

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

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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

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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?**

