



Association of  
Fraternity/Sorority  
Advisors

**WRITER'S TOOLKIT**

# SENTENCE ERRORS

## Subject-Verb Agreement

The subject and verb of a sentence must agree. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular; and if the subject is plural, the verb must also be plural.

**Incorrect:** An important part of my education have been my favorite professors.

**Correct:** An important part of my education has been my favorite professors.

**Incorrect:** The two best things about the trip was the food and the museums.

**Correct:** The two best things about the trip were the food and the museums.

If the subject is composed of two or more nouns or pronouns connected by *and*, use a plural verb.

**Incorrect:** She and her colleagues is attending the meeting.

**Correct:** She and her colleagues are attending the meeting.

If two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by *or* or *nor*, use a singular verb.

**Incorrect:** The paper or the essay are due tomorrow.

**Correct:** The paper or the essay is due tomorrow.

If a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by *or* or *nor*, the verb should agree with the noun nearer the verb.

**Incorrect:** The person or their co-workers turns in financial reports.

**Correct:** The person or their co-workers turn in financial reports.

If a phrase comes between the subject and the verb, the verb agrees with the subject.

**Incorrect:** The journal, including the articles about hazing, are important to read.

**Correct:** The journal, including the articles about hazing, is important to read.

When using the contractions *doesn't* and *don't*, use the following rules. *Doesn't* should be with a singular subject. *Don't* should be used with a plural subject. The exception is in the case of first person and second person pronouns *I* and *you*. With these pronouns, use *don't*.

**Incorrect:** The diners doesn't like the lunch menu.

**Correct:** The diners don't like the lunch menu.

Some word nouns require singular verbs. A few of these nouns are *civics*, *mathematics*, *dollars*, *measles*, and *news*. However, the word *dollars* requires a plural verb if referring to *dollars* themselves.

**Incorrect:** The nightly news are on at seven.

**Correct:** The nightly news is on at seven.

**Incorrect:** Dollars is exchangeable for pesos.

**Correct:** Dollars are exchangeable for pesos.

In sentences beginning with *there is* or *there are*, the subject follows the verb. *There* is not a subject, so the verb agrees with what follows.

**Incorrect:** There is many questions.

**Correct:** There are many questions.

## Vague Pronoun Reference

A vague pronoun reference (like *it*, *that*, *this*, and *which*) can leave the reader confused about what or to whom the pronoun refers.

**Incorrect:** When Sam finally found his lost cat, he was so happy. (*Is Sam or the cat happy?*)

**Correct:** Sam was so happy when he found his lost cat.

**Incorrect:** Charlie was happy and excited after hearing about Danni's new job. This is what started everything. (*What started everything? Charlie's happiness or Dani's new job?*)

**Correct:** Charlie was happy and excited after hearing about Danni's new job. Their job started everything.

Ambiguous pronoun references can also confuse readers.

**Incorrect:** Felix finished the report for Simon, but he couldn't deliver it on time because she stopped him to talk.

**Correct:** Felix finished the report for Simon, but Felix couldn't deliver it on time because Anna stopped Simon to talk.

## Parallel Structure

Faulty parallel structure occurs when two or more parts of a sentence are similar in meaning but are not grammatically similar.

**Incorrect:** Austin wanted to study chemistry, programming, engineers, scientist, and robotics.

**Correct:** Austin wanted to study chemistry, programming, engineering, science, and robotics.

**Incorrect:** The meeting directives were clear: hit monthly revenue goals, marketing campaigns, and reporting on daily sales.

**Correct:** The meeting directives were clear: hit monthly revenue goals, create marketing campaigns, and report on daily sales.

## Incomplete Comparisons

If you are comparing something to something else, make sure you clarify the something else.

**Incorrect:** The program was faster, better, and stronger.

**Correct:** The program was faster, better, and stronger than the old operating system.

## Sentence Fragments

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences. They don't have an independent clause and may lack a subject, a complete verb, or both.

**Incorrect:** With working too much got Tom behind in school.

**Correct:** Working too much got Tom behind in school.

**Incorrect:** Why did they stay at the party? In spite of everything.

**Correct:** In spite of everything, why did they stay at the party?

## Misplaced Or Dangling Modifier

A misplaced modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that is separated from the word it modifies or describes. Often, the mistake occurs when a description doesn't apply to the noun immediately following the phrase. You should place the modifier directly next to the word it is modifying.

**Incorrect:** While walking around campus, Martin found a faded soccer player's jersey.

**Correct:** While walking around campus, Martin found a soccer player's faded jersey.

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase modifying a word not clearly stated in the sentence.

**Incorrect:** Having started the meeting, the presentation was turned on.

**Correct:** Having started the meeting, Will turned on the presentation.

## Inflated Sentences

Inflated sentences occur when you are overly wordy. By adding in filler words, you muddy what you are trying to say. Also, don't overuse words like *that*, *just*, and *very*.

It has come to our immediate attention that your bill is overdue, and we highly encourage you to pay this overdue bill at your earliest convenience or before October 5.

**Edit to:** Your bill is overdue. Please pay by October 5.

## Sentence Sprawl

Void sentence sprawl because the sentence can become confusing or difficult to read.

**Incorrect:** Rob wanted to attend the annual conference, but then he remembered he was supposed to be in his friend's wedding, and he felt disappointed he was going to miss seeing his favorite keynote.

**Correct:** Remembering his friend's wedding, Rob couldn't attend the annual conference. He was disappointed to miss his favorite keynote.

## Split Infinitives

While split infinitives aren't grammatically incorrect, try to keep the subject and verb together.

**Incorrect:** Tom tried to quickly review the report.

**Correct:** Tom tried to review the report quickly.

**Incorrect:** They hoped to immediately improve their score by studying all night.

**Correct:** They hoped to improve their score immediately by studying all night.

# PUNCTUATION & STYLE

## Elements in a Series

Each element in a series should be separated by a comma. AFA uses the Oxford (or serial) comma.

- We visited Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado.
- We ate eggs, orange juice, and bacon for breakfast.

## Independent Clauses

Use commas to separate independent clauses joined by *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, or *yet*. An independent clause is a sentence that can stand on its own.

- We visited Texas, and I enjoyed the Alamo.
- I ate breakfast, so I am not hungry.

## Introductions

Add a comma to an introductory word, clause, or phrase. Introductory words include *however*, *meanwhile*, *furthermore*, *still*, and *suddenly*. Introductory clauses are dependent and provide background information for the independent clause. Introductory phrases are not complete clauses, and they do not have a separate subject and verb from the main clause of the sentence.

- However, she disagreed with the outcome.
- After the meeting was over, the team went out for coffee.
- If the phrase is incorrect, you should rewrite it to make more sense.
- A popular and well-liked professor, Loren was most likely to win the award.

If a dependent clause, or an introductory phrase requiring to be set off by a comma, precedes the second independent clause, no comma is needed after the conjunction.

**Incorrect:** The situation is not great, but, if we are prepared to act quickly, there is still a chance to turn it around.

**Correct:** The situation is not great, but if we are prepared to act quickly, there is still a chance to turn it around.

### Parenthetical Expressions

Nonrestrictive clauses are parenthetical. A nonrestrictive clause does not identify or define the prior noun. Thus, nonrestrictive clauses should be set off by commas.

**Incorrect:** The best way to see the campus unless you don't have enough time is to walk the perimeter and then go to the student union.

**Correct:** The best way to see the campus, unless you don't have enough time, is to walk the perimeter and then go to the student union.

Restrictive clauses are not parenthetical and are not set off by commas. Restrictive clauses function as an adjective and are essential to the intended meaning of the sentence. If removed, the meaning of the sentence would change.

**Incorrect:** All students, who do their work, should pass easily.

**Correct:** All students who do their work should pass easily.

### Compound Sentences

A comma separates two or more independent clauses in a compound sentence separated by a conjunction. The comma goes after the first clause and before the coordinating conjunction separating the clauses.

**Incorrect:** The campus visit went great and our hosts were very helpful.

**Correct:** The campus visit went great, and our hosts were very helpful.

**Incorrect:** The trip to our national headquarters was fascinating so we think we will return next year.

**Correct:** The trip to our national headquarters was fascinating, so we think we will return next year.

### Comma Splice

Comma splices occur when two sentences are joined with a comma instead of a period or semicolon. This often happens when using transitional words like *however*, *therefore*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, or *furthermore*.

**Incorrect:** They wanted to go to the conference, however they waited too long to register.

**Correct:** They wanted to go to the conference; however, they waited too long to register.

**Incorrect:** They wanted to go to the conference, they waited too long to register.

**Correct:** They wanted to go to the conference. They waited too long to register.

### Superfluous Commas

Superfluous commas often occur when the writer puts a comma in to indicate a pause. Avoid the liberal use of commas.

**Incorrect:** We went to the store, because we needed more office supplies.

**Correct:** We went to the store because we needed more office supplies.

**Incorrect:** They were thinking about getting the chicken, or the vegetarian meal.

**Correct:** They were thinking about getting the chicken or the vegetarian meal.

**Incorrect:** Bailey knew, immediately, she was going to win the scholarship.

**Correct:** Bailey knew immediately she was going to win the scholarship.

## Run-On Sentence

Run-on sentences occur when you connect two main clauses without using a coordinating conjunction or proper punctuation. You can avoid run-on sentences by seeing if there is more than one idea being communicated.

**Incorrect:** The conference room was occupied by another group they wanted to start the meeting at 10 a.m.

**Correct:** The conference room was occupied by another group, but they wanted to start the meeting at 10 a.m.

**Incorrect:** They drove very cautiously all the while the turn signal was blinking.

**Correct:** They drove very cautiously. All the while the turn signal was blinking.

**Incorrect:** Lee enjoyed the basket of muffins Jay gave her for the morning meeting however she prefers bagels.

**Correct:** Lee enjoyed the basket of muffins Jay gave her for the morning meeting; however, she prefers bagels.

## Colon Mistakes

A colon is used after a complete sentence to introduce a word, phrase, clause, list, or quotation. The colon signals what follows proves or explains the sentence preceding the colon.

**Incorrect:** People move to Florida for: the warmer weather, the beach, and the theme parks.

**Correct:** People move to Florida for three reasons: the warmer weather, the beach, and the theme parks.

## Using Semicolons & Colons Interchangeably

Anything written after a colon should be a summary, interpretation, or elaboration of what came before the colon. Colons also add emphasis and introduce dialogue or quotes.

**Incorrect:** I will make three dishes for dinner; a salad, rolls, and stew.

**Correct:** I will make three dishes for dinner: a salad, rolls, and stew.

## Using Semicolons & Commas Interchangeably

Use a semicolon when you want to link two independent clauses that are closely related in meaning or subject matter. In general, only use a semicolon in places where you could also use a period. Never use a semicolon in place of a comma before a coordinating conjunction.

**Incorrect:** There was a huge traffic jam on the highway; but I arrived at work early.

**Correct:** There was a huge traffic jam on the highway, but I arrived at work early.

**Incorrect:** I have never been to that particular part of town, besides it was far away from my work.

**Correct:** I have never been to that particular part of town; besides, it was far away from my work.

## Improper ellipses

Treat ellipses as three-letter words. There should be a space before and a space after the three dots. Ellipses are used to indicate deleting words to condense a quote or to indicate a thought the writer did not complete.

**Incorrect:** I am not sure...I might change my mind.

**Correct:** I am not sure ... I might change my mind.

## En Dash vs. Em Dash

The en dash ( - ) is the same dash used in hyphens. The em dash ( — ) is used to indicate a meaningful pause, abrupt change, series within a phrase, or an attribution. Avoid dashes when commas would suffice because dashes can be jarring to the reader.

**Incorrect:** They listed a few qualities - professionalism, promptness, intelligence, honesty - they wanted in a new hire.

**Correct:** They listed a few qualities — professionalism, promptness, intelligence, honesty — they wanted in a new hire.

## Periods, Commas, & Quotes

The period and comma both go inside the quotation marks. Colons, semicolons, and question marks can go outside quotation marks, if they belong to the whole sentence.

**Incorrect:** She said, "I am happy to participate in the report".

**Correct:** She said, "I am happy to participate in the report."

**Incorrect:** Did I hear you say, "I am happy to participate in the report?"

**Correct:** Did I hear you say, "I am happy to participate in the report"?

**Incorrect:** My favorite novels include the following: "The Star Side of Bird Hill", "A Wizard of Earthsea", and "Nora & Kettle".

**Correct:** My favorite novels include the following: "The Star Side of Bird Hill," "A Wizard of Earthsea," and "Nora & Kettle."

## Apostrophe Mistakes

Do not use apostrophes to pluralize nouns, numbers, or symbols. Apostrophes indicate possession or they create contractions.

**Incorrect:** Those hotel's were built in the 1970's.

**Correct:** Those hotels were built in the 1970s.

## Possessive Nouns

If the noun is singular, add 's to the word. Follow this rule if the word ends in s.

- Fido's new ball was red.
- Jess's research paper was accepted.
- The hostess's invitation was lost in the mail.

If the noun is plural, add the apostrophe after the s.

- The students' classroom was finally completed.
- The Johnsons' house was decorated for Halloween.

- The advisors' educational program is ready to share.

If the noun is plural but does not end in s, add 's.

- The alumni's contributions helped to create a new program.
- The children's choir will perform next week.
- I am looking forward to the women's art club.

## Avoid the Double Space

Do not use two spaces after a sentence.

## Avoid unnecessary capitalizations

Only capitalize formal titles when they precede an individual's name. If the title comes before the name, you may capitalize. In addition, use lowercase when using any title in a general sense.

- Jane Doe, mayor of Anytown, will speak tomorrow night.
- Mayor Jane Doe will speak tomorrow night.
- The mayor will speak tomorrow night.

## Generation names

Capitalize: Generation X, Gen X, Gen Xers, Generation Y, Generation Z, etc. Do not capitalize: baby boom, baby boomer, baby-boomer generation, millennials

## Seasons

Do not capitalize the seasons: winter, spring, summer, and fall. The exception is if the season is part of a formal title.

- In the fall of 2019, we had record enrollment.
- I can't wait for the Summer Olympics.
- My favorite season is summer.

## Composition Titles

Use quotation marks around books, films, TV shows, songs, poems, computer/video games, speeches, lectures, and works of art. Magazines and newspapers do not need quotes. Nothing should be italicized.



## Numbers

For numbers one through nine, write them out.  
For numbers 10 and above, use numerals.

- I have nine cats.
- The zoo has 25 cats.

When using percentages, use numerals and write out "percent."

- My battery is at 5 percent.
- The cost of living rose 0.89 percent.

Ages follow different rules from those stated above. You should always use numerals and add hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun.

- My child is 2 years old.
- The 21-year-old graduate landed their first job.
- I think they were in their 30s.

# WRONG WORD USAGE

## Accept vs. Except

Accept = receive. Except = exclude.

- I can accept the donations.
- We can take all the reports except for the unfinished drafts.

## Affect vs. Effect

Affect = verb; influence, alter, or act upon. Effect = noun; impression, power to bring about a result, outward sign, or a cause.

- This book really affected me.
- The loss was an effect of them not practicing.
- I hope this decision will effect immediate change.

## Alot vs. A lot vs. Allot

Alot is not a word. A lot = vast number of items.  
Allot = set aside.

- We have a lot of office supplies.
- We need to allot more funds for office supplies.

## Among vs. Between

Between = two items. Among = more than two.

- Let's split the project tasks between the two of us.
- The yearly bonus was shared among the whole staff.

## Assure vs. Insure vs. Ensure

Assure = to promise or say with confidence.  
Ensure = to make certain. Insure = to protect against.

- They assured us there was enough time for the project.
- We must ensure that records are kept for six years.
- Don't forget to insure the new car.

## Because, since.

Because = specific cause-effect relationship.  
Since is used in casual senses when an event leads logically to another.

- I moved the seat forward because I couldn't see.
- Since we created the campaign last month, revenue has been climbing.

## Could Of vs. Could Have

Never use could of, should of, would of, etc.

- We could have received the grant money, but we were past the deadline.

## Either

Either = one or the other, not both.

- I will eat either the sandwich or the salad.



### **Fewer vs. Less**

Fewer = individual items. Less = bulk or quantity.

- There were fewer applications this year.
- We had fewer than 25 people on the call today.
- We have less in reserves than we wanted.
- We have less than \$50 for the pizza party.

### **Farther, further.**

Farther = physical distance. Further = extension of time or degree or additionally.

- I walked farther than you.
- Can you explain this to me further?
- The team has no further questions.

### **i.e. vs. e.g.**

i.e. = that is or in other words, use to clarify or rephrase something already stated. e.g. = example given or for example, use to introduce examples of something already stated.

### **Into vs. In to**

Into = movement, to the inside, or interior of. In to = modify other words in the sentence. *In* is part of the verb and *to* is a preposition or part of an infinitive.

- We will move into the next lesson.
- We need to go back in to finish the meeting.

### **It's vs Its**

*It's* is a contraction and means it is or it has. *Its* is possessive and means belonging to it.

- I'm excited it's time for the party.
- The dog wagged its tail.

### **Lose vs. Loose**

Lose = verb; unable to find, fail to win, or to fail to keep or hold. Loose = adjective; not tightly fastened, attached, or held.

- I do not want to lose the game tomorrow.
- Since I lost a little weight, these pants are loose.

### **Maybe vs. May be**

Maybe = adverb; indicates possibility, guess, or suggestion. May be = verb; refer to something that could happen or something that might exist. *Tip: when in doubt, substitute "could" for "may."* If the sentence still makes sense, "may be" is the way to go.

- Maybe later we can go to the museum.
- Your story may be true, but I am still unconvinced.

### **Peek vs. Peak vs. Pique**

Peek = quick look at something. Peak = a sharp point. Pique = to provoke or instigate.

- The contest winner will get a sneak peek of the new movie.
- The contest winner will get to climb to the peak of the mountain.
- The contest piqued their interest.

### **That vs. Which**

If used as a conjunction, use *that* to introduce a dependent clause. Also, use *that* before subordinate clauses and conjunctions. Remove *that* when removing it does not change the meaning of the sentence.

- The secretary said that after the meeting they would review the minutes.

If used as a pronoun, use *that* and *which* in referring to inanimate objects or non-named animals. Use *that* for essential clauses and use *which* for nonessential clauses. *Tip: If you can drop the clause and not lose the meaning of the sentence, use "which."* A *which* clause is surrounded by commas.

- I remember the vacation that we took last year.
- I remember the vacation, which we took last year, was my favorite.

### **Than vs. Then**

Then = time. Than = comparison.

- We left the party and then went home.
- We would rather go home than stay at the party.

### **They're vs. Their vs. There**

They're = contraction for they are. Their = something owned by a group (also used as a gender-neutral pronoun). There = refers to a place.

- They're going to the meeting this afternoon.
- We need to get a gift because tomorrow is their birthday.
- We need to get ribbons for the team to celebrate their win.
- Jen was going there after work.

### **To vs. Too**

*To* is used as the start of an infinitive or a preposition. *To* often shows direction. *Too* is an adverb to express excess. *Too* often means additionally, also, or as well.

- Let's go to the movies.
- I am getting too full.

### **Toward, forward, backward, upward, downward, etc.**

Never end these in s.

- Let's think toward the future.
- Can you move the seat forward a bit?

### **Who vs. That**

When describing a person, use *who*. When you're describing an object, use *that*.

### **Who vs. Whom vs. Whose vs. Who's**

Who = subject; used as the subject of the sentence/clause to identify who is doing something. Whom = direct or indirect object; used as the direct or indirect object of a verb or preposition. Whose = assigns ownership. Who's = contraction for who is.

- Who is doing the required reading for tonight?
- Whom should I talk to about the upcoming program?
- Whose sweater is that?
- I wonder who's going to be at the meeting this year.

# VOICE ERRORS

## Passive Voice

Avoid using passive voice because it results in weak or unclear writing. Using passive voice results in the subject being acted upon.

**Avoid:** Research will be presented by the team at the conference.

**Use:** The team will present research at the conference.

## Person

### **First person = I/we perspective**

Use this only in personal narratives. The perspective is from the writer's point of view, so the writer becomes the focal point.

- I really enjoyed the trip I took with my family last year.
- Our car has a flat tire, so we will be taking the bus.

### **Second person = you/your perspective**

Second person is found in speeches, letters, and non-fiction works. This perspective addresses the reader directly.

- As you might have heard, the town is having a farmer's market next week.
- I hope you know you are invited to the party tonight.

### **Third person = he/she/it/they perspective**

Third person is used to remove the author as a character. It is an objective perspective.

- In this paper, the researchers highlighted the newest findings.
- They discussed the implications of the newest research.

# STYLE USE

AFA uses The Associated Press Stylebook, "The Elements of Style," and Merriam Webster's Guide to Punctuation and Style in all official business materials. The following usage guide should be considered in all writing.

## abbreviations

Do not use abbreviations the reader would not instantly recognize. Abbreviations that are widely known, in general and/or within the fraternity/sorority community, are accepted.

**BEFORE A NAME:** abbreviate the following titles when used before a name: *Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Mr., Ms., Mrs., Miss, Rep., the Rev.,* and *Sen.*

**AFTER A NAME:** Abbreviate junior or senior after an individual's name as *Jr.* and *Sr.* respectively. Abbreviate incorporated as *Inc.*

## acronyms

Acronyms may only be used when they are commonly used as an abbreviated way to refer to an organization or term: *AFA, AFLV, NIC, NPHC, etc.* Acronyms may only be used after the full name is written once in the document. In rare cases, an acronym can be created for ease of reading and writing.

## academic degrees

Use an apostrophe in bachelor's degree and master's, etc., but there is no possessive in Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science. *Jo has their doctorate in psychology. Alex graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in history. Use abbreviations as B.A., M.A., LL.D., and Ph.D. only after a full name – never after just a last name. Jane Doe, Ph.D., spoke about her research.*

## academic departments

Use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: *the department of history, the history department, the department of English, the English department,* or when department is part of the official and formal name: *University of Connecticut Department of Economics.*

## academic titles

Capitalize and spell out formal titles such as *chancellor, chairman, etc.,* when they precede a name. *Chairman Doug Simmons presided. Doug Simmons is the chairman.* Lowercase elsewhere. Lowercase modifiers such as department in *department Chairman Jerry Gergich.*

## addresses

Spell out and capitalize words such as *Avenue, Boulevard, Drive,* and *Street* when part of a formal street name without a number: *Pennsylvania Avenue.* Lowercase and spell out when used alone or with more than one street name: *Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues.*

## administration

Lowercase: *the administration, the president's administration, the governor's administration, the university's administration, etc.*

## AdvanceU

Always capitalized. No space. The hashtag for social media is #AdvanceU.

## advisor

Never adviser.

## AFA Annual Business Meeting

Always capitalize. AFA Business Meeting is also acceptable.

## AFA Annual Meeting

Always capitalize. Annual Meeting can be used after the first full mention. The hashtag for social media is #AFAAM.

## AFA Annual Report

Always capitalize. Do not set in quotations.

## AFA Central Office

Always capitalize. *Please contact the AFA Central Office with any questions.*

## AFA Exchange

Always capitalize. Capitalize *The Growth Exchange* and *The Collegiate Experience Exchange* as those are the full titles of the program. Do not capitalize exchange when used alone. *We will provide one table per exchange registration.* The hashtag for social media is #AFAEXCHANGE.

## AFA Foundation Donor Report

Always capitalize. Do not set in quotations.

## AFA Institutional Report

Always capitalize. Do not set in quotations.

## AFA related webpages

Do not capitalize resource center, career center, job board, community forum, strategic priorities, etc. as these are all universally used terms and not proper nouns.

## ages

Always use figures. *The member is 30 years old; the law is 8 years old; the 100-year-old institution.* Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or substitutes for a noun.

### **alcohol free, alcohol-free**

Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier. *The event will be alcohol free. This is an alcohol-free chapter.*

### **alumna/alumnus/alumni/alumnae**

*Alumna* refers to one woman. *Alumnus* refers to one man. *Alumnae* refers to a group of women. *Alumni* refers to either both a group of men or a group of women and men. Never use *alum* in writing.

### **Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors**

Use the full name when it appears written first in a document. The acronym, *AFA*, can be used in the following mentions. Do not capitalize *association* when it is used alone or in a general sense. *The association's members enjoyed the program. You are a member of the association.*

### **Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors Foundation**

Use the full name when it appears written first in a document. In following mentions, use *AFA Foundation*. Do not capitalize *foundation* when it is used alone. *The foundation board met last week.* The hashtag for social media is #AFAGIVES.

### **awards**

Always capitalize the names of AFA awards. Awards include: *Dr. Kent L. Gardner Award, Jack L. Anson Award, Dr. Robert H. Shaffer Award, Sue Kraft Fussell Distinguished Service Awards, Gayle Webb New Professional Award, S. Shelley Sutherland Outstanding Volunteer Award, AFA/CoHEASAP Award for Outstanding Alcohol/Drug Prevention Program, Diversity and Social Justice Initiative Award, Excellence in Educational Programming Award, Outstanding Change Initiative Award, Essentials Award, Perspectives Award, and Dr. Charles Eberly Oracle Award.*

### **board/board of directors**

Capitalize *board* only when it is an integral part of a proper name. Otherwise, *board* and *board of directors* should always be lowercase. *Sam enjoyed their time on the board of directors. AFA's board of directors held a meeting.*

### **bylaws**

One word. Should always be lowercase. *There is a bylaw proposal being reviewed. AFA is reviewing the bylaws.*

### **capitalization**

In general, avoid unnecessary capitals.

**PROPER NOUNS:** Capitalize nouns that constitute the unique identification for a specific person, place, or thing: *Mary, America, New York, England, General Electric, AFA Central Office.*

**PROPER NAMES:** Capitalize common nouns such as *party, river, street,* and *west* when they are an integral part of the full name: *Democratic Party, Mississippi River, Fleet Street, West Virginia.* Lowercase these common nouns when they stand alone in subsequent references: *the party, the river, the street.*

**DERIVATIVES:** Capitalize words that are derived from a proper noun and still depend on it for their meaning: *American, English, French, Marxism, Shakespearean.* Lowercase words that are derived from a proper noun but no longer depend on it for their meaning: *french fries, herculean, manhattan cocktail, pasteurize, venetian blind.*

### **chairman, chairwoman, chairperson**

Capitalize as a formal title before a name: *company Chairman Henry Smith.* Do not capitalize as a casual, temporary position: *meeting chairwoman Robin Jones.*

### **chapter**

Capitalize only with the full name of a specific chapter: *The chapter sponsored a workshop; Alpha Chapter sponsored a workshop.*

### **charter**

Always lowercase.

### **class year**

Lowercase *freshmen, sophomore, junior,* and *senior.*

### **coed**

One word, no hyphen. Acceptable as an adjective to describe coeducational institutions.

### **colon (:)**

Use at the end of a sentence to introduce lists, tabulations, text, etc. *There were three considerations: expense, time, and feasibility.*

Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence. *He promised this: The company will make good on all the losses.* The colon can also be effective in giving emphasis. *He only had one hobby: eating.*

### **college/university**

Capitalize when part of a proper name: *College of William & Mary.* Lowercase: *the university soccer team.* When abbreviating university or college names, do not use periods: *ASU,* not *A.S.U.* University names may be abbreviated after they have been spelled out in their first occurrence in a text, unless the abbreviation is expected to be instantly recognizable such as using *UCLA.*

### **collegian/collegiate**

A collegian (noun) is a student in college. Collegiate is an adjective meaning of or pertaining to college: *a collegiate dictionary, collegiate member.*

### **committee**

Capitalize only when referring to a specific or formal committee: *There is a vacancy on the Annual Meeting Planning Committee. The Nominations & Elections Committee will meet tomorrow.* Lowercase when used in general reference: *The committee will look for a new hotel.*

## composition titles

Book titles, computer and video game titles, movie titles, opera titles, play titles, poem titles, album and song titles, radio and television titles, and the titles of lectures, speeches, and works of art should follow these guidelines:

Capitalize the principal words

Capitalize *the*, *a*, or *an* if it is the first or last word in the title

Use quotation marks around the names of all works except books that are primarily catalogs of reference material

EXAMPLES: "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," the NBC program "Saturday Night Live," "Song of Solomon"

Do not use quotation marks around the Bible, the Quran, other holy books, almanacs, directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, handbooks, websites, and software titles.

## comma (,)

A series of three or more words, phrases or clauses take a comma between each of the elements including before the conjunction separating the last two: *The flag is red, white, and blue. I had orange juice, grapes, and a sausage and egg sandwich for breakfast.* Also use a comma before the concluding conjugation in a complex series of phrases.

## conferences/conventions

Capitalize only when used in reference to a specific conference: *We attended the National Black Greek Leadership Conference. This year's conference will have great keynote speakers.*

## Core Competencies manual

The Core Competencies manual is considered a handbook and should not be set in quotation marks. Capitalize Core Competencies when referencing the manual or evaluation. *There is still time to take your Core Competencies self-evaluation before the Annual Meeting. When reading the Core Competencies, take note of the Competency Model.* Do not capitalize competency when used as a generalization. *You can prioritize competencies based on your current position.*

## dash (—)

Use dashes to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or an emphatic pause: *We will go on a trip in June — if nothing happens.* When a phrase that otherwise would be set off by commas contains a series of words that must be separated by commas, use dashes to set off the full phrase: *Sam listed all the classes — history, science, art, algebra — offered at the school.* Use sparingly as they can be disruptive to the reader.

## dates

Always use Arabic figures without th, st, and nd.: *March 22*, not *March 22nd*. No comma between month and year if the day is omitted: *November 2004*. Include a comma after

the year if the full date is given: *November 2, 2024*, will be *the day of the food drive*. Never abbreviate the month.

## decades

Use Arabic figures to indicate decades in history. Use an apostrophe to indicate numerals that are left out; show plural by adding s: *the 1900s*, *the '90s*, *the 1920s*, *the mid-1920s*.

## directions and regions

Lowercase north, south, northeast, northern, etc. when they indicate compass direction: *He drove west. The cold front is moving east. The plane left headed south.* Capitalize these words when they designate regions: *A storm system that developed in the Midwest is spreading eastward. It will bring showers to the East Coast by morning. The weatherman is a Northerner.*

WITH NATIONS, STATES, AND CITIES: Lowercase unless they are part of a proper name or are used to designate a politically divided nation: *eastern Canada*, *western United States*, *North Korea*. Lowercase compass points only when they describe a section of a state or city: *western Texas*, *southern Atlanta*.

## dollars

Always lowercase. Use figures and the \$ sign in all except casual references or amounts without a figure: *The book costs \$4; Dad, please give me a dollar.* For specific amounts of more than \$1 million, use the \$ sign and numerals up to two decimal places. Do not link the numerals and the words by a hyphen: *He is worth \$3.25 million. The project cost \$100 million.* The form for amounts less than \$1 million: *\$4, \$25, \$500, \$1,000, \$650,000*. Do not add .00 when the amount is round.

## editor

Capitalize editor before a name only when it is an official corporate or organizational title. Do not capitalize as a job description. *Editor Anna Wintour. Debbie served as a magazine editor.*

## editorial board

See board/board of directors. *Clarke was appointed to the editorial board for this year.*

## e.g. and i.e.

Exempli gratia (e.g.) means *for example* and id est (i.e.) means *that is*. Always followed by a comma.

## ellipsis ( ... )

Treat an ellipsis as a three-letter word, constructed with three periods and two spaces. Use an ellipsis to indicate the deletion of one or more words in condensing quotes, text, and documents: *In all my decisions ... I tried to do what was best.* Ellipsis can also be used to indicate a thought the speaker or writer does not complete.

## email/e-newsletter/e-book/

Don't hyphenate email. Use a hyphen with other e- terms.



## Essentials

Essentials is an e-publication. Always capitalize. Do not set in quotation marks.

## exclamation point (!)

Avoid overuse. Try to use only in informal and social media writing.

## First 90 Days

Always capitalized. The hashtag for social media is #F90D.

## fraternal organizations

Capitalize when referencing a formal name: *Sigma Nu Fraternity*. No capitalization when being used as a noun. Whenever possible, use *fraternity/sorority* or *fraternal* to be inclusive of sororities. Women's fraternal organizations are oftentimes women's fraternities and not sororities. Capitalize the formal titles of officeholders when used before a name.

## gender

Not synonymous with sex. Gender refers to a person's social identity while sex refers to biological characteristics. Avoid references to both, either, or opposite sexes or genders.

## Graduate Training Track.

Always capitalized. GTT can be used after the first full mention. The hashtag for social media is #GTT.

## Greek

Always capitalized. Whenever possible, use the term *fraternal* or *fraternity/sorority* instead to avoid confusion with the Greek nationality. In addition, not all fraternal organizations use Greek letters. Always use *Greek* when it's the proper name of an office/organization: *the Office of Greek Life at Colorado State University, the college's Multicultural Greek Council*.

## Greek-letter

*Greek-letter* if it precedes a noun, *Greek letter* if it follows a noun. *Kappa Kappa Gamma is a leader in the Greek-letter community. Organizations with Greek letters must work together.* The use of *fraternity, sorority, fraternity/sorority, or fraternal* is always preferred.

## Greek Life

Two words, no hyphen. The word *life* is only capitalized when referencing a formal name: *Office of Greek Life. Greek life at our school makes a positive impact.*

## headquarters

A term often used as the name for the official office location of inter/national office locations of fraternities and sororities. When used in reference to the location and with the name of the fraternal organization, it should always be capitalized: *The interview was held at Sigma Kappa Headquarters. I have always dreamed of visiting my fraternity's headquarters.*

## house/chapter

The term *house* should only be used when referring to a physical structure or facility. The term *chapter* should be used to refer to individual fraternity/sorority chapters or groups. *Which chapter are you planning to join? The chapter house needs to be painted.*

## Interfraternity Council

One word; no hyphen. Capitalize when referring to one specific council: *The Interfraternity Council at the University of Idaho held elections last week.* Can be abbreviated to *IFC*.

## inter/national

For use when referencing the concept of a headquarters or fraternity leadership in a general sense: *Members should contact their inter/national organization for more details.* When used in reference to a specific fraternity or sorority, international or national should be used according to the preference or formal title of the fraternity/sorority referenced and capitalized only when used as a part of the formal title: *FarmHouse International Fraternity* or *Lambda Phi Epsilon International Fraternity, Inc.*

## internet

Never capitalize. A decentralized, worldwide network of computers and other devices that can communicate with each other. Web and email are subsets of the internet, and they are not synonymous and should not be used interchangeably.

## italics

While examples of correct and incorrect usage are provided in this guide in italics, do not use italics in writing. The exception is if italics can help break up content or for stylistic purposes. Italics can also be used in non-formal emails or webpages.

## magazine titles

Do not place in quotes. Lowercase magazine unless it is part of the publication's formal title: *Time magazine, Newsweek, Perspectives, Essentials e-publication.*

## membership categories

Do not capitalize membership categories. *You can join AFA as a professional, graduate, affiliate, emeritus, or vendor member. Thank you for renewing your vendor membership.*

## Multicultural Greek Council

No hyphen. Capitalize when referring to one specific council: *The Multicultural Greek Council at the University of Wisconsin held elections last week. Does your campus have a multicultural Greek council?*

## National Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) Panhellenic Association

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NAPA*.

## National Association of Latino Fraternal Organizations

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NALFO*.



### **National Multicultural Greek Council**

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NMGC*.

### **National Panhellenic Conference**

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NPC*. See also *Panhellenic*.

### **National Pan-Hellenic Council, Inc.**

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NPHC*. See also *Pan-Hellenic*.

### **nationalities and race**

Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples, races, tribes, etc.: *Arab, Arabic, African, American, African American, Caribbean American, Cherokee, Chinese, Filipino American, Inuit, Japanese, Jewish, Nordic, Puerto Rican, Swede, etc.*

### **Nominations & Elections Committee**

Always capitalize. Abbreviated: *NEC*.

### **nonprofit**

One word, no hyphen.

### **North American Interfraternity Conference**

Always capitalize. Acronym: *NIC*.

### **numerals**

Spell out numbers under 10. Use numerals for 10 or more: *The organization added two staff members in August. There are 50 letters that need to be mailed on the desk.*

Never begin a sentence with a numeral, spell out or reword: *Twenty members brought a gift. There were 20 women who brought a gift.*

Use numbers to indicate:

Ages (always use figures): *20 years old, 3-year-old*

Dates: *January 1, 2030*

Hours of the day: Spell out if you use "o'clock," i.e. *seven o'clock*

Degrees of temperature: *68 degrees*

Measurement: *4 feet, 128 volts*

Percentages: *89 percent*

Election results and game scores: *The Vikings won, 26 to 23.*

### **Oracle**

Always capitalize. Do not set in quotation marks. Use *Oracle*: The Research Journal of the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors in the first mention of the publication. In following mentions, *Oracle* is allowed.

### **Oracle Writers' Retreat**

Always capitalize when using the full name of the event. *Jay attended the Oracle Writers' Retreat. I had fun at the retreat.*

### **Panhellenic**

Capitalize when used in reference to a women's fraternal governing council: *Panhellenic Council*.

Do not capitalize when used as an adjective: *In an effort to be more panhellenic, the women's fraternities and sororities arranged a community-wide service event.*

### **Pan-Hellenic**

Capitalize both the p and the h; no spaces around the hyphen. Always capitalized.

### **parentheses ( )**

Use sparingly as they are jarring to the reader. However, they are sometimes necessary to insert necessary background or reference information. Place punctuation, like a period, outside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a sentence (such as this).

### **Perspectives**

Always capitalize. Do not set in quotation marks.

### **pledge**

Only used when quoting another's word choice.

### **president**

Capitalize president only as a formal title before one or more names: *President Barack Obama, former Presidents Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter. President John Smith of Acme.* Lowercase in all other uses: *The president plans to blow up the moon. Sam Smith served as the president of AFA.*

### **quotation marks**

Periods and commas always go within the quotation marks: *They performed "Changes," "My Girl," and "Staying Alive" at the AFA Foundation Variety Show.* Dashes, semicolons, question marks, and exclamation points go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quote: *She said, "Did you say something?"* They go outside when they apply to the whole sentence. *Who wrote "Oh, The Places You'll Go"?*

### **race**

Identification by race or ethnicity is pertinent in biological and announcement stories that involve significant, ground breaking, or historic events. When used, lowercase *black, white.* *Barack Obama was the first black U.S. president. Jeremy Lin is the first American-born NBA player of Chinese or Taiwanese descent.*

### **regional director**

See board/board of directors. *Jo serves as their regional director.*

### **seasons**

Lowercase *spring, summer, fall,* and *winter* as well as derivatives such as *springtime* unless part of a formal name: *Fall Recruitment.*

### **secretary**

Capitalize before a name only if it is an official corporate or organizational title. *Sam Smith, AFA secretary, sent a memo on Friday.*

**semicolon (;)**

Use the semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can convey but less than the separation a period implies. It is also useful to clarify a series where material must be set off by commas: *They were welcomed by John Smith, a math tutor from First University; Erin Doe, Ph.D., Jackson Jill, Ed.D., and Marie Brown, Ph.D., professors at Second University; and Lou Greene, a student at Third College.*

**sorority**

Capitalize when referencing a formal name: *Alpha Pi Omega Sorority*. No capitalization when being used as a noun. Not all women's fraternal organizations are sororities; some are women's fraternities.

**states**

Standing alone within any text, spell out the full name of all 50 U.S. states. Two letter postal abbreviations may only be used in mailings.

**substance free vs. substance-free**

Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier: *The Phi Delta Theta chapter facilities are all substance free. This is a substance-free event.*

**that, which**

Use *that* and *which* in referring to inanimate objects and animals without a name. Use *that* for essential clauses, important to the meaning of a sentence, and without commas: *I remember the day that we met.* Use *which* for nonessential clauses, where the pronoun is less necessary, and use a comma: *The team, which finished last a year ago, is in first place.* (Tip: If you can drop the clause and not lose the meaning of the sentence, use *which*; otherwise, use *that*. Avoid overuse of *that*.)

**titles**

In general, confine capitalization to formal titles used directly before an individual's name.

**LOWERCASE:** Lowercase and spell out titles when they are not used with an individual's name: *The president issued a statement. The pope gave his blessing.* Lowercase and spell out titles in constructions that set them off from a name by commas: *The vice president, Al Gore, invented the internet. Pope Francis, the current pope, was born in Argentina.*

**FORMAL TITLES:** Capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before one or more names: *Pope Francis, President Jane Doe, Vice Presidents Dwight Schrute and Angela Martin.* Formal titles that denote a professional activity are generally capitalized: *Sen. Dianne Feinstein, former Dr. Pep Pepper, retired Gen. Colin Powell.*

**LONG TITLES:** Separate a long title from a name using commas: *Charles Robinson, the undersecretary for economic affairs, issued a report.*

**treasurer**

Capitalize when used as a formal title immediately before a name. *Taylor Hayden, AFA treasurer, balanced the budget. AFA Treasurer, Moira Rose, will host the next AdvanceU program on budgets.*

**time**

When using exact time, use figures except for noon (12:00 p.m.) and midnight (12:00 a.m.). Use a colon to separate hours from minutes: *11:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 3:30 p.m.* Use two zeros when the time is on the hour: *1:00 p.m.*, not *1 p.m.* Avoid redundancies: *10:00 a.m. this morning.*

**United States**

Spell out when used as a noun. Use U.S. (no space) only as an adjective.

**university**

See college/university.

**web**

Short for *World Wide Web*. Also, *website, webcam, webcast, webfeed, webpage, webmaster, webinar.*

