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Style Guide

As of April 2015, the NIU website conforms to AP Style. All new pages should follow AP Style guidelines. Online access to the AP Stylebook is free for NIU employees and students through NIU Libraries. References to common usage are provided here for quick reference. If in doubt, check the AP Stylebook.

Voice and Audience
The voice of NIU’s website is friendly and in first-person. Use active verbs and write clearly and concisely. Refer to the Brand Voice section of the Communication Standards For Institutional Brand Identity for more information.

Primarily, the NIU website is a retention and recruitment tool for the university. The main audiences are current and potential students, therefore, the majority of the content should be designed for students.

Secondary audiences include faculty, staff, alumni, donors and community members. Content geared toward secondary audiences should be limited to websites and pages with clear connections to that audience.

For each page on the site, the author should match the content and the tone to its audience. For example, content written for student recruitment should resonate with young adults; mission statements should appear in the About section of a website, not on the homepage.

Capitalization, Spelling and Numbers

Capitalization
Capitalize the complete formal names of NIU colleges and departments, offices, committees, programs, course titles: Department of Marketing, Center for Black Studies.

Lowercase any fragmentary titles: the college, the university, the center, the marketing department.

Capitalize "program" in formal names: Honors Program, Advanced Placement Program, General Education Program. Lowercase "program" in general program names: the department’s program in finance.

Lowercase titles that follow a name or stand alone: Derryl Block, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences; chair of the School of Nursing and Health Studies; director, Health Services.

Capitalize titles preceding names: President Doug Baker, Dean Block.
Style Guide

Seasons and academic semesters or terms are lowercase: fall semester, spring 2008, summer session.

Majors, minors, specializations, emphases, concentrations, options and areas of study are lowercase in text references: major in elementary education, minor in urban studies, specialization in audiology, biochemistry emphasis, concentration in public history, time arts area of study. Languages are capitalized: major in English, minor in Spanish.

Page navigation labels are written in Title Case.

Spelling
Correct spellings of commonly misspelled words:
- accountancy (not “accounting” when referring to the academic department)
- advisor (not adviser)
- DeKalb
- email
- Huskie
- Internet (capitalized)
- U.S. (when abbreviating United States)
- website
- web page

Numbers
Cardinal numbers: spell out whole numbers below 10, use figures for 10 and above.

Ordinal numbers: spell out first through ninth; use figures starting with 10th.

Spell out “percent” or “percentage” in text. Use of symbol (%) is permissible in tables.

Write out a number when it is the first word in a sentence. For example, “Twenty-one is the legal drinking age in the United States.” Better yet, re-write the sentence so that it doesn’t start with a number: “The legal drinking age in the United States is 21.”

Carry decimals in a grade point average to two digits: 3.50.
Degree Terminology & University-related Terms

Use the terms fall semester, spring semester, summer session.

Upper division and lower division are the correct references for NIU students in junior-senior or freshman-sophomore groups and for NIU courses at the 300-400 or 100-200 levels. Do not use the terms “upper class,” “under class” or “lower class” in this context.

For the first mention of grade point average, spell out the entire phrase. For additional references, abbreviate to GPA. Carry decimals in a grade point average to two digits: 3.50.

The proper term is Graduate Record Examinations, not “Exams” or “Examination.”

Use periods for all degrees, certificates, and licenses: B.S., C.P.A., M.B.A., M.S.Ed., R.N., Ph.D.

Undergraduate Degrees:
- Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)
- Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.)
- Bachelor of General Studies (B.G.S.)
- Bachelor of Music (B.M.)
- Bachelor of Science (B.S.)
- Bachelor of Science in Education (B.S.Ed.)

Advanced Degrees and Certificates:
- Doctor of Audiology (Au.D.)
- Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
- Educational Specialist (Ed.S.)
- Master of Accounting Science (M.A.S.)
- Master of Arts (M.A.)
- Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)
- Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.)
- Master of Music (M.M.)
- Master of Physical Therapy (M.P.T.)
- Master of Public Administration (M.P.A.)
- Master of Public Health (M.PH.)
- Master of Science (M.S.)
- Master of Science in Education (M.S.Ed.)
- Master of Science in Taxation (M.S.T.)
- Performer’s Certificate (do not abbreviate as P.C.)
College of Law Professional Degree:

Juris Doctor (J.D.)

Examples of Degree Terminology:

- bachelor’s degree/baccalaureate degree/Bachelor of Arts degree
- master’s degree/Master of Science degree
- doctoral degree/doctorate/Doctor of Education degree law
degree/Juris Doctor degree

A Performer’s Certificate is not a graduate degree, but is designed to permit students to attain
greater mastery of their chosen fields than achievable with the master’s degree. “Performer’s
Certificate” is not abbreviated.

A Certificate of Graduate Study is a course of study, not linked to the pursuit of a degree,
consisting of a coherent set of courses, fewer than for a major, addressing a specific theme.

A concentration is a course of study, typically interdisciplinary, linked to the pursuit of a
specific graduate degree.

Use the word “degree” with the abbreviation, rather than the abbreviation alone—Ph.D. degree,
B.S. degree.
Cascade Best Practices

The following guidelines are recommendations for creating pages in Cascade, incorporating industry best practices for web design, accessibility, usability and search engine optimization. Following these guidelines will create consistency across NIU websites, creating a positive experience for our visitors.

File Structure
Every folder should have a page with the System Name "index." A web browser will default to this page if only the site URL and folder are entered. This is also necessary for breadcrumbs to link correctly.

Images should be stored in _image folders in the base folder, not within other folders. Use subfolders in the _image folder to organize photos.

PDFs should be stored in _pdf folders in the base folder, not within other folders. Use subfolders in the _pdf folder to organize documents.

Meta Tags
For SEO and accessibility value, every page must have unique meta titles and descriptions: title tags are approximately 55 characters with spaces; descriptions are approximately 115 characters with spaces.

Links
Do not bold links unless the text is already bold (as in a heading or subheading).

Do not use “Read more…,” “Click here…” or “For more information…” with a link to more information.
Link an appropriate snippet of text within the preceding sentence.

Links that point off-site (including links to any other NIU site) must open in a new window.

PDFs must open in a new window.

Navigation
All navigation is Title Case

Order of Top Nav (left to right)
- Home icon (links to site homepage)
- About
- Customized labels
- Contact Us (if needed)
Cascade Best Practices

Top Nav Labels
For consistency use the following labels in the top navigation:

- About (not About Us)
- Contact Us (not Contact)*

*Contact Us should only be added to the top navigation if there are many people/places to contact in the college/division/department. Otherwise, Contact Us should be nested under About.

Breadcrumbs
Use breadcrumbs ≥ 3rd level.

To make sure breadcrumb links work correctly, every folder should have a page with the System Name “index.”

Mission Statements & Welcome Statements
Missions and Visions do not belong on a site’s homepage. Place Missions, Visions and Welcome Statements as subnav items under About.

Heading Tags
Use <h> tags for the following page elements:

- H2: Main Heading (this should be automatically formatted in Cascade when you add text to the Main Heading field)
- H3: Sub heading, buttons, feature box headings
- H4: Lower sub heading

Naming, Renaming, Un-publishing and Deleting files
Don’t use spaces in file names. Separate words with dashes, not underscores.

Files must be unpublished (not deleted) then renamed. Then republish all relationships. Find any off-site links and update them to new file name.

When deleting a page, unpublish it. If a page will not be used again, delete it (and unpublish it). If unsure if the page will be used again, unpublish it and move it to an archive folder which will be reviewed annually.

Redirects should stay in place no longer than 6 months.
Cascade Best Practices

Archiving Files
Archived pdf, doc and image files should be deleted from Cascade after 18 months.

PDFs
Name PDF files with a simple file name. Do not include dates or references in the name.

Don't store old versions of PDFs in Cascade. To replace a PDF with a more recent version, edit the file in Cascade and upload the new PDF. The existing file will be replaced with the new one. Serial publications (like newsletters) can be uploaded as new files.

Convert word and excel docs to PDFs. Information should be presented as text on a webpage, not within PDFs.

PDFs should be stored in _pdf folders in the base folder, not within other sub folders.

PDFs should open in a new window.

Blogs
Cascade doesn't support blogs. You are welcome to create your own blog offsite with third party software and link to it from your site. Guidelines for creating an NIU blog can be found in the Social Media Toolkit.
The following guidelines are recommendations for choosing, uploading and managing photos and images on the NIU website. Following these guidelines will create high quality visual aids with a consistent look on all pages.

All photography must comply with Creative Services best practices regarding university photography, copyright and personal privacy.

All NIU logos for print or media must follow the Communication Standards for Institutional Brand Identity and can be downloaded from the Graphic Standards website.

Creative Services Web Image Library
Creative Services provides a custom image library of recent campus and event photographs, specially chosen and sized for the website templates, at http://webimages.media.niu.edu. Images will be kept in this library for two years and then archived to http://images.media.niu.edu/.

For access to the web image library, register on the site as a user. To limit duplication of images on different NIU websites when downloading a photo, add a comment listing the page/site where you expect to use the photo. You may also tag images and create a shared gallery to organize your photos. For more information about the web image gallery, contact Wade Duerkes.

For photographs of an upcoming event or for photos not available through the web image library, Page Masters may contact Wade Duerkes to request a photographer from Creative Services.

Website photos should be unique. Page Masters should take the time to check whether an image is being used on another page before uploading it to their site. Photos of people interacting with each other are preferred over photos of buildings.

Photo and Image File Formats
We recommend using the following file types on the NIU website. For help determining the file type for your project, contact Creative Services.

- **JPG** files are used most often for photos.

- **PNG** files are used for photos or flat art images, and are most useful for supporting transparencies.

- **GIF** files are used most often for flat art images
Image Sizes
To shorten download times and conserve server space, keep files small – from 2KB to 225 KB in size.

Don’t resize images in Cascade’s file sizing dialogue box. By doing so, you won’t change the size of the file and will cause slow page loads or compressed images if the original file is too large or you will cause photos to appear grainy if you are increasing the size of the original file. Use Photoshop or other image editing software before uploading your file to Cascade.

The most common web image sizes for NIU’s three website templates are:

**Black & white site templates**
- Full width banner – 1200x420 px
- Banner on page w/ left nav – 850x365 px
- Graphic for 3-column layout w/ left nav – 250x125 px –or— 640x420 px (ideal size)

**Beige/gray non-responsive (non-RWD) templates**
- Full width banner – 944x270 px
- Banner on page w/ left nav – 690x280 px
- Graphic for 3-column layout w/ left nav – 210x110 px

**Beige/gray responsive (RWD) templates**
- Full width banner – 960x275 px
- Banner on page w/ left nav – 714x290 px
- Graphic for 3-column layout w/ left nav – 210x110 px

**Banner Image Corners**
In the black & white site templates, image corners are square. In the beige/gray templates, image corners are rounded. In non-RWD templates, rounded corners must be added to image prior to upload. In RWD templates, rounded corners can be applied with styles in Cascade.

**Uploading and Storing Images in Cascade**
Give your image a descriptive name, using dashes in between words, not spaces or underscores. This will help provide SEO value.

As a general rule, images should be stored in _images folders in the base folder of your website, not within other folders. Use subfolders in the _images folder to organize photos.
Image Best Practices

Deleting Images in Cascade
If you remove an image from your website, you should un-publish and delete it from your site. A copy will be saved in your site’s recycle bin.

ALT Tags
To comply with accessibility standards and screen readers, give every photo or image a clear, descriptive alt tag. When given the choice in Cascade, don’t mark the image as decorative.

Rotating Banners
Rotating banners, or slideshows, appear only on the homepage of a site and are limited to three banner images. Each image should relate to an event, department or program and should link to the appropriate page on the site. Captions are optional. Creative Services has several default rotating banner scripts available and will help set up the banners upon request.

Photo Galleries
Cascade does not have a native photo gallery option. Therefore, photo galleries may be hosted on a third party site like Flickr, Facebook or a WordPress site. Page Masters can link to the photo gallery from their NIU site.

Social Media Icons
Use flat, unrounded social media icons from social media directory.
Video Best Practices

For new videos, Creative Services provides [video production and support services](#).

All embedded videos should be linked to NIU's [YouTube channel](#) or the college/division's YouTube channel.

**Closed-Captioning**

All new videos must be closed-captioned to meet accessibility guidelines. Contact Creative Services for closed-captioning services.