

# Common PRR Grammar Questions Answered from the Editorial Style Guidelines

## abbreviations and acronyms

Acronyms that appear as main entries in the dictionary can generally be used without first spelling them out (e.g., HTML, IQ, NASA). Other acronyms that are used more than once in a given piece of writing — such as a web or magazine article, a brochure, a letter, etc. — should be spelled out the first time they are used, with the acronym given in parentheses immediately afterward (a departure from AP style). Use the acronym on second and subsequent references.

## adviser/advisor

AP style calls for the word to be spelled “adviser,” and NC State follows that style except when referring to academic advisors. Here are examples of correct usage of both styles:

The governor conferred with her advisers before presenting her budget proposal.

NC State's academic advisors help students graduate on time.

## ampersand (&)

AP style dictates that the ampersand generally should not be used in place of “and,” and NC State style follows this rule. You should only use an ampersand when:

It is part of an organization's official name — Procter & Gamble, Wheeling & Lake Erie Railway

It is part of a publication name or composition title — the magazine *Garden & Gun*, the book and movie *Marley & Me*

It is a generally accepted abbreviation listed in the dictionary: B&B, R&B

## capitalization

In general, avoid unnecessary use of capital letters. Words are not capitalized just because somebody considers them important. Capitalize words in these categories:

Proper nouns (the proper name of a person, place or thing) — Debbie Yow, Raleigh, NC State University, Reynolds Coliseum, the Bulletin, the Department of Materials Science and Engineering

Personal titles immediately preceding a person's name — Chancellor Woodson, Coach Keatts

Personal titles following a name in a formal or ceremonial list — Warwick Arden, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

## commas

NC State follows AP style with respect to comma usage. To quote the *AP Stylebook*: “Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series.”

**Correct:** I'm taking courses in English, accounting and entomology.

**Incorrect:** The cafeteria served pizza, lasagna, and salad.

However, if the final element of a series includes a conjunction, then to prevent confusion it's best to put a comma before the concluding conjunction in the series.

**Correct:** I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast.

To ensure clarity, it's sometimes appropriate to use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series of complex phrases.

**Correct:** We must ask ourselves whether the strategic plan meets the needs of current and future students, whether it can be implemented with the resources available to us, and whether its success can be accurately measured.

## departments

When using a department's formal name, be sure to capitalize appropriately: the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. When referring to the department generically or informally, only capitalize proper nouns: the agricultural and resource economics department, the English department.

**Correct:** The Department of Mathematics is hiring new faculty.

**Incorrect:** The Math Department is hiring new faculty.

## **NCSU**

Do not use NCSU to refer to NC State University in any way, regardless of whether the communication in question is internal or external.

This rule stems from market research the university conducted in the 2000s to gauge public name recognition of "NCSU" vs. "NC State." This research discovered that "NC State" was recognized across the United States, but "NCSU" was not well known or well understood outside the South. To position NC State as a nationally prominent university, strengthen our name recognition and make our brand more cohesive, we eliminated "NCSU" from our communications.

To help members of our community get in the habit of using on-brand terminology, we prefer that people refrain from using NCSU even in internal communications with a more private audience, such as emails within the university or on platforms like Slack.

## **North Carolina State University**

"North Carolina State University at Raleigh" is the full, official name of our institution and may be written when explicitly required on official documents. Writers and editors should otherwise avoid using this name because of the implication that another branch of North Carolina State University exists in another city.

"North Carolina State University" is one of the two preferred forms of the university's full name. This form should be used on first reference in news releases and formal or ceremonial texts; and in other situations when a more formal tone is appropriate.

"NC State University" is the other preferred form of the university's full name. This form should be used on first reference in material aimed at high school students and undergraduates, most advertisements and other situations when a more familiar tone is appropriate.

"NC State" is the preferred second reference in all situations, mainly used as a noun (e.g., "Welcome to NC State"). Because "university" is missing from this short form, be careful when using it as an adjective; i.e., "NC State Department of . . ." may be confused with a department of the government of the state of North Carolina.

"The university" is an acceptable third reference.