Course Design Style Guide

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NOTE: All links contained within this document are created and maintained by the Department of Design and Development at Bellevue University. Please direct any questions you may have regarding this document to the lead author, Katie Ostdiek: kostdiek@bellevue.edu.

Course Design Style Guide

STANDARD RULE and EXPLANATION:

Basic Format & Style

Writing Style

- Standard American English[i] (spelling, punctuation, etc.):
  - Spelling: typical differences, ends –or (not –our) and –ter (not –tre). For example: use color (not colour), liter (not litre), etc.
  - Grammar: collective nouns are singular: "the staff is talented," "the band is great," "the team was on time";
  - Word choice (when appropriate): truck (not lorry), line (not queue), eraser (not rubber), etc.
  - Punctuation:
    - Commas and periods always go inside (rather than outside) quotation marks, unless quotation is followed by an in-text citation. Colons and semicolons go outside the quotation marks. (See the section on commas for additional examples.)
      - Examples:
        - Begin this assignment by clicking on the title above and then "Create Thread."
        - Thomas Jefferson, who declared "all men are created equal," was the primary author of the Declaration of Independence.
    - Double quotation marks should be used for all quotations, scare quotes, and words used as examples. Single quotations should be used for quotes within quotes and quotation marks in headlines.
      - *Note: There are exceptions to this rule. Within certain disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, and theology, single quotations are used to "highlight words with special meanings" (see Grammar Girl). Single quotations are also increasingly used in casual writing to convey emphasis.*
      - Examples:
        - Their first "house" was so small it could barely fit their whole family.
        - IDs frequently recommend adding instructions, such as "Begin this assignment by clicking on the title above and then 'Create Thread.'"
        - For additional examples, see the articles on this topic in Grammar Girl and Grammarly.

Tone

- Use academic tone (when appropriate):
  - Academic tone should avoid:

- Broad generalizations (always, never, etc.);
- Superfluous adverbs (really, clearly, etc.);
- Qualifiers (a little, definitely, etc.);
- Emotional language (e.g., It is heartbreaking that…);
- Inflammatory language (e.g., Smith's study was terrible, sickening, and sad.);
- Overly formal tone;
- Shifts in tone should be appropriate to audience and department:
  - Informal tone and voice may be useful for online teaching;
  - Defer to SME/PD/ID when determining appropriate tone.

Page or Document Layout

- Each page or Ultra document should:
  - Have introductory and transition sentences;
  - NOT simply contain a list of resources without context;
  - Address one concept;
    - In essence: Skill-building activities should either be separate pages, or should be included after the content, but format should be consistent throughout a course (this is a rule of thumb but may be overridden by instructional designer/PD).
  - Include headings and/or subheadings (depending on SME/PD preferences).
    - Most headings, specifically first- and second-level headings, should use title capitalization (see Text Styles: CAPS for details).
    - When using third-level headings, use sentence case (e.g., What is an oxford comma?).

Displaying Media

- Images and Illustrations:
  - Should be easy to read/view;
  - Should include an alternative title (Alt text);
  - Icon sizes should be consistent (e.g., 72x72).
- Videos and Other Media:
  - Videos should be organized to utilize space and minimize scrolling:
    - In Bb Original -- Sizes: 608 x 402, 560 x 315
  - Videos should be embedded when possible.
    - ID should use discretion when implementing videos from textbook providers/publishers to ensure copyright is not violated. See following LibGuide for additional information: [LibGuide Copyright Center](#)
    - Use the Kaltura LTI option for embedding Kaltura videos.
    - YouTube videos should be embedded using the media link option or through the Kaltura LTI YouTube option.
    - **NOTE**: There is a bug disrupting Kaltura captions for YouTube videos. Speak with Eli or an ID for additional information.
- Attaching Files:

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- Attach pdfs (rather than Word documents) when possible, unless specifically requested by PD (e.g., template for assignment, editable document, etc.).

Hyperlinks (also see Citations)

- All hyperlinks are automatically blue and underlined (do not alter text or formatting).
- Links should open in new window.
- Hyperlinks should use descriptive text (e.g., title) for the link text rather than the URL for accessibility.

Lists (bulleted or numbered)

- Lists should:
  - Include an introduction or transition;
  - Maintain parallel construction;
    - Example: All items begin with a verb (see parallelism under "Sentence Structure").
  - Use numbering if sequencing is important;
  - Include more than one item; there must be two or more to include a list.
- Each item of the list should:
  - Begin with a capital letter (unless the listed item is a word or phrase);
  - Have consistent and logical punctuation:
    - Examples:
      1. All items have no ending punctuation (for one-word lists);
      2. All items have similar or parallel punctuation:
         - All question marks,
         - All periods,
         - A reasonable combination of question marks and periods;
      3. All items (except final) end with a comma (short phrases);
      4. All items (except final) end with a semicolon (long and/or complicated phrases).
    - **NOTE**: The final item should typically end with a period (if a comma/semi-colon/period/question mark was previously used in the series).

Abbreviations & Acronyms

- Abbreviations should be used for:
  - Common titles (Mr., Ph D, etc.);
  - The acronym of a corporation, institution, or country that is more familiar than the full name (e.g., USA, IBM, FBI);
  - Mathematical measurements (e.g., meter = m, centimeter = cm, etc.).
  - Legal context:
    - Use v. or vs. as required by *Bluebook*
    - Only use abbreviations for versus in legal context (e.g., court case, report of court case, etc.) or in casual writing.
    - In formal/academic situations, use the full spelling or change phrasing.
  - When using the abbreviation for "also known as," omit periods: *aka*.

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- When you use an acronym (as an abbreviation):
    - Do not include spaces or periods (e.g., OED);
    - Write out the full name of the entity followed by the acronym in parentheses the first time;
        - Example: Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
    - Only use the acronym after introducing the full name (unless needed for student comprehension).
- Time Zones
    - Use CT to indicate submission times in Blackboard as Central Time;
    - This is a shorthand used in the United States to represent both Central Standard Time (CST) and Central Daylight Time (CDT) throughout the year, regardless of time changes in spring or fall;
        - Exceptions: Arizona, Hawaii, and other overseas territories.
    - Rationale:
        - While Central Standard Time (CST) and Central Daylight Time (CDT) are the correct and more specific abbreviations—especially for an international audience—using them in Bb requires biannual revisions to ensure that the time matches the time changes in spring and fall.
        - The United States uses CT as a shorthand for the Central time zone year-round; using this shorthand allows us to have consistent content from season to season. (Questions? See K. Ostdiek, B. Rapp, or J. Egri)
        - Professors are welcome to use the more accurate versions (CST/CDT), but they should be responsible for future revisions of this abbreviation from season to season (whether in the ICC or not).
- Course Names
    - Within text, course name should have a space between acronym and number.
        - Example: MSSP 500.

Punctuation: Commas, Hyphens, Apostrophes, Parentheses, and Spacing

Apostrophes

- Possessive:
    - When forming the possessive on a noun, add 's.
        - Examples: cat's meow, bee's knees, student's work.
    - When a noun is plural, add only an apostrophe.
        - Example: cats' food, students' attention, colleagues' desks.
    - When forming the possessive for a *singular* proper noun, add an apostrophe + s.
        - Examples: Freud's, James's, Watson's.
    - When forming the possessive for a *plural* proper noun, add an apostrophe after the s.
        - Examples: the Freuds' and the Jameses'
    - When forming the possessive for a *singular* proper noun that *ends in s*, add an s after the apostrophe.
        - Examples: Theseus's, Dickens's, Moses's.

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- o **Exception**: if the s is silent, only use the apostrophe. Our goal is consistency; when in doubt, check the course literature and follow that precedent.
  - o When forming the possessive for a proper noun that is plural but the entity is singular, add *only an apostrophe*.
    - Example: the United States' policy on China, the United Nations' meeting, etc.
- Do not use apostrophes to form plurals.
  - Examples: CDs, 1620s, 1900s.

Quotation Marks (also under writing style)
- Use double quotation marks for:
  - o Quoted material;
  - o Scare quotes;
  - o Specific names for assignments or buttons, as needed or per SME/PD preference;
  - o In specific citation formats, use for shorter works, such as articles within a journal, chapter title, poem (within a collection), etc.
- Use single quotation marks for:
  - o Quotes within a quote;
  - o Quotes in a headline.

Commas
- Use a comma:
  - o Before conjunctions in lists (serial comma or Oxford comma rule);
    - Example: Our department has teams for course design, production, and operations.
  - o Before (coordinating) conjunctions (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet) that link two independent clauses;
    - Example: Katie likes cookies, but she does not like cake.
    - Example: Katie likes baking, and she is going to bake a pie for the department.
    - Example: Read your peer's posts carefully, and then provide feedback based on the rubric provided for the assignment.

    NOTE: If you switch the comma and coordinating conjunction with a period and have two complete sentences, then you are following this rule.
  - o After a dependent clause that starts a sentence (if the dependent clause ends the sentence, no comma is needed);
    - Example: Once you have read the chapter, complete the weekly exercises. Or: Complete the weekly exercises once you have read the chapter.
  - o To offset nonrestrictive/appositive and non-essential information with two commas;
    - Example: The poet, who hadn't published before, was naturally reluctant to give a reading.

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- o After introductory adverbs and phrases, such as however, on the other hand, and furthermore (this rule is less strict in different formats and disciplines);
  - ▪ Example: Unsurprisingly, the course was a huge success. However, it required a lot of work to prepare it for the upcoming term.
- When used with quotation marks, commas and periods:
  - o Go inside the quotation marks;
    - ▪ Example: Begin this assignment by clicking on the title above and then "Create Thread."
  - o EXCEPT when the quote is followed by an in-text citation. Then follow quotation marks with citation and ending punctuation.
    - ▪ Example: According to Smith, this example quote "is completely made up to provide an example" (Smith, 2018, p. 54).

Semicolons

- Think of the semicolon as soft period or a hard comma (not a colon ":");
- Use semicolons to:
  - o Separate clauses (soft period),
    - ▪ Examples: (original) I have a big test tomorrow. I can't go out tonight. (revised) I have a big test tomorrow; I can't go out tonight.
  - o Create variety for sentence structure (soft period),
    - ▪ Break up excessive short and choppy sentences.
  - o Emphasize relatedness (soft period),
    - ▪ This is useful when showing relationship between sentences. See the example under "separate clauses."
  - o Separate items in a complex list (hard comma).
    - ▪ This is the only time that a semicolon acts like a comma (a super-comma);
    - ▪ A long sentence with multiple independent clauses that contain internal punctuation (such as a comma) can require a semicolon and coordinating conjunction, rather than a comma, to distinguish between each clause more clearly.

      NOTE: This is the only time to use a semicolon and coordinating conjunction together.
      - Example: I hope my daughter learns to be her own person; pursues hobbies, careers, and education that align with her interests; and feels confident in her own strength and judgment.
      - Example: If you want me to go out tonight, you need to help me with my homework first; and if you say no, I'll know that you don't really care about going out.
    - ▪ See [Grammar Girl](#).

Hyphens

- Compound words:
  - o Hyphenate compound words adjectivally (adjective and adverb); they will typically precede a noun;

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- Example: problem-solving skill vs Problem solving is an important skill.
- Example: "nineteenth-century literature" (adjective), but not "literature and the nineteenth century" (noun).

NOTE: Problem-solving and decision-making are always hyphenated when referring to a BU power skill.

Peer-to-Peer should be hyphenated

Skill-Building Activities (and all similar derivations) will be determined by program. The Lead CD will communicate this to the Quality team.

- Number or page ranges:
  - Should use a single hyphen;
    - Example: 1-5, p.10-15.
  - Should follow the example below when the number range is used adjectivally (also see compound words):
    - Examples: 1- to 5-minute speech, 10- to 15-page paper, nineteenth- to twentieth-century literature, etc.
- To set off parenthetical material or interruptions in prose:
  - Use unspaced long (em) dashes (—);
    - Windows Shortcuts: Ctrl+Shift+- or 2014+Alt+x
    - Mac shortcuts: Shift-Alt-hyphen or Command+M
  - Do NOT use single hyphens (-) or short (en) dashes (–);
- Do not hyphenate African American, Asian American, etc.
- Do not insert a hyphen between adverbs ending in –ly and the words they modify:
    - Example: heavily favored.

Parenthesis
- When the parenthesis encloses a complete sentence, the period belongs inside the parenthesis.
- When the enclosed phrase comes at the end of a sentence, or parenthesis are used to enclose a sentence fragment, the period belongs outside the parenthesis.

Spacing
- Space after period:
  - Single space after period;
  - UNLESS double-space is specified/preferred by SME, or use of APA format.
- Line spacing:
  - Maintain consistency with single- or double-spaced.

Sentence Structure: Parallelism, Consistent Voice, Fragments, Run-ons, and Comma-splices

NOTE: Maintain parallelism and consistent voice throughout the course.

Parallelism
- The same grammatical structure is used for two or more phrases/clauses in a sentence.

- o Make sure each sentence element is the same part of speech (e.g., same verb tense, nouns and verbs are not mixed, consistent use of singular or plural nouns, same subject matter, parallel rhetoric, etc.):
    - Incorrect: Instructional Designers like creating, designing, and to try new innovative techniques.
    - Correct: Instructional Designers like creating, designing, and trying new innovative techniques.
    - Also Correct: Instructional Designers like to create, design, and try new innovative techniques.
    - A sentence with parallel construction makes your writing **effective**, **classy**, and **certain** to impress anyone who reads your stuff (see [Grammarly](#)).

Consistent Voice

- Use active voice, not passive—EXCEPT when required by the discipline and/or SME/PD:
    - o Active: the subject performs the action of the verb:
        - Example: Sue read the poem.
    - o Passive: the subject is "acted upon" or passive:
        - Example: The poem was read by Sue.
- Active or passive voice is used consistently;
- Any shifts in tone are intentional and/or have a rationale.
    - o To review, check verbs for consistency.
        - Incorrect: She checked the verbs for consistency, made suggestions, and was dismayed at the responses she got.
        - Correct: She checked the verbs for consistency, made suggestions, and balked at the responses she got.
- Avoid 1st person:
    - o Doesn't use 1st-person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, etc.) unless directed by SME/PD.

Sentence Fragments

- No incomplete sentences;
    - o Ensure that any missing words or sentence components (articles, verbs, etc.) are incorporated.
    - o To review, insert missing subject, verb, etc., or complete thought as needed.

Run-on Sentences / Comma-splices

- No run-on sentences;
- Sentences have proper punctuation, conjunctions, etc., to show where one sentence ends and next begins;
- No comma-splices;
    - o Commas are not used to combine two complete sentences or independent clauses
    - o To correct a comma-splice, remove the comma and:
        - Insert a period or a semicolon;

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- Insert a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so);
- Insert a subordinate conjunction (when, where, because, although, since, after, if, etc.) in the place of the comma;
- Rewrite or cut the sentence into smaller sentences.

Text Style: Font, Bold, Underlined, Italics

Font

- Black font color is recommended in Bb Ultra and in Word documents.[ii]
- Use the default size used for the text style in Bb Ultra (e.g., paragraph, heading 1, subheading).
- Use the default font for the text style in Bb Ultra.
- Use a sans serif font for Word documents or learning objects. Ariel is often used but not required.

Bold, italics, CAPS, highlighting, underlining

- Use bold, italics, and CAPS sparingly for emphasis;[ii]
- Bold:
    - Section headings (use pre-set formats for heading or body text for ADA compliance when possible).
- Italics:
    - When needed for specific format citations (e.g., APA, MLA, etc.), use for the titles of longer works, such as books, periodicals, journals, films, etc. (not for shorter works, such as journal articles, poems, news article, essays in edited collections, etc.).
    - DO NOT use for commonly used foreign words (e.g., fin de siècle, nom de plume, etc.), unless specifically requested by SME/PD.[ii]
- Underline:
    - Do not use underline in online materials, unless requested by SME/PD.[ii]
    - Hyperlinks are automatically underlined (do not manually underline hyperlinks).
- Capitalization:
    - Follow standard capitalization rules:
        - For titles, capitalize the first letter in each word (Exceptions include articles and words of three letters or less, or titles in an APA Works Cited page, or an agreed upon format of existing titles of resources);
        - First letter of first word in sentence;
        - Names and proper nouns;
        - For more examples, see Grammarly, Grammar Girl, or Grammar Check).
    - S2P courses have specific capitalization guidelines.

Citations

Citation of Linked Resources

- Identify/establish citation format used by course and/or program and use consistently throughout the course; Defer to SME's preference when indicated;

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- Follow web standard "best practices"; for example:
  - Do not use "Click Here" for hyperlinked language—use keywords and language that describes what is available via the link.
    - Examples: Read more about diabetes/Find out more about diabetes/Learn about diabetes.
  - Look for opportunities to link to related content, especially using keywords.
    - For example, if the content is about the flu vaccine, link to the words "H1N1 Flu Vaccine."
  - Do not include the URL itself on the page—hyperlink text when possible. (An exception is when you expect a document to be printed out and used largely off-line.)
  - Avoid beginning a sentence with a link, and see HHS linking best practicess.
  - Check URLs to make sure they are working/correct.
  - For additional details, check out:
    - Formatting Web Content: Best Practices, Digital Communications Division (DCD), www.hhs.gov, 19 August 2015.
    - Link Purpose (In Context): Understanding SC 2.4.4, Understanding WCAG 2.0, www.w3.org, 2016.
- When APA is not specifically required, use a simplified format for citing linked resources. See the example below:
  - Insert Hyperlink as title. Following the title, list the author, source, date of the resource:
    - Example: Capitalization in Titles 101, Jennifer Frost, www.grammarcheck.net, 2013
- When APA is requested, follow APA citation format: http://www.bellevue.edu/student-support/writing-center/apa-faqs or https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/reference_list_author_authors.html.

Citations for Images, Illustrations, and Music

- Images and illustrations should be either open-source, Creative Commons licensed, purchased (University license), fall under fair use, or created in-house.
- Attribution should clearly give credit to the source when appropriate.
- When citing a resource, use instructions for "Citation of Linked Resources" (above) if applicable.
- Use this resource to clarify what to include in the citation for an image, illustration, or similar resource: http://libguides.scf.edu/apa_image_citation.

Titles of Linked Sources

- URLs and hyperlinked objects should have the title as the link.
- Title listed should match title of resource.
- Videos that are embedded (YouTube and Kaltura) should not have hyperlinked titles (see DS/CD Layout resources for additional instructions and information).

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Notes

[i] Standard American English (SAE), or General American English (GA), is distinguished by standardized rules, which include spelling, punctuation, word choice, and pronunciation. While SAE typically includes Canadian English, it is contrasted to Standard British English, or the United Kingdom Standard English (UKSE); Scottish Standard English; and General Australian English.

[ii] Consider ADA Compliance: Consider contrast ratios when altering colors. Consider screen readers' capacity to convey meaning or emphasis through textual format, color, or highlighting.