

STYLE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

The University of Washington School of Public Health style guide is intended to provide clarity on grammar, formatting and tone. Consistent usage of the style guide in messaging helps build consistency and credibility among our audiences. This is a living document that follows the Associated Press Stylebook, the UW brand and equitable language style guidelines.

MISSION, VISION, VALUES

<https://sph.washington.edu/about/mission>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [AP Stylebook](#)
- [SPH brand](#)
- [UW brand – style and punctuation](#)
- [UW brand – word list and common terms](#)
- [Developing an equity lens – visual guide](#)
- [UW's equitable language style guide](#)
- [Epidemiology EDI Glossary of Terms](#)

TONE

Tone refers to the emotional quality or mood that is conveyed in writing or speech. It's the way something is said, rather than what is said. Tone can change depending on the context, audience or subject matter. For example, the tone of a message might be formal when addressing an academic audience, but more casual or friendly when speaking to a general audience. Tone helps convey feelings such as enthusiasm, sincerity, humor or seriousness.

UW SPH'S TONE IS

- **Accessible:** Using clear, concise language that reflects a holistic and comprehensive understanding of public health issues.
- **Empathetic:** Connecting with readers through a compassionate understanding of their needs and concerns.
- **Informative:** Focusing on providing valuable insights, data and actionable guidance.
- **Encouraging:** Motivating individuals and communities to take positive action for their health and well-being.
- **Collaborative:** Emphasizing teamwork, partnerships, and collective goals within the public health community.

PERSONALITY

Personality represents the underlying character or disposition of SPH. It embodies the values, beliefs, and unique characteristics that distinguish the organization from others. Personality remains consistent across all communications, regardless of the context or audience. It's like the organization's "character," defining how it consistently behaves and communicates. For example, a brand's personality might be described as innovative, compassionate, bold or playful. Here is the [UW's Personality](#).

THE PERSONALITY TRAITS OF UW SPH ARE:

- 1. Curious:** Having a strong desire to learn, explore and inquire.
 - In writing:
 - Ask thoughtful questions that provoke reflection and exploration.
 - Showcase the investigative nature of public health through data, studies and insights.
 - Encourage readers to engage and think deeply about the issues being discussed.
- 2. Inclusive:** Embracing and accepting diverse perspectives and backgrounds.
 - In writing:
 - Use language that is non-discriminatory and welcomes all readers.
 - Highlight stories and perspectives from various cultures, identities, socioeconomic statuses, etc.
 - Acknowledge and address the diverse needs and experiences within the community.
- 3. Determined:** Showing resolve and purpose to achieve specific goals.
 - In writing:
 - Highlight the School's mission, vision and commitment to public health.
 - Emphasize perseverance in research, education and community engagement.
 - Use strong and affirmative language that inspires action.
- 4. Thoughtful:** Exhibiting compassion, consideration and empathy.
 - In writing:
 - Reflect a human-centered approach, focusing on the well-being of individuals and communities.
 - Share stories that evoke empathy and compassion.
 - Be sensitive to readers' feelings and needs, using language that conveys warmth and understanding.

5. Trustworthy: Being reliable, responsible and deserving of trust.

- In writing:
 - Use accurate and well-researched information, citing reputable sources.
 - Maintain transparency about methodologies, findings, and affiliations.
 - Communicate with honesty and integrity, building trust with the audience.

6. Holistic: Understanding and treating issues from a comprehensive and interconnected perspective.

- In writing:
 - Highlight the interdependence of physical, mental, social and environmental factors in public health.
 - Use examples that showcase a multifaceted approach to health issues.
 - Encourage readers to think beyond individual factors and consider the larger systemic context.

7. Approachable: Friendly and easy to talk to; accessible. Providing information in a clear and understandable manner that can be easily comprehended by various audiences.

- In writing:
 - Use a conversational tone that invites reader engagement.
 - Avoid overly technical language and academic jargon that could intimidate or exclude some readers.
 - Provide clear pathways for readers to engage further, such as inviting questions, directing to resources, or offering next steps for involvement.
 - Structure content in a logical and reader-friendly way, utilizing subheadings, bullet points and concise sentences.
 - Include visual aids like charts, graphs, or images that support the text and enhance understanding.
 - Offer alternative formats or resources for those with different abilities or needs, such as accessible PDFs or video content with captions.
 - Engage readers with practical examples or analogies that bring complex public health concepts to life.

GRAMMAR & STYLE (QUICK TIPS)

Abbreviations & Acronyms – [see full list here](#)

- Avoid using them whenever possible
- Always spell out the first citation and follow with the abbreviation or acronym in parenthesis
- Ok to use multiple references if the organization is more known by the acronym than full name (ex. I-TECH)
- Abbreviating University of Washington: spell out “the University of Washington” on first reference, then abbreviate thereafter
 - Include “the” in noun form (ex. Students at the UW have a lot of studying to do)
 - Omit “the” in adjective form (ex. UW students want to be in the classroom)
- Abbreviating School of Public Health: spell out “the School of Public Health” on first reference then abbreviate to “the School” or “SPH”
 - In noun form use “the School” when abbreviating
 - In adjective form use “SPH” when abbreviating
 - Always mention the School of Public Health up high in the copy and associate with the University of Washington
 - **In department news acknowledge the School of Public Health**

Academic degrees

- Spell out academic degrees as much as possible and use an apostrophe (ex. She earned a master’s)
- Use abbreviations only after a name and when it’s not possible to spell out the degree
 - Use periods when abbreviating B.A., B.S., M.A., M.S., Ph.D.
 - Use commas between a list of abbreviated credentials
 - No periods between MPH
- Capitalize an academic degree only if using the formal name (ex. Master of Public Health in Nutritional Sciences)

Capitalizations

- Headlines (see below)
- Schools, colleges, departments, programs and centers
 - Capitalize the formal name of a school, college, program or center
 - Exception: Capitalize “the School” when referring to the UW School of Public Health as an abbreviation
 - Lowercase the informal names except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives (ex. Russian department)
- Titles (see below)
- Lowercase academic seasons (autumn quarter)
- Lowercase state in Washington state

Colons & semi-colons

- Avoid using them whenever possible
- For colons:
 - Use for lists and bullets (Her favorite colors are the following: red, blue and green.)
 - Use sparingly for emphasis (ex. There is only one thing she refuses to eat: hot dogs.)
 - When using in a headline, capitalize the first word after the colon
 - When using in a sentence, capitalize the first word after the colon only if it is a proper noun
- Use a semi-colon for:
 - Joining two related independent clauses without using a conjunction word like “and” (ex. Her birthday was coming up in a few days; she hoped her grandma could attend the party.)
 - Serial lists (ex. She packed her food for the entire which included an egg sandwich for breakfast; a salad and fruit for lunch; grilled chicken, rice and vegetables for dinner; a brownie and cookie for dessert.)

Commas

- Do not use serial commas per AP style (ex. Sarah, Marie and Thomas)
- Only use a serial comma in a complex series if it improves readability and clarity

Dashes

- For en dashes:
 - Use between dates and numbers or any kind of range (ex. May–July)
 - Do not use spaces before or after en dash
- For em dashes:
 - Use em dashes to offset a phrase within a sentence
 - (ex. The initiative — and the School’s greater EDI roadmap — was led by key faculty members.)
 - Use a space before and after the em dash
 - Use em dashes sparingly

Dates

- Use March 1 or April 4 instead of March 1st or April 4th
- If within a sentence use a comma before and after the year (ex. The chair met on July 3, 2021, to discuss important matters.)
- No comma if only using month and year
- Spell out all months if used alone or with a year. If used with a date, only abbreviate Jan., Feb, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.

Department affiliations

- Mention affiliation to the department as high as possible within the story
 - Capitalize when using the formal department name and lowercase all other instances (ex. Department of Epidemiology, faculty of epidemiology)
 - Link to department upon mention in story
- Incorporate department affiliations in captions web stories and print stories as space allows
- Use department tags for blog postings
- In research stories with many collaborators, list names and department affiliations not mentioned in the story at end

Gender inclusive language (refer to [UW's equitable language style guide](#) for more information)

- Noun usage:
 - Avoid using words that assume gender such as mankind. Use words like persons or individuals.
 - Avoid using words with gendered endings such as chairman, spokesman. Use words like chair or spokesperson.
- Pronoun usage:
 - Avoid assumptions about a person's pronouns. Use a person's identified pronouns when writing about a known individual.
 - When a person's identified pronouns are not known, use the singular form "they."
- Titles:
 - For an individual graduate, we use the singular gender-neutral term alum unless the individual prefers using alumna or alumnus.
 - For more than one graduate, we use the plural term alumni unless the individuals prefer using alumnae or alums.

Headlines

- Use sentence case for all headlines (capitalize first word and proper nouns only)
- If a colon is used in a headline, capitalize the word following the colon
- **Exception: for print, titles with three words or less may all be capitalized**

Hyphens

- Use if the two words together function as an adjective before the noun that they are describing (ex. A long-term approach)

Names

- On first reference spell the full name
- Use last name only for all subsequent references

Numbers

- Write out numbers one through nine
- Use numerals for 10 and above when referring to age, course numbers and units of measure
- Spell out a number if it starts at the beginning of a sentence

Pronouns

- Avoid language that makes assumptions on a person's gender (ex. use titles like chair or spokesperson unless the official title is chairman or chairwoman)
- Embrace the singular use of "they" as a gender-neutral pronoun

Titles

- Capitalize title when it precedes a name
- Lower case title when it follows a name (see [UW example](#))
- Exception: quote attributions, or signature block
 - Hilary Godwin
Dean, University of Washington School of Public Health