



# Writing Style Guide

## Delta College Standards & Best Practices

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The Delta College Writing Style Guide provides a set of guidelines to those that have roles or responsibilities in developing or maintaining content for any Delta College print or electronic publication. A consistent communication style is important to uphold Delta's identity and ensures information is clearly communicated to audiences of all media. The standards included in this guide are a blend of best practices, formatting guidelines, common grammatical concerns, troublesome terms and AP Style highlights.

### Writing Style Standards

**Academic degrees** – When referring to academic degrees, use lowercase and an apostrophe with associate's, bachelor's and master's.

Example: Jenny is planning to earn an associate's degree at Delta College then transfer on to earn a bachelor's degree.

**Advisor** – Use the -or spelling in all Delta references.

**Alumni** – Use for those who attended a school. If all are female, use alumnae. Singular uses: alumnus (male) and alumna (female)

Example: The alumni attended the soccer game.

Example: Jenny is a Delta College alumna.

### Capitalization

- **Academic programs** – Except for languages, such as English and French, the names of academic disciplines, majors, minors, programs and courses of study are not proper nouns and should not be capitalized when used in a general context. When referring to the official Delta program you should capitalize these names.

Example: Jenny will start dental hygiene classes this winter.

Example: Robert is completing the Physical Therapist Assistant program at Delta College.

- **Common nouns** – Capitalize only when used as part of a specific name, in other uses it would be lowercase.

Examples: Founders Hall, Bergstein Room, Main Campus

- **GPA** – Capitalize, no periods
- **Program** – The word “program” is part of relatively few official names at Delta. It is not capitalized simply because it is preceded by a proper noun.  
Example: Physical Therapist Assistant program
- **Proper nouns** – a specific individual name  
Example: Delta College
- **Proper adjectives** – an adjective derived from a proper noun  
Example: English language
- **Social Security** – Capitalize, however words following (e.g. number) are not.
- **Titles** – Job titles such as dean, associate dean, manager, chair, vice president, president, professor, etc., should be capitalized when they precede a name. They should be lowercase following an individual’s name and elsewhere.
  - Example: Shelly Raube, vice president of Student and Educational Services, is in the B Wing.
  - Example: Vice President Shelly Raube’s office is in the B Wing.
- **Do not capitalize if not being used as a proper or common noun:**
  - administration, the administration, administrator
  - committee, the committee, our committee
  - board, the board, board of trustees
  - department, the department, our department
  - faculty, faculty member(s), member(s) of the faculty
  - main campus
  - semester, session
  - student, students, student body
  - planetarium

### **Affect, effect**

- **Affect**, typically used as a verb, means to influence. Affect is very rarely used as a noun, and its correct use as a noun relates to psychological emotional states.  
Example: His absences will affect his final grade.
- **Effect**, typically used as a noun, has a variety of meanings, including consequence or result; becoming operative; media technology; and your personal belongings which is always used as a plural.  
Example: The effect of the budget cuts will affect the entire staff.  
Example: The policy goes into effect immediately.  
Example: The special effects were amazing.  
Example: Be sure you don’t forget your personal effects.

**Afterward** – This is preferred in American English over afterwards.

- afterward, not afterwards
- anyway, not anyways
- backward, not backwards

- forward, not forwards
- toward, not towards

### **Apostrophe**

- Use 's with associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees.
- Use to indicate the omission of one or more letters in a word.  
Example: Coffee 'n More
- Use to indicate the omission of a century in a year. Do not use 's with decades.  
Example: '16, '50s, 1920s  
Not: 1980's

**Assure, ensure, insure** – All mean to make secure or certain, but only assure is used in the sense of putting a person's mind at ease and only insure is used in references to a financial guarantee. Use ensure in all other cases.

Example: We strive to ensure student success.

**At** – Never use the symbol @ in text other than in email addresses.

### **Athletics**

- Do not capitalize the names of sports even if the sport is preceded by "Delta College."
- For sports in which both men and women compete, the gender of the team must always be specified on first reference (e.g. men's basketball, women's basketball).
- Student athlete, not student-athlete

**Centers** – Use full name on first reference, drop "Delta College" on subsequent references.

- Delta College Downtown Bay City Center and Planetarium
- Delta College Downtown Midland Center
- Delta College Downtown Saginaw Center
- Delta College Planetarium

### **Check-in, check in**

- Check-in is used as a noun and adjective.
- Check in is used as a verb.

**College** – It is preferred that you use "Delta" instead of "the college." If "the college" is used, be sure to lowercase the word.

**Commas** – Do not use the serial (Oxford) comma. There is no comma before the conjunction in a list of three or more items.

Example: Topics will include chemistry, biology and physics.

### **Contact information and office hours**

The main page of your website should include important contact information.

- Department name – This should be the proper name of your office with all words in caps.
- Office location – Capitalize the wing letter; do not hyphenate.
- Email address – Make hyperlink
- Phone number – Use hyphens, not parenthesis or periods, to separate numbers.

Example: **Contact information**

Financial Aid Office

D101

[admit@delta.edu](mailto:admit@delta.edu)

989-686-9080

Monday – Thursday, 8am – 4:30pm

Friday, 8am – 4pm

**Coursework** – Not course work

**Department name** – Capitalize department name, lowercase when used as a modifier.

Example: The admissions department is located in the H Wing.

Example: Jenny works for Admissions.

**Dates and time**

- Include the day of the week on first reference of a date.
- Use digits for dates. Do not use "st" or "th" after dates.
- Spell out all days and months. Do not abbreviate.
- Do not include the year unless it is different than the current year.

Example: Please submit applications by Tuesday, October 14.

Not: Please submit applications by Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

- Include the minutes, except if the time is on the hour – do not use :00.
- "am" and "pm" should be lowercase with no periods.
- No space between the time and "am" or "pm."
- Only include the "am" or "pm" on the ending time if both instances are the same.
- Use an en dash (CTRL + minus) with spaces on either side to connect the start time with the end time.

Example: The performance is from 6 – 8:30pm.

Not: The performance is from 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

**E-references**

- **eLearning** – Delta's online learning system. The generic term elearning is not hyphenated and not capitalized.
- **email** – no hyphen, lowercase
- **email addresses** – lowercase for Delta email addresses
- **homepage** – one word, lowercase
- **internet** – lowercase
- **login, login name** – noun, one word

- **log in** – verb, two words
- **offline, online** – one word, no hyphen, lowercase
- **user name** – two words, lowercase
- **web** – lowercase
- **web addresses** – Also known as URLs. "Web address" is preferred over URL in all Delta communication.
- **webpage** – lowercase, one word, no hyphen
- **website** – one word, lowercase
- **WiFi** – capitalize W and F, no hyphen

**Each** – May be abbreviated (ea.) in tables, but never in text. Avoid unnecessary use.

Example: Tickets are \$12.

Not: Tickets are \$12 each.

**e.g. and i.e.** – The abbreviations 'e.g.' (meaning "for example") and 'i.e.' (meaning "that is") are always lowercase and always followed by a comma.

Example: Delta College has many sustainability initiatives incorporated into the parking lot (e.g., LED lighting and electric vehicle charging stations).

**Emeriti** – Use for past presidents. If all are female, use emeritae. Singular uses: emeritus (male) and emerita (female)

Example: President Emerita, Dr. Jean Goodnow

Example: Don Carlyon, president emeritus of Delta College

### **Entitled, titled**

- Use entitled to describe someone who believes they have a right or privilege.
- Use titled to describe something with a formal title such as a book or a person's professional title.

### **Everyone, every one**

- Use one word when used as a pronoun meaning all persons.
- Use two words when referring to each individual item.

### **Farther, further**

- Farther refers to physical distance.
- Further refers to an extension of time or degree.

### **Fewer, less**

- Fewer means "not as many." Use fewer for things you can count.
- Less means "not as much." Use less for things you cannot count.

**Fieldwork** – Not field work

**File types** – When listing a file type, use as an adjective and all caps. Do not use lowercase and a period.

Example: The catalog is available as a PDF file.

Not: The catalog is available as a .pdf.

**First-year student** – Not freshman

**Fundraising, fundraiser** – One word

**Gender bias** – Avoid in writing.

Example: firefighter, chair, people

Not: fireman, chairman, mankind

- Pronouns: Use she/her, he/him, or they/them when preferred pronouns are known. Use they/them when referring to groups of two or more people and individuals with unknown gender or pronoun preference.

Example: They are responsible for maintaining accurate files.

Not: She/he is responsible for maintaining accurate files.

**Grades**

- Do not use quotations.
- Use 's to form the plural of a letter grade.

**Great Lakes Bay Region** – Use when referring to Bay, Saginaw and Midland counties. Do not use not Tri-Cities.

**Headings and subheadings**

- Capitalize only the first word of the heading/subheading or if there is a proper noun in the heading/subheading.
- No punctuation unless it is a question.
- Ampersand – May be used in titles and subheads. Do not use within copy or full sentences unless it is part of a formal name.

Example: Procter & Gamble

**Healthcare, health care** – One word when referencing a system or industry. Two words when referring to a provider's actions.

Example: The healthcare system is overwhelmed with patients.

Example: The physician provided the patient with a detailed health care plan.

**Home schooling** – Two words, no hyphen

**In, into**

- Use in when referring to a location.
- Use into when indicating motion.

## Links – Print

- The prefix “https://” or the suffix “.aspx” or “.html” should not be included when listing a web address in a correspondence or publication.
- URL should be written in all lowercase.
- Based on your audience, it is appropriate to eliminate the “www.” on some print publications. If you are speaking to the prospective student, you can eliminate.
- If a link appears at the end of a sentence, do not include punctuation. If you would like to include punctuation to add a sense of excitement, another word must follow the URL.

Example: See your options at [delta.edu/transfer](https://delta.edu/transfer)

Example: Visit [delta.edu/transfer](https://delta.edu/transfer) today!

Not: Explore opportunities at [delta.edu/programs](https://delta.edu/programs)!

## Links - Web

- Links should be found at a glance. Use descriptive wording for your links. Do not use “click here” or the URL. It is important that users know where the link will take them and what they are likely to find.

Example: [Apply now](#) for graduation.

Not: [Click here](#) for the graduation application form.

Not: Apply for graduation at <https://forms.delta.edu/form.aspx>

- If the link takes you to a document, label the format of the linked document in parentheses.

Example: [Application form \(PDF\)](#)

- When creating links, don’t include the spaces or punctuation before or after the linked words.

Example: See our [course catalog](#).

Not: See our [course catalog](#).

- External links should open in a new window.
- Link labels on the webpage should remain short and memorable. Use the full link address behind the scenes.

Example: Visit [delta.edu/planetarium](https://delta.edu/planetarium) for more information on the latest show. (The full link address goes to <https://www.delta.edu/news/2025-rovers-rockets-rock-n-roll-planetarium-show.html>, but the short link appears on the webpage.)

## Lists

- Only capitalize the first word and any proper nouns.
- If each item is a full sentence, include a period at the end.
- If the list is a directory or a list of resources, present alphabetically.

## Money

- In text, do not include a decimal unless there are cents – delete the .00.  
Example: Tickets are \$10 general admission and \$8 for students/seniors.  
NOT: Tickets are \$10.00 general admission and \$8.00 for students/seniors.
- Do not repeat numbers parenthetically after spelling them out  
Example: Eighteen (18)
- Express amounts greater than \$1 million as numerals, decimals and lowercase words.

Example: \$24 million or \$9.25 billion

- Use numerals and lower case for amounts less than one dollar.

Example: 3 cents or 85 cents

### **More than, over**

- More than is used with numbers.
- Over is used for spatial references.

**None** – When used to mean "no single one," none always takes a singular verb and pronoun.

Example: None of the students *is* (not *are*) required to turn in notes.

**Nonprofit** – One word, no hyphen

### **Numbers**

- Spell out numbers one through nine in text. Use digits for numbers 10 and above.
- In cases where the numeral is the first word in the sentence (avoid whenever possible), spell it out.
- For ages, always use digits.

**Out** – Avoid unnecessary use.

Example: Students will print the assignment in class.

Not: Students will print out the assignment in class.

**Percent** – Always use % in charts, graphs, flyers and advertising copy. Use % in long form writing, as well. Spell out the word percent when it appears in a heading (exceptions may apply).

**Phone numbers** – Use hyphens, not parentheses.

Example: 989-686-9359

### **Premiere, premier**

- Use premiere to refer to the first performance or debut showing.
- Use premier to refer to importance or rank.

Example: Visit the planetarium for the premiere of *Life in Space*.

Example: *A Chocolate Affair* is the premier fundraising event in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

**Presently, at present, current, currently** – Avoid unnecessary use.

Example: Delta has 9,121 students registered for fall classes.

Not: Delta presently has 9,121 students registered for fall classes.

### **Quotations**

- Use quote marks for essay titles and direct quotations.
- If quotes are used in the middle of a sentence, a comma should be included before and after with the second comma included within the closing quote mark.

Example: The student submitted his essay, "The Roles of Water in the Lives of Organisms," to the professor.

- If quotes are used at the end of a sentence, the period should always be included within the closing quotation. However, if a question mark or exclamation mark is used, it can go outside of the quote if it applies to the whole sentence and is not part of the quotation.
- Use single quotations in headings and quotes within quotes.

**Room numbers** – There are no spaces in between the building letter and room number.

Example: My office is B154.

Example: The classroom location is J134.

### **RSVP**

- Do not use periods.
- This is an abbreviation for the French phrase for "please respond." Using "please RSVP" is redundant, use just "RSVP."

### **Semester**

- Capitalize the season when immediately followed by the year.  
Example: Winter 2025
- Lowercase when used generally.  
Example: The winter semester

### **Sign-up, sign up**

- Sign-up is used as a noun and adjective.
- Sign up is used as a verb.

### **Spacing**

- Use one space after a period at the end of a sentence.
- Use one space after a colon. Capitalize the first word after a colon only if it is a proper noun.  
Example: The meeting covered three main topics: equity, retention and completion.

### **Symbols**

- Only use the "@" symbol in email addresses, never in copy.
- Always type out "at", "percent", "number", "and" and "plus" in headings and paragraphs.
- Symbols can be used in tables to save room.  
Example: More than 40 percent of students plan to transfer on to earn their bachelor's degree.  
NOT: More than 40% of students plan to transfer on to earn their bachelor's degree.

### **Text characteristics**

#### **Italic**

- Italicize titles of books, films, plays, magazines, newspapers, movies and works of art.

- Do not use italics for emphasis.
- Do not use italics for quotes or long lines of text because it is hard to read, and not accessible.  
Example: The English class is reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*.  
Not: The essay assignment is *due by Monday, November 19*.

### **Bold**

- Use bold text to emphasize important words, but use it sparingly. If everything is bold, then nothing will stand out.
- Do not use all caps for emphasis.  
Example: **A student ID is required** for admission to the game.  
Not: **A STUDENT ID IS REQUIRED FOR ADMISSION TO THE GAME**.

### **Underline**

- Do not use underlined text on the web. Hyperlinks are shown with underlines, so underlining words that are not links can be confusing.
- If you need to emphasize a point, use bold.

**The** – Lower case, unless it begins a sentence

**Theater** – Use theater, not theatre, for all Delta references.