



Murray State University follows the grammar and punctuation guidelines from the latest edition of the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook, which is the standard guide for most U.S. newspapers, magazines and public relations firms. The Editorial Style Guidelines for Murray State discussed within this document should be applied in all University materials to create a single style to be used consistently and appropriately across the Murray State campus. This guide is organized alphabetically and demonstrates correct usages for common style questions, including references to titles, quotes, dates and more.

For more tips on AP Style, we recommend Purdue Owl and Grammar Girl, both accessible online, as excellent resources. If you have further questions, please contact Abby Ponder, communications specialist, in the Office of Branding, Marketing and Communication at aponder1@murraystate.edu.

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Acronyms

In general, avoid using acronyms. If an acronym is necessary, use the full name on first reference followed by the acronym enclosed in parentheses.

Example: *She is a student in the Center for Telecommunications Systems Management (TSM).*

Advisor

Do not use “adviser.”

Ampersands

The ampersand (&) is not a substitute for “and.” Use only when included as part of an official name, such as the Town & Gown Partnership.

Capitalization

Capitalize sparingly. In general, avoid unnecessary capitalization and resist the urge to use capitalization to signify importance. See also “**colleges and departments**,” “**degrees**” and “**titles**” in this guide.

Colleges and departments

Capitalize the official names of Murray State colleges, departments and offices. Lowercase program names, majors, areas, minors and informal names (e.g., biology department) except in the case of proper nouns, such as English, Spanish, Chinese, etc.

Examples:

- *Arthur J. Bauernfeind College of Business*
- *Department of History*
- *nonprofit leadership studies*
- *chemistry department*
- *an accounting major with an English minor*

Commas

Do not use the Oxford (a.k.a. serial) comma, which is the comma that comes before conjunctions like “and” and “or” in a series of three or more items.

Example: *The students purchased notebooks, pens and folders before the semester started.*

Dashes

Use an en dash (–) instead of a hyphen (-) for number ranges, including dates and times. Using “to” is also acceptable when referencing ranges.

Example: *May 2–5*

Example: *10 a.m. to 2 p.m.*

Example: *pages 128–135*

Use an em dash (—) with a space before and after it — just like this — to call out important information.

Dates and times

When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate the following: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. Spell out when using alone or with the year alone.

Example: *The event takes place Jan. 2, 2019.*

Example: *She started classes in August 2018.*

When a phrase refers to the month, date and year, offset the year with commas.

Example: *The seminar begins Sept. 1, 2018, in Lovett Auditorium.*

Use periods and lowercase letters for “a.m.” and “p.m.” Do not use “:00” when referencing a time that is on the hour. Spell out “noon” and “midnight” instead of using the numeral “12.”

Example: *The movie begins at 7 p.m.*

Example: *His class is at 9:30 a.m.*

Use cardinal numbers (e.g., April 1) rather than ordinal numbers (e.g., April 1st).

Degrees

Casual references to degrees require a possessive apostrophe and ‘s’ for “bachelor’s” and “master’s” degrees but not “associate” or “doctorate” degrees. Do not capitalize academic degrees in general text except when referencing proper nouns like English or Spanish. This is the preferred usage.

Example: *The student first earned an associate degree before attending Murray State to graduate with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering.*

Capitalize the formal name of the degree if referencing, for example, “Bachelor of Arts” or “Master of Science.” This style should be used sparingly.

When listing degrees by their initials, do not use periods. This style should be used sparingly.

Example: *BS, MS, MFA and PhD*

Faculty and staff

Use “faculty members” or “staff members” to avoid awkward singular constructions.

Freshman

The phrase “first-year student” is preferred. However, “freshman” is also acceptable in headlines and in phrases like “freshman class” (note it is not “freshmen class”).

Grade point average, GPA

Spell out “grade point average” on first reference. Use “GPA” on second and subsequent references.

Names

Use first and last names on first references. If an individual holds a doctorate, include “Dr.” before their first and last name on first references. In all subsequent references, use only the individual’s last name.

Example: *The class was taught by Dr. Kelly Jones. The students enjoyed the conversational approach Jones used in her classroom discussions.*

Numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine or if a number begins a sentence. Use the numeral for numbers 10 and up or when referencing percentages, times, dates, ages and monetary amounts. Use a comma in numbers higher than 999.

Example: *There are eight students on the intramural team.*

Example: *The auditorium holds 200 people.*

Example: *More than 1,500 individuals attended last night’s event in the CFSB Center.*

Percentages

In text, use numerals and write out “percent” rather than using the % symbol.

Example: *At the meeting, 65 percent of students agreed with this initiative.*

Quotes

Punctuation goes inside the quotation mark.

Example: *“Murray State University affords opportunities to students,” said Dr. Bob Davies, president.*

Example: *John Smith referred to Murray State as an “incredible value.”*

When writing press releases, quotes should stand alone in individual paragraphs. Attribution should come at the end of the quote’s first sentence.

Example: *“The lecture was very informative,” Smith said. “I’m glad I decided to attend.”*

References to alumni

Follow the names of Murray State graduates with the year(s) of graduation offset by commas on first reference.

Example: *John Smith, ’95, returned to campus for Homecoming.*

If referencing a former student who did not graduate, list the years of attendance and offset with commas.

Example: *Sally Jones, attd. ’01– ’03, won a national award.*

Spaces

Use only a single space after a period at the end of a sentence.

States

The names of states should always be spelled out when used in a body of text. Offset the state with commas if paired with a city.

Example: *He grew up in Mayfield, Kentucky, before deciding to attend Murray State.*

Example: *Several incoming students from Ohio attended the Summer O session.*

Telephone numbers

Use 10-digit numbers with hyphens as separators: 270-809-XXXX. Do not use parentheses around the area code.

That, which

Use “that” for essential clauses. If the clause in question can be omitted without changing the meaning of the sentence, use “which” and offset the clause with commas. “That” and “which” are not interchangeable.

Example: *I remember the day that we first met while visiting Pogue Library.*

Example: *The team, which finished in second place last year, is stronger than ever.*

Titles

Capitalize professional titles only when they appear before a person’s name. Make titles lowercase if they are informal, appear without a person’s name or are offset by commas.

Example: *“This is great news,” said Provost Mark Arant.*

Example: *The provost attended the event.*

Example: *John Smith, program director, organized the event.*

When referencing composition titles — such as books, movies, plays, poems, lectures, articles, etc. — place the title within quotation marks. Do not italicize. Newspapers, magazines and journals are not placed in quotation marks or italicized.

Example: *The theatre students performed “Crazy for You” in September 2017.*

University name usage

Do not use “MSU.” Always spell out the University’s full name in the first instance and use “Murray State” and “the University” in subsequent references. Capitalize the “U” when referring to Murray State as “the University.”

Website (URL) addresses

Use the shortest version of a URL that works. Delete the “http://” and “www.” portions of the address. Include a hyperlink for digital content. Make certain the link is functional and takes users to the correct webpage.

Example: *murraystate.edu/myopportunity*

Murray State University has no shortage of great stories that extend the attributes of students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters. An integral part of University Advancement, the Office of Branding, Marketing and Communication creates public awareness of Murray State to provide increased value to the community, region, country and world.