Michigan Sea Grant Editorial STYLE GUIDE: 
A living document

Please keep this in mind: Grammar rules are guidelines, not laws. If we see something is not working for Michigan Sea Grant, we can make suggestions to change the accepted styles. The style guide is based loosely on Associated Press style, with many customizations specific to Michigan Sea Grant. If something is not addressed within the guide, notify the communications coordinator. If he/she is not available and you need to make a quick decision, defer to the AP style guide.

Cheat Sheet - Michigan Sea Grant
- Single spacing within text, between sentences.
- No serial comma.
- Numbers <10 are written out and >10 are represented numerically (that includes large numbers. Ex: 2.4 million) with a few exceptions. See NUMBERS for more.
- Each of the following is one word, without a hyphen: Runoff, Seawall and Watershed.
- Shrink-wrap gets a hyphen.
- Age is always written with numbers.
- Percent is written out when it appears in a sentence. In a bullet or parentheses, though, it is represented as %.

A –

Abbreviations and Acronyms
Avoid abbreviations. If possible, avoid acronyms. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can properly be cited as "the Corps" on second reference. Acronyms for other federal agencies are acceptable on second reference to avoid confusion or needless length. The National Marine Fisheries Service, for example, can be cited as NMFS.

When using an acronym, spell out the entire organization the first time it is used, and include the acronym in parenthesis. Example: Michigan Sea Grant (MSG). Guideline: Limit the total number of acronyms in all documents and especially in smaller publications, such as fact sheets.

Academic Degrees
Use "Dr." before an individual's name only for those people who have earned a
doctor of dental surgery, doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of podiatric medicine.
If it is necessary to mention and the person holds a doctoral degree in something other than one of the medical fields, place that information after the name. Example: Lefty McGraw, who has a doctorate in science, will lead the discussion. Or Lefty McGraw, Ph.D, will lead the discussion.

In non-story formats (lists, etc.), abbreviations are permissible. Check the following list to determine which ones do not require periods:
B.A. Bachelor of arts
B.S. Bachelor of science
M.A. Master of arts
M.S. Master of science
Ph.D. Doctorate of philosophy
MBA Master of business administration
EMBA Executive master of business administration
MFA Master of fine arts
M. Arch. Master of architecture
J.D. Juris doctorate

Also note: It is bachelor’s degree, master’s degree and doctoral degree.

**Active vs. Passive Voice**
Active voice is usually the best voice to use. Passive voice is when you don't name what is responsible for the action or when something is done “by” someone.

Example:
Passive voice: John Jones was appointed by the dean.
Active voice (preferred): The dean appointed John Jones.

If you don’t know who is responsible for an action or you need to lead the sentence with the more meaty parts, passive voice can suffice.
Examples: "Mistakes were made."

Active: Michigan Sea Grant released an economics report that indicated....
Passive (preferred in this case): More than 1.5 million jobs are reportedly connected to the Great Lakes, indicates a new report released by Michigan Sea Grant.

**AM/PM vs a.m./p.m.**
Lowercase them and insert one space between the number and the a or p. Example: 10 a.m.

**Animal/Fish Names**
Lowercase, with the exception of animals whose name includes a proper name. It is not necessary to include Latin names in press releases unless the species in question has no common name or shares a common name with another species. In those cases, capitalize the first word of the Latin name and italicize. Example: lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*).

If you discuss more than one species of the same genus in text, cite the full scientific name for the first and abbreviate the genus for subsequent species or subspecies. Example: gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), Mexican wolf (*C. Lupus baileyi*) and red wolf (*C. rufus*).

**Apostrophe**
Do not use an apostrophe after a date, such as the Roaring 20s. Add only an apostrophe after a plural noun ending in "s." Use an 's for singular nouns ending in s, unless the noun is a proper name or the next word begins with an s.

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**B – Bird Watching**
Is two words.

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**C – Capitalization**
**General Rule:** When in doubt, do not capitalize.

- **Titles**
  Publication Titles: Capitalize the principal words (including all pronouns and verbs) and any prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters.

- **Person Titles**
  Capitalize all conferred and traditional, educational, occupational and business titles when used specifically in front of the name; do not capitalize these titles when they follow the name. Examples:
  - President Harris Pastides, University of Reckoning
  - Les Sternberg, dean
  - Professor T.S. Elliot is chair of the Department of Electrical Engineering.

- **Department Names**
Do not capitalize official department names unless there is a proper noun within it or it falls under title rules. Refer to the individual department, office or unit for its official name.

- Faculty members from the geography, anthropology and ethnic studies departments are cooperating on this project.
- James Elias, associate professor in the department of biological chemistry, will deliver the first lecture of the conference.

Also do not use capitals when the department affiliation serves as an adjective rather than as a noun:
- The dean announced that electrical engineering Professor Pat Mendez had been promoted.

**Note:** In tabular matter and addresses, these titles may be capitalized regardless of location.

- **Exception:** When a word such as *former* is used in conjunction with a title and name, the title does not get capitalized, as it is considered part of a compound adjective (i.e., former president Andrew McGuiness).

- **Geographic Places and Capitalization**
  Use northwest Michigan or east Michigan, not capitalized.
  Capitalize geographical terms commonly accepted as proper names. Do not capitalize descriptive or identifying geographical terms that do not apply to only one geographical entity or are not considered proper names. In general, lowercase cultural or climatic terms derived from geographical proper names. Common examples:
  - Upper Peninsula, the Thumb, Metro Detroit, the South, southern, southwestern (direction), the Southwest (U.S.), the West, western Europe, the West Coast, the Middle East, the Midwest (U.S.), west, western, westerner.

- **Schools**
  Capitalize the names of schools on campus when written as a proper noun. Example: The School of Natural Resources and Environment hosted an open house.

**Do Not Capitalize:**
- The administration, federal or national when not part of a name.
- Seasons: summer, spring, winter nor fall.
- The city, when used in conjunction with the proper name of the city unless referring to the presiding governmental entity.
  - Correct examples:
    - “The City of Detroit enforced an ordinance...”
    - “She lives in the city of Detroit.”
- Classes: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, first-year, second-year, etc.
- The college.
- Degrees: doctorate, doctor's, master's, bachelor's, baccalaureate.
- The state of Michigan (but the State of Michigan when referring to the governmental entity).
• Plural proper nouns – Lower-case when citing more than one. Example: Mississippi and Missouri rivers, Atlantic and Pacific oceans, lakes Michigan and Superior.
• The university (when it stands alone in reference to a specific university).
• Century, as in the 20th century.

Clean Marina Program (Michigan and others)
Capitalize and our program is referred to as the Michigan Clean Marina program on the first reference. (It is NOT the Michigan Clean Marinas Program)

Coast
Capitalize when it refers to a region, such as the East Coast/West Coast. Lowercase when it refers to an area, such as the Michigan coast.

Commas
The biggest question of comma usage we face at MSG is whether or not we use the serial comma. No, we do not use it. Yet, most academics (it’s also called the Harvard Comma) will insist upon using it. For our purposes – particularly outreach material – it should not be used. The Michigan Sea Grant standard for outreach materials (Upwellings, web pages, other materials produced for general public) does not employ a serial comma by way of standard. This follows a fairly clear Associated Press style on using commas: Use commas to separate items in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series: The flag is red, white and blue. He would nominate Tom, Dick or Harry.

Serial comma example: She ate a banana, pear, and apple.
Non-serial comma example (USE THIS ONE): She ate a banana, pear and apple.

However,
• Put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction: I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast.
• Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: The main points to consider are whether the athletes are skillful enough to compete, whether they have the stamina to endure the training, and whether they have the proper mental attitude.
• Use a comma to avoid ambiguity or confusion: She thanked her parents, Liza Minelli and God. Unless she is the love child of Liza and God, it should be: She thanked her parents, Liza Minelli, and God. Or better yet rewrite to clarify: She thanked God, Liza Minelli and her parents.

D –
Dangling Participles
A participle is a verb that acts like an adjective. The present participle form of a verb usually ends with "ing." For example, "dream" is a verb, and "dreaming" is its present participle. "Swim" is a verb, and "swimming" is its present participle.
A dangling participle is participial phrase floating out there in your sentence with no proper subject in sight. Don’t leave them hanging – they hate it so.

Dangling: Straddling the Arizona–New Mexico border, the archaeologist found a string of ancient pueblo ruins. (Was the archaeologist straddling the border when she found the ruins?)
Correct: The archaeologist found a string of ancient pueblo ruins straddling the Arizona–New Mexico border.

**Dates**
Abbreviate these months only when they are used with a specific date: January, February, August, September, October, November, December. Exceptions may be made in tabular, formal or graphic treatments. Examples: December 2010 or Dec. 25, 2011

**Decision Maker/Making**
Decision maker is written as two words, no hyphen. However, decision-making is hyphenated. (Sometimes this can create an awkward sentence. Rewrite it clarify.)
Examples:
It helps with our decision-making process vs. this guide is for decision makers.

**Departments**
Do not capitalize the names of departments when used in text unless one of the words is a proper noun.
Examples: He enrolled in the department of natural resources. He enrolled in the biology department. He enrolled in the English department.

**Dimensions**
Use figures and spell out inches, feet, yards, etc. to indicate depth, height, length and width. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns.

Examples:
- He is 5 feet 10 inches tall. She is a 5-foot-4-inch dynamo.
- The team signed a 7-footer.
- The tool shed is 20 feet long, 10 feet wide and 8 feet high.
- The room is 9 feet by 12 feet.
- She bought a 9-by-12 rug for the room.

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**E – En vs. Em Dashes**
**EN DASH (the width of the letter N)**
Use an en dash with no space before or after:
a) To indicate continuing (or inclusive) numbers, dates, times or reference numbers.
Ex: 1978–98
May–June 1987
10 a.m.–5 p.m.
pp. 12–47

* When a word introduces the timeframe, use to or and
Ex: from 1978 to 1998
From May to June 1987
Between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.
From pages 12 through 45

b) In a compound adjective at least one element of which consists of two words or of a hyphenated word.
New York–London flight

**EM DASH (the width of the letter M)**
Use an em dash with one space before and after:
a) To denote a break in thought that causes an abrupt change in sentence structure.
Ex: That is all I know — actually, there is one more thing.

b) In defining or enumerating complementary elements.
Ex: The influence of three immortals — Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven — was of great importance in his development as a musician.

c) In sentences having several elements as referents of a pronoun that is the subject of a final, summarizing clause.
Ex: Smith, Jones, and McCoy — all felt groggy on humid days.

**Event Listings**
MSG uses a standard AP setting for event announcements: **Time, Date, Place (in that order)**. It is particularly important to include this correctly in press releases that are targeted at the media.

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**F – Federal**
Is not capitalized in general references unless part of a proper noun.

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**G – Governor**
Capitalize and abbreviate as Gov. when it precedes a name. Capitalize and spell out when it precedes a direct quote. Lowercase and spell out in all other uses.
Examples: Gov. Snyder said Michigan needs more beer.
The governor said Michigan needs more beer.
Governor Rick Snyder said, “Michigan needs more beer.”
H –

**Hyphens**

Do not hyphenate the words *vice president* and words beginning with *non*, *except* those containing a proper noun.

Examples: non-German and nontechnical

Do not place a hyphen between the prefixes *pre, post, semi, anti, multi,* etc., and their nouns or adjectives, *except* before proper nouns or when two vowels with no hyphen separating them would be unclear. Examples: Predentistry and electro-optical, *but* preindustrial and pro-American.

**Exception:** *pre* when used before *law* or *med*, as in *pre-law* or *pre-med* advising.

**Combined Adjectives**

Generally, hyphenate between two or more adjectives when they come before a noun and act as a single idea. Example: The decision-making process was rough.

**Homepage**

Written as *homepage* (lowercase, one word).

Example: The redesign of the homepage took months of work.

I

J

K

L –

**Latin Names**

First name is capitalized. Second and subsequent names are lower case. The whole name is italicized. Example: *(Phragmites australis)*

**Legislative**

Capitalize and abbreviate as Rep., Reps., Sen. or Sens. when it precedes a name or group of names, but capitalize and spell out Representative or Senator when the reference precedes a quote. Lowercase and spell out in all other uses. Add U.S. or State before the title if needed to clarify relationships.
M –

**More Than vs. Over**

"More than" is the correct wording when dealing with numbers.  
Example: Enrollment grew by more than 1,000 marinas.  
"Over" is best used to describe direction or spatial movement.  
Example: The water flowed over the dam.

N –

**Numbers**

MSG follows a standard guideline on numbers. Write out zero to nine when referenced in text. With 10 and above, numerals are used.

**Exceptions:**
- When a number begins a sentence, *always* spell it out.
- When referencing a large amount like millions, do not spell it out. Consider the whole number. Example: 4.2 million or 9 billion.
- Use numbers for degrees, money, ratios, percentages, peoples’ ages or program credit hours.

**NOTE:** In order to maintain consistency within a series, use numerals if more than half of the numbers are 10 or over; otherwise use number words within a series.  
Examples: 22 hours, 12 minutes, 6 seconds  
Twelve hats, five purses, five umbrellas, seven sweaters, and sixteen pairs of shoes were sold yesterday.

**Fractions** standing alone are spelled out: One-fourth of the students.  
**Phone numbers** are written as follows: (734) 615-0400.

O

P –

**Phragmites**

Capitalize in general usage. Also called the common reed but we refer to it in many publications and throughout the website as Phragmites.  
Example: The Phragmites stands quickly took over the shoreline.

**Plant Names**

Lowercase, with the exception of plants whose name includes a proper name such as the Ash Meadows milk vetch. It is not necessary to include Latin names in press releases unless the species in question has no common name or shares a common name with
another species. In that case, capitalize the first word of the Latin name. Example: hairy rattleweed (*Baptista arachnifera*).

If you discuss more than one species of the same genus in text, cite the full scientific name for the first and abbreviate the genus for subsequent species or subspecies. Example: MacDonald’s rock-cress (*Arabis mcdonaldiana*), shale barren rock-cress (*A. Serotina*).

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**S** –

**Semicolons**

Semicolons are followed by a lower case letter, unless that letter is the first letter of a proper noun. They have no spaces before them, but one space after.

Use them:
- Between items in a series or listing containing internal punctuation, especially parenthetic commas, where the semicolons function as serial commas. This is the most frequent use. Example: She saw three men: Jamie, who came from New Zealand; John, the milkman’s son; and George, a gaunt kind of man.

- Between closely related independent clauses not conjoined with a coordinating conjunction. Think of it as a stopping point between a comma and a period. Ex: Reptiles, amphibians and predatory mammals swallow their prey whole or in large pieces, bones included; waterfowl usually take shellfish whole.

**Spacing (single vs. double)** – MSG uses single spacing between sentences and punctuation marks. There is no need to double space, and it adds work at the layout/proofing stage to remove them.

Incorrect: she said. There was a...
Correct: she said. There was a...

**Species**

Is both singular and plural. Use singular and plural pronouns and verbs depending on the meaning being conveyed.

**Spelling – Common Questions**

- *acknowledgment* and *judgment* (no e after g)
- *adviser* preferred to *adviser*
- *affect*: to have an influence on; *effect*: to bring about
• *African American* is two words. A hyphen is not necessary, even in adjective form (in order to be consistent with similar terms such as *Latin American, Native American*, etc.).

• *Alumnus* is the singular reference for a male graduate; *alumna*, the singular reference for a female graduate; *alumni*, the plural reference to a mixed group of male and female graduates or male graduates only; *alumnae*, the plural reference for female graduates only.

• *capital* for the city, *capitol* for the building

• *chair, not chairman, chairperson, or chairwoman*

• *course work, not coursework*

• *credit-hour* (adjective), *credit hour* (noun)

• *database, not data base*

• *disabled, not handicapped*

• *fund-raising* (noun), *fund-raising* (adjective), *fund-raiser* (noun)

• *grade point average, not grade-point average*

• *high school* (noun), *high school* (adjective)

• *kickoff* (noun or adjective), *kick off* (verb)

• *master class, not masterclass*

• *online, not on-line*

• *resume as shown here, not résumé or resumé*

• *theatre* when referring to the department, discipline or a performance; *theater* when referring to a building (exception: names)

• *toward, not towards*

• *workplace, not work place*

• *workstation, not work station*

**Avoid**

• The longer of two similar words: *use* (not *utilize*), *competence* (not *competency)*.

• Singular/plural disagreements with pronouns. For example, do not refer to a single person as “they” or with “their” and keep in mind a committee or group of people is one entity.

**Split Infinitives**

An infinitive is a two-word form of a verb. For example, "to tell." In a split infinitive, another word separates the two parts of the verb. For example, “To boldly tell” is a split infinitive because “boldly” separates “to” from “tell.” It is okay to sometimes split infinitives (ha ha). Seriously though, try no to do this.

Split: He was told *to quickly process* the papers.

Joined (preferred): He was told *to process* the papers quickly.

**States**

When abbreviating states (such as when following the name of a city), do not use the two-letter, no-period abbreviations used by the U.S. Postal Service. We prefer the traditional abbreviations (and note, some states never get abbreviated):
We do this because it is easier to understand/less confusing when discussing states with similar starting letters. For instance, MI could mean Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, Minnesota... for the uninitiated. Using Mich. or Minn. or Miss. or Mo. clears it up (for the most part).

T –
**Temperature**
Use figures, but spell out zero. Remember, temperatures rise or fall; they do not get warmer or colder. Write out the word degrees unless there is reason to use the degree symbol (cookbook, scientific activity, etc.). There should be no space between the number and the symbol when used.

**Time**
Use figures, but spell out noon and midnight to avoid confusion. Use a colon to separate hours and minutes.
**Titles and Other Proper Indicators**

The following should be *italicized*:
- books
- catalogs
- CDs
- long musical compositions
- movies
- operas
- pamphlets
- periodicals
- plays
- radio and television programs
- works of art (paintings, statues, sculpture, etc.)

Web publications (but not Websites).

The following should be placed in “quotation” marks:
- book series
- conference presentations
- dissertations and theses
- essays
- film series
- lectures
- parts of volumes (chapters, titles of papers, etc.)
- radio and television episodes
- short stories
- single conferences/lectures (but not lecture series)
- songs.

Italicize the specific names of ships, airplanes and spacecraft, but not the abbreviations that may precede them. Do not italicize designations of classes or makes, and do not italicize names of trains.

**USS Enterprise**, **HMS Victory**, **Spirit of St. Louis**, Boeing 747, Essex Class carriers

**Toward**

NOT towards – no s.

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**U –**

**United States**

When abbreviating, use periods to indicate the U.S.

Correct: U.S. EPA or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Incorrect: US EPA

- Use U.S. in text only as an adjective. Spell out *United States* as a noun, e.g., the U.S. Senate, but a resident of the United States.
**URLs and E-mail Addresses**

Do not add punctuation to an e-mail address or URL. However, if a sentence ends with an e-mail address or URL, do punctuate it as you normally would. Most people are now familiar enough with the web that they will not be confused and think the punctuation mark is part of the address. It is best not to break a URL across two lines. However, if a URL won’t fit on one line, break it after a forward slash or before a period. Do not hyphenate words within URLs, even if they make for awkward line breaks.

Whenever possible, website URLs should be in all lower-case letters.

**Guidelines for presenting URLs:**

- It is not necessary to use boldface or italic type for URLs (although these are acceptable options). Just be consistent in your treatment.
- If the URL looks awkward in the middle of a sentence, rewrite the sentence to allow for placement at the end.
- Leave off the http:// at the beginning and forward slashes at the end of URLs. Most browsers automatically insert these for you. Exception: a URL that starts with something other than www. The http:// prefix might be necessary in certain communications, such as html e-mails.

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**W – Web**

*Webpage* is one word and lowercase: webpage.

*Website* is one word, lowercase: website

*World Wide Web* is capitalized. But, the shorter version, the web, is lowercase.

**Wetlands**

Wetlands is singular when used as an adjective and plural when used as a noun.

Examples:

Wetland habitat is disappearing at an alarming rate; Promote the protection of wetlands.

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X, Y, Z