

STYLE GUIDE

A Comprehensive Guide to Editorial Style for Print and Digital

Capitalization

In General Official names and proper nouns are capitalized. Common nouns and various shortened forms of official names are not capitalized. Use the full, official name the first time it appears in a document or section of a document.

Yesterday's banquet was the official start of the New Century Capital Campaign. The campaign has already raised \$25 million.

A Note on Capitalization These style guidelines for using initial capitals for university related terms may differ from what you have been using. In general, this guide recommends a lowercase style, for several reasons:

Standard style guides, including the *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law* and *The Chicago Manual of Style*, require lowercase letters in running text for such things as job descriptions and unofficial department names. Several CU publications, including *Silver & Gold Record*, also observe the preference for lowercasing such terms. The lowercase style is becoming the preferred style for external communications at other institutions as well, in part because the media observe that style; therefore, it is the style familiar to noncampus readers.

Because many primary, official CU publications and documents already use the lowercase style, and because it is the preferred style in the rest of the business and professional world, we recommend that all CU writers adopt this style.

Keeping everything except full, official names lowercase also simplifies decisions about when to capitalize shortened forms of official names.

Do Not Capitalize:

- central administration
- city of Boulder, the
- classes: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior
- college, the
- degrees: doctorate, doctor's, master's, bachelor's, baccalaureate
- department, the
- form names, unofficial: admissions form, drop/add form
- orientation
- program, the (specific)
- seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter
- school, the
- spring break
- state of Colorado, the
- university, the (when it stands alone in reference to the University of Colorado)

The Case for Lowercase

When too many words are capitalized, they lose their importance and no longer attract attention.

Readability studies have shown that copy is more easily read when it isn't peppered with initial caps or all caps.

Using lowercase letters in no way diminishes the stature or credibility of an individual's position or a department's reputation. After all, even the title "president of the United States" is lowercased in running text when it doesn't immediately precede the incumbent's name.

When writing promotional or marketing materials (such as brochures or print ads), emphasis can be achieved more effectively by the skillful use of white space, typeface, and typestyle than by excessive use of initial caps or all caps.

Academic and Nonacademic Units and Bodies Capitalize only the complete and official names of colleges, schools, divisions, departments, offices, and official bodies (such as Board of Regents, Faculty Assembly, Student Government Executive Council). Lowercase informal and shortened versions of all such names. (See also [Department Names](#) in this section.)

The College of Arts and Sciences welcomes you as a new student. The arts and sciences departments are housed in several different buildings on campus.

The Leeds School of Business is often referred to as the business school.

The School of Law is often simply called the law school.

When the Board of Regents met last week, the regents voted not to add a new major.

The Schools of Education and Law have both increased enrollment in the last year. Both schools have added new course sections to accommodate the growth.

Committee, Center, Group, Program, and Initiative Names Unless a committee, center, group, program, or initiative is officially recognized and formally named, avoid capitalizing. An ad hoc committee's name, for example, would not typically be capitalized. Do capitalize the official, proper names of long-standing committees and groups and formally developed programs and initiatives.

The Mountaineering Collection in Norlin Library contains a wealth of intriguing materials. The collection is located on the library's third level.

The Honors Program has been a huge success.

Both faculty and students support the Total Learning Environment initiative.

The university's presidential search committee met in closed executive session Tuesday on the Fitzsimons campus of the Health Sciences Center.

Course Titles Style official course titles with initial capitals but without quotation marks, italics, or any other formatting.

Students should consider taking Accounting Issues for Lawyers as well as Agency, Partnership, and the LLC.

Degrees Capitalize abbreviations of degrees (see [Abbreviations](#) section) but not the spelled-out versions and not when they're referred to generically.

Lawrence Tort received a doctor of law degree from CU.

Miller family members hold a total of five doctor's, three master's, and ten bachelor's degrees.

Julie Jones, PhD, earned her bachelor of science degree from CU-Boulder.

Department Names Capitalize official department names and office names in running text. References using shortened or unofficial names should be lowercase.

Despite our best attempts, we have not been able to obtain a comprehensive, officially sanctioned master list of formal department names. Until we hear that one exists, assume that academic departments are officially named Department of X and that service departments and other offices are Office of X or X Services or X, as in: Office of News Services, Printing Services, Publications and Creative Services.

Faculty members from the geography, anthropology, and ethnic studies departments are cooperating on this project.

Mary Moore of engineering has been promoted to associate professor.

Allison Eco of EPO biology gave the keynote address. (*EPO* is in caps because it is an acronym.)

The Department of Kinesiology publishes a newsletter.

Do not use capitals when the department affiliation serves as an adjective rather than a noun:

Electrical engineering Professor Sparky Line has been promoted.

Geographical and Related Terms Geographical terms commonly accepted as proper names are capitalized. Other descriptive or identifying geographical terms that either do not apply to only one geographical entity or are not regarded as proper names for these entities are not capitalized. Cultural or climatic terms derived from geographical proper names are generally lowercased.

the Flatirons, the Front Range, the South, southern, southwestern (direction), the Southwest (U.S.), the West, western Europe, the West Coast, the Middle East, the Midwest (U.S.), west, western, westerner

Grades Capitalize and italicize grade letters and use two numerals after the period in GPAs.

She got an *F* in Principles of Modern Homekeeping, which brought her overall GPA down to 3.30.

Job and Position Titles Capitalize job titles only when they immediately precede the individual's name or when they are named positions or honorary titles (as in the last two examples).

It's common knowledge that President George W. Bush loves his dogs.

The president, George W. Bush, took the oath of office under cloudy skies.

The president of the United States serves a four-year term of office.

Have you taken a course from Professor Sherman?

Sherman, a music professor, does not teach in the summer.

Search committee Chair Paul Jones received only 12 applications for the job.

When Secretary of Education Sally Reid visited CU, she was impressed.

When Sally Reid visited CU, she was secretary of education.

The vice chancellor for student affairs uses a variety of means to improve students' lives on the Boulder campus.

Jane Doe of engineering has been promoted to associate professor.

Jason Homer is Important Alumni Name Professor of interdisciplinary studies.

Moses Sunquist was a Distinguished Practitioner-in-Residence this summer.

Long Titles When a person has a very long title, put the title after the name to avoid clumsy syntax and "capitalizationitis".

Jane Bear, special assistant to the president and director of special university projects, is moving her office to the new administration building.

Descriptive Job Titles Note that descriptive job titles, as opposed to formal, academic, or administrative titles, are not capitalized:

Features photographer Inda Gnow and writer Helda Line presented the proposal to public affairs Director Noah Comment.

Occupational Descriptions Do not capitalize occupational descriptions either before or after a name.

When chef Ella Fragrant had lunch with writer Nola Wirred, they decided to create a CU-Boulder cookbook.

Titles in Addresses When a title is part of an address or headline (or other display type), capitalize the title even if it appears after the name.

Jean Warren, Director of Housing
University of Colorado at Boulder
111 UCB
Boulder, CO 80309-0111

Publication and Other Titles When writing for general readerships, set book, journal, brochure, pamphlet, long poems, TV series, operas, long musical compositions, artwork, and movie titles in italics; set chapter and article titles in roman and enclose them in quotation marks; set names of forms in roman.

Capitalize the following in titles:

the first word

the last word

the first word after a colon

all nouns, verbs (including short verbs, such as *is, are, be*), pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, subordinating conjunctions (*if, because, as, that*)

Do not capitalize the following in titles (unless they fall into one of the previously listed categories):

articles (*a, an, the*), unless they are part of a proper noun

coordinating conjunctions (*and, but, or, for, nor*)

prepositions (*on, between, because of, to, so, yet, by, before, over, under, through, etc.*)

Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years, by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger, has been a popular guide for parents since its publication in 1997.

The library recently received three copies of Francis Whitley's latest book, *Educating Minds through Active Learning*.

Students must return their Application for Admission by the published deadline to be considered for admission to the University of Colorado at Boulder.

In special cases, where you know that an author officially uses lowercase letters (as in the case of poet e e cummings), use the preferred capitalization.

Seasons and Semesters Lowercase seasons, semesters, and terms.

spring semester

fall 2003

the summer 2002 term

Structures and Places Capitalize the full official names of buildings and formally designated places on campus.

Main Campus

East Campus

BUT Boulder campus, Colorado Springs campus

Eaton Humanities building

Engineering Center (these two rather generic names have traditionally been capped in running text for lack of official names; we support the initial caps in these cases)

Koenig Alumni Center, the alumni center

Imig Music, the music building

Norlin Library (subsequent references using just "the library" would not be capped: Norlin Library is a great place to study. I spent three hours in the library last night.)

Mary Rippon Theatre

Students Do not capitalize freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or first-year student, unless they appear at the beginning of a sentence or in a headline. *Upper-division* and *first-year* are preferred adjectives for students instead of *upper-class* and *freshman*.

Trademarks Many words and names are legally trademarked and should appear with initial capitals to acknowledge that fact. Also owners of such trademarks have a legal right to restrict the use of those trademarked terms to their specific product. As a result, avoid using trademarked names, like *Kleenex* and *Xerox*, as generic terms. Instead, use *facial tissue* and *photocopier*, unless you intend to refer to the trademarked brand name. A good dictionary will tell you whether commonly used words are trademarked and will also indicate if a trademarked term should be capitalized.

The symbols ® and ™, which often appear on product packaging and advertisements, need not be used in running text.

The University There has been considerable confusion about whether to capitalize *university* when the word refers to the University of Colorado. We recommend a foolproof solution: **no capital unless you are spelling the full name of the university.**

Use of a capital or a lowercase *u* in *university* when the reference is to one's own institution is divided; some institutions—both great and small—use a capital while some do not. It has been more or less customary at CU to capitalize *university* when referring to the CU system or one of its campuses (in part because older editions of *The Chicago Manual of Style* did so). However, we strongly recommend that CU writers switch to using a lowercase *u* for these reasons:

Doing so eliminates any confusion about when to capitalize the word. When writers use the full name—the University of Colorado—or an abbreviation or acronym—CU-Boulder or CU—they will have no difficulty knowing which elements require caps.

Nonuniversity preferences (in publishing, the news media, and the nonacademic business world) are for lowercasing *university*, even when it refers to a specific institution.

CU writers communicate often and widely with external audiences. Sometimes materials originally intended for internal distribution are later distributed to external audiences.

In almost all cases, context will clearly indicate when *university* refers to the University of Colorado. In cases where there may be ambiguity, writers can easily substitute *our university* or *CU* or *the Boulder campus*.

The University of Colorado at Boulder is committed to diversity. To that end, the university sponsors several programs and offices that encourage diversity and provide support to university faculty, staff, and students of diverse backgrounds. Developing campuswide understanding of diversity is important at every United States university.

A Couple of Analogies Every current, reputable style guide that we are aware of (including *The Chicago Manual of Style*, which tends to use more capitals than AP newspaper style) promotes the general rule that subsequent references to proper nouns that use a part of that proper noun (such as *street*, *hotel*, *building*, *company*, *university*, *association*, etc.) are not capitalized. Because we write within an academic setting, our readers have a right to expect us to choose a writing style that is clear, intelligent, and logically defensible—as far as the latter is possible given the vagaries of the English language. In case of University vs. university, we might compare usage to similar cases.

The Important Company is holding a stockholders' meeting next week. The company is expected to announce record-breaking profits.

(In this example, although *company* in the second sentence refers to the Important Company, and although *company* is capped when it appears in the full, proper name of the company, in the second sentence *company* serves as a common, lowercase noun.)

The Colorado Supreme Court will rule on the case this year. The court has an exceptionally heavy caseload this year.

(In this example, although *court* in the second sentence refers to the Colorado Supreme Court, and although *court* is capped when it appears in the full, proper name of the court, in the second sentence *court* serves as a common, lowercase noun. Note that the only exception in this context is the U.S. Supreme Court, which is always referred to as *the Court*.)



Capitalization with Job Titles

Capitalization with job titles can be confusing. A good rule of thumb is to use lower case for all titles when using *the* in front of them.

Examples:

Ms. Hanson is the editorial advisor for The Independent Journal.

Sal Lowen is the chairman of Acutech.

Mr. Cortez was formerly the senior managing director of the Baskin Group.

However, when the title is used without *the*, you may capitalize.

Examples:

Ms. Hanson, Editorial Advisor for The Independent Journal, helped draft the article.

Sal Lowen, Chairman of Acutech, will give a presentation on Friday.