

Skidmore College

Guide to Writing Right

June 2001

To help keep all Skidmore publications clear, consistent, and effective, the College Relations Office has compiled this short style guide. We use this guide in writing and editing all publications (except news releases and *Scope* magazine, which use slightly different styles). This guide covers some of the most common problems and also explains the few instances where our style differs from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, used by most academic institutions. We hope you'll find this guide a handy source of answers about capitalizing job titles, punctuating lists, hyphenating compound adjectives, and other questions of style and usage.

For do's and don'ts not covered here, please refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. To find preferred spellings and hyphenations, please use the first (not second) and the American (not British) spelling given in a Webster's dictionary — we like *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*. For correct department and course names, faculty titles, and other Skidmore-related items, the most current *Skidmore College Catalog* is your best guide.

And for help or advice about any of these issues, feel free to give our staff a call at ext. 5730 or 5732.

DEPARTMENTS, PROGRAMS, COURSES

For official names of Skidmore departments and programs, capitalize both the name and the word “department” or “program” (but not the preceding “the”):

the Environmental Studies Program, the College Relations Office (or the Office of College Relations), the Department of English (or the English Department), the Art and Art History Department (or the Department of Art and Art History)

When referring subsequently to “the department” or “the program,” don't capitalize it. But when referring to Skidmore, we make an exception and capitalize “the College.”

Don't capitalize general initiatives or undertakings like “the undergraduate program,” “the varsity soccer program,” or “the leadership gifts program.”

Don't capitalize the names of disciplines or fields of study (except for countries or languages, which are capitalized anyway):

The chemistry curriculum includes a couple of hair-raising lab experiments.
She's a history major, with a minor in American studies.

Proper names of courses should be capitalized and enclosed in quotes:

A biology major, he excelled in “Plant Physiology” but had trouble with field zoology.
They specialize in literary history, offering such courses as “The French Novel.”

OTHER ORGANIZED ENTITIES

Major College events and named activities are capitalized:

Commencement, Reunion '03, Family Weekend, Spring Fling, Winter Carnival

But the same words are lowercased when they refer not to one specific event but to such events as general occurrences:

Most commencement exercises are rehearsed ahead of time.
Successful reunion giving depends on alumni loyalty.
Old-fashioned homecomings can be fun.
A reunion volunteer, Sally organized her class dinner for Reunion '99.

Rule of thumb: if it sounds OK with an article or adjective in front—"this reunion," "our 65th reunion," "a lovely commencement"—then it should be lowercased. If it can stand alone with no article or adjective—"they said Commencement is on Sunday," "I came to Reunion," "I met him at Reunion"—then it should be capitalized.

When citing campus buildings, it's usually best to give the last name only:

Bernhard Theater, Harder Hall, Jonsson Tower, Filene Music Building

If you wish to highlight the building's namesakes, you could use the full, formal building name on first reference only:

They named the Therese W. Filene Music Building for the mother of Helen Filene Ladd '22.

When using the full proper name of Skidmore's campuses, use capitals:

the Scribner Campus, the Jonsson Campus, the campus

"Award" and "prize" are capitalized when the full name is used, but not in shortened versions:

Amahlia won the Katherine Scranton Rozendaal Citizenship Award.
The Rozendaal award goes to civic-minded students.

The full official name of the board and the alumni association is capitalized:

the Skidmore College Board of Trustees, the Skidmore College Alumni Association

But in subsequent references, use the briefer, lowercased version:

the board of trustees, the alumni association

The same is true for graduating classes:

the Skidmore College Class of '86, or the class of '86

Likewise with government offices: on first reference call it the New York State Department of Education, but afterward just call it the state education department.

As a proper name, the Federal Reserve Bank is capitalized, but general terms like "federal scholarship" or "national offices" or "state championships" are lowercased.

If, in order to distinguish the state from the city, you use the word “state” in a state’s name, capitalize all words: New York State and Washington State.

Capitalize the names of officially constituted committees or clubs:

the Institutional Planning Committee, the Student Life Committee, the Social Integrity Board, the Outing Club

And then, in subsequent reference, just use “the committee” or “the club.”

Don’t capitalize the “the” preceding names of businesses, groups, etc.:

the *New York Times*, the Metropolitan Opera, the Beatles

DEGREES

Except when abbreviated as initials (B.A., M.S.W., Ph.D.), academic degrees are lowercased. They can be expressed as the full name followed by “degree,” or in a shorted version with an apostrophe and “s”:

I earned a master of science degree. I earned a master’s.
Choose from three bachelor of arts degree programs. Choose from three bachelor’s programs.

Ph.D.s may also be referred to as “doctorates” or “doctoral degrees.”

Again, capitalize department names but not fields of study:

Jane has a Ph.D. in management, Ahmed has a master’s in social work, and Susan did her bachelor’s work in the Chemistry and Physics Department.

PEOPLE AND TITLES

Professional titles are not capitalized unless they precede the person’s name:

Gita met with Vice President Rhonda Walloon, Associate Professor Robert Sledd, and Assistant Dean Eugene Wiseacre; later she consulted Bruce Bonamo, department chair and professor of American studies, and Anna Kakurian, director of financial services.

Don’t capitalize appositive phrases that describe a person’s role but that aren’t full, formal job titles:

FORMAL JOB TITLE: According to Assistant Dean for Freshman Orientation George Fairbanks, Jamal was always on time.

ROLE DESCRIPTION: According to freshman orientation coordinator George Fairbanks, Jamal was always on time.

When citing a title alone, also use lowercase:

I’ll have to check with the dean regarding the registrar’s plan.

If citing a professor's discipline, be sure to indicate the particular field, which may *not* be the same as the department name:

Emilio Suarez, associate professor of anthropology, joined the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work.
Professor of Chinese Karen Finkbeiner is a member of the Foreign Languages Department.

For endowed, named professorships, capitalize all the words in the title on first reference, and afterward use a shortened version with the "chair" or "professor" lowercased:

He's been the F. William Harder Professor of Business Administration for three years.
Traditionally, the Harder professor gives a public lecture.

Professors may be appointed to endowed chairs, or may hold endowed chairs, but they cannot *be* endowed chairs:

Because she was appointed to the Gertrude Q. Fenstermacher Memorial Chair in Cetology, she's now the Fenstermacher professor of cetology.

Note: It's usually a chair *in* a field, but a professor *of* a field.

In citing people, use their first and last names on first reference, and their last names only (without any title such as Mr., Ms., Prof., or Dr.) on subsequent reference:

Smith offered Levine and Chen a taste of his pie.

Exception: For Skidmore's founder, use her full name, "Lucy Skidmore Scribner," or "Mrs. Scribner."

When people have the same last name, subsequent references will need to include their first names:

The dance is performed by Yves and Simone Levée, along with Peter Charleston. Yves has studied with Charleston, but Simone just met him.

Omit the comma before "Jr." or "Sr."

When a name ending in "s" is made possessive, add an apostrophe and another "s":

Slim Pickens's voice was unmistakable.
Rachel Voorhies's door is always open.

Exceptions: Moses' law, Jesus' teachings, Isis' temple (no one else!)

When referring to family members by pluralizing their last name, add "s" or "es" even if the name itself already ends in "s":

The Alvarazes donated a new building, but the Smiths' and Joneses' gifts were unrestricted.

In formal contexts where a subsequent reference includes a title like "Mr." or "Ms." it's acceptable to refer to all faculty members as "Prof. Lastname," but *not* "Dr. Lastname."

When using “emeritus”—or, for women, “emerita”—place it immediately after “professor,” not after the discipline:

Ernest Meeker, professor emeritus of classics, found himself in the conga line next to Professor Emerita Ruthanne Kraft, the drama coach.

On first reference, alumni should be listed with their class year after their name:

The scholarship was given to Shirley Wright '69, a poet.
The scholarship was given to poet Shirley Wright, class of '69.

Like most collective nouns, “faculty” and “staff” are generally used as singular nouns, but common usage allows them to be plural as well:

BEST: Faculty members are devoted to undergraduate teaching, or the faculty is devoted to undergraduate teaching.
BUT OK: Faculty are devoted to undergraduate teaching.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations consisting of initials do not include periods:

AIDS, HIV, NCAA, HEOP, UK, UN, POW-MIA, UCLA, USDA

Exceptions: Use periods for all college degrees (B.S., M.A., M.D., M.Div., Ph.D., etc.) and for “U.S.” and “U.S.A.”

When citing a city and state, either spell out the name of the state or use the Associated Press abbreviation:

The cats had trekked from Duluth, Minn., to Eau Claire, Wis.

When citing a state alone, don't abbreviate it:

The cats had trekked from Minnesota to Wisconsin.

In giving an entire mailing address, use the two-letter U.S. Post Office abbreviation for the state:

Kitty Kompanions Inc.
1234 Furze Flower Blvd., suite 9
Duluth, MN 54545

PUNCTUATION

In a list or series with commas, College style calls for a comma before “and” and “or”:

Waffle Fest is a time to eat, drink, and be merry.
On-campus students live in singles, doubles, or sometimes triples.

Use semicolons in a series only if one of the elements already contains its own commas or other punctuation. When using semicolons, be sure the list comes at the *end* of the sentence; don't interrupt a sentence with a semicolon:

NO: The singer, a freshman from Rye, N.Y.; the biologist, a junior from Ontario, Canada; and the chemist, a senior from Peck, Texas, agreed that Saratoga is a toddlin' town.

YES: The singer (a freshman from Rye, N.Y.), the biologist (a junior from Ontario, Canada), and the chemist (a senior from Peck, Texas) agreed that Saratoga is a toddlin' town.

YES: Three students cited Saratoga as a toddlin' town: the singer, a freshman from Rye, N.Y.; the biologist, a junior from Ontario, Canada; and the chemist, a senior from Peck, Texas.

In general, use a comma before a clause beginning with "which":

Twelve clowns emerged from the red car, which was tiny.

If the meaning is "from the red car which was tiny, as opposed to some other red car," then it's best to omit the comma and use "that" instead of "which":

They emerged from the car that was tiny and climbed into the car that was large.

Rule of thumb: a "which" clause often resembles a parenthetical remark: if you omitted it, the sentence would still express your main point. If the information is indispensable to your meaning, then you're usually better off using a "that" clause.

A slash is shorthand for "or," or quite often for "and/or":

Unauthorized vehicles may be ticketed/towed.

Don't use a slash as a separator (better to use a comma), or as a connector (better to use a hyphen):

NO: Call the box office/587-1234/Monday-Friday.

YES: Call the box office, 587-1234, Monday-Friday.

NO: The student/faculty team studied the composer/pianist Franz Liszt.

YES: The student-faculty team studied the composer-pianist Franz Liszt.

In phone numbers, use a hyphen after area codes. When listing campus extensions only, precede them with the lowercased abbreviation "ext."

Call the yearbook editor at 518-580-4166.

Call the yearbook editor at ext. 4166.

In running text, when citing a state after a city, set off the state with a comma both before and after:

She had her sheepskin mailed to her Springfield, Mass., address.

If citing a date with a year, set off the year with commas (but not if citing only a month and year):
Her essay is due by January 1995, so she set December 1, 1994, as her research deadline.

In business names, omit the comma before “Inc.” or “Ltd.” (Ditto for people named “Jr.” or “Sr.”):

Robert Barron Jr. was named CEO of Dewey Cheatham Inc. over a year ago.

In letters and e-mail, it’s usually best to put two spaces after a period that ends a sentence; however, if the text will be typeset and commercially printed, it’s best to insert just one space after a period.

ITEMIZING AND ENUMERATING

When items must be listed on separate lines and set off with a bullet (or numeral), it’s best to place the bullet at the left margin and indent any runover lines:

Campers are asked to:

- sweep out their tents each week
- avoid deflating the rubber rafts, inner tubes, dock pontoons, air mattresses, and volleyballs
- carry a flyswatter with them at all times

Unless the items are complete sentences, no punctuation is needed at the end of lines; the itemized format serves in place of punctuation. If the items are complex or contain punctuation, you could add semicolons after the items, with a period after the last item.

HYPHENATION AND SPELLING

As a rule, most prefixes don’t use hyphens, unless they precede a capitalized word. If the prefix ends with the same letter that begins the next word, adding a hyphen can help avoid confusion:

substandard, nonprofit (but non-Western and non-negotiable), postgraduate, semifinal, antiwar (but anti-inflammatory), premedical (but pre-Christian and pre-eminent), coed, cocurricular, cosponsor, interdisciplinary, overused, underestimate, midterm (but mid-June), recalculate (but re-enter), minicollege, minicourse

Exceptions: “co-worker,” “anti-aircraft,” and others that might be misread without a hyphen.

Always hyphenate with the prefix “self-.”

Be sure to hyphenate compound adjectives when they come before the noun:

The death-defying acrobats set up high-tension wires over the all-purpose playing fields.
Many alumni provide annual gifts, but some also make a life-income arrangement.
This may be *called* top-quality sirloin, but it’s not of top quality.

When an adverb (other than “well” or “ill”) precedes an adjective, no hyphen is needed:

The thespians put on a creatively designed show for the wildly appreciative crowd.

College style prefers these spellings, even though a couple of them disagree with Webster's:

catalog (not catalogue)
advisor (not adviser)
fundraising, fundraiser (one word)
Web site, on the Web
online (one word)
e-mail

For other spellings, please follow a Webster's dictionary.

NUMERALS

In running text, spell out numbers from one through nine and use numerals for 10 and up. But if a sentence or paragraph contains several numbers, it's best to use numerals for all of them.

Never begin a sentence with a numeral: either spell out the number or recast the sentence so that the number is not the first element.

Spell out large round numbers like "one hundred," "ten thousand," etc. Also certain casual or colloquial expressions are better spelled out:

This new map is fifty times better than the old version.

In citing percentages in running text, always use numerals and the word "percent":

The blob grew by 45 percent and then shrank to 8 percent of its original size.

Don't use ciphers (place-holding zeros) with even dollar amounts or times of day:

The festival starts at 8 p.m. on Friday; tickets are \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for kids.

For phone numbers, see under "Punctuation."

DATES AND TIMES

Don't use ordinal suffixes such as "th" or "nd" with numerals in dates:

We seeded the lettuce on May 22, and by August 6 we'd picked it all.

There was a parade for the July 3 holiday—an early celebration of the Fourth of July.

When referring to decades, either spell them out in words or else use numerals preceded by an apostrophe (to indicate the missing "19" or "20" prefix) and followed by an "s":

For them, the sixties were momentous.

For them, the '60s were momentous.

When decades refer to people's ages rather than calendar years, always use the words:

People in their twenties rarely have arthritis.

For times of day, use lowercase abbreviations with periods:

12:30 p.m., 3 p.m., 10:05 a.m.

Note that at 12 o'clock exactly, it's neither a.m. nor p.m.; it's 12 noon or 12 midnight (or just noon or midnight).

To list a range of dates or times, use *either* "from" and "to," *or* "between" and "and," *or* a hyphen:

This fall, registration will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Sack-race practices will be held between noon and 3 p.m., from April 26 through June 2.

The gallery is open Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and 3-8 p.m.

When using a hyphen to indicate a range of years, don't repeat the "19" or "20":

His presidency, 2001-03, came after service as secretary during 1987-97.

In ranges of figures with the same measurement, include the measurement term only once, at the end of the range:

Test scores dropped 10-20 percent; my own went down from 1030 to 910 points.

NONDISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE

The College avoids gender-based language—most commonly, the use of a male pronoun ("he" or "him") to refer to such general terms as "the student," "the applicant," or "the professor." But don't abandon good grammar and use a plural pronoun when the antecedent is singular (for example, "When a student enrolls, they must attend class"). The best approach is usually to make everything plural:

AVOID: If a biology student wants to study mosquitoes, he'll find plenty at the pond.

INSTEAD: If biology students want to study mosquitoes, they'll find plenty at the pond.

WRONG: An employee who loses their ID card can get it replaced.

RIGHT: Employees who lose their ID cards can get them replaced.

WRONG: Any student who violates parking regulations may lose their parking privileges.

RIGHT: Violators of parking regulations may lose their parking privileges.

In cases when you must use singular forms, give both male and female pronouns (in either order) and separate them with "or" (not with a slash):

Each club member must tie-dye his or her own T-shirt.

Especially with promotional, nonlegalistic documents, try using the second person ("you"), which avoids any gender bias:

You will need to tie-dye your own T-shirt.
If you violate the rules, you may lose your privileges.
To register for classes, please show your ID card.

For people who chair departments or boards, use “chair,” not “chairman,” “chairwoman,” or “chairperson.”

In formal contexts using titles like “Mr.” or “Ms.,” when citing a married couple with the same last name, either give both first names or omit first names, but don’t give just the husband’s first name:

NO: Mr. and Mrs. William O’Sullivan
YES: Mr. and Mrs. O’Sullivan
YES: William and Claudia O’Sullivan

In citing ethnic identity, don’t use an adjective as a noun (e.g., “blacks and whites agreed to try”). Avoid the vague, indefinite term “multicultural” when referring to members of specific ethnic groups. Instead use terms preferred by each group:

black (as an adjective) or African-American
white (as an adjective) or Caucasian
Asian-American or Asian
Hispanic (as an adjective), or Latino (male) and Latina (female)
Native American or American Indian

Note: Check the biographical material provided by guest speakers or performers to see how each refers to himself or herself (e.g., activist Russell Means prefers “American Indian,” and artist Juan Sanchez refers to himself as “Puerto Rican”).

Likewise, follow the preference of the people in question for terms concerning sexual orientation. As a rule, “gay” is an adjective, not a noun (e.g., don’t say: “The gays on the panel called for a vote”), while “lesbian” works as an adjective *and* a noun. “Gay” is the standard term for men but can refer to women as well.

SELECTED EXAMPLES

advisor	<i>not</i> adviser
African-American	hyphenated
Asian-American	hyphenated
alumnus	one male graduate
alumna	one female graduate
alumnae	two or more female grads
alumni	two or more male <i>or</i> mixed-gender grads; avoid “alumnae/i”
alumni association	capitalize only when “Skidmore College” precedes it
B.A., B.S., M.A.	include periods
bachelor’s degree	lowercased
board of trustees	capitalize only when “Skidmore College” precedes it
catalog	<i>not</i> catalogue
chair	<i>not</i> chairwoman, chairman, or chairperson

class of '99	capitalize only when "Skidmore College" precedes it
cocurricular	no hyphen
co-driver	hyphenated to avoid confusion ("codriver" = cod river?)
College	capitalize whenever it refers to Skidmore
committee	capitalize only in full name—e.g., "the Curriculum Committee"
course work	two words
deferred-gift arrangement	hyphenated as a compound adjective
department	capitalize only in full name—e.g., "the Music Department"
director	capitalize only when it precedes the person's name
emeritus, emerita	no italics; directly follows the word "professor"
every day	two words <i>unless</i> used as an adjective—e.g., "an everyday event"
Filene scholar	capitalize all words in full, official name, but not in shortened version
first-year student	hyphenated as a compound adjective
freshman	OK for both genders
HEOP	no periods
he/she, him/her	avoid; instead try to use plurals ("they") or use second person ("you")
Latino, Latina	masculine and feminine forms
Liberal Studies courses	capitalize when referring to Skidmore's unique program
master's degree	lowercased
midterm, midyear	no hyphen
mid-June	hyphenated because second word is capitalized
multicultural	may describe a group, but not one person
Native American	no hyphen
NCAA	no periods
nonprofit	no hyphen
non-Western	hyphenated because second word is capitalized
off-campus study	hyphenated as a compound adjective
office	capitalize only in full, official name—e.g., College Relations Office
online	no hyphen
nineties	spell out decades (or use numerals: the '90s)
percent	one word
Ph.D.	include periods
phonathon	<i>not</i> phonathon
preprofessional	no hyphen
president	capitalize only when it precedes name—e.g., President Jamiene S. Studley
professor	capitalize only when it precedes name—e.g., Professor David Miller
résumé, resume	use <i>both</i> accent marks, or else <i>none</i>
self-determined major	always hyphenate with "self-"
the <i>Skidmore News</i>	italicize and capitalize, except for the "the"
to study abroad	two words (a verb and an adverb)
a study-abroad program	hyphenate as a compound adjective
theater	<i>not</i> theatre, <i>unless</i> proper name of a particular playhouse uses "Theatre"
under way	two words
U.S., U.S.A.	include periods
UWW	no periods
the Web	capitalize when referring to World Wide Web
Web site	two words

