

# UNBC Style Guide

This style guide was prepared by the Office of External Relations and is intended as a guide for members of the UNBC community who write about the university for internal or external audiences.

When in doubt, UNBC uses the Canadian Press Style Guide (appropriate link?)

## Formatting

### Abbreviations:

1. UNBC uses a period to abbreviate words such as etc. and adj. (adjective).

### Acronyms:

1. Only use acronyms that are familiar to ordinary readers (e.g., “CBC” and “BA”).
2. UNBC does not place periods between the letters in acronyms, such as “UNBC.”
3. When giving an example using the acronyms “i.e.” and “e.g.” (see fuller description of both below) we use periods to separate the letters (“i.e.”, and “e.g.”).
4. Provide an acronym in parentheses such as “the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC)” only if the organization is mentioned again in the body of the text.

### Contractions:

1. UNBC uses periods for contractions such as “Dr.” “Ms.” “Mr.” and “Mrs.,” but not for the contractions of degrees (“BSc” and “BComm”).

**Credit (Photo/Quote):** When giving credit for photos or quotes, the name should be right aligned, preceded by an en dash, and not italicized (see example below).



-Photo Credit: UNBC

**Degrees:**

1. Please visit the UNBC programs website (unbc.ca/program) to view proper degree abbreviations (e.g., BA and BSc).
2. Note that UNBC does not use periods with the abbreviated degrees (e.g., BSc).
3. When citing a member of UNBC's alumni, please use their UNBC credentials in the order of degree/major/year of graduation (e.g., "BA Anthropology 2005" or "BComm General Business 1998").

**Graduation year:** If you choose to abbreviate the year of graduation, please do so with a "nine" apostrophe to two digits such as "1999" to "99."

**Italics** - UNBC uses italics for the names of published literary works, such as *Catch-22* as well as magazines (*Macleans*), newspapers, and periodicals.

**Names:** When referring to people in articles, and online, first use their full name ("John Smith") and afterwards refer to them by their last name ("Smith") "he/she," or with their honorarium ("Dr. Smith") and not by their given name.

The exception to this rule is when referring to alumni, in which case we use their given name after the initial introduction using their first and last names. This is to encourage the notion that alumni are part of the UNBC family.

**Numbers:** UNBC spells out the words for the numbers one through nine, and types the numerical figure for the number 10 onwards, except when the number begins a sentence (e.g., "Fourteen black birds landed on the lawn.")

**Official Name:** The official name of UNBC is the University of Northern British Columbia *not* the University of Northern BC.

**Passive voice:** Try to avoid using the passive voice when writing about the university for internal or external audiences.

Incorrect: "It is through this paper that the benefits of exercise will be examined."

Correct: "This paper will examine the benefits of exercise."

**Phone Numbers:** UNBC uses dashes to separate blocks of numbers and area codes within phone numbers (e.g., 250-960-5555 as opposed to 250.960.5555 or (250)960-5555).

**Social Media:** UNBC capitalizes the names of social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter as opposed to facebook and twitter) with the exception of Apple products such as iTunes or iPod. We also add extra capitals where indicated in the titles of certain sites such as LinkedIn and YouTube.

**Titles:**

1. UNBC refers to researchers and professors first by their official university designation (e.g., UNBC History professor Jonathan Swainger) and thereafter by their PhD title "Dr." (e.g., "Dr. Swainger").
2. UNBC uses the word "Dr." with a period after it, as opposed to without (see "Contractions" above).

**Websites:** UNBC lists website without adding “www” such as “unbc.ca” except in order to avoid confusion in cases with abnormal website addresses, such as <http://cms.unbc.ca>.

## Grammar

**Affect and effect:** Most of the time, “affect” is a verb and “effect” is a noun.

Affect means “to influence” as in, “The arrows affected the aardvark.”

Effect usually means “a result” as in, “The effect was eye-popping.”

**E.g. and i.e.:** While they look similar, their meanings are distinct. “i.e.” means “in other words” and e.g. means “for example.”

Use i.e. to clarify and simplify: “We hope you read UNBC’s Style Guide because it will help you with your writing online (i.e., it’s educational).”

E.g. is useful for reinforcing statements with examples: “There are a lot of fun things you can do on the Web (e.g., Facebook).”

**“Less” versus “fewer”:** Use “fewer” for things that can be counted, “less” for uncountable items (e.g., “less money” and “fewer dollars”; “less water,” “fewer gallons of water”).

**“That” versus “which”:** Essential information uses “that” and no commas (“a career that interests you”), while nonessential descriptive information uses “which” with commas (“which” functions as if “by the way” were inserted after it (“The car, which was red, was going very fast.”)).

**“Upon” versus “on”:** Both are correct, but “on” is less formal and better for online communications.

## Punctuation

**Ampersand:** UNBC only uses the ampersand when it forms a part of a corporate name (e.g., the publisher was Ginn & Co.), in tables and figures where space is at a premium, and in common abbreviations (e.g., R&D).

### **Apostrophes:**

1. When abbreviating a year (e.g., 1999 to '99), UNBC uses a “9” apostrophe, rather than a “6.”
2. Avoid using the “Grocer’s Apostrophe” with non-possessive words (e.g., 1990’s versus 1990s, CPU’s versus CPUs).

### **Bulleted lists:**

1. When each bulleted item is short enough and cannot stand on its own as a sentence, the content does not require capitalization or a period at the end.

The symptoms of a heart attack include:

- dizziness
  - shortness of breath
  - confusion
  - chest pain
  - numbness in the left arm
2. When the bulleted item is longer and can stand on its own as a sentence, it should be treated as a normal sentence and include a capital at the beginning and a period at the end.

The government's current measures to combat bird flu include:

- Committing to effective surveillance to prepare for and reduce the effects of the human pandemic.
  - Supporting the avian flu preparedness efforts of the World Health Organization.
  - Enhancing public awareness.
3. The bullets can be either long or short, but should always follow a parallel structure.

**Colon:**

1. Use a colon before a list of items (e.g., "The candy shop had many sweets: lollipops, chocolate bars, and gobstoppers.")
2. (Think of the colon as a substitute for the words, "that is.")
3. If a colon is followed by a complete sentence, capitalize the first word after the colon ("While in Venice, he did something he had never done before: He took a gondola ride.")

**Commas:** UNBC uses the serial or "Oxford" comma, which is the comma used immediately before a coordinating conjunction (usually "and" or "or", and sometimes "nor") preceding the final item in a list of three or more items.

For example, a list of three countries should be punctuated as "Portugal, Spain, and France" with the serial comma between "Spain" and "and."

**Compound words:** There are no widely agreed upon rules for compound words, but the general practice is to first write them open ("knuckle ball"), then hyphenated ("knuckle-ball"), and finally as a single word ("knuckleball") once they have become widely known and accepted (e.g., e-mail should now be "email" and on-line should be "online").

When in doubt, consult the Canadian Style Guide.

**Dashes:**

1. An em dash (--) sets off a word or phrase that interrupts the flow of a sentence, such as an example, a clarification, or an afterthought. The em dash is a very strong type of punctuation and should not be overused. UNBC's policy is to set

the em dash off with spaces for ease of reading, as in this sentence:  
“Managers—unless otherwise notified—must attend the meeting.”

2. An en dash (-) is a connector that joins words or other terms into single units, as in January 7-February 28 and pages 17-31. It's UNBC's policy not to insert spaces on either side of the en dash.

**Ellipsis Points:** Use three ellipsis points (...) to indicate a silence in dialogue, hesitation or interruption in speech, a pause in narrative, or the passage of time. Used in this way, they are sometimes also referred to as suspension points: “The Minister’s speech dragged on and on... until, finally, the TV announcer’s voice broke the monotony.”

**“Its” versus “it’s”:** “Its” is possessive (belonging to someone) while “it’s” is a contraction for “it is.”

**Parentheses:** Ensure that you position periods on the outside of the closed parenthesis (such as at the end of this sentence). The only exception is when you have a complete sentence within the parenthesis (e.g., This would be an example of a complete sentence within parentheses.)

**Quotation Marks:** When using quotation marks, commas and periods are added within the marks (e.g., “Stop shouting,” said Dr. Smith. “Thank you.”). Watch out for “9” marks that should be “6” and vice versa.

**Semicolons:** Semicolons, which are used to join two independent clauses, are generally used in front of the following words: However, thus, as a result, rather, therefore, nevertheless, moreover, indeed, then, accordingly, even so, for example.

Use a semicolon when two complete sentences, together, make one thought (e.g., “Call me tomorrow; I will give you my answer then.”)

**Spacing:** Use one space, not two, after periods, colons, exclamation marks, and question marks.

# Spelling

## Capitalization:

1. UNBC capitalizes specific political and administrative divisions (“Department of Geography at the University of Northern British Columbia”), but keeps lowercase words such as city, and province, and university except when in reference to UNBC and when it is part of the incorporated name (e.g., “City of Prince George”).
2. In reference to northern BC, UNBC does not capitalize “northern” or “north” when speaking of the general northern area (“the north”).
3. Formal titles of individuals, which are inseparable from their identity are capitalized (“UNBC President George Iwama”, or “Prime Minister Harper”).
4. Titles separated from the name of the person, such as by a comma, are in lower case (“George Iwama, president of UNBC”)

**UK vs. US?** As a Canadian university, UNBC follows the UK spelling of words such as “labour” as opposed to the American spelling “labor.”

**“Websites” versus “web sites” versus “web-sites.”** Use “website and “email.” See “Compound Words” above.