Digital Content & Best Practices Style Guide for msudenver.edu

This guide's purpose is to provide guidance for web authors editing or writing University webpages. The guide was compiled from best practices for web writing, the University's stylebook and other widely used writing resources.

The first section contains guidance on how to align content with the University's new digital content style. The second section covers guidance on grammar and the University's general guidelines on writing style.

In most cases, apply these rules to all social media. However, Twitter may require suspension of some of these rules.

DIGITAL CONTENT STYLE

Acronyms/Abbreviations

On first reference, spell out all words in an acronym or abbreviation that are not in common usage. Include the abbreviation or acronym in parentheses after the first reference if you plan to refer to the entity elsewhere.
Example: The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) awarded the grant. The OMB also gave recommendations for spending grant proceeds.

Notable acronyms and abbreviations in common usage include but are not limited to: MBA, NASA, NASCAR, NFL, SEO, GPA and URL. Refer to the AP Style Guide and the MSU Denver Style Guide for more examples.

All Caps

Avoid using all caps in content.

ADA Compliance

All images on MSU Denver websites should include a description. Screen readers use the description — also known as an "alt-tag" — to describe the image for users with visual impairments.

Captions

Caption photos where appropriate. This includes most secondary images on homepages and

Version 1.0/June 3, 2016

top-level pages. An exception includes page-hero images. In those cases, entering a description allows screen readers to accurately define the image.
Example: "Provost Vicki Golich" or "Students walking on campus."

"Click Here"
Avoid using as link-text. Instead, link-text should clearly describe content the user will find after clicking.
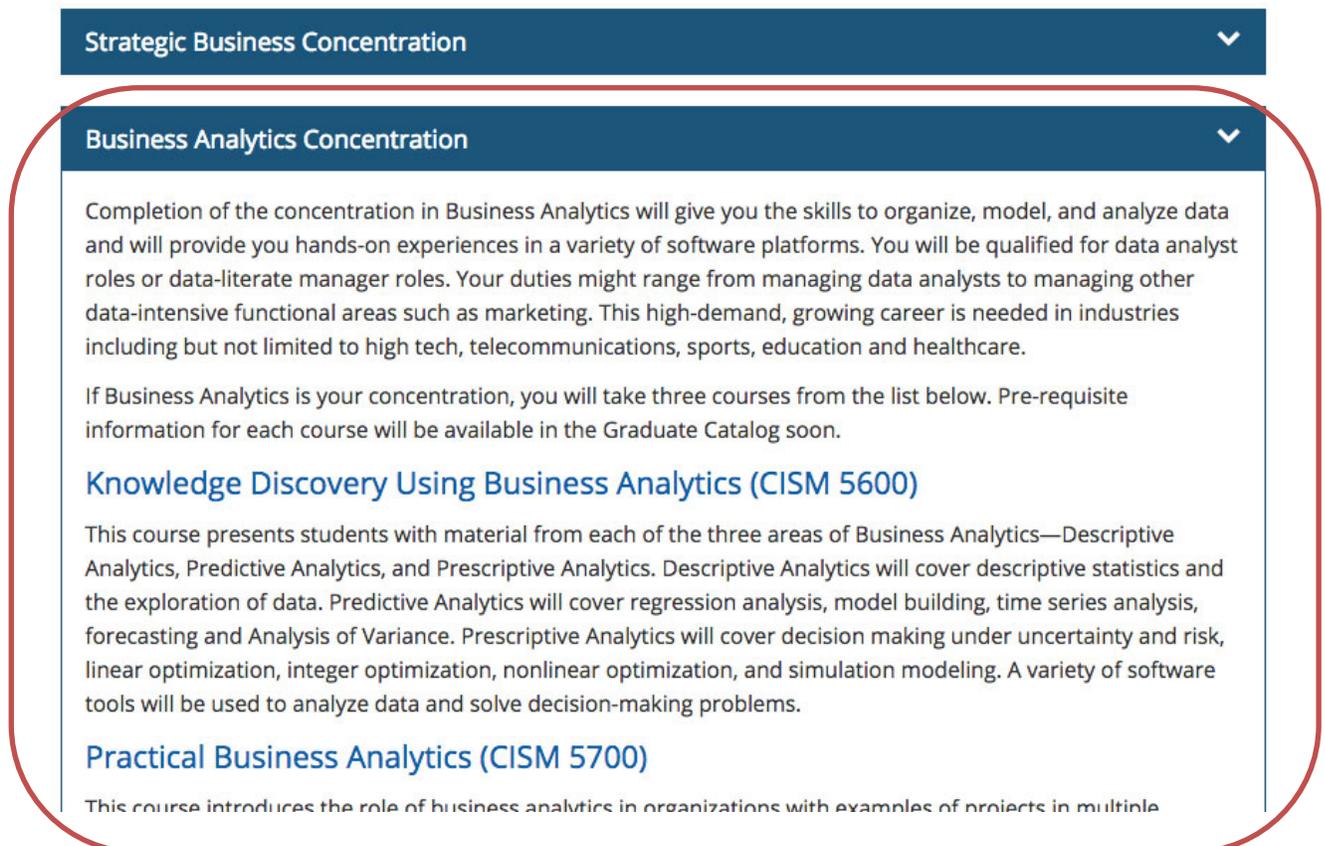*Example: "Learn more about our faculty" instead of "Click here for a faculty listing."*

Contractions
Use consistently to convey an informal tone in web content.

Dropdown Menus (Slidedown Menus)
It may seem that dropdown menus are a way to shorten pages with lots of text. However, they essentially hide content. Be sure to use accurate, descriptive headings in order to induce a user into expanding the menu.

Exclamation Points
Use sparingly. They can suggest unprofessionalism.

Version 9.0/June 27, 2016

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File Names

File names are an important part of websites. In a content management system (CMS), file names allow web authors to organize content. The file name also can help future web authors more easily and quickly make adjustments to webpages.

File names also play a significant role in search engine optimization (SEO). The file name is part of the complex algorithm a search engine uses to determine pagerank. Good SEO techniques mean prominent placement in a search engine's results.

Please follow our best practices for naming files.
1.) Name the file no more than three words. In rare cases, more words may be needed.
2.) Make sure the words are descriptive of the content that's in the file.
3.) Connect the words with hyphens (-). Other special characters can result in an error without warning.
4.) Lowercase all letters in a file name.

Special characters include: ! @ # $ % ^ & * ( ) + : ; " ' ? / > . < , | \ [ ] { } *

Examples of an optimized filename:
- *msudenver.edu/materials/class-schedule-2016.pdf*
- *msudenver.edu/materials/dimond-fellowship-application-form.pdf*
- *msudenver.edu/images/stephen-jordan.jpg*

Links
1. Avoid telling users where to click. *Example: Use the links on the left…*
2. If linking to another MSU Denver webpage, use an internal link. Internal links require less management because a user can change a URL and Terminal Four/Site Manager will update your page with the new information automatically.
   a. Instructions for an internal link:
      i. In the content field, highlight the text to be linked.
      ii. Click the "Insert Section Link" button from the Content menu.
      iii. Expand the "Metropolitan State University of Denver" section.
      iv. Scroll through the list of MSU Denver websites.
      v. Click on the desired website.

Version 1.0/June 3, 2016

Note: You may need to expand further sections to locate the desired page.

3. If linking to a page outside of msudenver.edu (or an external, non-MSU Denver website), use an external link. External links require more management because other people can change a URL and break that link on a University webpage. If using an external link, make sure it opens in a new window.
    a. Instructions for an external link:
        i. In the content field, highlight the text to be linked.
        ii. Click "Insert/Edit Link" button from the Content menu.
        iii. Copy the external URL.
        iv. Paste the external URL in the "Link URL" field.
        v. Expand the "Target" field.
        vi. Select "Open in a New Window (_blank)."
        vii. Click "Insert."

Headlines

Capitalize main words in headlines and subheads.

Keywords

In general, choose five keywords for page content. Keywords should align themselves with search terms. To determine keywords, think of the terms a user would enter into a search engine to find the page.

Make sure to incorporate keywords into visible content including: page titles, headlines, subheads, captions and the first line of text within a paragraph. Keywords should be entered into the "description" and "keywords" fields found within the Metadata tab in a piece of content. For an example, see the Metadata entry.

Metadata

When you create a section in Terminal Four, please fill out all metadata fields. Metadata is an important part of SEO.

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| General | Content | Page Layouts | Metadata | Edit Rights | Content Types | Subsections | Access |

Metadata Information for this section.

Update **Publish Now** Cancel

Name	Value	Publish Language
author		English
description		English
keywords		English
og:description		English
og:title		English

Update **Publish Now** Cancel

Page Titles

Keep page titles, which appear in the tabs on your browser, as short as possible. One word is optimum, but you may need to use more. Do not use abbreviations or acronyms.
Page titles should be one word, but no more than five words.

PDFs

There may be times when a large document needs online distribution. In these cases, use a PDF. Align the PDF name with the University's file naming conventions.
Example: "presidents-commencement-speech-2016.pdf," not "Presidents-Commencement-Speech-2016.pdf" or "presidents_commencement_speech_2016."

In text, link the PDF to text that describes the content.
Example: President Jordan's <u>2016 commencement speech</u> covered many subjects.

If referencing the PDF in a bulleted list or as a standalone link on the page, use a short, descriptive name, then link to the document.
Example:
- *<u>2016 Commencement speech</u>*
- *<u>2015 Commencement speech</u>*
- *<u>2014 Commencement speech</u>*

Version 1.0/June 3, 2016

Tables

In general, information tables are not compatible with mobile devices. If you have a data modeling requirement, please contact the web team for a mobile-compatible solution.

Student Forms	
Administrative Withdrawal Form	This form can be used to request for an administrative withdrawal taken in Fall 2013 and after. Students can withdrawal themselves online prior to the withdrawal deadline. Please remember to consult with an academic advisor prior to withdrawing from your course.
Application for Certificate	Students who are anticipating on receiving a certificate at the end of the term will need to complete this application. Refer to the documents below on how to apply as well as what you can apply for: • **Certificate Program Procedures** (17 KB) • **Certificate Declaration Process Listing**
Audit Approval Form	To audit a course (i.e., to attend without receiving academic credit) you must apply and be admitted to MSU Denver. Upon receiving your notification of acceptance, contact the Office of the Registrar at 303-556-2686 to request the Audit Approval Form.
Best Grade Stands	This form is not required. The Office of the Registrar will automatically have the Best Grade Stands reflect the student's academic record at the end of each term. This form is only if you wish to have your grade updated prior to the end of the term. • **Last Grade Stands (*prior to Summer 2013*):** If a student's academic record does not reflect a last grade stands for a course, send a notification to the Office of the Registrar at **regquery@msudenver.edu** to update the student's record. • **Best Grade Stands (*Fall 2013 forward*):** The Office of the Registrar is in the process of

URLs

When writing out a URL on a website, do not include http:// or www. At this point the web has been so widely used that this syntax is assumed and when it is left out the browser fills it in automatically.
Example: msudenver.edu/events, not http://www.msudenver.edu/events

Underline

Avoid underlining text — the reason is that it is a technique used to identify hyperlinks and any additional underlining can be confusing to a user as they will assume link functionality. Also, some elements of the University's visual presentation include underlines.

SEO

"SEO" is an abbreviation for "search engine optimization." SEO techniques are in use widely across the University's website in order to improve page rankings in search engine results. Our goal is to help place MSU Denver webpages high in search engine return results so that your content appears as close to the top of the first page of results as possible.

For more information or for strategies on how to improve your page rank, please contact the [MSU Denver Web Team](#).

Spacing

Use one space after a period or between sentences.

Special Characters

Special characters should not be used in file names. Only an underscore (_) or hyphen (-) should be used in file names. Examples of special characters: <>&*;`'´"\/#@=%:?!{ }¢£€¥ƒ¤©®™•§——¶«»€œ¿¡

Welcome

Many websites feel inclined to welcome users with a literal "welcome" when they visit a website. This does very little in telling users what they can expect from your webpage. While this may work well in a face-to-face setting, it is rarely needed on the web. What users really need is a visible headline or tagline that explains what your website offers that is of value to them. The key in generating lots of incoming organic search traffic is to offer useful and unique content.

GRAMMAR and MSU DENVER STYLE

Consider this section a quick reference on some of the most common grammar and style mistakes found within MSU Denver websites.

Apostrophes

Denote possession. *Example: President Jordan's speech.*

Use in contractions. *Example: You're going to love our new Brewery Operations Program.*

Commas

Oxford commas, or serial commas, should not be used for items in a series.

Example: MSU Denver Athletics teams won championships in softball, volleyball and basketball.

Daylong

One word.

Example: The daylong conference will cover a variety of topics.

Degrees

For most degrees, use periods between letters. *Examples: B.A., B.S., M.A., M.S., Ph.D.*

Exceptions: MBA, MFA

Department/Office Names

Capitalize main words in department and office names.

Examples: Office of the President, President's Office, Department of Accounting, Accounting Department, Office of Marketing and Communications.

When possible, add MSU Denver on first reference. *Example: MSU Denver President's Office.*

Dr. vs. Ph.D.

If a University faculty or official possesses a doctoral degree, insert "Ph.D." after their name. "Dr." is used to identify medical doctors only.

Example: MSU Denver President Stephen Jordan, Ph.D., spoke to the Colorado legislature.

Email

Email no longer requires a hyphen. But e-reader and e-commerce still do.

Event listings

At MSU Denver, event information needs to include the time, day, dates and places.

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Example: The Summer Soirée will take place at 6 p.m., Saturday, June 4, at the SSB Courtyard.

Homepage
One word.

Its vs. It's
"Its" is the possessive form of "It." *Example: I like its color.*
"It's" is a contraction of "It is." *Example: It's going to rain.*

Majors
Lowercase all majors except languages.
Examples: Mary is a marketing major. Mark is an English major.

Online
No hyphen.

Phone Numbers
Use hyphens between the area code and prefix.
Example: 303-556-5740.

Roadrunner
Always capitalize "Roadrunner" or "Roadrunners" when referencing the University's mascot.

Semesterlong
One word.
Example: Be sure to keep a semesterlong journal.

There, Their and They're
"There" indicates a location or direction. *Example: The students are over there.*
"Their" is the possessive form of "They." *Example: Their food choices were limited.*
"They're" is a contraction of "They are." *Example: They're going to the game.*

Titles
Capitalize before a person's name. *Example: President Stephen Jordan.*

Version 1.0/June 3, 2016

Lowercase after a person's name. *Example: Stephen Jordan, president of MSU Denver, gave a speech*.

Only short titles should be used before a person's name.

Time
Use numerals to represent time. Place periods in p.m. and a.m. Use p.m. and a.m. once to indicate a specific time or a duration. *Example: 8:30 a.m., 8 p.m., 8-10 a.m.*

University
Capitalize "University" when referring to MSU Denver.

Spell out Metropolitan State University of Denver on first reference. "MSU Denver" or the "University" is acceptable in subsequent references.

Do not use "MSUD" or "Metro State."

"University of Denver" should never appear alone. Be wary of this with line breaks, headers and content titles.

Your vs. You're
"Your" is the possessive of "you." *Example: I like your website.*
"You're" is a contraction of "You are." *Example: You're going to love my website.*

Web
The word "web" is not capitalized in any usage.
Example: The web has been used to advance communications around the globe.

In many cases, "web" can be applied to another word to form a singular concept.
Examples: website, webcam, webcast, webmaster, webpage.

Sometimes "web" is still separated from other words.
Examples: web editor, web address, web author.

*More style guidance may be found in the AP Stylebook and MSU Denver Style Guide – msudenver.edu/styleguide.

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