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Do not capitalize or use possessive pronouns when spelling out names of degrees.

- He/she received a bachelor of science (not “his/her bachelor of science”).
- They were awarded doctorates (not “their doctorates”).

In most writing, use of the general terms bachelor’s or bachelor’s degree, or master’s or master’s degree, is preferred to use of the full name of the degree (e.g., bachelor of arts degree) or the initials (B.A.).

Note that Boston College uses periods in its abbreviations of academic degrees—a departure from The Chicago Manual of Style.

- Jane O’Hara, M.A. ’12

For a full list of degree names and abbreviations, see Majors and Minors.

• • •

Do not set o common Latin words, phrases, and abbreviations in italics or quotation marks.

- Joanna graduated cum laude from Boston College. Two years later, her sister graduated summa cum laude from BC.

• •

Capitalize formal and professional titles only when they precede an individual’s name. Lowercase those that follow the name or that stand alone.

- Boston College President William P. Leahy, S.J.; David Quigley, the provost and dean of faculties
- Assistant Professor of Theology Jane come, her 3C; O’Ho t J39752

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B

See generations.

B

Following the leads of major news organizations including the Associated Press (AP) and the New York Times—and in concurrence with Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS)—OUC now capitalizes the “b” in Black when the word is used in a racial, ethnic, or cultural context. The modification aligns “Black” with long-standing identifiers such as

Do not use chairman, chairwoman, or chairperson. Do not capitalize unless it is part of an official title preceding a name.

- John Chang, chair of the Metaphysics Department
- Metaphysics Department Chair John Chang

Always add a space between the surname and an abbreviated form of the undergraduate graduation year; no comma before or after the year. Apostrophes face away from the numerals.

- Jane Harris '99; Joseph Jones Jr., '11

Advanced degrees, on the other hand, should be set off by commas.

- Joseph Lee, M.A. '12, returned to his alma mater.
- Jerome Lee '01, M.B.A. '03, Ph.D. '09

When a speaker has a degree from another school as well as one or more degrees from BC, list first degree (B.A.) without naming institution. Follow it with Boston College years and degrees.

- Lisa Rodriguez B.A. '95, M.S.W '88
- John Parker M.F.A., Ph.D. '93

Recognize an honorary degree recipient with the letter H, followed by an apostrophe and an abbreviated form of the year in which the holder was honored. No extra space or comma.

- Jennifer Park H'10

BC publications that identify parents of Boston College students and alumni by graduation year follow a similar format.

- Cathy Wang P'13

Commencement should only be capitalized when referring to Boston College's annual exercises.

- Several Boston-area colleges and universities hold their commencement ceremonies in late spring.
- Boston College Commencement is usually held in May.

C

Capitalize when referring to the official University Core Curriculum, or to the national K–12 Common Core state standards.

No "s" when referring to the Boston College department/major.

C

Capitalize when referring to these yearly BC events.

One word.

Single words.

Not “cyber-security” or “cyber security.” Exception: The Boston Conference on Cyber Security, held on campus in conjunction with the FBI.

D

Data is technically a plural noun, and should be treated as such when it refers to multiple individual data points. When it describes a whole body of data, however, it can be regarded as a singular noun.

- The data were different during the second study.
- The data is questionable.

Capitalize and spell out the days of the week and months of the year, but not the names of seasons. Do not abbreviate months in expository writing.

- The fall semester started on the first Thursday of September of the year, but not the names of seasons. Do not abbreviate months in expository writing.

F

FA

Do not add an “s” to this abbreviation for “frequently asked questions.”

• • •

This gender-neutral term is preferred to “freshman.”

• • •

Use “FY” and the abbreviated year (no apostrophe, periods, or spaces).

- The results for FY19 were an improvement over the previous year’s.

• • • • •

On first usage, italicize foreign words the reader may not know. On subsequent uses, you need not italicize. Do not italicize foreign phrases commonly used in English when they are used in an English context. Examples:

- ad hominem, pro bono, ibid, habeas corpus

• •

Spell out and hyphenate fractions of less than one: one-half; two-thirds; three-quarters. Use numerals for all fractions larger than one.

- Use one-half cup sugar and 2¼ cups flour.

• • • • • • • • • • •

Use the gender-neutral terms first-year student(s), sophomore(s), junior(s), and senior(s) instead of “freshman(men)” and “upperclassman(men).”

• • • • •

These should always be written as one word, rather than two.

—

—

When referring to Boston College, use a comma between Jesuit and Catholic.

- Boston College is a Jesuit, Catholic university.

Use abbreviations such as these only when they accompany full names of individuals. Do not precede with a comma unless it is part of an established usage (e.g., Thomas P. O’Neill, Jr. Library).

- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Harry Connick Jr. has recorded more number-one albums than any other artist in US jazz chart history.

Either of these spellings is acceptable in BC publications.

A gender-neutral term used in place of the description Latino/Latina. The “x” replaces the Spanish-language male and female endings “o” and “a,” as in the School of Social Work’s Latinx Leadership Program.

B. +

The acronym currently used by Boston College’s LGBTQ+ Student Programs and Resources stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and questioning students.

“Login” is a noun; “log in” is the verb.

Do not use postal abbreviations for states (MA, CT) unless they are part of a full mailing address. Use conventional spelling and abbreviations of state names in running text. Do not abbreviate the state name if it is used without a city or town.

- He works in Massachusetts.
- She works in Chestnut Hill, Mass. (not Chestnut Hill, MA).
- Full mailing address: Jane Doe, Office of University Communications, Boston College, 140 Commonwealth Ave., Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Use a comma after the state in expository writing.

- The voters in Boston, Mass., turned out in droves that year.

“Media” is a plural noun that describes the main means of mass communication—broadcasting, publishing, and the internet collectively. The singular form is “medium.”

- The media were out in force covering every aspect of the event.
- Print is still a powerful medium, even in the second decade of the 21st century.

Do not capitalize “millennium” or “millennial” in running text.

For any amount of money from \$1–\$999,999, use numerals and a dollar sign. For sums exceeding \$1 million, combine numerals and words. Hyphenate only when using adjectival forms.

- They received \$4.52 million dollars in funding.
- They received a \$2.2-billion grant.

One word. Do not hyphenate as non-profit or not-for-profit.

Spell out numbers one through nine only; use numerals for larger numbers. Apply these guidelines to ordinal numbers as well. Avoid superscript.

- Out of 25 applicants, only three candidates were interviewed.
- Fourth annual BBQ; the 25th Reunion Class (not 25th)

Exceptions: Spell out a number when it is the first word of a sentence unless it is a year.

- One hundred students were awarded scholarships.
- 2001 was singularly memorable for many Americans.

Not “Office of Undergraduate Admissions” (no “s” at the end).

Capitalize the names of offices, buildings, and centers within Boston College when the full name is used. Do not capitalize office, center, institute, etc., when the full name is not used.

- Office of Student Programs
- Staffers in the office respond to numerous inquiries.

One word, lowercase.

• Do not capitalize the names of seasons (spring, summer) unless they are part of an official name. See also dates.

•• •••• •

Never hyphenate these terms.

• , • • , • , •

The most common relative pronouns are who/whom, whoever/whomever, whose, that, and which. Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, which are a type of dependent clause that modify a word, phrase, or idea in the main clause.

If the “which/that” clause changes the meaning of the sentence, use “that.” If the “which/that” clause is subordinate, use “which.”

- The swimming pool, which was occasionally heated, was barely popular with guests.
- The swimming pool that was heated was popular with guests.

••

Do not capitalize “the” before proper names unless it is part of a title.

- the BC Eagles; the Department of English
- The Hunt for Red October

•• ••, •• ••

Use the U.S. spelling, “theater,” unless “theatre” is part of a formal name, such as the Boston College Theatre Department; a theatre major.

- Most BC student productions are staged at the Robsham Theater Arts Center or in its Bonn Theater.

•

Write a.m. and p.m. in lowercase, with periods after each letter. When writing times of day, eliminate unnecessary figures and punctuation.

- 5–7 p.m. (not “5:00 to 7:00 p.m.”)

Use numerals when citing the exact time, or when using a.m. or p.m. Use noon for 12 p.m. and midnight for 12 a.m. When listing start-to-end times, use an en-dash (not a hyphen).

- 7 a.m.; 7:30 p.m. (not “seven p.m.” or “seven-thirty p.m.”)
- 2–4 p.m.

• •• i

Titles of books, periodicals, journals, plays, and other freestanding works are italicized, according to The Chicago Manual of Style. Titles of articles, chapters, and other shorter works, including poems, songs, short films, and TV or radio shows, are set in roman and enclosed in quotation marks.

•• ()

Capitalize “trustee” when it precedes a name, and when it is part of the official title “Boston College Board of Trustees.” Otherwise, lowercase.

- Boston College Trustee Mary Stack
-
-
-

Two words, per The Chicago Manual of Style.

Always spell out the country's name on first mention. You may use U.S. in subsequent mentions.

Always capitalize "University" when referring specifically to Boston College. Generally, use lowercase.

- The University was founded in 1863.
- He was accepted by three other universities.

When spelling out URLs in running text, always use lowercase and do not underline or italicize. It is not necessary to include "http://" or "www." If a URL comes at the end of a sentence, place a period after it.

- The article was featured on change.org.
- The Boston College website is bc.edu.

When abbreviating the word "versus," use *v.*

- *J.*

Punctuation

• • •

Use an ampersand (&) to replace “and” only when the symbol is part of the official name of an office or department.

- Boston College Center for Work & Family
- U.S. News & World Report
- Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences

• • • • •

Use apostrophes to form contractions and to show possession. If a singular possessive ends in “s,” add an apostrophe and an “s” at the end of the word. If the noun is plural, add only the apostrophe.

- James’s bicycle
- The neighbors’ cars

Never use apostrophes to form plurals.

- We had dinner with the O’Reillys (not the O’Reilly’s).

el, -s. If theor

The en dash (–) means “through.” Its principal function is to indicate a range of things, particularly times, numbers, dates, and distance:

- 5–7 p.m.
- The 2020–21 school year
- See pp. 147–150 of Coates’s book.

The hyphen (-) is used between numbers that are not inclusive, such as telephone and Social Security numbers. It is also used in compound adjectives.

- 617-552-3821
- Subject-verb agreement; Pulitzer Prize-winning book; much-needed break

• • •

Three spaced periods that indicate a suspended thought or omitted content within a sentence. Use four periods and a space to indicate words that are omitted between sentences.

•
•

American English uses double quotation marks (“”) rather than single quotation marks (‘ ’), which are typically used only for quoted words and phrases within double quotations.

- “The Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay’s ‘On Broadway’ has always been one of my favorites,” she said.
- In American English, commas and periods are normally placed inside quotation marks. “Welcome to the workshop,” she said. “Let’s get started.”

Dashes, colons, and semicolons almost always go outside quotation marks, because they aren’t directly quoted.

- “She loves classical piano music,” he marveled —it had moved her from a young age.

Question marks and exclamation points go inside quote marks if they are part of quoted material.

- “Yikes!” he exclaimed. “That was a close call.”
- “I’ve never liked the play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*”, she said.

When quoting a passage that consists of several consecutive paragraphs, put quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph, but at the end of only the final one.

When different speakers are quoted in a text, cite each individually.

| • • • • •

A word or phrase purposely misused, or intended to convey irony, enclosed in quotation marks that are meant to signal doubt or derision about what is being said or cited.

- She wished the committee chairs would limit the time they spent describing their “brilliant” ideas.

•

The semicolon most frequently links two or more independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction (e.g., “and”; “but”; “so”).

- The weather was ghastly; Jane fretted about getting home in time to meet her sister.

Semicolons are also used in place of commas to separate items in a series in which one or more of the individual items includes a comma.

- Her favorite films included *Moonlight*; *I, Tonya*; and *Monsters, Inc.*

• • • • •

Insert one space, not two, between a period at the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next. (People who



Always use a comma, rather than a hyphen, between these terms.

The terms are not interchangeable. Liturgy refers to any public prayer. Mass is a Catholic liturgy that is celebrated, delivered, or said. Always capitalize when referring to the ceremony, but lowercase any preceding adjectives.

- He delivered high Mass.

The Roman Catholic order of priests and brothers founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, known as the Jesuits. Boston College was founded by the Jesuits in 1863. The abbreviated form, S.J., takes commas before and after the initials.

The first full reference to a member of a Roman Catholic religious order should provide the priest or sister's full name, followed by the initials of his or her religious order.

- John Doe, S.J.
- Lakshmi Patel, C.C.V.I (Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word)

Use a comma after the individual name and, on first reference, the order's initials. Subsequent mentions should refer to "Fr. Doe," "Br. Doe," "Sr. Maria Gonzales," or "Sr. Gonzales."

Confusables

Frequently confused or misused words and phrases that mar your writing—and that spellchecker may not catch.

Affect is most often used as a verb meaning to influence. Effect, a noun, means result.

Though widely used, alright is still considered nonstandard English.

All together applies to groups of people or things that are being treated as a group: "We put the holiday decorations all together on one shelf." Altogether means entirely: "I am altogether disheartened by the outcome of the contests."

Allude means to make an indirect reference. In his poem "The Second Coming," W.B. Yeats alludes several times to World War I. To elude is to evade or escape.

Alternate can be a noun, verb, or adjective. As a verb, it means to occur in turn repeatedly. As an adjective, it means every other (as in "alternate Sundays") or taking the place of something ("an alternate route"). An alternative suggests another possibility: "He considered veganism a healthy alternative to the standard Western diet."

• • / • •

Beside is a preposition that means next to: “Put the picture frame beside the vase on the shelf.” Besides means also or in addition: “Besides, I want to tell you something about that photo.”

• / •

The city or town that is the seat of government is its capital: “Boston is the capital of Massachusetts.” The building in which the legislative assembly meets is the capitol: “Congress meets in the U.S. Capitol.”

• / : / •

Cite is a verb that means to quote or document a source: “She cited more than a dozen references.” Sight is a vision or view: “The sight of the Statue of Liberty affects many people deeply.” A site is a position or place, e.g., “the site of our future public library.”

• • • / • •

Complement is a noun or verb that refers to something that completes or enhances a whole: “The citrus salad was a delightful complement to the cream soup.” A compliment expresses praise or admiration: “Your entire meal was superb; my compliments to the chef.”

• • • / • •

According to the traditional rule, the whole comprises the parts, and the parts compose the whole. Comprise means to include or consist of: “The exhibition comprises sixteen works of art.” Compose means to form the substance: “The exhibition is composed of sixteen works of art.”

• • • / • •

Concurrent means simultaneous or happening at the same time as something else: “The concurrent winter storms developed into a devastating blizzard.” Consecutive means successive: “We had seven consecutive weeks of bad weather that season.”

/ •

A denotation describes a word in its literal meaning—what we might call a “dictionary definition.” A connotation implies or suggests broader associations we have with a word; what it implies or suggests: “Thoughts of a fireplace connote feelings of warmth for me.”

• • / •

The noun conscience refers to one’s moral sense of right and wrong: “Her conscience discouraged her from plagiarizing portions of an obscure text.” The adjective conscious usually means awake or aware: “He was stunned but conscious after his fall.”

• / • / • / • •

A councilor is a member of a council—a local government assembly such as the Boston City Council. A counselor who gives counsel—advice or guidance—might be an attorney, a college admissions advisor, or a supervisor at a camp.

• • • / • • •

Discreet means prudent, circumspect, or modest: “Her discreet handling of an uncomfortable situation put him at ease.” Discrete means separate or individually distinct: “Each company in the conglomerate operates as a discrete entity.”

• • • / • • •

Disinterested means unbiased or impartial, as on a jury: "We appealed to a disinterested mediator to help settle our dispute." Uninterested means not interested or indifferent to: "They seemed entirely uninterested in our offer."

• /

Elicit is a verb that often means to draw out. Illicit is an adjective meaning unlawful. "No matter how hard the reporter tried to elicit a few scandalous stories from her, she kept all knowledge of illicit goings-on to herself."

• • / •

An emigrant leaves his or her native country to settle in another: "All her grandparents were emigrants from Hungary." One emigrates from a place and immigrates to another: "Many immigrants to the United States today are native Spanish speakers."

• • / • / •

To be eminent is to be outstanding; famous; respected. Immanent means inherent. Something imminent is impending; about to take place.

• • • • / • • • •

The former refers to physical distance, the latter to an extension of time or degree. "Those cities are farther apart than I assumed." "I can't ponder this problem any further."

• • • / •

Fewer is an adjective that means smaller in number. It is used with countable objects: "My basket has fewer items than yours." Less means smaller in amount or degree, and used with non-countable nouns (e.g., time; happiness; liquid): "Which bottles hold less liquid?"

• • • • / • • • •

Figuratively is an adverb that means metaphorically or symbolically: "Frightened, he figuratively jumped out of his skin." Literally is an adverb that means actually: "I'm not exaggerating when I say I literally fell off my chair." For whatever reasons, "literally" has become so overused as a "sort of vague intensifier" that it is in danger of losing its literal meaning, observes Paul Brians, author of *Common Errors in English Usage*. "It should be used to distinguish between a figurative and a literal meaning of a phrase. It should not be used as a synonym for "actually" or "really." Don't say of someone that he 'literally blew up' unless he swallowed a stick of dynamite."

f • • / f • •

These two words are actually synonyms, both meaning easily set on fire: "The highly flammable (inflammable) fuel was stored safely in a specially built tank." Use nonflammable to mean not flammable.

f i / f i

To flaunt means to show off shamelessly. "Eager to flaunt her sense of style, Helen shopped compulsively, spending much more money than she had." To flout means to show scorn or contempt for: "Lewis joined a fraternity, but soon flouted the house rules."

• • • • / • • • •

The noun foreword means an introductory note or preface: "In my foreword, I explained why I wrote the book." Forward is an adjective or adverb that means toward the front or ahead: "Let's try to move this conversation forward."

Founder means to sink below the surface of the water, out of sight. “The ship foundered after colliding with an iceberg”. Flounder means to move about clumsily, or to blunder.

Hanged is the past tense and past participle of hang, meaning to execute by suspending from the neck: “They hanged the prisoner for treason.” Hung is the past tense and participle of hang when the meaning is to suspend from above with no support from below: “I hung the painting on the wall.”

Generally, historic refers to what is important in history, while historical refers to whatever existed in the past, whether it was important or not: “a historic summit meeting between the prime ministers;” “historical buildings torn down in the redevelopment.”

Continually confused abbreviations of Latin phrases, e.g. stands for *exempli gratia*, or “for example”; i.e., or *id est*, means “that is” or “in other words.” In general usage, both should be followed by a comma.

It’s is a contraction for it is or it has. Its is the possessive form of it: “The story your book tells is excellent. And its illustrations are superb.”

Laid is the past tense and the past participle of the verb lay and not the past tense of lie. Lay is the past tense of the verb lie, and lain is the past participle: “He laid his books down and lay down on the couch, where he has lain for an hour.”

Lend and loan are both acceptable as verbs in standard English: “Can you lend (loan) me a dollar?” However, only lend should be used in figurative senses: “Will you lend me a hand?”

Passed is the past tense and past participle of pass. If you refer to a distance or period of time before the present, use past: “We took a detour so we could drive past our old house”: “We passed several new homes on the street where we lived.”

Penultimate means “next to last” or “second to last,” not “the very last.”

The verb precede means to come before. Proceed means to move forward.

Principal, a noun, describes someone who holds a top position or plays a singularly important role—the school principal, or a principal partner in a law firm, for example. It can also mean “main” or “chief,” as in: “The principal reason I turned down the job offer was that it would have meant moving to another city.” Principle is a noun that means a rule or standard: “They refused to compromise their principles.”

• / •

Stationary is an adjective that means fixed or unmoving: "The fitness room was packed with stationary bikes."
Stationery is a noun that refers to paper, pens, pencils, and other writing materials.

• / • / •

There is the possessive form of they; there refers to place; and they're is the contraction of they are: "They're going there because their mother wanted them to experience her childhood home, a place she recalls fondly."

• / •

Venial means corruptible; easily bribed. It is an adjective, as is venal, which, in Christian theology, describes a person who is the contraction of