize the full degree name but not the specialty; do not make *Bachelor plural*.

CORRECT: He has a Bachelor of Science in marketing.

INCORRECT: He has a Bachelor's of Science in Marketing.

- When writing out a degree informally, do not capitalize *bachelor's* unless it is the start of a sentence; do use an apostrophe.

CORRECT: He has a bachelor's in business.

CORRECT: She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration.

INCORRECT: She earned a Bachelors in Business Administration.

Master/master's

- Master's degrees follow the same rules as bachelor's; use *Master of [...]* when writing out the formal degree name and do not make *Master plural*.

CORRECT: She is a Master of Business Administration.

INCORRECT: She has a Master's in Business Administration.

- When writing out a degree informally, do not capitalize *master's* unless it is the start of a sentence; do use an apostrophe.

- **CORRECT:** She has a master's in business.
- **CORRECT:** He earned a master's degree at Davenport University.
- **INCORRECT:** He has a Master's of Business Administration.

Alumni, Alumna, Alumnus

Use *alumni* for groups, even when only women are included. Davenport prefers to avoid the use of *alumnae* and *emeritae*. Never use *All alumnae and alumni are invited*. Use *All alumni are invited*.

Alumna (emerita) is singular female. / **Alumnae** (emeritae) is plural female.

Ex. Jane is an alumna. / Jane is an emerita.

Ex. Jane and Mary are alumnae. / Jane and Mary are emeritae.

Alumnus (emeritus) is singular male.

CORRECT: He is an alumnus of DU. / John is an emeritus.

INCORRECT: He is an alumni of DU.

Alumni (emeriti) is plural male AND plural when both men and women are included.

CORRECT: John, Jane and Mary are alumni. / John, Jane and Mary are emeriti.

CORRECT: All alumni are invited to attend homecoming.

INCORRECT: Each alumni is invited to attend homecoming. / All alumni and alumnae are invited.

Special note: Do not use the slash form *alumnus/na*. Use *alumni* to refer to all or use *alumnus* and *alumna* (the full words) to refer to each. This style also applies to *emeriti*, *emerita* and *emeritus*.

Semesters

When referring to semesters, do not capitalize the season.

Ex. In the fall 2020 semester, more nursing classes will be opening.

Ex. The fall 2020 semester starts on Sept. 4.

Academic Years, Year of Graduation

Use the following formatting for academic years; list the first year completely and abbreviate the second year.

Ex. We're going into the 2019-20 academic year.

When listing out someone's graduation date, use an apostrophe followed by the abbreviated date.

Ex. Brian Thompson '07 has been working with the Alumni Mentor Network for years.

On campus, on-campus, off campus, off-campus

Hyphenate when the phrase serves as an adjective describing a noun.

Ex. I want to live in on-campus housing. / Davenport also offers off-campus housing.

Do not hyphenate when *on/off* serves as a preposition to campus.

Ex. I want to live on campus. / The Farmers Insurance Athletic Complex is off campus.

Salutations for Form Letters

Form letters are addressed to groups. The salutation should, therefore, be plural. Capitalize key words, lower case articles and conjunctions, and end with a colon.

Examples

Dear Students:

Dear Alumni:

Dear Members of the Board:

Dear Faculty and Staff:

Sports

Do not capitalize the names of sports such as football and volleyball, even if the sport is preceded by the name of the school or the school nickname.

Ex. Davenport volleyball and Panther football are undefeated.

For sports in which both men and women compete, the gender of the team must always be specified on first reference to avoid confusion.

Ex. men's basketball, women's soccer

However, when referring to varsity teams, do not identify gender when Davenport University has only one gender represented in that varsity sport.

Ex. Do not say women's softball or men's baseball. Use softball or baseball.

Never use *girls* or *ladies* to refer to women's teams; use *women*. Never use *boys* to refer to men's teams; use *men*.

Acronyms

Spell out the full name on first reference, followed by the acronym in parentheses. It's OK to use only the acronym on all references after that. Do not use periods in acronyms.

Ex. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is hosting a fundraising event this week. The NAMI event will be held at Davenport University.

Exceptions: There is an exception for *U.S.*, which is written with periods in body text. In headlines, it is written as *US*, with no periods.

List of common acronyms

See the word list in Appendix A on Page 15 for common acronyms used at Davenport University.

Capitalization

In addition to this section, also find the *Semesters* and *The University* entries listed in the Academics section above.

After a Colon

In running text, don't capitalize the word after a colon unless it is the start of a complete sentence. In titles and subtitles, always capitalize the word after a colon.

Ex. All employees experience these things: dependable pay, safety, respect and support.

Ex. All employees have agreed on this: It's OK to ask for help.

Department/College Names

Always capitalize the full formal name of a department or college when it is spelled out. Shorthand names of departments are always lowercase; do not capitalize an informal name unless it falls at the beginning of a sentence. Then, capitalize only the first word.

Ex. Department of Biological Sciences, Office of the President

Ex. The marketing department loves to receive content from their peers.

Ex. Everybody in the biological sciences program had a great semester.

Ex. The president's office is busy today.

Program Capitalization

Context-Based Capitalization: To align with both editorial standards and common higher education practices, Davenport University has adopted a **hybrid capitalization approach**.

Marketing materials, program pages, social and web content:

- Capitalize full program names, which is the preferred choice in many cases:

Ex. *Bachelor of Science in Nursing*

- Use lowercase for general references:

Ex. *bachelor's degree in nursing*

Editorial and news content:

- Follow AP style conventions:

Ex. *bachelor's degree in nursing*

Ex. *Bachelor of Science in nursing*

Job Titles

Job titles are capitalized only when they are used immediately before one or more names.

Ex. The president of the company is Richard J. Pappas.

Ex. That kind of inquiry should go straight to President Richard J. Pappas.

To avoid excessive capitalization, which can appear awkward, try to place long job titles after the name.

Ex. Please see John Smith, the associate manager for advanced consumer social media innovation, for that request.

Exception: In formal documents, such as policies and procedures, there may be times in which job titles are capitalized when there is no name listed with the title.

Ex. The Officer of Campus Security and the University President will determine campus closures for inclement weather.

Headings and Subheadings

In headings, capitalize only the first and any word immediately following a colon. These rules also apply to subheadings.

CORRECT: 5 simple marketing tips to boost your enrollment

INCORRECT: 5 Simple Marketing Tips to Boost Your Enrollment

Branded Product Names

Capitalize all branded product names, services, teams and operations. Trademark and registered trademark designations (™ and ®) are not used in AP style for body text or in headlines unless Davenport University owns the trademark.

Formatting

Organization Name

Here are the proper ways to use Davenport University's name.

- On first reference, always spell out *Davenport University*. After the first reference, you can use *Davenport* by itself.
- Do not use *DU* in formal or external communications. In informal internal communications, it is OK to use *DU* but never *D.U.*

Headlines

Headlines are key to any story. A vivid, accurate and fair headline can entice people to dig in for more.

Capitalize only the first word. Always capitalize the first word of a headline, even if it starts with a proper name such as iPhone or eBay. It is better to avoid this structure, though, so recast the sentence if possible. Avoid abbreviations and acronyms in headlines.

Exception: The first word after a colon is always capitalized in headlines.

Spacing

Use single spaces between sentences in all communications; DO NOT use two spaces.

Lists

In general, capitalize only the first word in each bullet or numbered step, as is the case with all examples that follow. Don't use periods after list items, even if they form complete sentences. Similarly, don't use semicolons or *and* after list items.

Ex.

1. Invest in relationships
2. Position communications
3. Make an action plan

Always use circular bullets for lists.

Ex.

- Construction
- Hospitality
- General labor

Always use numbers instead of bullets when indicating steps or procedures.

Ex.

1. Register for classes
2. Purchase books
3. Study for exams

Use parallel structure in lists whenever possible. When it comes to words or phrases, using parallel structure means using the same grammatical or stylistic pattern throughout the entire series.

PARALLEL:

- To hire
- To supervise
- To evaluate

NOT PARALLEL:

- We schedule
- To supervise
- Evaluating personnel

Numbers, Dates, Times, Percentages

Numbers

Use numerals for 10 and all larger numbers. Write out numbers up to and including nine, except in hard data or when written as a percentage. For more on that topic, review *Percentages* on Page 11.

Exception: If you use two or more numerals in a sentence and they would not all be spelled out or written as numerals, use numerals for every number in the sentence as shown in the second example below. This exception differs from AP style.

CORRECT: We received five applications from one website. However, we received 72 applications from the other website.

CORRECT: Of the 20 applications, only 3 students were accepted.

INCORRECT: Of the 20 applications, only three students were accepted.

In body text, if you must begin a sentence with a number, write it out. In general, however, it is better to rephrase so as to avoid beginning a sentence with a number.

Ex. Twenty-two of the experts agreed.

Ex. Among all the experts, 22 of them agreed.

Use numerals in headlines; data shows that people are more likely to click on 5 than *Five*.

Ex. 5 marketing tips for your career

Use numerals in front of *million* and *billion*.

Ex. The U.S. is expected to send almost 2 billion pieces of direct mail in 2019.

Ex. Our new athletic field will cost \$1 million.

Use abbreviations such as *1M* for 1 million and *1B* for 1 billion in headlines and subheads. Otherwise, avoid such abbreviations in body text wherever possible.

Ex. Read about our success in the article “\$1M athletic field hits big.”

Other notes:

- Do not mix millions and billions in the same figure: *2.6 billion*. Not: *2 billion 600 million*.
- Do not drop the word *million* or *billion* in the first figure of a range: *He is worth from \$2 million to \$4 million*. Not: *\$2 to \$4 million*, unless you really mean \$2.

Dates

Spell out all months when they are not used with a specific date, including when they are used with a specific year. In body text, when a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate the following months: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec.; spell out all other months.

If months need to be **abbreviated outside of body text**, as in graphics, charts and tables, use the following abbreviations without periods: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec.

When **you write out a date**, refer to the conventions below in regard to comma use and placement as well as the order of values. When you shorten a date, use slashes, not dashes.

Ex. September 2020

Ex. Monday, Sept. 1, 2020

Ex. 9/1/2020

Do not use ordinal numbers, such as *1st*, in any dates.

Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers, which are adjectives describing the numerical position of something, should always be written out when being used. Do not use them in dates.

CORRECT: First, third, tenth

INCORRECT: 1st, 3rd, 10th

Percentages

No matter how big or small the number, ALWAYS use a numeral followed by the percent sign (%) in the body copy of all official communication. As with all numbers, spell it out if it starts the sentence, but you should avoid this construction if possible. Use the percent sign in headlines, subheads, advertising graphics, charts and tables as well. DON'T include a space between the number and the percent sign.

Ex. On average 91% of Davenport graduates are employed within six months after graduation.

Ex. Davenport is designated a Military Friendly School by G.I. Jobs, placing it among the top 15% of schools nationwide.

Ex. Davenport's graduation rate has increased by more than 158% since 2009, with graduate satisfaction at 94% and student satisfaction at 5.96 on a 7-point scale.

Phone Numbers

Include a period in between all unit blocks of a phone number, not dashes or parentheses. This differs from AP style.

Ex. 616.698.7111

Times

Use the guidelines below to note the time of day. You may also express the time of day prosaically, as in the last example. When in a table, chart or otherwise designed (as opposed to in body copy), you can omit the periods between *am* and *pm*. List time ranges using a hyphen with no space on either side between the two numbers or the word *to* between the times when *a.m.* or *p.m.* falls in-between.

Ex. 9 a.m.

Ex. 5 p.m.

Ex. 9-10 a.m.

Ex. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Ex. From Monday through Friday, I work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Punctuation

Ampersands

Avoid using ampersands (&) in headlines and in body text. Use *and* instead.

Exceptions: In advertising, charts or tables; where space is tight; or when it's part of a proper noun.

Apostrophes

In general, use an apostrophe followed by an *s* when you need to form the possessive of the word, not to form a plural. The exception to this is the possessive of *it*, which is *its*. The spelling *it's* always functions as a contraction of the phrase *it is*.

Ex. The new CFO's office had its own entrance.

Ex. Jerry put in a hard day's work.

Ex. It's true that Davenport supports veterans.

For plurals that end in *s*, as well as for singular proper nouns that end in *s*, just add an apostrophe to form the possessive without adding an extra *s*.

Ex. The vice presidents' presentations at the town hall meeting received standing ovations.

Ex. The team held Charles' performance in high regard.

Commas

Omit a comma before a conjunction in a simple series using one *and*.

Ex. We can provide bachelor's degrees in business, health and technology.

Use a comma before a conjunction in a complex series using more than one *and*.

Ex. He possesses significant experience with game and application design, information and networking systems, and cybersecurity.

Though writers may disagree about whether or not to place a comma before *too* when the word means “also” and ends a sentence, such a comma is generally unnecessary for clarity. For the sake of consistency across Davenport's copy, we suggest that writers omit the comma in this instance.

Ex. We have a lot of traditional students on campus, but there are a large number of adults too.

Do not set off the designations *Jr.*, *Sr.*, *I*, *II*, *III* or *IV* with a comma.

CORRECT: Martin Luther King III, the son of Martin Luther King Jr.

INCORRECT: Martin Luther King, III, the son of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dashes

When the tone is appropriate, feel free to use **em dashes**, with spaces on either side, to set off text or emphasize a point in a sentence.

To create an em dash on most word processors, use the “insert symbol” function or follow these steps:

1. Type a word, with no space after it.
2. Type two hyphens, with no space between or after them.
3. Type another word.
4. Type a space.
5. Add spaces on either side of the em dash.

Ex. The university's strategic planning process incorporates environmental scanning, goal and target setting, establishing budgets, and developing action plans — all within the scope of the Davenport mission, vision and values.

At the end of a quotation, use an **en dash** with a space on both sides to set off the attribution.

Ex. "I am honored to serve as a member of the board for the American Council on Education and the Heart of West Michigan United Way." – Dr. Richard Pappas

Hyphens

For numbers: Use a hyphen with no space on either side of it to represent a numeric range, but use the word *to* when including a numeric range in a sentence.

Ex. The goal is to increase full-time students from 51% to 60% by next fall.

Ex. Breakfast: 9-10 a.m. / The event runs from 9 to 10 a.m.

Hyphenating phrases: Use a hyphen in a compound modifier when the modifier comes *before* the noun it's modifying. This is called a compound adjective. When the modifier comes *after* the noun, you generally don't need a hyphen.

CORRECT: Is this a dog-friendly campus?

ALSO CORRECT: Is this campus dog friendly?

You also don't need a hyphen when your modifier is made up of an adverb and an adjective, whether it's before or after the noun.

CORRECT: Do you think anyone will believe this clearly impossible story?

INCORRECT: Do you think anyone will believe this clearly-impossible story?

Quotations

Write *said*, not *says*, when quoting someone.

Ex. "Emily brings a tremendous amount of experience and expertise to our team," said John Smith.

Always use double quotation marks on the outside. Single quotation marks are used inside double quotation marks to designate another level of quotation or to set off the title of a composition.

Ex. “I really loved reading ‘Lean In’ and talking about it with colleagues,” said Caroline.

Periods and commas ALWAYS go inside the closing quotation marks.

Ex. “I enjoyed going to lunch with the team,” Jonathan said. “It helped me get to know everyone better.”

Ex. “Whether your favorite book is ‘Blue Ocean Strategy,’ ‘Lean In’ or ‘Outliers,’ you should always read with a critical eye,” said Deb.

Question marks and exclamation points go inside quotation marks only when they’re part of what the speaker is saying or if they are part of a composition title.

Ex. Janice asked, “When would you like to see a first draft?”

Ex. Do you ever think to yourself, “I can’t afford an outside photographer”?

Ex. Her favorite book was “Who Moved My Cheese?”

Ex. Who wrote “Blue Ocean Strategy”?

Colons, semicolons and dashes should generally be placed outside of quotation marks.

Ex. Requests for entries in the following category should use the “official marketing request form”: design for posters, brochures for various audiences and event signage.

Word Choice

Effect vs. Affect

To *affect* means to produce a change or influence something.

Ex. How will the new program structure affect the marketing course?

An *effect* is a change that has already occurred.

Ex. The effect of the new program structure will be significant.

Affect is most often a verb; *effect* is usually a noun.

Insure, Ensure, Assure

To *insure* applies in instances where one is referencing some kind of insurance, especially the practice of insuring against a loss in value for financial assets or property.

Ex. You are insured against theft.

To *ensure* means to confirm or verify.

Ex. Track your ROI to ensure your success.

To *assure* means to promise, convince, guarantee or make certain.

Ex. I can assure you that we will find you a good-paying job.

Website References

When referencing any of the university's websites, do not include *http://www.* before the address.

Ex. Please visit davenport.edu to learn more about our campuses.

Ex. The university blog can be found at post.davenport.edu.

In general, this advice can be followed for all websites listed in written pieces unless it's absolutely necessary to include *http://www.*

Appendix A: Commonly Used Acronyms

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC)

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King – Always spell out his full title and name; never use “MLK”
Institute of Professional Excellence (IPEX)