

Style sheet for quick reference (internally)

TITLES AND DEGREES

Titles of staff and faculty: In most cases, put title after the name and lower case. For instance: Barbara Rossing, professor of New Testament. When titles are before a name, capitalize: President James Nieman.

Deacon is the title for what were formerly associates in ministry and diaconal ministers; the deaconess is also referred to as deacon. Members of the Deaconess Community of the ELCA use sister unless the individual prefers deacon.

Pastor or Rev., Dr., the Rev. Dr., Professor in front of names? In more formal communication, such as letters, certainly the author of the letter may choose to do so. But not in the Epistle magazine and even less so on social media, where we use a more casual style (sometimes we may even refer to a person as a faculty member or professor rather than full title, which can be quite long). In formal communication, don't use "the Rev. Dr." unless the doctorate is an earned degree (reference ELCA guide).

Titles of books and periodicals (magazines and journals) are put in italics. Articles within are in quotation marks. No underlining!

Graduate year and degree. We do not put an apostrophe in masters degree, and we do not put periods in degree abbreviations: MDiv, not M.Div. When referencing graduates, in the Epistle magazine for instance, put the year and degree in parenthesis after a person's name: Angela Khabeb (2009, MDiv).

COMMON PUNCTUATION

One space between sentences. Periods and commas always go on the inside of quotation marks. Colons and semicolons always go outside quotation marks unless the punctuation applies to quoted material. Question marks or exclamation marks go inside the quotation mark only if the quoted material is the question or exclamation. (See further instructions in detailed style guide). Use exclamation marks sparingly!

URL, WWW. We no longer need www in front of a website.

Spell out numbers nine and below. Exception: ages are always numerals; also length of time.

Months, dates, years and commas. Abbreviate months when used with a date (Feb. 25, not February 25). When using a month, date, year, a comma follows the year (We will meet Nov. 2, 1998, at the hall.). When the month and year are used alone, spell out the month and do not separate with a comma (November 1998). When writing month, date, year, or just month and date, abbreviate all months other than March, April, May, June and July. Always use figures without the ending -st, -nd, -rd, or -th: “Jan. 1, 2009,” not “Jan. 1st, 2009.” (See more guidance in ELCA Style Guide)

States are abbreviated when used with a city: Chicago, Ill., and have a comma on each side of the abbreviated state when used within a sentence. In most of our communication, we do not use postal code state abbreviations.

a.m. and p.m. are lowercase and include periods.

Serial punctuation/Oxford comma. Do not use a comma before the conjunction in a simple series (e.g., a, b and c): They bought apples, bananas and cherries. **However:**

- If a serial comma would help with clarity, insert it: We had juice, cereal, and ham and eggs.

- Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: The judges in the contest considered the originality of the submission, the creativity of the content, the illustrations, and the compliance with the stated theme.

Use acronyms sparingly; write out on first reference. An exception to this is if the acronym is commonly used by the audience, such as: ELCA, LGBTQ+, AA, MDiv, etc.

A final, guiding principle: We recognize that style standards will change whether communicating in a formal way (a letter from the president) or informal (marketing material, social media, emails or the Epistle newsletter). For instance, we frequently use first names on second reference in Facebook Posts. But we don't in the Epistle magazine, which follows a journalism (AP) style. This document will help us stay consistent with our communications.

Excerpts from the [ELCA style guide](#)

A

acronyms. Generally, do not use acronyms, exceptions are ELCA (unless being used in external communication on first reference), acronyms in common usage for versions of the Bible.

African American (adj.) Don't hyphenate (exception to AP Stylebook). The usage of the cultural-ethnic background of people who were transplanted to the Americas (by immigration or by slave trade) is preferred, rather than referencing skin color. This usage affirms the rich ethnic traditions from which people have come rather than simply indicating skin color or a perceived skin color. Since members of some ethnic groups use different terms when referring to themselves, if possible ask them how they would like to be identified.

ages. Always use numerals; hyphenate ages used as adjectives: A 5-year-old girl painted it. The book was written for 3-year-olds.

a.m., p.m. Lowercase, with periods

C

catholic/Catholic Lowercase when referring to the universal church: I believe in ... the holy, catholic church. Capitalize when it refers to a specific Catholic Church such as the “Roman Catholic Church”; or “Eastern Catholic Church.”

Christian church Note that “church” is lowercase.

church/Church • Lowercase in instances such as “the early church,” “the Lutheran church,” “the church (building),” “church founders,” “church school”

- Do not use “church” when you mean “congregation: Our congregation has many young members. not “Our church has many young members.”
- Capitalize only when referring to a specific church: “St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church.”

comma

- With dates: in full dates, a comma follows the year: On Nov. 8, 1998, the Committee on the Rightful Place of Commas will meet. When only the month and year are listed, don’t use a comma, as in “November 1998.”
- With Junior, Senior, II, III: no comma is used between the surname and these designations: Benjamin V. Washington Jr., executive assistant to the bishop, met with us. Joseph J. Olson III, executive assistant to the bishop, was absent.
- With states and countries: a comma follows the name of a state in city-state or city in city-country references in text: The meeting

was held in Columbus, Ohio, at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. They visited Geneva, Switzerland, while on their vacation in Europe.

D

dash AP Stylebook uses only one type of dash, the em dash; it is used in the following circumstances:

- Abrupt change in thought or an emphatic pause.
- Attribution at the end of a quotation, followed by the author's name. Note: a space both precedes and follows the dash; exception an en (–) or em (—) dash is used in some biblical citations which encompass more than one chapter. see biblical references.

dates • Always use figures without the ending -st, -nd, -rd, or -th: “Jan. 1, 2009.”

- When the month and year are used alone, spell out the month and do not separate with a comma: “November 1998.”
- When using a full date (month, date, year), or just month and date, abbreviate the months Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.: “Nov. 2, 1998,” but “July 4, 2011”; and “Nov. 2” but “July 4.”
- When using a full date (month, date, year) in the middle of a sentence, a comma follows the year: “We will meet Nov. 2, 1998, at the hall.”

E

ellipsis Three dots used to indicate, in quoted copy, that some material was purposely left out.

- In general, treat an ellipsis as a three-letter word, constructed with three periods and two spaces: “Therefore we are to ... gladly act according to his commandments.”
- If the quoted material before the ellipsis makes a complete sentence, place a period at the end of that text before the space and

the ellipsis: “I am the Lord your God. ... I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”

- If the quoted material before the ellipsis does not make a complete sentence, retain any punctuation that follow the last word before the material being left out: “Our Father in heaven, ... now and forever. Amen.”

ethnic, national and racial group references

- Avoid using the term “minority” when referring to ethnic, national or racial groups.
- Usage of the cultural-ethnic background of people is preferred rather than reference to categories of color. This affirms the rich ethnic traditions from which people have come rather than simply indicating skin color or a perceived skin color.
- Take care when using terms that identify people by their skin color, ethnicity or nation of origin. Each group of people has its own history, culture and heritage. Because members of some ethnic groups use different terms when referring to themselves, if possible ask them how they would like to be identified.

eucharist/Eucharist The celebration of the word of God and the meal of bread and wine; capitalize only when referring to the title of the specific rite in a publication, often accompanied by a source citation; “communion” or “Holy Communion” is often preferred.

F

full time if used as a noun, it is two words: She works full time. As an adjective, it should be hyphenated: The company has 99 full-time employees.

H

headlines in all resources should be styled with first word capitalized, all other words lowercase.

I

Islam is the name of the religion; “Muslim” refers to a person who adheres to Islamic practices.

J

Jesus’ is the possessive form for “Jesus.”

Jew Do not use unless referring to the first people living in Judah when the Israelites were divided into the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah. After the Babylonian captivity, all descendants of Abraham were called Jews. Since the Jews were God’s chosen people, Paul sometimes spoke of a true Jew as being anyone who pleases God. Note: it is inaccurate to use as a blanket term for those who doubted or persecuted Jesus. see Jewish people Jewish people Use when referring to the contemporary situation. do not use “the Jews”

junior, senior No comma between the last name of the individual and the abbreviation “Jr.,” “Sr.” or a generation indicator such as “III”: Martin Luther King Jr. John F. Kennedy Sr. John Anderson III

L

Latino (m. or collective); **Latina** (f.) Preferred over “Hispanic.” Use a more specific identification when possible, such as Cuban, Puerto Rican or Mexican American. Since members of some ethnic groups use different terms when referring to themselves, if possible ask them how they would like to be identified

LGBTQ and LGBTQIA+ Acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer” and “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexuality +(stands for all of the other sexualities, sexes and genders that aren’t included in these letters). Both can be used on first reference without full explanation, especially in headlines, if the audience will understand the usage. Preferred

because it indicates the diversity of the community. Note, also the following usages: “gay man”; “bisexual woman or man”; “transgender person.”

lists in running text are two types: The list contains bulleted items that are complete sentences. Use a colon with bullets, numbers or symbols; capitalize the beginning of each bulleted sentence and end each with a period. Example: With your own illustrations, show how: • Listening is active. • Attitude is important. • Silence is golden. The list is like a “grocery” list. Use a colon with bullets, numbers or symbols; lowercase/capitalize as needed, but no other punctuation is necessary. Example: Include the following information: • name • address • day and night phone numbers • spouse’s name • Social Security number

Lutheran Center, the building that houses the churchwide organization, should not be referred to as “the ELCA.”

Lutheran church capitalize “Church” only as part of a corporate title: “Faith Lutheran Church.” Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, use an em dash when spelling out the denominational name.

M

missional Avoid usage in public documents; describe what is meant in clear adjectival terms instead. Exception: Missional Leadership Centers.

N

nonprofit No hyphen.

nonsexist language

• Avoid using terms that unnecessarily specify someone’s gender, such as “chairman” or “prophetess”; in most cases, “chair” or “prophet” can be used instead.

- Avoid sexism by using nongender-specific language such as “humanity” or “humankind” instead of “mankind,” except when directly quoting from an original source.

numbers/numerals

- In general, do not begin a sentence with a numeral; spell out a number at the beginning of a sentence or rewrite the sentence.
- Spell out the first nine cardinal and ordinal numbers when used in text: There were eight applicants. She was the sixth spelling bee contestant.
- Use figures for numbers above nine: The table was set for 10. There were 50 in the audience.
- These “spell out” and “use figures” rules above do not apply to ages, figures in headlines, figures containing decimals, statistics, results of voting, percentages, sums of money, times of day, days of month, latitude and longitude, degrees of temperature, dimension, measurements and proportion, numbers that are part of titles, or sports points
- Spell out large numbers: They planned to raise \$2 million.
- With four digits, use a comma in the number, as in “2,000,” except in reference to a year: “A.D. 2000”
- Do not use “firstly” or “secondly”; use “first” and “second”
- Use numerals for both % and percentages: 2% 3.75% 0.6% 10 percentage points • Use numerals to express age: 5 years old 32-year-old
- Fractions should be written out and hyphenated: two-thirds three-fourths.

P

percent AP style changed its guideline on percent in 2019. Using the symbol % is now permissible in running text. Use numerals, not words, for the quantity expressed: “4%,” “0.6%.” Use % if quoting interest rates, statistics or in fundraising materials in charts/lists.

person/people Plural form of person is “people,” not “persons.” Exception: use “persons” only for the voting category: “persons of color or language other than English”; or in other constitutionally mandated instances; or in reference to the triune God: “God in three persons.”

Paschal Triduum Prefer “the Three Days.”

Passion, the Capitalize when referring to a day: “Sunday of the Passion”; a portion of Scripture: “the Passion narrative”; or the suffering of Jesus: “the Passion of Christ.” Passion Week Prefer Holy Week.

pastor Usage should be “pastor of First Lutheran” not “pastor at First Lutheran.” see clergy titles;

Q

quotation marks and punctuation Periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks; colons and semicolons always go outside quotation marks unless the punctuation applies to quoted material. Question marks or exclamation marks go inside the quotation mark only if the quoted material is the question or exclamation. Exception: place period after the citation for quotations of Scripture or ELCA constitutional provisions, bylaws or resolutions: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son” (John 3:16).

R

rostered leader Do not use. Rostered minister replaces rostered leader, includes ministers of Word and Service and ministers of Word and Sacrament.

S

same-gender (adj.) Do not use “same-sex”: This law protects same-gender couples.

scripture(s)/Scripture Capitalize when meaning the Bible or any portion of it: The pastor quoted various portions of Scripture in his sermon. Lowercase when referring to the sacred writings of a religious group: “the Hindu scriptures.”

serial punctuation Do not use a comma before the conjunction in a simple series (e.g., a, b and c): They bought apples, bananas and cherries. however:

- If a serial comma would help with clarity, insert it: We had juice, cereal, and ham and eggs.
- If any of the series terms themselves have a comma in them, use semicolons to separate: She was accompanied by her daughter, Jane, from Des Moines; her cousin, Alice, from Chicago; and her aunt Bernice, from Minneapolis.
- Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: The judges in the contest considered the originality of the submission, the creativity of the content, the illustrations, and the compliance with the stated theme.

state names

- in running copy, spell out state names when used alone in a sentence: I grew up in Minnesota. note: State names should be abbreviated when a city is also mentioned: I grew up in Small Town, Minn.
- A comma follows the name of a state in city-state references and follows the name of a country in city/country references in text: The meeting was held in Chicago, Ill., at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. The tour included Hamburg, Germany, among other European cities.

- If using an abbreviation, do not use postal codes (e.g., MN) in running text; the U.S. Postal Service’s abbreviations for the 50 states are designed to aid sorting of mail by machine; they should not be used in copy unless within the context of an address. see Appendix 3 for a list of state abbreviations and postal codes

T

time • Use numerals except for noon and midnight.

- Lowercase a.m. and p.m.

- Avoid redundancies: write We will meet at 7 p.m. today. not “We will meet tonight at 7:00 p.m.”

- Use numerals to express length of time: Allow 2 minutes for discussion.

titles of compositions includes book titles, magazine titles, movie titles, opera titles, play titles, album titles, radio and television program titles. Use italic type; capitalize principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters; capitalize articles or words of fewer than four letters if it is the first or last word in a title. Use roman type and italics for chapter titles, hymn titles, documents. Exceptions per AP Style include the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material (e.g., almanacs, directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, gazetteers, handbooks and similar publications).

U

United States/U.S. Spell out if used as a noun; preferred use of abbreviation is as an adjective; use periods and no space between letters: “U.S. Senate.”

URL/URLs Acronym for uniform resource locator, an Internet address.

- In running text or HTML e-blasts, use roman type, no italics, capitalize ELCA in promotional items. Go to www.ELCA.org/globalmission for more information.
- when the URL stands alone, and is not intended to be hyperlinked, use roman type, no underscore, no “www”:
ELCA.org/globalmission
- Avoid, if possible, listing a URL at the end of the sentence. If there is no way to rewrite, add ending punctuation; do not add a space between the URL and the ending punctuation.
- When the URL breaks at the end of a line of copy, do not add any punctuation, such as a hyphen, lest that hyphen be taken as part of the URL; try to break the URL in a logical place: between words, after existing punctuation, and the like.

V

vacation Bible school Only the word Bible is capitalized. Same with Sunday school.

W

web addresses prefer “URL.”

website One word, no hyphen; lowercase.

White (adj.) Exception to AP Stylebook: capitalize when referring to a group: White Americans Similar style is used with other