

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Style Guide

This style guide has been adapted from the guidelines set forth in the *University Relations' Style Guide for Written Documents* (www.branding.unirel.vt.edu/university_style.php) and notes specific rules and usage to be followed by college faculty and staff. It incorporates some aspects of the *Virginia Cooperative Extension Publications Style Guide*, which should be referred to for specific style guidelines for Extension publications.

This guide is a means to clarify and supplement what is currently being used within the university. For other general rules, use the *AP Stylebook* as first reference followed by *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

About Our Names

university

It is Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Never use an ampersand instead of “and.” Never use VPI&SU, VPI and SU, VT, or Virginia Tech University. Refrain from using VA Tech; it can be confused with other organizations.

Also, when using “university” to refer to Virginia Tech in text, lowercase the “u.”

Example: “The university is one of the land-grant institutions.”

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

It is the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Never use the acronym CALS. When the full name has been used on first reference in a document, subsequent references can be to “the college.”

Departments

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has 10 departments.

They are:

- Agricultural and Applied Economics
- Agricultural and Extension Education
- Animal and Poultry Sciences
- Biochemistry
- Biological Systems Engineering
- Crop and Soil Environmental Sciences
- Dairy Science
- Entomology
- Food Science and Technology
- Horticulture
- Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise
- Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science

The Department of Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise is the only exception to the serial comma rule. Whenever the phrase “human nutrition, foods and exercise” is used, there is NO serial comma after “foods.” This exception applies to all instances when the phrase is used whether it refers to the department, a program of study, or a person’s title.

Some departments use abbreviations or initials to shorten long names, e.g., PPWS for Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science. Spell out the department name on first reference and use the abbreviation afterward if desired. Do not use the ampersand symbol (&) within departmental names.

Wrong: Agricultural & Applied Economics

Right: Agricultural and Applied Economics

Other Units, Departments, Programs, and Centers

Spell out the center or program name on first reference and use the abbreviation/acronym afterward if desired.

- 4-H (never Four-H; preferred is 4-H Youth Development on first reference, 4-H thereafter)
- Agricultural Technology
- Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resources Information Technology (AHNR-IT)
- Alphin-Stuart Livestock Teaching Arena
- College Farm Operation
- Commercial Fish and Shellfish Technologies (CFAST)
- Family Nutrition Program (FNP)
- Fralin Biotechnology Center
- Hahn Horticulture Garden
- Institute for Biomedical and Public Health Sciences
- Office of Communications and Marketing
- Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIRE)
- Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion
- Virginia Bioinformatics Institute (VBI)
- Virginia Tech Center for Food and Nutrition Policy
- Virginia Tech Dairy Center
- Virginia Tech Pesticide Programs (VTPP)

Virginia Cooperative Extension

It is Virginia Cooperative Extension. Always capitalize “Extension” when it is used on second reference to denote Virginia Cooperative Extension or the national system. (It is also permissible to use VCE on second reference when the initials will not be confused with Virginia Correctional Enterprises.)

Wrong: Virginia Tech Extension

Wrong: Virginia Cooperative Extension Service

Wrong: The extension agent led the seminar.

Right: The Extension agent led the seminar.

Wrong: Representatives of the Extension Service attended the meeting.

Right: Representatives of Virginia Cooperative Extension attended the meeting.

4-H Educational Centers

There are six 4-H Educational Centers:

- Northern Virginia 4-H Educational Center
- Jamestown 4-H Educational Center
- Airfield 4-H Educational Center
- W.E. Skelton 4-H Educational Conference Center at Smith Mountain Lake
- Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Conference Center
- Southwest 4-H Educational Center

District Offices

There are six VCE District offices:

Northern, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest, Central, and Southeast

All are referred to as “Virginia Cooperative Extension [*name of office*] District Office”

Right: Virginia Cooperative Extension Northern District Office

Unit Offices

There are 107 VCE county/city offices:

All county offices are referred to as “Virginia Cooperative Extension [*name of office*] County Office”

City offices drop the word “county” and are referred to as “Virginia Cooperative Extension [*name of office*] Office”

Wrong: Page County Extension Office

Right: Virginia Cooperative Extension Page County Office

Right: Virginia Cooperative Extension Richmond Office

Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station

The name of the agency is the Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station. When referring to the agency, there is no “s” at the end of the word “station.” The acronym VAES may be used on second reference. The phrase “the Experiment Station” may be used on second reference.

Wrong: The Virginia Agricultural Experiment Stations perform research on crops.

Right: The Virginia Agricultural Experiment Station performs research on crops.

Right: Many of the state’s research and Extension centers perform research on crops.

Agricultural Research and Extension Centers

There are 13 Research Centers. Most center names include the words “Agricultural Research and Extension Center” and may be referred to on second reference with the abbreviation “AREC.” Two centers, however, should not use the abbreviation “AREC” – Reynolds Homestead and Southwest Virginia Aquaculture.

The centers are:

- Shenandoah Valley Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Middleburg Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Northern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Eastern Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Eastern Shore Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Southwest Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Reynolds Homestead Forest Resources Research Center
- Southern Piedmont Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Tidewater Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center
- Southwest Virginia Aquaculture Research and Extension Center

Official Extension Materials

When referring to numbered items produced by VCE the title of the item comes first set in italics followed by its VCE designation.

Publications and other written materials: *Title*, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 000-000

Breeze presentations: *Title*, Virginia Cooperative Extension Macromedia Breeze presentation 000-000

Abbreviations

acronyms

Avoid acronyms whenever possible. When they must be used, always spell out names first. Also see “About Our Names” section.

a.m. and p.m.

Use lowercase with periods.

states

Spell out when state names stand alone. Use AP abbreviations when used with the name of a city in text. Use the two-letter postal abbreviations only in complete mailing addresses with zip codes.

Wrong: The road runs through the Va. valleys.

Wrong: Ask your local VA Cooperative Extension office.

Right: Ask your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office.

Right: Our agents worked with those in Maryland.

Right: The university located at College Park, Md., assisted.

Right: Send it to John Doe, 123 Any Lane, Thistown, VA 24123.

United States

Spell out when used as a noun. Abbreviate with periods and without spaces when used as an adjective.

Wrong: He came to the U.S. to get an education.
Right: He came to the United States to get an education.
Right: Extension is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

U.S. Department of Agriculture

USDA without periods or spaces on second reference.

Virginia

Use the full name. Never use VA as an abbreviation for Virginia except in complete addresses that include zip codes.

Capitalization

The preference is to downstyle. When in doubt, don't capitalize a word.

books and journals

Spell out the full names of books and journals cited as references

Wrong: *J Fun Res*

Right: *The Journal of Fungible Resources*

Commonwealth of Virginia, the commonwealth (the state, when used informally)

departments

Department of Entomology (but entomology department).

regions

Northern Virginia, Southwest Virginia (but southwestern Virginia), Tidewater, Southside, Eastern Shore, Piedmont, Northern Neck. (Do not use Nova, NoVa, or NOVA under any circumstances as an abbreviation for Northern Virginia.)

titles

A title preceding a person's name is uppercased. The title is lowercased when it stands alone or follows a person's name. This includes professor, assistant professor, and associate professor, which is an exception to AP.

Right: Dean Sharron Quisenberry

Right: Sharron Quisenberry, dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Right: The dean spoke at the faculty meeting.

Symbols and Numbers

percent

Spell out in text, repeating the word if a range is being described.

Do not spell out the figure in percentages.

Wrong: More than 30% of the students were below average.

Wrong: Fewer than five percent of students own airplanes.

Wrong: The tuition remission will be between 15 and 40 percent.

Right: The tuition increase will be between 5 percent and 10 percent.

Note: Use % in tables and charts.

pounds, feet, inches

Use the words rather than the symbols (#, ', ") except in tables.

Spell out or use figures?

Follow the *AP Stylebook*: Spell out whole numbers one through nine; use figures for 10 and above. Fractions standing alone are spelled out. For fractions with whole numbers, use figures.

Right: She has eight cats and 11 dogs. About one-fifth of her salary goes to buy 2 1/2 tons of pet food each year.

The exceptions to this rule are age and recipes.

Right: She is 6 years old. She has a 5-year-old cat.

Right: 1/2 c sugar

telephone numbers

Preferred: 202/555-4832

Acceptable: (202) 555-4832

Unacceptable: 202/555/4832

Unacceptable: 202-555-4832

Unacceptable: 202.555.4832

Extensions: 202/555-4832 ext. 123

Punctuation

The serial comma and semicolon are preferred. Placing a comma or semicolon before a conjunction (and, or) helps the reader keep items grouped correctly.

Right: The three things you need for gardening are soil, plants, and time.

Right: The authors are Jane Doe, professor, Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology, and Weed Science; Joe Roe, assistant professor, Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise; and Zoe Bow, graduate student, Department of Agricultural Economics.

There is one exception to this rule, the Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise (See Departments under College of Agriculture and Life Sciences above.)

articles and chapters: Use quotation marks. "How I Spent My Career at Virginia Tech"

books/videos: Names of journals, books, publications, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, reports, and videos should be italicized.

hyphens

land-grant university, yard-waste compost (As a general rule, all compound modifiers should be hyphenated.)

highly developed (no hyphen with adverbs ending in “ly”)

nonprofit, postgraduate, preadmission (no hyphen with non-, pre-, post-, sub-, etc., compounds)

Exceptions:

When the second word in a pair is capitalized; e.g., non-English.

Numbers; e.g., pre-1954.

Re-create when used to mean create again; recreate is an awkward verb meaning to take part in recreation.

When the last letter of a prefix is the same as the first letter in the second word, use a hyphen; anti-intellectual, pre-existing.

other punctuation examples

Proper names ending in “s”

Singular possessive: Davis’ (apostrophe alone)

Plural: Davises

Plural possessive: Davises’

M.S.’s, Ph.D.’s (plurals)

Plural of a single letter: A’s, B’s

Decade as a noun: The 1990s were a profitable time. The ’90s saw a rise in enrollment.

Decade as a possessive: His thesis discusses the 1990s’ cultural changes.

Computer Terms

CD-ROM

chat room

database

desktop publishing (DTP)

download

e-mail (singular and plural)

homepage

HTML

Internet (also, the Net)

keyboard

laptop

logon, login, logoff

megabyte (abbreviated MB or mb)

mouse (plural: mice or mouses)

multimedia

online

upload

URL (full caps)

World Wide Web (also, the Web)
website (one word)

e-mail and Web addresses: In body copy, italicize e-mail and Web addresses. The preferred style for Web addresses that start with the protocol “http://” is to leave the protocol off if it is followed by “www.” Do use “http://” if it is not followed by “www” and do use the protocol if it is something other than “http://.” Individuals can opt to always use the protocol as long as they are consistent within a publication.

When a Web address ends a sentence, finish with a period.

Verb Tense

to say: In magazine-type publications (*Innovations, Solutions*), use the present tense “says.” In newsletters, news releases, and departmental newsletters as well as Connections, use the past tense “said.”

Odds and Ends

gender-specific language

Avoid unless intended. For example, never assume someone is male (or female). A professor should always control his classes. Better: Professors should always control their classes. If at all possible, avoid the awkward singular noun and plural pronoun solution to the problem of unknown gender.

Awkward: When the shopper opens their account.

Better: When a shopper opens an account.

Better: When the shoppers open their accounts.

chair/chairman: Use chair to refer to the head of a committee unless the official title is chairman or chairwoman.

Right: Who did they elect as chair of the committee?

Right: Chris Smith, chairwoman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Subcommittee, gave her opening remarks.

ZIP code: The internal postal code used by Virginia Tech must not be used as a plus-4 ZIP code extension in addresses. Currently, there are no plus-4 zip code extensions established for non-residential university buildings, and the internal postal code is not recognized by the U.S. Postal Service. In fact, its use as a ZIP code extension can actually impede the timely delivery of mail. Instead, use the internal code as an extension on the second address line and place in parentheses.

Wrong:

Elmer Fudd

301 E. Media Bldg.

Virginia Tech

Blacksburg, VA 24061-0109

Right:
Elmer Fudd
301 E. Media Bldg. (0109)
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, VA 24061

University Buildings/Locations/Landmarks

Refer to the list of university buildings and locations for their official names:
www.branding.unirel.vt.edu/university_style.php

September 2008