



WORCESTER  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY

# Writing for the Web

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**A brief content style guide**

**2014**

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# Purpose of these Guidelines

When you write or edit text for the wide range of visitors to the Worcester State University website—prospective students, students’ families, alumni, peer institutions, prospective employees, and so on—it is important that you reflect the established editorial style of our existing content. When you do, you reinforce the coherence and integrity of WSU’s institutional messages and overall brand.

We’ve pulled together this handy guide to help you to create and revise content that will increase understanding of and enthusiasm for Worcester State and its offerings. Don’t hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions or suggestions.

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Please note: This website content style guide is intended as a supplement to the *Worcester State University Quick Reference for Writers and Editors*, updated September 2014, and the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

# What's in a Name/The Institution

Worcester State University, Worcester State, and WSU are commonly used on our website. When referring to the University for the first time on a Web page, use the full name "Worcester State University." Here's an example from the Academic Support Services page:

## Academic Support Services

Here at Worcester State University, we believe that academic support services—like tutoring, computer labs, and advising—are vital to the academic achievements of our students. From your first moment on campus to your final days before graduation, you will find yourself accessing resources, solving problems, and connecting with other members of the academic community through these service centers.

# What's in a Name/The Institution

After the first appearance of the full name on a Web page, you should feel free to abbreviate with "Worcester State" or "WSU," just as you would in normal conversation. If you adopt this style, it's not necessary to insert the abbreviation "(WSU)" as part of the first appearance of "Worcester State University." Here are examples from the Professional Development and Graduate Assistantships pages:

## Professional Development

At Worcester State University, we understand that professional development in business and education is a multifaceted challenge. Long-term programs that lead to major career stepping-stones are not the only answer for enhancing your own capabilities or those of your workforce. That's why, in addition to our numerous graduate certificate and licensure programs for educators and certificates programs in other professions, we offer a range of specialized short courses and seminars geared toward workforce development and the advancement of public instruction through Worcester State's centers and institutes.

## Graduate Assistantships

One of the best ways to get an in-depth understanding of your field is to learn from a leader in that field. That's what Worcester State University graduate assistantships are all about. You are eligible for a graduate assistantship if you are matriculated into a WSU graduate program and have at least a 3.0 GPA. We give preference to students enrolled in 9 credit hours per semester.

# What's in a Name/Departments

When you refer to an academic department, the word “department” should appear after the name of the academic discipline. “Biology Department” is correct; “Department of Biology” is incorrect. Remember, too, that you should capitalize the word “department” only when using it as part of a formal title. Always use lower case when writing phrases like “Our department ...” Note these examples from the Biology landing page:

## Biology Department

In the Biology Department at Worcester State University, we provide you with a solid understanding of the biological sciences through a dynamic integration of classroom learning, laboratory investigation, and fieldwork. Our department offers majors in biology and biotechnology—the only public program of its kind in Massachusetts—as well as a minor in biology. Our accomplished professors illuminate the diversity of modern biology in courses like Ecology, Genetics, and Microbiology. Through our challenging curriculum, you'll hone important critical thinking, problem-solving, and technical skills that are relevant to a wide array of disciplines including chemistry, psychology, medicine, and pharmacology

# The Worcester State University Voice

When you write or edit content for the Worcester State website, adopt the established voice and tone of the site.

## Voice

The preferred voice for the WSU website is first person and conversational. It addresses the reader directly. Whenever possible, use personal pronouns like “you,” “we,” and “our” rather than third-person nouns like “the student,” “the university,” and “the department.”

## Tone

To match the tone of the existing site, do your best to exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Friendly and welcoming:** Web content plays a key role in establishing and nurturing relationships with our readers—it shouldn’t read like a research paper or an impersonal business letter.
- **Smart and thoughtful:** Your writing doesn’t have to be scholarly or laden with technical terms to sound intelligent. Good Web writing is clear, concise, and well organized.
- **Inspirational:** Let your passion for Worcester State show. When you display enthusiasm for your topic, you will help create excitement about WSU and inspire readers to act.

The following excerpt from the “Education Department” page illustrates the voice and tone we’ve adopted for our website. The text brings you into the picture in the first sentence with a direct address. It identifies specific skills and capabilities you’ll gain and communicates a sense pride in the department’s legacy.

## Education Department

As a student in the Education Department at Worcester State University, you will gain the theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience you need to earn a Massachusetts teaching license and pursue a fulfilling career in education. Since 1874, our department has been preparing highly qualified teachers to lead classrooms across Massachusetts. Our renowned and diverse faculty understands the rewards and challenges of teaching, and they will help you develop the skills to build curriculum, plan daily instruction, and solve classroom challenges.

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# Tips on Writing for the Web

When writing for the website, remember that the vast majority of readers will scan your content rather than read it from start to finish. Consider who will be reading the page and what information they will expect to find. Then make it quick and easy to locate.

Here's how:

- Use plain English, simple wording, and short sentences.
- Keep paragraphs brief—one or two ideas and three to four sentences, at most.
- If you have more than three paragraphs, use subheadings to give readers signposts as to what's ahead and where to locate the information they need.
- When you want to express many thoughts related to a single theme, consider using bullet points with one idea each for easy scanning.
- Create clear and concrete calls to action by beginning statements with active verbs like “create,” “explore,” “discover,” “expand,” and “innovate.”
- Use numerals rather than spelling out numbers in most instances to allow for quick scanning.

# Heading Styles

In the screen shot below, you'll see three heading types—banner headline (across the image), main heading (below the image), and subheadings (in the main content). Your headings should conform to the specific style requirements of each type.

- Banner headline—Start with an active verb and initial capital letter and end with a period.
- Main heading—Use title case (initial capital letter for principal words, lower case for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions) and mirror the navigation label.
- Subheading—Use title case for proper names or program titles and use an initial capital letter with no period at the end for the remaining words.



## Leadership Programs

In the Student Involvement and Leadership Development Office at Worcester State University, we believe that the road to leadership travels through student activities. That's why we encourage you to participate in campus clubs and organizations—it's an excellent way to explore leadership roles and develop skills that will boost your career opportunities.

Whether you are a seasoned leader or taking on your first leadership role, you'll find programs throughout the year to match your skills and experience. We offer comprehensive leadership training and development for students involved in clubs and organizations as well as for students who want to develop their general leadership capabilities.

### Student Leader Welcome Back Dinner

As a student leader, you'll be invited to participate in our September welcome back dinner. The event is designed to prepare and inspire you for your role during the upcoming academic year. The evening is highlighted by a keynote speaker with proven expertise in the realm of leadership.

### Leadership Getaway

To support your development as a leader and promote bonding with other student leaders, we offer a two-day, off-campus retreat each February. Although many schools hold off-campus retreats for student leaders, we believe our getaway stands out because of its dynamic life skills component.

# Special Points of Grammar, Punctuation, and Formatting

Style guides may differ on the following points of grammar, punctuation, and formatting. For the purposes of consistency, adopt the following standards when writing for the WSU website.

## Contractions

As a general rule, we prefer to use contractions like “you’ll” versus “you will” and “we’re” versus “we are” in Web content because it is more conversational. There are two exceptions to this rule. Avoid using a contraction for the very first subject/verb combination on a page. For example:

At Worcester State University, we will strive to make sure your student experience is fulfilling. On the WSU campus, you’ll be sure to find everything you need for a successful academic career.

Spell out any multiword compound verb that would be split by a conjunction like “also.” For example, “you also will be learning” is correct and “you’ll also be learning” is incorrect.

## Compound words and phrases

Be sure to match the following forms:

- “health care” rather than “healthcare;” “health-care” when used as an adjective
- “non-profit” rather than “nonprofit”
- “full-time program” rather than “fulltime program” or “full time program”
- “part-time program” rather than “part time program”
- “4+1 program” and “4+1 option” rather than “4 plus 1 program”

# Special Points of Grammar, Punctuation, and Formatting

## Punctuation

We use the serial comma when including three or more items in a list:

- Correct use: “We believe that services like tutoring, advising, and computer training are vital to your success.”
- Incorrect use: “We believe that services like tutoring, advising and computer training are vital to your success.”

Use the em-dash (a long unbroken line) to indicate conversational emphasis—and to get your attention when driving home a point.

Use the hyphen to show ranges of time (4-6 p.m.) and dates (November 7-10).

## Spacing

Single spacing is universal on our site between a period and the first word of a new sentence.

## Bulleted lists

On the WSU website, we use two styles for bulleted lists. The first style is a sentence fragment that uses an initial capital letter and no period.

The second style is a full sentence that uses an initial capital letter, may include a colon, and ends with a period.

Consider applying to be a part of a living-learning community, which provides an organized living arrangement for students who share similar interests, backgrounds, and career goals. Choose from:

- **A.I.D.** for students in this alternative-admission cohort managed by the Multicultural Affairs Office; located in Dowden Hall
- **CLEWS** for first-year students interested in community building and leadership; located in in Sheehan Hall (first-year students) and Wasylean Hall (sophomores - seniors)
- **ECO House** for students interested in sustainability of the earth; located in Sheehan Hall
- **Honors House** for members of the Commonwealth Honors Program; located in Dowden Hall (first-year students) and Wasylean Hall (sophomores - seniors)
- **Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Communication Sciences and Disorders House** for first-year majors in these 3 programs of study; located in Dowden Hall

Key aspects of Student Involvement and Leadership Development at Worcester State include:

- **Student organizations:** Whatever your interests—sports, the arts, media, community service, student government—you’ll find your fit within our 30+ clubs and organizations active on campus.
- **Leadership programs:** Hone your leadership skills with our comprehensive training programs offered throughout the year for both emerging and experienced student leaders.
- **Commuter services:** Enjoy a home away from home on campus, relaxing in the Living Room lounge, a place to connect with other students, hang out between classes, and get immersed in campus life.
- **Orientation programs:** Meet friends and faculty, learn your way around campus, scope out academic programs and services, and have fun with other newcomers to Worcester State.

We hope you'll find these style guidelines helpful when you write or edit content for the WSU website. As noted above, this guide is intended as a supplement to the main University quick reference style guide and *Chicago Manual of Style*.

If you have questions that are not addressed in these guidelines, please consult the *Worcester State University Quick Reference for Writers and Editors*, updated September 2014, or *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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