

## Authors' Style Guide

2009

The purpose of this Style Guide is to help ensure accuracy and consistency in our writing...whether the content is for the website or our informational pamphlets.

There is considerable debate, still, about how to capitalize words associated with the Internet. The most important guiding principle in all such matters is consistency within a document and consistency within an office or institution.

### 1. Active vs. Passive

- The active voice is more direct and strong than the passive voice, and as a rule uses less verbiage.

Example: *Passive* Our resources brochure was designed by Mark.  
*Active* Mark designed our resources brochure.

Try to use the active tense wherever possible. If there are healthy helpings of helping verbs (as in “was designed”), it may be a clue that you are using the passive tense too often.

### 2. Capitalization in Headlines

Chicago recommends the following rules (“pragmatic rather than logically rigorous but generally accepted”):

- Always capitalize the first and last words both in titles and in subtitles and all other major words (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and some conjunctions).
- Lowercase the articles *the*, *a*, and *an*.
- Lowercase the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*.
- Lowercase the words *to* and *as*.

### 3. Miner Conventions

- “Ask a Librarian” instead of “Ask A Librarian.” *The Chicago Manual of Style* supports the use of lowercase articles *the*, *a*, and *an* in headlines and titles.
- We will usually change “The Miner Library” to “Miner,” except in the first instance in a lead article.
- Substitute “Miner’s” for “the Library’s” where possible. Or better yet, make your tone more conversational by using “we” or “our.”

Example: *Formal* The Miner Library now offers classes in its new classroom.  
*Conversational* We now offer classes in our new classroom.

- Avoid using “the patron.” Our more conversational tone addresses Miner’s clients as “you.” Also, try to compel them in your article.

Example: *Formal* Customers can find out about Miner’s Education services by calling 275-6877.  
*Conversational* You can find out about our Education services by calling 275-6877.  
*More compelling* Find out about our Education services by calling 275-6877.

- Spell out numbers less than 10 except those that refer to units of time. Examples:

Example: Miner is offering two new classes this quarter.  
Each class is 2 hours long.

4. Does It Qualify?

- Use qualifiers such as “perhaps,” “rather,” “quite,” “some,” and “very” sparingly; consider whether the sentence loses any meaning without the qualifier. If you want emphasis, use stronger, more descriptive adjectives instead.

5. Other General Rules:

- When in doubt, leave it out.
- Keep it simple; avoid jargon.
- When using acronyms, spell out the entire word or phrase the first time you use it, then also show the acronym in parentheses. For example, “We’re located in the University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC).”

6. “Click here”

- Don’t use it!
- It looks silly when printed on paper.
- It’s bad food for search engines. If you say “For information on pneumonia, click here,” search engines won’t know that your document contains a link to a document about pneumonia. Some important search engines use the link text in estimating the relevance of a link. Using descriptive link texts thus helps users in finding documents they’re interested in, potentially including your document *due to* a link text with some key word.
- It’s device-dependent. There are several ways to follow a link, with or without a mouse. Users probably recognize what you mean, but you are still conveying the message that you think in a device-dependent way.
- Example:  
If you are interested in accessible design, [click here](#) for a list of good online resources. - WRONG  
If you are interested, there are some good [accessible design resources online](#). - RIGHT
- “Auditory users” -- people who are blind, have difficulty seeing, or who are using devices with small or no displays -- are unable to scan the page quickly with their eyes. To get an overview of a page or to quickly find a link, these users will often tab from one link to the next or review a list of available links on a page.

Is it really necessary to use all those words?

it is often the case that = frequently

in the event that = if

be of the opinion that = believe

be in possession of = have

owing to the fact that = since or because

the fact that he had arrived = his arrival

on the order of = about

in advance of = before

in spite of the fact that = although

is indicative of = indicates

had occasion to be = was

put in an appearance = appeared

take into consideration = consider

at this point in time = currently

**More examples of excess padding**

general consensus of opinion = consensus  
 eliminate completely = eliminate  
 temporary reprieve = reprieve  
 may possibly = may  
 small in size = small  
 absolutely essential = essential

future plans = plans  
 advance warning = warning  
 spell out in detail = detail  
 completely unanimous = unanimous  
 various different = various or different  
 complete monopoly = monopoly

**6. Frequently used words**

WORD(S)	COMMENT
E-mail	Always hyphenate; capitalize only at the beginning of a sentence.
Evidence-based	Always hyphenate. Capitalize the “E” in “Evidence” only at the beginning of a sentence. Capitalize the “b” in “based” only when used in a title.
Internet	Most dictionaries still capitalize this word.
Log on, log in, etc.	Write “log in” (or “log on”) and “log out” (or “log off”); furthermore, don’t forget to hyphenate the adjective form, for example “log-in page.” (It does not matter that when these words have been used as commands or prompts on computer screens, they’ve been closed up!)
Online	Not hyphenated; capitalize only at the beginning of a sentence.
PDA’s	Not PDA’s.
Sign up	While Merriam-Webster indicates “sign-up” as also correct, “sign up” (without the hyphen) is preferred.
Web or web	Capitalize Web (when referring to the World Wide Web) and Internet. The word <i>web</i> need not be capitalized when it applies to generalizations or technologies that are typically but not exclusively used with the World Wide Web. A <i>web authoring tool</i> , for example, might be one used for the creation of documents using the HTML markup language, for whatever purpose.
Website	“Website” is acceptable for informal or friendly writing. (Most of our writing falls into this category.)  Use “Web site” (2 separate words; W always

	capitalized) for formal writing. (Refer also to “Web,” above.)
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**7. References**

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University of Chicago Press. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

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W3C Worldwide Web Consortium <http://www.w3.org/>