

OBERLIN

COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY

Web Content Style Guide

Prepared by OHO Interactive

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Maintaining Your Style Guide](#)

[Audiences](#)

[Voice, Tone, and Content Guidelines](#)

[About Voice and Tone](#)

[Brand Attributes](#)

[Sample content](#)

[Language and Style](#)

[Oberlin College Guide to Editorial Style and Usage](#)

[Additional language considerations](#)

[Oberlin-specific style considerations](#)

[Oberlin Acronyms](#)

[Campus Building & Room Names](#)

[Message Architecture](#)

[Visual Content Guidelines](#)

[Photography](#)

[Graphics](#)

[Web Writing & Publishing Best Practices](#)

[SEO Considerations](#)

[Other SEO considerations](#)

Introduction

The goal of this guide is to promote consistency in Oberlin’s digital publications, ensuring that content adheres to both institutional style/brand standards and best practices for web content. Anyone responsible for creating, editing, or otherwise contributing to digital content at Oberlin is encouraged to reference this guide.

The quality of our web content should reflect the high quality of instruction and experience at Oberlin. Adherence to the style and standards referenced in this guide will help us meet this objective. By conveying a consistent voice and tone, we will cultivate trust and promote conversation with our audience as we support their informational needs and engage them with the Oberlin brand and experience.

Maintaining Your Style Guide

A style guide is not intended to be a static record. Rather, it is a living document that may change as both organizational standards and communications best practice evolve. With that in mind, we recommend that the style guide be maintained in a manner that prioritizes accessibility to the community and updates as warranted:

- House the style guide online (website, intranet, etc.) so there is one universally accessible version. This avoids the problem of “version control” across various outdated PDFs that may be linked across the website or lingering on individuals’ hard drives. (*Note: While this style guide deliverable is delivered in PDF format for review, we do not recommend this document as the final format for internal distribution.*)
- Solicit suggested updates from members of the community (e.g. content editors, stakeholders).
- Regularly review and, if necessary, update the style guide to be sure it is appropriately serving communicators across campus while reflective university standards and best practices.
- Widely communicate any changes to the campus community; consider doing this through an in-person event as well as electronically through established all-faculty/staff channels. This is also a good opportunity to remind people of the value and purpose of a style guide, and why it is important.
- Prominently feature the “last updated” date, as well as contact information for where to direct questions or suggestions.

Audiences

Primary website audience

- Prospective students/parents

Secondary website audiences

- Current students
- Faculty and staff
- Prospective faculty
- Alumni
- Donors and prospective donors
- Community and abutters

Voice, Tone, and Content Guidelines

About Voice and Tone

Voice is the consistent expression of the Oberlin identity, while *tone* is how we adjust our communication to be appropriate for specific contexts or audiences.

For instance, let's say two characteristics of your voice are to be approachable and helpful. On a page with financial aid content, our tone needs to be more serious in providing clear explanation, yet supportive and helpful given the potentially stressful and emotional context from which people may be experiencing that content.

Content about student clubs and activities, however, can be lighter, conveying more enthusiasm in inviting people to learn more about campus life.

In both instances, the institution represents itself as approachable and helpful, but the tone is considerate of the audience, the subject matter, and the context in which they both operate.

Brand Attributes

We are... but not...	Content Characteristics
<p>Community-oriented and supportive, not smothering or sacrificing individuality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First person POV (we; speak direct to audience “you” instead of “student” or “students”) -- warm, inclusive, welcoming, conversational ● When quoting or captioning students, always include attribution with name/year/major ● Use gender-neutral language ● Not sappy, sentimental, or saccharine ● Communicate to students like customers and peers, not children; don’t “mom” or patronize them - respect them ● Show warmth and caring by celebrating the community (accolades, success stories) ● Convey openness and accessibility through uncomplicated syntax and plain language ● Always provide a path for personal connection (e-mail, phone number, social media, etc.) ● Avoid dense, complex blocks of copy that can alienate a reader ● Ensure that important information and processes (e.g. admissions deadlines, financial aid application) are conveyed in approachable, clear language and an authentic, friendly and approachable human voice ● Balance attention to user needs and promotion of offerings but not presuming intentions/desires (“we’re the best fit for you”) – focus on validating user feelings, then informing, helping, and enlightening. ● Empower the user with active verbs (e.g. Find, Search, Explore, Get, Discover) and use active voice to reinforce clarity and a direct, proactive attitude ● Build trust through openness and clear communication; don’t be obtuse ● Our students are on individual journeys. Where appropriate, content should be helpful and contextualize multiple options, but not prescribe a single path. ● Don’t go for “cool” or slick – be down-to-earth ● Be careful when attempting humor; being funny online is much harder than it seems ● Reflect our multicultural community beyond race,

	<p>gender, ethnicity as a core strength and distinguishing feature of the community, across all content types</p>
<p>Passionately activist, not dogmatic or close-minded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect engagement with current issues and events, and action in the community ● Convey service and social justice less as an activity or event and more as a culture, lifestyle, or emphasis ● Whenever possible and appropriate, draw a relevant connection to real-world impact ● Write with warmth, humanity, and inclusiveness; do not be sanctimonious or self-righteous ● Focus on empowerment, not “fixing” problems ● Use active voice to reinforce clarity and a direct, proactive attitude ● Encourage, don’t command or be instructive ● Build trust through openness and clear communication; don’t be obtuse ● Our students are on journeys. Where appropriate, content should provide relevant options, but not prescribe a single path. ● Show compassion by not exhibiting judgment or pity, acknowledging difficult realities in our community ● Avoid being prescriptive or judgmental; focus on productive collaborations for social good ● Our actions are not brash, but thoughtful. Reflect process, outcomes and context around social engagement.
<p>High-achieving, highly regarded, preprofessional (Con), not competitive, exclusive, or stuffy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use plain language (avoiding academic jargon, slang, acronyms, pedagogical terms, and internal-facing process language) and syntax (while recognizing that not every sentence can be simple clauses) while striving for clarity ● Emphasize collaboration, partnerships, and group efforts ● Integrate relevant outcomes whenever possible/available ● Conversational language (we, you) ● Use contractions (“won’t” instead of “will not”) ● Use simple words, not bulky phrasing (e.g. “because” not “due to the fact that”) ● Maintain no higher than Grade 10 readability level ● Don’t be humble in factually communicating high caliber of Oberlin’s education

<p>Risk-taking, unconventional, and idealistic, not reckless or eccentric</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect people’s true journeys, including ups and downs, and unconventional paths and choices ● Don’t overuse weak words, such as “outstanding” or “exciting” – inform and describe meaningfully ● Be genuine and authentic; don’t make unsupported claims with language such as “the best” or “top-ranked”; avoid hyperbole ● Don’t be humble - take ownership, share stories, use active voice - but don’t be cocky ● Draw fact-based distinctions between Oberlin and the “norm” ● Appeal to emotions; validate with facts (recent statistics with date, quotes and testimonials with attribution, third-party accolades, outcomes) ● If you must, use exclamation points sparingly ● Emphasize the ability to discover, explore, experiment, and take prudent-risks ● Reflect the thoughtfulness, process, goals, and facts behind changes and new programs ● Use bold, active, dynamic verbs - discover, choose, do, find, get, seek, search, create, make, define
<p>Intimate, but not rural or sleepy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reflect sense of worldliness, relevance, and connection to issues of the day ● Emphasize qualities of Oberlin location - beautiful, small, progressive college town but less than 30 minutes from major urban center of Cleveland; regional context fosters opportunity, is not as a limiting factor ● Location and small community affords opportunity to focus on studies, without significant distractions ● Emphasize events (concerts, lectures) that bring the world to Oberlin, and programs (e.g. study abroad) that bring our community out into the world ● Emphasize community and sense of welcoming and inclusiveness while using crisp, active language and incorporating references to relevant events and programs to convey sense of energy ● Find opportunities to relate Oberlin’s impact on the community and the world

Sample content

Brand Headlines

More like this:

Let's change the world
The things you care about come alive at Oberlin
Create the future

Less like this:

An elite academic community
A community of knowledge
Be all that you can be

Call to Action

More like this:

Discover (Oberlin Abroad)
Explore (Our Co-Ops)
Browse Spring 2017 Courses

Less like this:

Read more
Learn more
Go

Process Copy

More like this:

Figuring out how to pay for college can be challenging. We can help.

Visiting Oberlin is easier than you think. We offer several types of tours and visit programs, and we are just 30 minutes' drive from Cleveland International Airport.

The deadline for submitting your application is November 30. We strongly encourage you to ensure you have all the components of your application collected and submitted well before that date - we don't want to miss the chance to get to know you.

Less like this:

Your application must be submitted by November 30 or you will be denied admission.

Want to visit Oberlin? Great! Come on down! We can't wait to welcome you to our tiny, quiet college town.

To apply for financial aid, you must submit the FAFSA. If you are an international student, you must complete the necessary paperwork confirming your ability to pay. If you are a transfer student, you must still complete the FAFSA.

Overview marketing copy

More like this:

Music is your passion. It's your calling. You want to commit your life to that passion, and we get it - we've been there. At Oberlin, you receive one-on-one instruction from our world-class faculty, helping bring that passion to new professional and personal heights.

We are driven to create, to learn, to dive into the world around us and figure out how to make it a better place.

We believe that diversity means dialogue. That's why we host several annual forums on race, gender, and other relevant issues. That's why we have executive-level leaders and student groups alike committed to fostering that dialogue and cultivating understanding across our community.

Less like this:

Our oboe program is one of the best in the country. You will be taught by the best instructors in the field. You won't believe where Oberlin can take you.

Diversity is important to Oberlin. Since our founding we have shown an ongoing commitment to diversity. This commitment shines through in everything we do.

At Oberlin, we are driven by our ideals. We let our passions guide our actions, unencumbered by convention, norms, or consequence.

Descriptive Copy

More like this:

Our study abroad programs give you the opportunity to enrich your learning through life-changing international experiences. You'll learn more than a new language or culture - you'll gain a truly global perspective that will forever influence your life.

Undergraduate research opportunities are essential to the study of science at Oberlin. Whether you are studying chemistry, biology, or physics, you will find opportunity to conduct research - and even publish or present - alongside faculty who are active scholars in their respective fields.

Oberlin is home to students from more than 50 countries around the world. The rich mix of cultures and views makes Oberlin an incredibly enriching place to learn and live. And we offer comprehensive support to help international students feel at home on campus.

Less like this:

Our undergraduate research facilities, which cost several million dollars, are the best in the Midwest. You will receive elite, personalized instruction from top scholars in the sciences. The best undergraduate scholars will receive opportunities to present and publish their research.

If a student wants to study abroad, he or she may choose from dozens of available programs across the globe.

International students are some of our favorite students to work with. We hold your hand every step of the way to ensure you meet every deadline and have a friend on campus by day one.

Language and Style

Highlights

- Use gender-neutral terms
 - Lowercase when possible
 - Use closed co-compound words (co-, multi-, pre- post-, -wide
 - coauthor, multiethnic, precollege, postdoctorate, citywide, campuswide, etc.
 - Hyphenate sparingly; close up prefixes unless they would otherwise confuse readers
 - No periods in academic degrees (BA, MA, PhD, BMus, MME, ...)
 - Capitalize course titles
 - When referring to the institution, do not capitalize the words "college, institution, institute, conservatory, program," etc., unless using the full official name. Lowercase these words if standing alone
 - Use Dr. when referring to a medical doctor; if necessary, use PhD after a name for one with a doctorate degree
 - John Green, PhD, of Mercyhurst College
 - Capitalize academic and professional titles when they appear immediately before a name. Lowercase these titles when they are used alone or when set off from a name with commas:
 - Professor of Art Jane Smith
 - John smith, professor of art
 - art professor John Smith
 - lawyer Jan Smith
 - Director of Admissions Mary Smith
 - The director of admissions spoke to guidance counselors
- *for person with multiple academic appointments, use the title most appropriate for the situation*

Additional resources

Use the Oberlin College Guide to Editorial Style and Usage in conjunction with the following resources:

- Chicago Manual of Style
- Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual

Oberlin College Guide to Editorial Style and Usage

The staff of the Office of Communications has compiled and published the "Oberlin College Guide to Editorial Style and Usage, to promote consistency in Oberlin College publications and

websites, especially to those going to external audiences. Employing one editorial style creates a consistent and professional voice for Oberlin, and assures our readers that the many materials they receive from us or view on the web are indeed coming from the same institution. The web has its own language, of which some terms are constant while others are fluid. However, the same editorial standards and guidelines for the written or printed word apply to the Internet.

You should use the Oberlin College Guide to Editorial Style and Usage in conjunction with the following resources:

- Chicago Manual of Style
- Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual

Additional language considerations

Students

first year (not freshman, freshmen), first-year student

second year or sophomore, second-year student

third year or junior, third-year student

fourth year or senior, fourth-year

double-degree student

fifth year, fifth-year student (although rarely used)

Academic

advisor not adviser

catalog

cocurricular

coursework

don't use e-mail as a verb; can stand alone in tabular format

no courtesy titles (other than obituaries)

- no Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms.; Dr. is for medical doctors
- use person's last name on second reference

The current list (with approved names) for all Oberlin academic programs (majors, minors, diplomas, etc.) are represented on the program listing pages for the college and conservatory.

Style samples:

- Department of Africana Studies or Africana studies department
- Department of Art, art department
- Cinema Studies Program, cinema studies

- Creativity & Leadership Project, Creativity & Leadership program
- Creative Writing Program, creative writing
- Gender Sexuality, and Feminist Studies Program, gender, sexuality and feminist studies program
- Peace and Conflict Studies Concentration, peace and conflict studies
- Jewish Studies Program, Jewish studies

Oberlin-specific style considerations

Idioms and “Obieisms” can build a sense of community in a story or blurb that targets current students or alumni but may be off-putting to site visitors or prospective students who don’t have the inside scoop or background. Use official names of people, buildings, and places for external audiences; shortened names for those within the campus community.

Oberlin-specific language usage

Latinx

Obie

Commencement/Reunion Weekend, CRW

Convocation, Convocation Series

Office of Winter Term, winter term, winter-term program, WT

First-Year Seminar Program, First-Year Seminar, FYSP

Experimental College, ExCo

Oberlin Students Cooperative Association, OSCA, co-op

fall semester

spring semester

College and Conservatory references

Oberlin College, college (if referring to both divisions)

- Conservatory of Music (official/formal); Oberlin Conservatory, conservatory
- College of Arts and Sciences (official/formal), arts and sciences
 - not College of Arts & Sciences
- Double Degree Program — capitalize title, in headline, on first reference
 - can lowercase on second and subsequent reference in running text:
double-degree program, double-degree student

Alumni

Alumni Association

alum/alums – not on first reference; informal usage

Class of 1950, Class of 2016

May Smith '16 (not Mary Smith OC '16)

Oberlin Acronyms

This list is not meant to be a complete list of all Oberlin acronyms and does not include the various acronyms for student clubs and organizations.

Campus Dining Services — CDS
Central Ticket Service — CTS
Center for Information Technology — CIT
Center for Learning, Education & Research in the Sciences — CLEAR
Center for Teaching, Innovation and Excellence — CTIE
Comparative American Studies — CAS
Comparative Literature — CL
Concert Production — ConPro
Conservatory — The Con
Cooper International Learning Center — CILC
(Office of) Environmental Sustainability — OES
East Asian Studies — EAS
Experimental College — ExCo
Firelands Association for the Visual Arts — FAVA
First Year Seminar Program — FYSP
Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies — GSFS
Multicultural Resource Center — MRC
Oberlin Bibliographic Information System — OBIS
Oberlin Center for Languages and Cultures — OCLC
Oberlin Center for Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies — OCREECAS
Oberlin Center for Technologically Enhanced Teaching — OCTET
Oberlin College Dialogue Center — (OCDC) former name; see YBCD
Oberlin College Mailroom — OCMR
Oberlin College Media Center — OCMC
Oberlin Public Interest Research Group — OPIRG
Oberlin Student Cooperative Association — OSCA
Office of Religious and Spiritual Life — ORSL
Personal Records for Employees and Students at Oberlin — PRESTO
Residential Education — ResEd
Resource Conservation Team — RCT
Science and Technology Opportunities for a New Generation — STRONG
Spanish in the Elementary Schools — SITES
Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics — STEM
Student Academic Services — SAS
Student Finance Committee — SFC
Technology in Music and Related Arts —TIMARA

(Office of) Undergraduate Research — OUR
Yerworkwha Belachew Center for Dialogue at Oberlin College — YBCD

Campus Building & Room Names

Adam Joseph Lewis Center (see Environmental Studies)

Afrikan Heritage House (see Lord-Saunders)

Allen Memorial Art Building

- Clarence Ward Art Library

Allen Memorial Art Museum

- Ellen Johnson Gallery
- Fisher Gallery
- John N. Stern Gallery
- King Sculpture Court
- Ripin Print Gallery

Allencroft (Russian House)

Apollo Theatre

- Apollo Outreach Initiative Workshop
- Burrows Theatre
- Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman Cinema Studies Center for Media Education and Production (See Cinema Studies)
- Goldring Theatre

Asia House (Quadrangle)

Athletic Fields and Facilities

- Dick Bailey Field (football)
- Robert K. Carr Pool
- Community Fitness/Cross Country Trail
- Culhane Field (softball)
- Dan Hunsinger Courts (tennis)
- Dill Field (baseball)
- Field Hockey Field
- Heisman Field House (indoor track and tennis)
- Robert Kahn Track
- Knowlton Athletics Complex
- Fred Shults Field (soccer and lacrosse)
- Williams Field House (practice facility)

Bailey House (French House)

Baldwin Cottage (Women's Collective and Third World Co-op)

Barnard House

Baron (Richard D.) '64 Art Gallery (See Dewy Ward '34 Alumni Center)

Barrows Hall

Bonner Center for Service and Learning (see Daub House)

Bosworth Hall

- Fairchild Chapel
- Development and Alumni Affairs

Burrell-King House (Conservatory of Music)

- Community Music School

Burton Hall

Campus Security Building (see Security Building)

Carnegie Building

- Financial Aid
- Office of Undergraduate Admissions
- Fowler Room
- Miller Room
- Root Room

Conservatory Annex

- Office of Conservatory Admissions
- Conservatory Communications

Conservatory of Music

- Bibbins Hall
- Central Unit
- Clonick Hall
- Clonick Recording Studio
- Bertram and Judith Kohl Building, Kohl Building
- Kulas Recital Hall
- McGregor Skybar, Lily Smith McGregor Skybar
- Robertson Hall
- David H. Stull Recital Hall, Stull Hall
- Warner Concert Hall

Counseling Center (see Professional Services Building)

Cox Administration Building

- Cass Gilbert Room
- Office of the President

Creative Writing Building (Yellow House)

Dascomb Hall

Daub House (Bonner Center for Service and Learning)

East Field Storage

East Hall

Edmonia Lewis Center for Women and Transgender People

Environmental Studies (Adam Joseph Lewis Center for (AJLC))

- Hallock Auditorium
- Living Machine

Fairchild House

Finney Chapel

Firelands

Firelands Association for the Visual Arts (FAVA)

French House (see Bailey House, la Maison Francophone)

German House (see Kade)

Hales Annex

- Billiard Room
- College Lanes, bowling lanes
- Cat in the Cream Coffeehouse

Hales Gymnasium

Hall Auditorium and Annex

- Central Ticket Service
- Hall
- Little Theater

Harkness House

Harvey House (Spanish House, La Casa Hispánica)

Heisman (John W.) Field House (see Athletic Fields and Facilities)

Hotel at Oberlin — Tappan Square

International House, The

Johnson House (Hebrew House)

Kade (German House, Max Kade German House, Deutsches Haus)

Kahn (Robert Lewis) Hall

Keep Cottage

King Building

Kosher Halal Co-op (see Talcott Hall)

Langston Hall (North Hall)

Lewis Annex

Lewis (Adam Joseph) Center for Environmental Studies (see Environmental Studies, AJLC)

Lewis House

- Office of the Ombudsperson/ Yerworkwha Belachew Center for Dialogue at Oberlin College
- Multifaith Center

Lord-Saunders (Afrikan Heritage House)

Mudd (Seeley G.) Center (Library)

- Azariah's Café
- Center for Information Technology
- Circulation/Stacks
- College Archives
- Help Desk
- Oberlin College main library
- Research Desk
- Scholar Studies/Late Study
- Special Collections

- Technology Store

Multifaith Center (see Lewis House)

Noah Hall

Old Barrows

Peters Hall

- Office of the Dean of Studies
- Paul & Edith Cooper International Learning Center, Cooper International Learning Center, Cooper language lab
- Study Away, International Student Services

Philips (Jesse) Physical Education Center

- Carr Pool
- Department of Athletics & Physical Education
- Weight rooms
- Climbing Wall
- Heisman Club Hall of Fame

Price (Third World House)

Professional Services Building

- Office of Communications
- Counseling Center
- Investment Office
- Student Health Services

Pyle Co-op (see Asia House)

Rice Hall

Russian House (see Allencroft)

Science Center

- Craig Lecture Hall
- Nancy Schrom Dye Lecture Hall (formerly West Lecture Hall)
- Science library
- Wright Laboratory of Physics

Security Building

Service Building (Ronald R. Watts)

- Human Resources
- Printing Services
- Office of the Controller

Severance Hall (Psychology)

South Hall

- Yu (Diane) Fitness Center

Spanish House (see Harvey House, La Casa Hispánica)

Stevenson Hall

- Career Center
- Conference Services
- Office of Residential Education, ResEd
- Stevenson Dining Hall

- ID Card Office
- Campus Dining Services

Wright Laboratory of Physics

Student Health Services (see Professional Services Building)

Talcott Hall

- Kosher Halal Co-op

Tank Hall

Tappan Square

- Clark Bandstand
- Fire Pit
- The Rock

Third World Co-op (see Baldwin Cottage)

Ward (Dewy '34) Alumni Center

- Alumni Association
- Richard D. Baron '64 Art Gallery

Warner Center

Watts, (Ronald R.) Service Building (see Service Building)

Weltzheimer-Johnson House

Wilder Hall

- Office of the Dean of Students
- DeCafé
- Dionysus Club ('Sco)
- Rathskellar (the Rat/Rath)
- Student Union
- Student Mailroom
- Wilder Information Desk, Wilder Desk

Wilder Bowl

Wright House, Frank Lloyd (see Weltzheimer-Johnson House)

Wright Laboratory of Physics

Yerworkwha Belachew Center for Dialogue at Oberlin College (See Lewis House)

Zechiel House

Message Architecture

A message architecture prioritizes strategic brand attributes and aligns them with communication goals to guide decision making for website content, design, and user experience. These themes don't represent actual copy, but rather the aspirational and foundational elements that cumulatively represent the key messages the website should reflect.

College

Oberlin is an open-minded, empowering community

- A place for finding and being yourself
- A place where you will find true, accepting friends and mentors

Our students are enthusiastically engaged with the community and world around them

- Richly diverse in their interests
- Focused, intelligent, and driven

A collaborative, student-driven learning environment

- First-rate instructors across a broad range of rigorous offerings
- Seeking to transform both our students and the world they inhabit through knowledge

Oberlin is a top-tier institution with a longstanding reputation for excellence

- An established tradition of exceptional liberal arts instruction and conservatory training
- Relishing our improvisational, progressive approach to education

Conservatory

Oberlin is a top-tier institution with a global reputation for excellence

- An established tradition of exceptional liberal arts instruction and conservatory training
- Relishing our improvisational, progressive approach to education

A collaborative, student-driven learning environment

- First-rate instructors across a broad range of rigorous offerings
- Equip students to succeed in the professional music world

Our students are enthusiastically engaged with the world around them

- Richly diverse in their interests
- Focused, intelligent, and driven

Oberlin is an open-minded, empowering community

- A place for finding and being yourself

- A place where you will find true, accepting friends and mentors

Visual Content Guidelines

Photography

- Photography as content
 - Use photography as purposeful content. It is better to not use a photo than to use one just to “flesh out” a page
- Layout and technical requirements
 - Horizontal orientation photographs typically work best on the web
 - Use photos taken in the proper resolution (72 dpi for web)
- Photography sources
 - Do not use photos to which you do not own the rights
 - Generally speaking, avoid the use of stock photography
- Photo subjects and setting
 - When planning photo shoots in advance, counsel photo subjects as to appropriate attire bright, neutral solid colors (no patterns; no white or black) are preferable.
 - Oberlin apparel is appropriate, in limited quantities
 - Capture interior spaces and details as well as exterior spaces and facades
 - Capture candid interactions between faculty, students, and staff; reflect the strength of the relationships that define our community
 - Show people engaged in their work or their learning, using the tools of their trade or in a defining space (e.g. lab, hospital, backstage)
 - Strive for candid environmental portraiture; stay away from “grip-and-grin” shots or portraits of individuals facing the camera
 - Show people relaxed in their respective elements, to reflect their confidence and approachability
 - Capture location-specific elements whenever possible (e.g. Chicago skyline or landmark in background)
 - Capture unique, iconic, or compelling spaces and backgrounds
 - Reflect diversity (ethnic, gender, cultural, age, race) as organically as possible staged shots tend to feel staged to the viewer
 - Ensure no brand logos or insignias are visible
 - Use natural light whenever possible; ensure all subjects are lit appropriately
 -
- Media caption style
 - By staff
 - Photograph by John Smith
 - By freelancer
 - Photograph by John Smith

- By current student or alum
 - Photograph by John Smith '17
- By faculty/staff
 - Photograph by John Smith, associate professor of history
 - Photograph by John Smith, dean of students
- By Source other than above or provided by other source
 - Photograph Courtesy of College Archives
 - Photograph Courtesy of Fast Sign Studios
 - Image (Graphic, Illustration, etc.) Courtesy of Price Graphics

Graphics

- Do not use clip art
- Do not use graphics gratuitously. They should communicate purposefully
- If using infographics, provide a text alternative at the bottom of the page
- Graphics and copy should work in complement to one another. They should not compete for attention or detract from one another
- Use properly cropped images at the appropriate resolution

Web Writing & Publishing Best Practices

If you only adhere to one guideline for writing on the web, it should be this: **write like a human**. We are writing for people, so our writing should be human in its tone, warmth, and structure. If you're unsure if your content fits these criteria, read your copy aloud to yourself or a peer. If it feels unnatural or clunky, consider further revision.

Be concise

- Follow the adage popularized by Strunk & White: "Omit needless words."
- Cut to the chase. Don't say more than you need to in order to convey your message or state the facts in an engaging, direct manner.
 - Don't waste your reader's time with clever prose or poetic language, as it only inhibits task completion and comprehension
 - Avoid meaningless phrases like "an innovative reputation for cutting-edge excellence"
 - Relatedly, a website does not require a welcome note, introduction, greeting or signature. A letter from a dean or other personality is not an appropriate web content type, especially as the homepage of a website. Such devices only serve as obstacles between your audience and the information they seek. Get out of the user's way.
- Use the active voice.
 - Encourage calls to action by using action verbs: read, donate, visit, search, apply, register, like, subscribe, submit, request, etc.
 - In addition to supporting more direct, assertive communication, it requires fewer words.
- Use simple words rather than complex words or bulky phrases wherever possible. This helps reinforce a genuine, conversational voice, as well as clarity of meaning. While we are an academic institution, on our website, we are communicating as approachable peers, not as verbose scholars.
 - given, not accorded
 - do, not accomplish
 - allow, not afford an opportunity
 - use, not utilize
 - plenty vs numerous
 - contact us vs please call us at
 - because, not on account of the fact that
 - show, not elucidate
 - need, not necessitate
 - See more examples at plainlanguage.gov
- Avoid jargon or overly technical terminology
- Use consistent terminology in how you refer to programs, degrees, etc.

- Avoid hackneyed phrases and idioms
 - “Get your ducks in a row”
 - “Bang for your buck”
 - “Cut from the same cloth”
 - “Get the ball rolling”
- Avoid unnecessary use of superlatives and adjectives (e.g. our exemplary research facilities, our one-of-a-kind internship program, our unique students) and instead let the qualities of these features speak for themselves.
- Avoid hyperbole or unsupported claims (e.g. we have the most successful students, our chemistry program is the best in the country) and instead use facts, data, and or rich, descriptive imagery to tell the story
- Aim for short sentences and paragraphs (~3 sentences), but don’t compromise meaning for length. Short may not always be feasible in order to communicate a thought effectively. Strive for clarity above all.
 - A good guideline is to limit yourself to one concept per sentence and one broader concept per paragraph.
- Avoid repetition. Repeating information only obscures your point, rather than reinforcing it.
- Be brief whenever possible. For complex or lengthy text such as disclosures, disclaimers, and instructions, write as concisely and clearly as possible, creating a hierarchy that distinguishes this content from other content on the page.
 - But don’t make page content so brief that the page loses value. A page should, as a general rule, have at least a paragraph’s worth of valuable, relevant information.

Use inclusive language and positively represent the concept of difference

- Refrain from identifying individuals by gender, nationality, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation unless that identification is essential to understanding the purpose of the content. Be mindful that you are not inadvertently using a discriminatory language or tone.
 - Remain gender-neutral
 - Avoid using gendered pronouns or establishing a gender binary. However, do not use a plural pronoun when the antecedent or object is singular. Reword to ensure that plural pronouns are used correctly (do not use “their” for singular pronouns).
 - UNACCEPTABLE: If the student gets lost, he should ask for directions.
 - ACCEPTABLE: If the students get lost, they should ask for directions.
 - UNACCEPTABLE: If the professor is late, s/he should apologize to the class.

- **ACCEPTABLE:** If the student is frequently late for class, the student may seek tutoring.
- With informal documents, use the second-person pronoun “you” (e.g. Submit your application to the history department)
- Transgender/spectrum pronouns should be indicated by the person’s preferred pronoun, but use the person’s name as much as possible with gender-neutral pronouns such as ne, ve, ze/zie and xe.
- To describe a mixed-gender group of graduates of the college, use “alumni.” Avoid configurations like “alumni/ae” and “alumnus/na.” “Alumnae” may be used when referring to a group of women graduates. “Alumni” is always plural. You may choose to use the increasingly common word “alum” to refer to a single alumnus or alumna.
- Avoid gender-based word choices

Avoid	Prefer
chairman, chairmen	chair, chairs
congressman, congresswoman	representative, congressperson
policeman	officer
foreman	supervisor
fireman	firefighter
coed	female student
stewardess	flight attendant
manmade	artificial
manned	staffed
manhunt	search
mankind	people
freshman	first-year student
minority	underrepresented

- Examples
 - **UNACCEPTABLE:** Each student should submit his/her application to the history department.
 - **ACCEPTABLE:** Submit your application to the history department
- Avoid words like “victim,” “crippled,” etc., and phrases like “confined to a wheelchair” or “suffers from” when writing about people with disabilities. People are not defined by their conditions. Please refer to the person first and the disability second.
- If necessary to use a racial distinction, don’t hyphenate ethnic groups, even when used as an adjective
 - African American, black
 - African American businessman

- Japanese American, Asian American
- Latino/Latina, Latin@ but at Oberlin: Latinx, not Hispanic (except for the major/department name)
- American Indian (or name of tribe if known)
- People of color (if referring to underrepresented groups), people of color, POC
- white (if used as a racial designation)
- underrepresented not minority if referring to people
- Avoid directional language (e.g. below, above, following, to the left) when referring to on-page content. We do this for three reasons:
 - In the context of a webpage, the page layout should make any content references intuitive
 - Such references will be irrelevant to individuals using screen readers or other alternative methods of reading a webpage
 - Depending on what device is used, what is “on the right” in one context may be “below” in another
 - Examples
 - UNACCEPTABLE: Select one of the payment options below:
 - ACCEPTABLE: Select your preferred method of payment:
 - UNACCEPTABLE: To register for classes, visit the “Course Schedule page” and on the menu to the right, click the third link.
 - ACCEPTABLE: Class registration opens March 15, 2016. Peruse the course schedule to begin planning your semester now.
- Use the first-person plural point-of-view (e.g. “we” “us” “our events”, “our students”) and speak directly to the target audience (e.g. “you” instead of “students”) to reinforce a conversational tone.
- Don't use time-dependent language because you don't know when that page will next be updated and the time reference will become irrelevant and confusing.
 - Examples
 - UNACCEPTABLE: Professor Smith started teaching here last year.
 - ACCEPTABLE: Professor Smith started teaching here in 2008.
 - UNACCEPTABLE: We recently opened a second coffee shop on campus.
 - ACCEPTABLE: We opened a second coffee shop on campus in February 2012.

Use contractions wisely

Prudent use of contractions (e.g. “won’t” instead of “will not,” “can’t” instead of “cannot”) reinforces concise writing and a contemporary, conversational tone.

Punctuation

Headlines, subheads, titles, bullets, and calls to action do not require end punctuation

- em dash (—): used to set off a thought or idea
 - Example: An internship is an excellent way to learn more about a field—and make connections that could lead to a job when you graduate
- en dash (–): used to represent a range of numbers, dates, or time.
 - Example: Professor Smith holds office hours on Wednesdays from from 10-11 a.m. (if in the same time period) OR 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- hyphen (-): used to create compound terms
 - Example: Even undergraduates have the opportunity to conduct research in our a state-of-the-art biotechnology facility.

Avoid exclamation points. Instead, use striking language that evokes a similar sense of surprise, excitement, or urgency.

Scannability

Visitors to your website are likely to only read about 20 percent of the words on the page. Thus, make your page scannable so visitors can take in more of the information.

- Avoid blocks of text that may confuse and alienate the reader, resulting in them bouncing off the page.
 - Use bullet points to break up a series of items into a readable list
 - Introduce a bulleted list with a complete sentence or a sentence fragment followed by a colon
 - Only end bulleted text with a period if it is a complete sentence
 - Capitalize the first word in each bullet
 - Use parallel sentence construction, beginning each bullet with the same part of speech

Example:

Sophomores can choose from three available research opportunities:

- Field research to Costa Rica
 - Lab fellowship at a local biotech firm
 - Independent study with a faculty member
-
- Write in short paragraphs (no more than one or two short sentences per paragraph).
 - This aids in not just readability, but comprehension

- Use headers and subheads with clear, descriptive text to break up text and guide reader as they scan through the page. Break up sections with headlines that are clear, useful and informative
 - Bad: Academic Options
 - Good: Complete List of Majors
 - Use header tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.) help create hierarchies
 - Note: Keyword placement in header tags is critical for SEO
- Break up text with relevant images
- Boldface relevant keywords (e.g. names of majors, deadlines, locations, dates), but do so sparingly
- Represent complex information in a table or chart

Text Formatting

There are generally two types of text:

- Body text
- Header or subheader text

The font style, size, color, and alignment of text is typically determined by the style sheets encoded into the website.

- Body text should be left-aligned, never centered or justified, with no hanging indents.
- The font should never be modified, except when applying header or subheader styles.
- Use boldface and italicized text sparingly. It can interrupt the reader's flow of scanning through page content, which is guided by headers, subheaders, and paragraph breaks. Typically, if you wish to emphasize a sentence, it is more effective to set it off as its own paragraph. The exception to this rule is that publication titles (books, film, music, etc.) should be italicized.
- Never underline, boldface or italicize a hyperlink
- Use capital letters appropriately. Never write a word or a full sentence in all caps, even for emphasis

PDF

PDF stands for Portable Document Format, and is a file type typically reserved for information designed for printing. PDFs are easy to create, and thus much content ends up posted to the web as a PDF (especially if it is already in a PDF for printing purposes).

However, PDFs are not always the right choice. PDFs have several disadvantages as a web publishing format that should be kept in mind before publishing important content (e.g. academic calendar, program requirements) in that format:

- Poor accessibility
- Poor usability
- Poor navigation
- Less findable than a web page
- More difficult to access from a mobile device
- Requires user to launch PDF reader program in browser
- Not editable, which leads to version control issues as updated documents are uploaded

Typically, a PDF should be reserved for a document that a user may need to print out (e.g. a form to fill out, a schedule meant for hanging on the wall, a promotional flyer for distribution).

If the content does not meet these criteria, adapt the content on a webpage instead of in PDF format.

When using a PDF appropriately, always follow a link to a PDF with [PDF] to designate it as such to the user.

FAQs

Instead of creating discrete FAQ pages that can segregate content from context and create a redundant user experience, address answers to common questions within the appropriate page context.

Linking

Links are the language of the web. While WYSIWYGs make it easy to hyperlink text, there is much more to consider when it comes to effective linking.

- Make links descriptive and actionable
 - The words “click here” have no value for search engines, or for users. Hyperlink actionable and descriptive words and phrases
 - e.g. "Apply for summer programs" or "View the event calendar"
- Indicate document type (MP3, PDF, MOV, PNG, etc.) if link goes to a non-HTML page (e.g. [Read the manual](#) [PDF])
- Don't clutter text with inessential hyperlinks, as they will distract the user's scanning eye and distract from taking desired actions

- Linking in body text should not replicate page navigation.
- Use keywords in linked text whenever possible without compromising meaning or clarity
- People use the web in a non-linear fashion. Links should not guide a sequential web experience. Links should be used to connect people to relevant information in context, regardless of where it may live on the web.

SEO Considerations

Meta description

- Describes the content found on your page
- Maximum of 150-160 characters
- Shows up in Google search results (good meta descriptions can boost traffic from search engine result pages (SERPs))
- Should be unique
- Echo keywords used in the title and meta keywords
- Balance use of keywords with compelling, descriptive language so both humans and machines can make sense of information
- Avoid quotes; stick to alpha-numeric characters

Page title

- Defines the title of your web document
- Less than 70 characters
- Shows up in Google search results and user's web browser title bar (it is also the default content for titling a bookmark)
- Use meaningful words; avoid vague acronyms with no first reference or context (e.g. "MCCM" for Master of Contemporary Chamber Music) that may alienate or confuse both the user and search engines, unless the acronym is commonly understood by the target audience (e.g. BA).
- Should be unique and adhere to a consistent sitewide format
- Echo keywords used in meta description and meta keywords
- Balance use of keywords with compelling, descriptive language so both humans and machines can make sense of information
- Place keywords near the front of your title.
 - Primary Keyword - Secondary Keyword | Brand Name

Keywords

- Informs search engines of search terms relevant to your topic
- Limit to 10-15 terms, compiled in a comma-separated list, with the most important keywords listed first
- Echo keywords found in the meta description and title.
- Do not repeat keywords within this list
- Meta keywords do not impact Google page rank (though they may be helpful to other search engines, e.g. Bing)

Headers

Use headers and subheads with clear, descriptive text to break up text and guide reader as they scan through the page

In HTML, there are different header tags that help your label, organize and create hierarchy around your content. The tags are h1, h2, h3, h4, h5 and h6. Each header has a distinct visual style that helps reinforce this hierarchy

- The h1 tag, as the first tag in the hierarchy, should contain the most relevant and defining information about your page to help people find it. (For example, “Minor in History at Oberlin” instead of “Explorations in History”)
- The h2 tag (secondary header) may appear only once at the top of the page.
 - h2 should use initial caps but never all caps
 - e.g. Requirements for Bachelor Degree in Economics
 - It should be worded differently from the h1 header already on your page, and it must apply to the entire page.
 - Example: h1 - Graduation; h2 - Deadlines for Graduation
- The h3 tag (subhead) only capitalizes the first letter
 - Example: Conservatory graduation requirements; Events calendar criteria
 - The h3 may be used on a page even when there is no h2 in use.
 - You may begin a page with an h3 subhead, but only if it is one of at least two that appear on the page
- The h4 tag (secondary subhead) may be needed on rare occasions in order to separate or break information that appears under a subhead into a number of easily scannable chunks of text.
 - If you find yourself needing to use h4 tags, revisit your content and consider if you are including too much information on a single page.

Other SEO considerations

- Do not create multiple instances of the same content or duplicate pages
- Always use alt text for images. This is good practice not just for accessibility considerations (e.g. visually impaired users), but also because alt text is searchable
- Use on-brand keywords within your text in order to attract relevant site visitors.