

The Hilltop Style Guide

Below are just a few of the do's and don'ts when writing for The Hilltop.

TITLES ARE NO LONGER THAN 70 CHARACTERS, BLURB NO MORE THAN 125 CHARACTERS

WE DO NOT INCLUDE DATES IN THE FIRST GRAPH OR LEAD WITH DATES. EXACT DATES GO IN NUTGRAF (EXAMPLE BELOW)

Leading with date:

(Incorrect) Last Friday, the Howard University Elections Commission held a public press conference in the Armour J. Blackburn University Center's ballroom. Despite sparse attendance from the student body, the commission shared its commitment to transparency and accessibility to Howard students.

(Correct) The Howard University Elections Commission held a public press conference in the Armour J. Blackburn University Center's ballroom last Friday. Despite sparse attendance from the student body, the commission shared its commitment to transparency and accessibility to Howard students.

Dates in the first graph:

(Incorrect) On July 22, Howard University introduced HU Hospitality, a dining program focused on community, culture, and quality. This initiative introduced during July represents a fresh vision for campus dining designed to enhance the student experience. As part of this transition, Howard is moving from Sodexo to Aramark Collegiate Hospitality.

(Correct) Howard University introduced HU Hospitality, a dining program focused on community, culture, and quality this July.

The new dining service, introduced on July 22, emphasizes revitalizing campus spaces, planning for growth, and enhancing the overall quality of dining facilities.

ACADEMIC MAJORS - Do not capitalize academic majors unless the word is already a proper noun. (English, Spanish, German, French).

STUDENT IDENTIFICATION - Every section, except Sports, should say a student's classification and major on first reference unless the person's major takes away from the relevance of their opinion on a topic. Ex: A biology major speaking their opinion on political views. Use your best judgment.

NAMES - First reference in a story, full name and title. Second reference and beyond in the same story, just the last name when referring to the individual.

- a. **WRONG** – Dr. Joyce Williams, PhD, a teacher in the department of history, said she was excited to be at the school. “I have always wanted to work here,” Dr. Joyce Williams said.
- b. **CORRECT** – Joyce Williams, PhD, a professor in the history department, said she was excited to be at the school. “I have always wanted to work here,” Williams said.
- c. **ALSO CORRECT** – Dr. Joyce Williams, a professor in the history department, said she was excited to be at the school. “I have always wanted to work here,” she said.

NAMES OF CAMPUS BUILDINGS - Buildings should be referred to as ____ Hall on first reference. On second reference they may be referred to the fine arts building, the physics building, the biology building, etc. Do not capitalize any titles on second reference if the actual name is not used.

CRAMTON AUDITORIUM - NOT Crampton

GREENE STADIUM – NOT Green

DOUGLASS HALL – NOT Douglas Hall

LOCAL NAMES OF CITIES – It’s Washington, D.C.; it’s Silver Spring NOT Silver Springs.

BISON – Bison is both singular and plural. Never add an S at the end of the word.

INDENTATION OF PARAGRAPHS – Don’t indent the first line of each paragraph.

FRATERNITIES/SORORITIES - Greek letter organizations should be referred to by their full names on first reference. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and etc. These are legal titles and can be verified through a Google search, Refer to members as brothers for fraternities or sisters for sororities. Honors or music fraternity members are referred to as members since they are coed.

THE YARD - The Yard should always be capitalized. The same goes for The Valley and the Punchout.

UNIVERSITY – Should always be capitalized if part of name of school in first reference, Howard University, Hampton University, the University of Maryland. If the full name is not used, such as second reference, then university is lower case.

Dormitory Names - Spell out name of dormitories as such:

- West Towers = Howard Plaza Towers, West
- East Towers = Howard Plaza Towers, East
- Annex = Bethune Annex Hall
- Quad = Harriet Tubman Quadrangle
- Cook = George W. Cook Hall
- Drew = Charles R. Drew Hall
- Slowe = Lucy Diggs Slowe Hall
- College Hall North
- College Hall South

STREET NAMES AND ADDRESSES - Never abbreviate Street or Avenue, unless there's a number in the address. For instance, 235 Bryant St. is acceptable. Bryant St. is not. Instead, say Bryant Street.

DATES - Spell out months when used alone or with a year (e.g., January 2023), but abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., and Dec. when used with a specific date (e.g., Jan. 15, 2024). The months March, April, May, June, and July are never abbreviated. Also, don't add a "th," "rd" or "st" after a date.

The event will be on Dec. 13. Wrong: The event will be on December on 13th.

The meeting was held on July 1. Wrong: The meeting was held on July 1st.

The actor died on Aug. 3. Wrong: The actor died on August. 3rd

CITIES AND STATES - Spell out city and states. Be sure to put a comma after city and state.

The shooting in Ferguson, Missouri, was three months ago.

Wrong: The shooting in Ferguson, Missouri was three months ago.

Also wrong, The shooting in Ferguson, MO was three months ago.

ATTRIBUTION - Attribution to a source should always follow whatever statement has been quoted or made by the writer. "According to," "In a press release," "In an email," etc. should be either in the middle or the end of sentences to avoid having attention redirection to other news sources than The Hilltop. Use "according to" when attributing information to a publication. Use "said" or "says" when attributing information to a person.

FOR EXAMPLE, HOWEVER FOR INSTANCE – Never use these words or phrases at the beginning of a sentence. Instead, use them midway through the sentence.

Marcus went to the store. He forgot, however, that he had to be somewhere at 6:30 p.m.

WRONG. Marcus went to the store. However, he forgot he had somewhere to be at 6:30 p.m.

ALUMNUS, ALUMNA, ETC - Alumnus - a male graduate; Alumna - a female graduate; Alumnae - a group of female graduates; Alumni - a group of male and female graduates. NOTE - "Alum" is NEVER THE CORRECT TERM.

FRESHMAN/FRESHMEN – Freshman, singular; Freshmen: Plural; Freshman week, not freshmen week. When in doubt, mentally replace the word with senior for freshman and seniors for freshmen.

ACADEMIC DEGREES - Use lowercase when using bachelor's, master's or doctor's degree. Use lowercase for doctorate or doctoral program.

HYPHENS - Suspensive hyphenation: Not three or four-person party, but three- or four-person party. Not 19 and 20-year-olds, but 19- and 20-year-olds. Always remember the space after first hyphen. Always use a hyphen between words when the adjective is meant to be together but more than one word. Ex:

- He's 20 years old. He's a 20-year-old man.
- The well-dressed gentleman entered the room.
- Her best-selling book, was a bestseller.
- Full-time job

DASHES - The dash works somewhat like parentheses or commas, but it is used where a stronger punctuation is needed. Ex:

- Each of the courses being taught — English, writing for the media, sociology and calculus — are being delayed.

Note: If there is only one appositive (which renames a noun), then you should set that off with commas, not dashes, for example:

- The best course, Writing for the Media, can teach students about journalism.

CAPITALIZATION - Capitalize Board of Trustees, except when it's just board. Ex:

- The board met at 9 a.m.

DEAN'S LIST – Always lower case

HEAD COACH/ATHLETIC DIRECTOR – Lower case.

METRO - Always capitalize Metro and name of lines, ex: Green, Red

BLACK AS RACIAL IDENTITY – Capitalize Black, as well as African American, Hispanic, Latino, Native American and Asian. Use Black as main reference when referring to Black people. Also, never Blacks as a noun. It is Black people, Black students, white residents, etc.

HOMECOMING - should be lowercase, homecoming unless following Howard and in reference to a specific year.

ACRONYMS - Avoid using acronyms, however, UGSA, HUSA and NAACP are acceptable. Gentlemen of Drew Social Club, Ladies of the Quad Social Quad should always be spelled out. Say GODSC or LOQSC on second use.

TIME REFERENCE - Use lowercase and periods for “a.m.” and “p.m.”

COMMAS - Washington, D.C. should ALWAYS have a comma after Washington.

Always use a comma at the end of the clause when stating the sentence with a preposition.

Ex: After Dr. Frederick met with the students, he then made a decision.

When naming three or more items, do not use a comma before the word “and.”

Ex: “I love blue, green and red.” Not “I love blue, green, and red.”

No comma before Jr. or Sr. in a man’s name.

CAPITALIZATION - Capitalize Board of Trustees, except when it’s just board.

Ex: The board met at 9 a.m.

QUOTES - When using a quote within a quote, use single quotes inside the double quotes. When entering the end of a sentence, always do single quotes, period/comma, end of double quotes.

“My professor then said to me ‘Turn in your homework.’”

“My professor then said to me ‘Turn in your homework,’” Daniel said. “She liked it. She then said to me ‘Keep up the good work Daniel.’”

Always add person who’s being quoted after first/second sentence, depending on how long the quote is. Not at the end, readers need to know who’s talking.

“The crowd started to get louder and louder,” Aaron said. “We could barely hear each other talk.”

When back-to-back paragraphs are nothing but quotes, don’t add a quotation at the end of the first paragraph.

“The party started to get louder and louder,” Aaron said. “We could barely hear each other talk as there were people everywhere. Many people were complaining because the noise became a huge issue.

“After the police showed up, many people began to disperse. Some people refused to leave the party and police started using force. It was a crazy scene. I caught it all on video footage.”

HE SAID VS. SAID HE - Don’t say “said Dr. Frederick” at the end of a sentence followed by a comma. Say “Dr. Frederick said” at the end of a sentence. Think of it as you wouldn’t say “said he/she,” you would say “he/she said.” On first mention, feel free to say “said he/she, the senior journalism major.”

"I love reading The Hilltop," said John Smith, a junior journalism major. "It's a great paper that the student body should read."

ITS VS. THEIR - When referring to a company, “its” is used. When referring to people, “their” is used.

The Hilltop is being honored for its terrific paper.

Writers for The Hilltop are being honored for their work.

SPORTS TEAMS - When referring to a sports professional city and team. The city is “its” and the team name/mascot is “their.”

Seattle won its first Super Bowl.

The Seahawks won their first Super Bowl.

The Seattle Seahawks won their first Super Bowl.

When mentioning sports team for first time, always refer to it with complete name.

Green Bay Packers, Los Angeles Clippers.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE - Don't use the same words twice in a sentence.

Many students say their classmates speak too loudly. Not: Many students say other students speak too loudly.

Sentence structure and usage of verbs should always be parallel.

"She loved jogging, swimming and dancing." Not: She loved jogging, swimming and to dance.

DATELINES – If a reporter writes a story that takes place outside of Washington, the story should have a dateline, the location (city name) of where the event took place and that name should be in all capital letters. Popular, well known cities do not need the state after their name. Those cities include: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Oklahoma City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, San Francisco and

Seattle. Cities not on this list should include the state abbreviation. NOTE: State abbreviations are only used in datelines, not in the body of an article.

STATE NAMES – Always spell out state names in your articles. Do not abbreviate states.

NUMBERS – Stay away from starting sentences or quotes with numbers. - One through nine should be written out as words. Numbers 10 and higher, use the numeral.

Ex. There were nine children in class. There were 22 students in class last week.

Never start a sentence with a number. Always re-write the sentence so the number is inside the sentence.

a. Wrong: 22 students were in class last week.

b. Correct. The university said 22 students were in class last week.

c. THIS RULES DOES NOT APPLY TO AGES. All ages are usually numbers. She is 12 years old. John Smith, 33, said he hated the food in the cafeteria.

PERCENT - Always write out “percent” not “%”

Ex: She said 80 percent of the class failed.

DAY AND TIME - Spell out name of the days, don’t abbreviate. Never say yesterday, tomorrow, but the specific day (Monday, Tuesday)

OK: 10 a.m to 11 p.m. WRONG: 10 A.M to 11 P.M.; WRONG 10 a.m. – 11 p.m.

HEIGHT - Numbers less than 10 can be spelled out when discussing height. 6-foot running back, not 6’0 running back. The basketball team signed a 7-footer.

COMMON WORD USAGE MISTAKES -

Allude: Chris alluded to his last book in his recent presentations.

Elude: Chris eluded any questions after his presentation.

Shown: He’s shown tremendous growth recently.

Showed: He showed tremendous growth after his letter.

It’s not “apart of,” it’s “a part of.” Use “part of” to avoid that.

Avoid writing “located on,” “located at” etc. If you drop “located” from the sentence it typically still makes sense and might even flow a little better. Ex:

The lab on the first floor of the building. Not: The lab located on the first floor of the building.

Halftime, overtime = one word

VERB TENSE - The majority of your stories should use verbs that are in past tense. Not present, except for the headline. If you covered an event that has already occurred, the verbs should be in past tense. If something is coming up in the future, you can then use future tense.

- d. WRONG. They ARE the first team to attend an event on campus.
- e. CORRECT. They WERE the first team to attend such an event on campus.

- f. CORRECT. They will be the first team to attend such an event on campus (for stories where the event has not occurred as of yet and is in the future).

ON-THE-RECORD, BACKGROUND, DEEP BACKGROUND, OFF-THE-RECORD. Make sure you (and the person you are interviewing) know the difference and explain the difference to your sources when they use any of these terms.

- g. On-the-Record. This means the information and quotes you receive you can use and attribute to the person who told it to you by name. This is the most preferred way of obtaining information for stories.
- h. On Background – This means, you can use the information, but instead of identifying a person by name who gave you the information nor the quote, you keep their identify hidden but identify the person by their position. Example: According to a Howard spokesman. Reporters, your editor should always know who this person is, even if you don't identify them in your article.
- i. Deep Background – This means you leave out their name and their position but say something like, according to a person familiar with the university's decision. Once again, your editor needs to know who this person is, even though you don't identify them in your article.
- j. Off-the-Record – This means you can't use the information at all, not in your article or even to report by asking others about the information. When a person you are talking to says "This is off the record." Quickly ask them are you saying, you don't want me to use this information at all, or you just don't want your name attached. Often times non-journalists will say something is "Off the Record," but they actually mean, they just want it to be on background and that their name not be used.

MORE THAN, LESS THAN AND OVER – When writing about numbers, use more than or less than, not over. Over is a direction such as, the plane flew over the house.

- k. WRONG – The increase was over \$10,000.
- l. CORRECT – The increase was more than \$10,000

LEDES - Please keep your ledes (the first paragraph of your story) no more than 25 words or three to four lines. Read your ledes out loud to yourself. If you run out of breath

before getting to the end of the paragraph or feel the need to stop and add a pause, then your lede is too long.

SHOW, NOT TELL - More show, less tell. As journalists, our job is to describe what we see and write about it. But we also describe what we hear, what we smell, sometimes even what we taste. We use all our senses when covering a story. That also means describing more of what you see than simply just telling readers what you see. Reporters who rely on more tell than show are often seen as lazy and poor writers.

TOO MUCH TELL, NOT ENOUGH SHOW – Protesters carried signs and danced through the demonstration.

SHOWING – Protesters carried signs that read “Protect choice” while a group of protesters, dressed in black and white spandex, danced to Beyonce’s “Women Rule the World.”

NOT ENOUGH SHOW – The restaurant brings together people various backgrounds such as doctors, lawyers, students and even the unemployed.

GOOD SHOW – Jonathan Williams, a chiropractor at Howard University Hospital, sits at the counter eating a turkey burger as David Jones, who recently was laid off as a garbage man in Silver Spring, eats a bowl of chicken noodle soup.

CLICHÉS - Avoid familiar, over used phrases in your story. It’s also lazy writing. Examples: Actions speak louder than words, the end justifies the means, by any means necessary, truth is stranger than fiction, you can’t judge a book by its cover; begs the question, last ditch effort; game changer. Here is a list of some. But one way to always decide if a phrase is a cliché: stop and ask yourself is the phrase you are about to use something you have heard repeatedly. Then more than likely (cliché!!!) it’s probably a cliché.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/opinions/wp/2014/02/27/the-outlook-list-of-things-we-do-not-say/>

EDITORIALIZING - Careful of editorializing. Your job as a writer is to be objective. That means, only report the facts, what you see, what you hear, etc. Don’t add your own thoughts or ideas or even beliefs. That also means being careful of personal adjectives.

WRONG - She wore a beautiful red dress to the gala.

CORRECT – She wore a floor length, red-strapless gown designed by Versace to the gala.

THIRD PERSON, NOT FIRST PERSON – Stories should be written in third person voice, never first-person voice. The only time first person is used is if you are writing an opinion piece.

WRONG – I saw dozens of people storm the Yard yelling that the school was not doing enough about housing.

WRONG – You may have seen dozens of people storm the Yard yelling that the school was not doing enough about housing.

ACCURATE – Dozens of people stormed the Yard yelling the school was not doing enough about housing. (Also, you don't always need to use the word that, often times you can just drop that as a descriptor).

KICKER – The kicker in the story is your last paragraph. Novice writers often try to sum up their story in the last paragraph as if they are writing an English term paper. That is not done in journalism. When your story is over, it's over. Just end it. You can end it with a quote, with a final piece of information, whatever you choose, but don't summarize anything. Just end the article.

NUTGRAPH – The nutgraph is the paragraph or sentence that explains to the reader why you are writing the story now. Often time, the nutgraph can be the lede of your article. But sometimes, such as in a feature story, that information may be further down in the article. The nutgraph should never be any further down in your article than the fourth paragraph. For example, if you are doing a profile of new College of Fine Arts Dean Phylicia Rashad. Your first two or three paragraphs might be a colorful anecdote observing Rashad in a classroom or working with students. But the fourth paragraph, the nutgraph; should be something like: In May, the university named Rashad dean of its College of Fine Arts, making the TV actress one of the visible and high-profile deans on the college's campus.

BYLINES, CUTLINES, PHOTO CREDITS – All stories should have bylines. And all stories with photos should have cutlines and photo credits.

The byline is the name of the reporter (s) who wrote the article. That should appear at the top of the story with BY: Jane Smith, Hilltop Staff Reporter

The cutline, or caption, is a description such as a brief sentence that appears underneath a photo to give the reader a sense of what is happening or who is in the photo in the article.

The photo credit is the name of the person who took the photo or provided the photo. It should appear underneath the cutline. If you took the photo or a Hilltop photographer, then it should be your name or the photographer's name. If the

photo was provided to you for the article, the photo credit would be: Photo Courtesy Howard University (or whoever provided the photo).

HEADLINES – Every story must have a headline (a few words about what the article is about to grab the reader), written by the reporter. The headline goes on top of the article, as well as on top of any photo if a photo is also attached. The copy desk will ultimately make the headline streamline and stronger, but at least you as the reporter can give the copy editor an idea of what you think the headline should say.

- No periods in headlines ex: DC not D.C. in headlines

DIED, NOT PASSED AWAY – When writing about someone who died, journalists say the person died or use the word death. We do not say someone passed. Saying someone passed is colloquial. And yes, while you may see in some media a reporter using the term that someone passed, it is still not AP Style and not standard.

MONTH- Case by case longer months (december, september, november) abbreviated

ROYAL COURT TITLES- Mister and Miss Howard not Mr. or Ms.

