Word Nerds
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Grammar gotchas
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Agenda

Top five tips for content creators
1. “The UW” vs. “UW”
2. Headline capitalization
3. Commas
4. Professional titles
5. Fun with modifiers

Four crowdsourced queries
1. Singular “they”
2. Degrees and departments
3. Academic quarters
4. Coordinate vs. cumulative adjectives
TOP FIVE TIPS
TIP #1: “The UW” vs. “UW”

> On first reference, spell out “the University of Washington”; then can abbreviate to “the UW.”

> In noun form, include “the”:
  – The UW will host this year’s conference.
  – Researchers at the UW have discovered a cure.

> In adjective form, omit “the”:
  – UW students celebrate W Day in October.
  – Most UW staff love going to meetings.

> Abbreviate to “UW Bothell” and “UW Tacoma” (no article); don’t use UWB or UWT externally.

> Note: “UW Seattle” is not a thing.
TIP #2: Headline capitalization

> Per AP style: all sentence case, all the time
> Applies to headlines and every level of subhead
> Recent examples:
  – A healthy future after kidney failure
  – Summer has arrived in the Pacific Northwest
  – Art, identity on display at KEXP
> Exception to colon rule in two-part headlines
  – Here’s my problem: Too many words, too few slides
TIP #3: Commas

> Per AP style, no serial comma:
  – This, that and the other

> Exceptions:
  – Potential color combinations include purple, gold and white; green, blue and silver; and red, black and yellow.
  – I’d like to thank my parents, Joan Didion, and Al Green.

> Let’s talk names (and restrictive/nonrestrictive):
  – He arrived at the reading with his friend Alicia.
  – She arrived at the reading with her wife, Alicia.
  – They arrived at the reading with award-winning poet and UW alumna Jane Wong.
TIP #4: Professional titles

> Not AP’s finest moment, but ...

> Before the name, use title case:
  – Associate Professor of Chemistry Helen Husky lectures on Tuesdays and Fridays.

> After the name, use sentence case:
  – Helen Husky, associate professor of chemistry, lectures on Tuesdays and Fridays.

> UW exceptions: quote attributions, display copy
  – “I lecture on Tuesdays and Fridays.”
  — Helen Husky, Associate Professor of Chemistry
TIP #5: Fun with modifiers

> Misplaced modifier
  – The info before the comma modifies what follows:
    • Covered in cherry blossoms, I love the Quad in spring.
    • *Solution:* Covered in cherry blossoms, the Quad is my favorite place in spring.
    • *Solution:* I love the Quad in spring, when it’s covered with cherry blossoms.

> Dangling modifier
  – Describes something that’s not in the sentence:
    • Hiking the trail, the birds chirped loudly.*
    • *Solution:* Hiking the trail, they heard birds chirp loudly.

*Source: Grammar Girl, “Dangling and Squinting Modifiers”*
CROWDSOURCED QUERIES
QUERY #1: Singular “they”

“When we have story subjects whose pronoun is ‘they,’ do we write around that or do we embrace it even though it’s bad grammar? I feel like the former is difficult to do well and the latter can be confusing to the reader.”

> It’s not bad grammar, it’s inclusive — and we embrace it!
> AP style accepts “they” as a gender-neutral pronoun.
> Brand-new 17th edition of CMS does, too.
> Other media outlets: BuzzFeed, Washington Post, AHD, etc.
> Use the singular “they” with a plural verb:
  – They are coming to the party, but they might be late.
> If there’s a chance of confusion, recast:
  – Every student brings their own laptop.
  – All students bring their own laptops.
QUERY #2: Degrees and departments

> Formal proper names are title case:
  – He teaches in the Department of Communication.
  – She is the dean of the Foster School of Business.

> Informal descriptive names aren’t:
  – He teaches in the communication department.
  – She is the dean of the business school.

> Same goes for degrees:
  – They have a Bachelor of Science degree from the Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering.
  – They have a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering.
QUERY #3: Academic quarters

“Is it Autumn or Fall quarter? Seems like this campus is split.”

> You’re right: Usage is inconsistent.
  > Site search for “autumn quarter” (26,300) and “fall quarter” (90,200)
> Office of the Registrar uses “autumn,” so that’s our official stance.
  > Admissions, course catalog, academic calendar, etc.
> Note: All seasons are lowercase — in this context and beyond.
  > She’ll start at the UW in spring quarter 2019.
QUERY #4: Coordinate adjectives vs. cumulative adjectives

> What the *what*?
> Coordinate adjectives:
  – These hold equal weight in describing the noun; they could be reversed in order or have “and” between them without changing the meaning.
    • He had a bright, friendly smile.
> Cumulative adjectives:
  – The main adjective and noun make up a compound noun; other adjectives modify that compound.
    • She bought a gorgeous vintage gown at the auction.
    • The alley dead-ended at a tall green door.
Resources

- UW brand: Word list and common terms
  - uw.edu/brand/editorial-elements/word-list
- UW brand: Style and punctuation
  - uw.edu/brand/editorial-elements/style-and-punctuation
- AP Stylebook (subscription required)
  - apstylebook.com
- Webster's New World College Dictionary
  - websters.yourdictionary.com
- Any requests?