

UCF Style Guide

The University of Central Florida (UCF) Style Guide was designed to help anyone who prepares and writes official documents on behalf of UCF. It includes all of the necessary communication standards needed to produce a high-quality document under the UCF brand. By aligning your document with the requirements of this Style Guide, you are ensuring that your document is well-positioned for professional or academic use.





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ABOUT

Developed within UCF's ENC 4293 Document and Project Management course, this specific UCF Style Guide is the result of a collective, semester-long effort. Five teams were formed based on student strengths, each responsible for tasks such as project management, chapter research, collaborative writing, document design, and peer review.

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INTRODUCTION

UCF is committed to supporting students, staff, and professional technical communicators in understanding the university's writing expectations and best practices. Regardless of your department, when producing well-crafted documents, all written materials must reflect three key voices of UCF's brand: bold, modern, and entrepreneurial.

Bold: UCF displays the courage to challenge convention, communicating with clarity, confidence and assertiveness.

Modern: UCF maintains a clear, accessible tone to express fresh and forward-thinking ideas.

Entrepreneurial: UCF embodies an energetic and solution-driven mindset committed to innovative growth.

Grammar and Writing Style

The *Grammar* chapter is a crucial part of the UCF Style Guide as it ensures users comprehend and apply formal writing skills to their documents. The chapter sections outline a few core grammatical rules, such as punctuation, sentence structure, and parts of speech. It also breaks down acceptable examples and highlights errors, informing the user on the criteria with little confusion or referencing too many outside sources.

The *Writing Style* chapter covers the more specific guidelines of grammar according to UCF's brand. This content solidifies that your writing is not only proficient but also written in an active voice to reflect bold, modern, and entrepreneurial concepts. There are repeated topics such as parts of speech; however, this section emphasizes more of their function(s) in your writing versus what they are (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc). Overall, the breadth of the *Writing Style chapter* helps you avoid simple mistakes that can jeopardize the communication and reception of your document.

Information Fluency and Research Skills

The *Information Fluency and Research Skills* chapter is a critical part of the style guide, equipping users with the tools to critically evaluate and apply information on academic and digital platforms. By defining basic competencies like building credibility, identifying bias, users learn to utilize content on the web safely. It also introduces hands-on strategies like the CRAAP evaluation model, which allows users to analyze a source's



currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose. The chapter is also careful to focus on the threats of misinformation, including false charts, spin headers, and unreliable AI-generated content.

Information fluency and research skills establish that all material created within the UCF environment is credible, transparent, and ethical. It emphasizes the responsible use of technology and outlines UCF's expectations for accurately citing both traditional and AI-generated content across various citation formats. (APA, MLA, Chicago). Lastly, this section seeks to encourage good research habits, add validity to your work, and reduce dependence on questionable or unverified sources while also keeping you aligned with UCF's academic integrity and digital communication policies.

Document Design and Graphics

The *Document Design* chapter outlines how visual elements should be arranged and applied on UCF documents. UCF's bold, modern, and entrepreneurial brand identity should drive your aesthetic decisions, maintaining a level of consistency across everything the university produces. Detailed instructions appear on alignment, contrast, typography, color, information hierarchy, page construction, and lists. When designing a UCF-qualified document, whether that is brochures, advertisements, memos, or law documents, visual rhetoric is crucial to how information will be perceived by the audience.

The *Graphics* chapter specifies how UCF graphics are used in multiple document types. When adding official visual content like graphics, you must align them with the university's brand identity, but also supplement them correctly to the message you are trying to convey. The main sections dive into the university's three main logos, figures, maps, tables, images, videos, and additional characteristics. Documents that include graphics should engage an audience, providing examples for direction and context. Note that you must showcase graphical choices that remain usable and accessible for different media types and users.

Electronic Documentation and Accessibility

The *Electronic Documentation* chapter outlines the best practices for creating, formatting, organizing, and securing digital documents for UCF in a technologically relevant era. The chapter recommends using accessible file formats and emphasizes consistent formatting with built-in software tools. Unique file naming conventions and organized folder structures are also explained, making it easier for users to find



documents. Further, storing files securely using platforms such as OneDrive, proper access control, and virus protection is advised.

The *Accessibility* chapter focuses on making sure all UCF documents are inclusive and usable for individuals who may have disabilities that make it difficult to access documents. That being said, accessibility should be at the forefront of all documents you produce for the entire UCF community. These chapter sections provide guidelines on how to use plain and inclusive language, proper fonts, high contrast colors, alt-text, captions, and screen-reader-friendly formatting. In addition, it will describe different methods on how to check that your content considers all the accessibility features.



GRAMMAR

Consistent grammar is essential for effective communication in the UCF community and beyond. You can establish credibility, maintain professionalism, and increase clarity through proper grammar usage. Inaccurate or confusing grammar often misconstrues meaning, potentially creating misunderstandings between you and your audience.

This chapter describes grammar conventions and clarifies grammatical errors that can be found in professional correspondence. You should reference these guidelines when drafting documents and communications for UCF, as this chapter addresses parts of speech, punctuation, and sentence structure with examples.

Parts of Speech (PoS)

A Part of Speech (PoS) is the label for the ways a word functions in a sentence. These labels fall into several categories: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Abbreviations and numbers are also included in this section. Word function and purpose help you determine what PoS a word is and the consequent rules you must apply to that word. Below are the explanations of the parts of speech and examples of how they should be used.

Nouns

Nouns are defined as the word for a person, place, or thing. However, exceptions to this definition arise when you use abstract words such as “criticism” or “tolerance,” because these terms do not refer to tangible objects and instead refer to abstract ideas. As a result, your syntax will determine whether a word is a noun or another part of speech (Oxford 274). This syntax includes placing nouns at the beginning of a sentence.

Examples:

- **Samantha** biked across campus.
- **Henry** spoke to the class.

You may additionally place them throughout the sentence.

Examples:



- The freshman grabbed her **coffee**.
- The boy wearing a **hat** asked for his **ID**.

See the *Sentence Structure* section for more information on subjects, objects, and modifiers, which will help you determine whether a word is a noun or another part of speech.

Common nouns and proper nouns are subclasses of nouns. Use lowercase letters for common nouns and capitalize the first letter of proper nouns. If a common noun is the first word of a sentence, you must capitalize the first letter of that noun or noun phrase. If a proper noun consists of a phrase or long title, you should use title case to capitalize that noun.

Common nouns:

- The professor's **office** is located down the **hallway**.
- **Students** visit their professors during office hours.

Proper nouns:

- You can see **Knightro** at the **Student Union** during events.
- The **Nicholson School of Communication and Media** is located on UCF's main campus.

Pronouns

Pronouns substitute nouns or noun phrases after a noun is mentioned. Pronouns have several subclasses based on their function and meaning. These subclasses are defined below:

Subclass	Definition	Associated Pronouns
Personal	Refers to specific people or things	I, you, we, he, she, they, my, her, him, us, them
Possessive	Indicates ownership	mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs
Demonstrative	Points to specific objects and indicates space	this, that, these, those
Interrogative	Inquires about people,	who, whom, which, what,



	things, or choices	whose
Indefinite	Refers to nonspecific people or things	someone, anyone, everyone, something, anything, everything, nobody, none, some, any
Relative	Connects adjective clauses to the main clause	who, whom, which, that, whose
Reflexive	Refers to the speaker or sentence subject	myself, yourself, himself, herself, themselves, ourselves, yourselves
Reciprocal	Expresses a relationship between two or more subjects	each other, one another

You must understand the correct placement and meaning of these pronoun subclasses to avoid audience confusion. Gender bias can also appear when using personal pronouns and should be avoided. The following examples display ways pronouns are commonly misused.

Incorrect:

- Me and my TA will release grades shortly.
- I have a colleague that responds promptly to all emails.
- A director must learn how to navigate his priorities.

To avoid these errors, you should keep track of the noun a pronoun is referring to, along with the number, gender, and other attributes of this noun. Be mindful of bias and seek to use gender neutral pronouns when the noun is non-specific. Refer to the corrected examples found below if you encounter any confusion.

Correct:

- My TA and I will release grades shortly.
- I have a colleague who responds promptly to all emails.
- A director must learn how to navigate their priorities OR Directors must learn how to navigate their priorities.



Additionally, when you use the same noun more than once in the same sentence or in consecutive sentences, you should use pronouns as a noun substitute to prevent redundancy and improve clarity.

Examples:

- The director held a meeting on Wednesday. **She** decided our project deadline is next Monday.
- While the professor waited for an answer, **he** drank from **his** water bottle.

Finally, avoid vague pronoun references. A pronoun should clearly refer to its associated noun, known as the antecedent. If there is not a specific antecedent or if more than one word qualifies as the antecedent, you should edit to clarify your meaning.

Unclear: John got a flat tire, was late to class, and missed the professor's notes. This made him irritated for the rest of the day.

Clear: John got a flat tire, was late to class, and missed the professor's notes. These events made John irritated for the rest of the day.

Unclear: In the library, they are handing out free candy.

Clear: In the library, members of the student government are handing out free candy.

Verbs and Verb Tenses

Verbs describe actions that the subject of a sentence either completes or connects to. Verb tenses refer to the form that a verb takes to indicate the time and state of an action. Verbs have complex subclasses and functions, so refer to the *Sentence Structure* section for a deeper explanation of the ways they can be used to construct a sentence.

Because of their complexity, verbs experience some of the most common errors in writing. These include using incorrect verb tenses, issues with subject-verb agreement, misuse of irregular verb tenses, and malapropisms.

Incorrect verb tenses occur when verb tenses switch mid-sentence or mid-text without a clearly defined transition. They also occur when the wrong verb form is used in a phrase or specific situation.

Incorrect: They filled out the forms before they enter the auditorium.

Correct: They filled out the forms before they entered the auditorium.



You should monitor verb tense consistency throughout your document, and make sure your switches between tenses are meaningful and logical.

Issues with subject-verb agreement occur when the verb tense does not match the number of the noun it is referring to.

Incorrect: The committee have determined that the library's hours will change.

Correct: The committee has determined that the library's hours will change.

To minimize confusion, try to keep nouns and verbs close together. You can also shorten the length of noun phrases or rearrange a sentence if you cannot discern whether the phrase is singular or plural.

Unclear: Campus is tiresome to walk across in the afternoon.

Clear: Campus is tiresome to walk across in the afternoon.

Irregular verbs have different tense conventions compared to most English verbs. If you are unsure about what an irregular verb's tense would be, search the verb online with the term “Conjugation Chart” to receive examples of every context it can be conjugated in, then select the tense that matches your sentence's noun and time frame.

Incorrect: I done my homework.

Correct: I did my homework OR I have done my homework.

Finally, avoid these common verb malapropisms in your writing. Search for definitions online if you are unsure about the correct use of a verb.

Avoid:

- “Should of” instead of “Should have” when spelling out the contraction “should've”
- “Effect” instead of “Affect” when describing impact
- “Lie” instead of “Lay” when referring to objects other than yourself

Adjectives and Adverbs

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns, and adverbs modify verbs. They describe words in more detail and change a sentence's meaning. Because of these properties, they are



part of the modifier word class. More information on modifiers can be found in the Sentence Structures subsection.

You should use adjectives and adverbs strategically to enhance clarity without overwhelming your readers. Keep in mind these guidelines when using adjectives and adverbs specifically:

Do:

- Place adjectives next to or near the noun they are modifying.
- Lean towards placing adverbs near the verb they modify, though you can place them elsewhere in a sentence.
- Use your judgment to determine whether an adverb placement causes confusion or invites clarity.

Do not:

- Overuse adjectives and adverbs in a sentence. If you stack them, you should edit your sentences for conciseness.
- Seek out nouns or verbs that are more specific for your intended meaning.
- Use vague adjectives or indefinite adverbs. These include “good,” “bad,” “interesting,” “very,” “totally”, “fantastic”, “actually”, “literally”, and others.
- Instead, strive for descriptive and clarifying modifiers when you must use them.

Examples:

- Library renovations increased student traffic by a notable 53%.
- The students argued persuasively for building a new dining hall.

Incorrect: The numerous hard-working and engaged students took notes.

Correct: Hard-working students take notes.

Incorrect: The report was actually very interesting.

Correct: The report was engaging.

Determiners

Determiners are words preceding nouns that limit their meaning in some way. Common determiner types include articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, and possessives.



Articles come before nouns and communicate whether they are definite (“the”) or indefinite (“a” and “an”). Avoid using “a” or “an” for uncountable nouns like “advice.”

Demonstratives indicate proximity or distance of a noun, and they include words like “this,” “that,” and “those.” These determiners need clear antecedents to make sense when they are used as stand-alone words (as seen in this sentence’s subject). Ensure that there is a clear connection between an antecedent and a determiner, and add clarification if the determiner is vague.

Example: There has been a 16% increase in students studying anthropology. **This** figure indicates a growing interest in the subject.

Quantifiers indicate the quantity or amount of a specific noun, and they include words like “some,” “each,” and “much.” Remember to use “many” with countable nouns and “much” with uncountable nouns (e.g. many students versus much time). Always use a singular noun after “every” or “each.”

Possessives indicate ownership of a noun. Avoid mixing up terms like “your” and “you’re.” If the term has an apostrophe, it is a conjunction of the verb “to be” and is not a possessive.

Incorrect: I will stop by your office during office hours.

Correct: I will stop by your office during office hours.

Prepositions

Prepositions express relationships between words in a sentence. They can be used to form prepositional phrases, which are addressed in more detail in the *Sentence Structures* section. Some common prepositions include “in,” “at,” “upon,” “via,” “by,” and “with.”

The prepositions “at”, “on”, and “in” are often confused in time expressions. Use “at” for the time of day, use “on” for days and dates, and use “in” for months and years.

Examples:

- The class starts **at** 12 p.m.
- The conference is **on** July 31st.
- Fall 2025 finals occur **in** early December.



“In” and “at” tend to also be confused when referring to destinations. Use “in” for cities, countries, and large areas. Use “at” for specific places.

Examples:

- The study abroad program is **in** Kyoto.
- My class is **at** Classroom Building C.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions connect clauses, sentences, or phrases. They can also connect words in the same clause. Common conjunctions include “and,” “but,” “because,” and “since.” Conjunctions can be further categorized as coordinating, subordinating, and correlative.

Coordinating conjunctions link words or phrases of equal grammatical rank. When using coordinating conjunctions, avoid overusing conjunctions in the same sentence. If several conjunctions are included in one sentence, combine phrases or separate it into additional sentences.

Incorrect: Students are expected to take notes and listen in class and study on their own, because doing so will help them pass their tests.

Correct: Students are expected to take notes, listen in class, and study on their own. Doing these actions will help them pass their tests.

Avoid overusing “and” specifically. This conjunction is only used to add information to the sentence; instead, try conjunctions like “but” for contrast, “so” for results, and “for” for causes if your sentences have “and” repetitively.

Incorrect: The College of Arts and Humanities wanted to increase their theatre budget, and they had funds allocated to other projects.

Correct: The College of Arts and Humanities wanted to increase their theatre budget, but they had funds allocated to other projects.

Finally, avoid starting sentences with coordinating conjunctions. It is often read as informal.

Incorrect: The Reflection Pond was blocked off for the day. So Emily studied at Trevor Colbourn Hall.

Correct: The Reflection Pond was blocked off for the day, so Emily studied at Trevor Colbourn Hall.



Subordinating conjunctions connect two different clauses together (more information on clauses can be found in the *Sentence Structure* section). Use commas between independent clauses or after a dependent clause is placed at the beginning of the sentence. For independent clauses, place the comma before the conjunction. For dependent clauses, place the comma at the end of the phrase.

Examples:

- The professor was in a good mood, **so** he cancelled class for the day.
- **Because** the bus was delayed, John was late for his class.

Correlative conjunctions consist of pairs of words that connect words of equal length. When using correlative conjunctions, make sure to pair both parts of correlative conjunctions in a sentence, rather than using only one part.

Example: **Either** students will submit a research paper, **or** they will complete a self-guided creative project.

Interjections

Interjections are a word or expression that interrupts, precedes, or follows a sentence. They express spontaneous feelings or reactions to a situation. It is best practice to avoid using interjections altogether, because they are viewed as informal and unprofessional.

Incorrect: Wow! The results were decisive.

Correct: The results were decisive.

Abbreviations

While technically not a part of speech, abbreviations consist of and often fill in for various parts of speech. They shorten long phrases and aim for conciseness and clarity in professional writing.

The Acronyms and Abbreviations webpage of the UCF Faculty site provides a list of common abbreviations that occur in UCF correspondence. See the [Acronyms and Abbreviations webpage](#) as reference when you write about UCF facilities.



Refer to the following policies when abbreviating specific terms or phrases in your writing.

Do:

- Write a phrase out in full when you use it for the first time and place its abbreviation in parentheses immediately afterwards.
- Use phrase abbreviations in subsequent references.
- Use periods between letters and no spaces for lowercase abbreviations that shorten a well-known phrase, like etc., e.g., and a.m.
- Abbreviate degree names like PhD, EdD, and PsyD.
- Place periods before Internet suffixes like .edu and .gov.

Example: The National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) gave her the opportunity to present her thesis after she completed her PhD program.

Do not:

- Add spaces or periods between abbreviations with all capital letters, e.g. UCF or CECS. An exception occurs for proper names, such as J.R.R. Tolkien.
- Add periods between or after letters for common measurements, such as mph, lb, and rpm. An exception occurs for inches (in.) to avoid confusion.
- Spell out titles when they occur in front of a full name. Instead, use the shortened versions, e.g. Dr. instead of Doctor.

Numbers

Numbers can take on several different forms in writing. For UCF documents, mimic the formatting of the following guideline examples when you reference dates, times, addresses, percents, figures, and number phrases.

Guidelines:

- Spell out one through ten as words, then type 11, 12, 13, etc. as numerals.
- Use the Month Day, Year format for formal documents and memos.
- In email correspondence, it is acceptable to use the MM/DD/YYYY format instead.
- Use ordinal suffixes when writing spelled out dates, e.g. June 7th, 2025.
- Do not use ordinal suffixes for numerical dates, e.g. 07/07/2025.
- Do not use apostrophes for decades, e.g. the 1970s.
- Include the century digits for year citations, e.g. 2010–2011.



- Per the *Abbreviations* subsection, use periods for specific times, like 9 a.m.
- Write out addresses in full, e.g. 4000 Central Florida Blvd.
- Use the percent symbol for percentages, like 45%.
- Use decimal places for numbers in the millions of places, e.g. 12.4 million.
- Use commas for numbers in the thousands, like 3,200 and 102,005.
- Omit the 0 before decimal places, like .004 kg.

Punctuation

Punctuation, which is a standardized set of marks and symbols used in writing, can help add meaning and emphasis to words. They mark when a sentence is over, when to pause, or what the relationships between certain elements in a sentence are.

Punctuation can join or separate ideas, let a reader know when they are being asked a question, or when the author is trying to convey a specific emotion or tone. Examples of punctuation you will be using and some rules for their usage can be found below.

Periods and Ellipses

Periods (.), also known as a “full stop”, are the most commonly used punctuation mark in the English language. You should use them to conclude complete sentences. The definition of a complete sentence can be found below in the *Sentence Structure* section, along with examples.

You should follow certain rules when a period is used in conjunction with elements such as parentheses or quotation marks.

Parentheses Rules:

- (If the parentheses contain a complete sentence, you should place the period inside the parentheses.)
- If the parentheses do not contain a complete sentence, you should place the period outside the parentheses (as in this example).

Similar rules apply for the use of quotation marks. Periods and commas almost always go inside the quotation marks. The exception is if a parenthetical directly follows the quotation, such as citing a page reference.

Example: ““Twas beauty killed the beast” (33).



An ellipsis (...) is a series of three or more periods, though three is standard. You should primarily use it to indicate an omission of text or information, such as when a direct quote has been altered for the sake of brevity. Depending on whether you are using another style guide, such as the American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), or The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), ellipsis formats and spacing may vary.

Note: For the sake of this UCF Style Guide, put a space after the first word following the ellipsis when omitting information or text.

Example: According to James (2024), “The findings of the study suggest a significant correlation between the two variables... indicating a need for more targeted research.”

Semicolons

A semicolon (;) joins two sentences or statements that are closely related, and you can use it in place of a period in many cases.

Example: Lilith dreamed of having her own cooking show; she had long fancied herself a foodie and amateur chef.

Semicolons are also occasionally used to separate items in a long list, though you should avoid this practice in professional writing. If a list contains a multitude of items, you should consider using a numbered or bulleted list format instead; see the *Document Design* chapter’s *Style Mechanics* section for more information on proper formatting of lists.

Commas

Commas (,) can indicate a pause in a sentence or statement and help to separate items in a list. If you want to join two clauses or statements that are complete sentences individually, use a semicolon instead. Using a comma to join two or more complete sentences is known as “comma splicing” and is grammatically incorrect. More information regarding sentence structure can be found in the *Sentence Structure* section of this chapter.

When using commas to separate items in a list, you should make sure you place a comma after every term:



Example: Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme

This rule does not apply to business or organization names:

Examples:

- Begin, Munns and Munns
- Farrar, Straus & Giroux

Question Marks and Exclamation Points

A question mark (?) indicates an interrogative, a question being asked. Best practice is to avoid its use altogether in professional documents as the intent is not to question the reader but to provide information.

An exclamation point (!) is used to convey excitement or strong emotion, and you should use it exceedingly sparingly if at all in professional communication. For professional documents, you should avoid it altogether outside of direct quotes.

Apostrophes

An apostrophe (') is most often used in contractions and to denote possessiveness. In a contraction, two words are combined into one. Some examples include the words don't (do + not), can't (can + not), that's (that + is), and who's (who + is).

When using an apostrophe to convey singular possessiveness (something that belongs to an individual), an “s” follows the apostrophe.

Examples:

- This is Kate's pen.
- David drove to the city after borrowing Sean's car.

You can also use an apostrophe to denote plural possessiveness (something that belongs to more than one person).

Examples:

- Patrick requested use of the university's auditorium.
- Clara got ready to attend the neighborhood's block party.



When the owner of an object's name ends with an "s", you should use an apostrophe "s" with nothing following.

Example:

- Chris' car was totaled after the accident.
- Dan walked over to Seamus' house.

Possessive pronouns should not get an apostrophe.

Example: The university revised its rules concerning microwaving fish in the teacher's lounge (in this example, *its* does not get an apostrophe but *teacher's* does.)

Hyphens

A hyphen (-) can have different uses in different contexts. Most often, you should use it to connect two compound terms.

Examples:

- Jason is a highly-skilled carpenter.
- Jane identifies as Irish-American.
- There were ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall.

You should also use a hyphen when adding a prefix to a word.

Examples:

- Non-toxic
- Pro-environment
- Anti-theft

Dashes

A figure dash (–) can be used for phone numbers, tables, or accounts. It is typically the same width as digits.

Example: 555–555–555

An en dash (–) represents a range or connection of terms or numbers, such as estimates of time or distance. It is typically the length of two hyphens.



Before: Orlando is forty to sixty miles away from here.

After: Orlando is 40–60 miles away from here.

Before: Monday through Friday

After: Monday–Friday

An em dash (—) is used as an interruption of thought in a sentence. However, this is a narrative convention, and you should avoid using em dashes in professional writing unless it is used in a direct quote. It is typically the length of three hyphens.

Example: He was going to say something—but he held back.

Note: When using a hyphen or dash, you will not put a space between the words or numbers being connected.

Ampersands

An ampersand (&) is a symbol used in place of the word “and”. You should never use it in professional writing for this purpose as it is unprofessional, with the only exceptions being if it is used in an official business or organization name, brand name, or title.

Examples:

- Simon & Schuster
- Johnson & Johnson
- M&M's
- *Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas*



WRITING STYLE

Writing style requires careful alignment with the bold, modern, and entrepreneurial brand identity of UCF. The voice and tone of these three principles shape how readers perceive your message and determine whether your communication achieves its intended purpose. You can establish credibility, build trust, and effectively convey information by staying consistent with these three standards across all university documents.

Word Choice and Precision

Professional communication requires precision and deliberate word choice throughout each document. You can strengthen your writing's impact and clarity by selecting concrete terms, eliminating unnecessary words, choosing strong verbs, and avoiding redundant expressions.

Concrete versus Abstract Language

You must balance concrete and abstract language to help your audience understand complex university concepts. This could include things like expressing deadlines and procedures within the university.

Abstract Term: Collaboration

Concrete Term: Team meeting

Note: Concrete terms refer to physical, observable, or clearly defined things. Abstract terms refer to more general ideas or values.

You can use abstract language when discussing university goals and values, but you should pair it with concrete examples to ensure comprehension:

Without Concrete Language	With Concrete Language
The meeting was productive.	The meeting resulted in a finalized plan with a timeline.
Students should behave appropriately.	Students should arrive on time, silence their devices, and avoid talking.



Concrete language helps readers understand complex concepts by providing specific, observable details they can visualize and act upon.

Abstract: We prioritize student success.

Concrete: We provide tutoring services, career counseling, and academic workshops to help students achieve graduation requirements.

You should ask yourself these questions when revising for concrete language:

- What exactly do I mean?
- Can these terms be more specific or demonstrated through an example?

Eliminating Filler Words

You should remove filler words that weaken your writing's impact and make it harder for audiences to process information efficiently and clearly. These words such as “really,” “just,” “very,” and “kind of” are typically stylistic habits carried over from speech that create uncertainty in professional writing.

Common filler words and phrases:

- Really
- Just
- Very
- Literally
- Simply
- Maybe
- Somewhat
- Kind of
- Sort of

Filler Phrase	Cleaner Revision Option
It's really important to...	It's important to...
The lecture was very helpful in...	The lecture helped...
It's kind of difficult to explain...	It's difficult to explain...



These filler words create problems in professional writing by weakening tone, disrupting rhythm and pacing, and making instructions sound uncertain.

Weak: Each and every student

Strong: Each student

Weak: It's basically a kind of revision plan.

Strong: It's a revision plan.

Choosing Strong Verbs

You should use strong verbs to increase clarity and engagement in your writing, as verbs carry the core meaning of sentences. When you use weak or generic verbs like “do,” “make,” “have,” “is,” and “are,” you often create passive or vague phrasing that requires additional explanation.

Weak: She spoke quickly during her final presentation.

Strong: She rushed through her final presentation.

You should use strong verbs instead of pairing a weak verb with an adverb, which simplifies your writing and strengthens tone.

Weak	Strong
Walked slowly	Strolled
Worked hard	Labored
Spoke loudly	Shouted

You can select verbs that reflect the specific context of your writing:

For policy: Authorize, mandate, require

For reports: Evaluate, recommend, analyze

For summaries: Highlight, outline, summarize

You should evaluate your verb choices by asking these questions:

- Does this verb name the action directly?



- Could I eliminate a noun phrase by changing the verb?

Avoiding Redundancy

You should eliminate redundancy that makes writing unnecessarily wordy or weakens impact. This includes phrases that repeat the same ideas or words that serve no purpose beyond habit. While some repetition can be stylistically effective, unnecessary repetition adds clutter that distracts from your main points.

Writers often repeat modifiers without realizing it. Identify modifiers during editing by examining paired nouns and adjectives and asking yourself:

- Does this add new information?
- Can the sentence work without it?

Voice and Tone

You can build credibility and trust by maintaining consistent UCF bold, modern, and entrepreneurial standards that match your audience and context. Effective voice and tone require understanding when to use different levels of formality and how to project both competence and accessibility in your communication.

Formal versus Informal Register

You must match your language level to your audience and context to communicate effectively. Different situations require different levels of formality while maintaining standards throughout university communication.

High formality situations:

- Board presentations and policy documents
- External stakeholder communications
- Official university announcements
- Legal and compliance documents

Moderate formality situations:

- Departmental newsletters and website content
- Training materials and instructional guides
- Professional email correspondence
- Staff meeting agendas and minutes

**Lower formality situations:**

- Internal team communications
- Workshop materials and collaborative notes
- Project updates within departments

Formal Language Characteristics	Informal Language Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete sentences without contractions• Precise, institutional terminology• Objective presentation of information• Formal sentence structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More direct engagement with audience• Accessible explanations of complex topics• Shorter, clearer sentence structures• Maintained institutional authority

You should consider these examples that demonstrate appropriate formality levels for different communication contexts:

Correct (high formality): The university will implement revised protocols to enhance operational efficiency across all administrative divisions.

Correct (moderate formality): You should apply the new protocols to improve efficiency in your department's daily operations.

Correct (conversational professional): You can streamline your workflow by following these updated protocols.

Incorrect (too casual): These new rules will totally help you get stuff done faster.

Professional Voice Requirements

You must maintain objectivity and institutional authority in all professional UCF documents. A professional voice requires careful attention to language choices that support credibility and eliminate personal bias.

Avoid:

- First person pronouns (I, we, our, my)
- Emotional language and subjective expressions
- Personal opinions without supporting evidence
- Casual expressions and slang terms

**Use:**

- Objective, third-person perspective
- Evidence-based statements
- Neutral, professional language
- Institutional voice and authority

Aim to support all claims with credible evidence when making professional statements. Evidence-based statements require reference to institutional data when available, citations to established policies and procedures, relevant performance metrics, and support from credible sources.

Incorrect: We believe this program will be successful because our team feels confident about the outcomes.

Correct: Research indicates this program demonstrates potential for success based on established performance metrics.

Incorrect: I think the new policy is really great and will help everyone.

Correct: The revised policy addresses identified operational challenges and supports institutional objectives.

Professional Communication Standards

You must balance demonstrating expertise with ensuring accessibility for diverse audiences within the UCF community. Effective professional communication projects competence while remaining approachable to readers with varying knowledge levels.

Authority indicators:

- Accurate use of professional terminology
- Reference to established policies and best practices
- Systematic organization of information
- Demonstration of institutional knowledge

Accessibility strategies:

- Define technical terms upon first use
- Provide concrete examples for abstract concepts
- Use clear, logical organization
- Include helpful context for complex topics



You should project competence by presenting accurate information confidently, using appropriate professional vocabulary, organizing content systematically, and demonstrating thorough understanding. Remain approachable by focusing on clarity over complexity, providing helpful explanations, using respectful and inclusive language, and avoiding a condescending tone.

Incorrect: Obviously, anyone who understands basic financial planning knows that budget submissions are due in March and must include the standard categories we always use.

Correct: The budget planning process requires department heads to submit preliminary forecasts by March 15th. You should include personnel costs, operational expenses, and capital expenditures in your submission.

Maintaining Tone Consistency

You should establish your formality level early and maintain a consistent voice throughout your document. Inconsistent tone disrupts reader experience and undermines professional credibility.

Avoid jarring shifts between formal and casual language that create confusion for your audience:

Inconsistent: The research methodology demonstrates rigorous analytical standards. However, the results are pretty cool and show some neat trends.

Consistent: The research methodology demonstrates rigorous analytical standards. The results reveal significant trends that support the proposed framework.

Implement several strategies to maintain uniform voice throughout longer documents:

- Develop a glossary for key concepts and acronyms.
- Use consistent verb tenses within sections.
- Maintain parallel structure in headings.
- Apply uniform formatting standards.
- Create standardized phrases for common concepts.

You should check tone consistency during the revision process by systematically reviewing your document for formality inconsistencies. Active voice occurs when the



subject of your sentence performs the action, creating clearer and more direct communication than passive constructions.

Maintain professional authority by consistently using active voice throughout your document:

- Compare formality levels across all sections.
- Verify consistent use of active voice.
- Check for appropriate terminology throughout.
- Ensure smooth transitions between sections.
- Confirm the conclusion matches the introduction tone.

Sentence Construction

Effective sentence construction enhances readability and strengthens UCF-worthy communication. You can engage readers and communicate complex information clearly by varying sentence length, eliminating wordiness, applying parallel structure, and using subordination strategically. More detailed grammatical concepts are covered in the *Sentence Structure* section.

Varying Sentence Length

You must combine short, medium, and long sentences to create an engaging rhythm and maintain reader attention throughout your documents.

Short sentences (5–10 words):

- Emphasize key points
- Create impact and clarity
- Break up complex information
- Provide clear directives

Medium sentences (11–20 words):

- Present standard information clearly
- Connect related ideas smoothly
- Maintain professional flow
- Support detailed explanations

Long sentences (21+ words):

- Explain complex relationships



- Provide comprehensive context
- Include multiple related details
- Demonstrate sophisticated analysis

Consider this example that demonstrates effective sentence variety:

Correct: Budget planning requires careful attention. You must consider multiple factors when preparing departmental forecasts, including personnel costs, operational expenses, and anticipated revenue changes. Submit completed forms by March 15th.

Incorrect: Budget planning requires careful attention to multiple factors. You must consider personnel costs when preparing your departmental forecast. You should include operational expenses in your budget calculations. You need to submit completed forms by March 15th.

Apply these strategies for sentence variety:

- Begin sentences with different structures.
- Alternate between simple and complex constructions.
- Use transitional phrases to vary openings.
- Combine short statements with longer explanations.
- End sections with concise summary statements.

Eliminating Wordiness

You should identify and remove redundant phrases that weaken your message and waste reader attention. Concise writing demonstrates respect for your audience and improves communication effectiveness.

Eliminate common redundant phrases by replacing wordy constructions with direct alternatives:

Wordy: In order to complete the process

Concise: To complete the process

Wordy: Due to the fact that the meeting was canceled

Concise: Because the meeting was cancelled



Wordy: At this point in time

Concise: Now

Wordy: In the event that you need assistance

Concise: If you need assistance

Examine these before and after examples that demonstrate comprehensive wordiness revision:

Wordy: In order to ensure that all faculty members are able to have access to the new online portal system, it is necessary that you complete the required training modules that have been provided by the IT department.

Concise: You must complete the IT training modules to access the new online portal.

Wordy: The purpose of this memo is to provide information regarding the upcoming changes that will be implemented in the parking policy procedures.

Concise: This memo outlines upcoming parking policy changes.

Apply these revision strategies to strengthen your writing:

- Replace weak verbs with strong action verbs.
- Eliminate unnecessary prepositions.
- Remove redundant adjectives and adverbs.
- Cut filler phrases and empty expressions.
- Combine related ideas into single sentences.

Parallel Structure Applications

You must create balance in lists and series by maintaining consistent grammatical patterns throughout your writing. When elements in a series follow different grammatical structures, readers must mentally adjust to each new pattern, which slows comprehension and weakens professional impact.

Recognize that parallel structure errors often occur when mixing different parts of speech or verb forms within the same list. The most common mistakes involve combining gerunds (-ing) with infinitives or mixing nouns with verb phrases.



Ensure all items in a list follow the same grammatical pattern, as mixing different forms forces readers to mentally reset with each new structure:

Incorrect: The training covers how to budget, scheduling, and reports.

Correct: The training covers budgeting, scheduling, and reporting procedures.

Incorrect: You should review policies, update procedures, and staff training.

Correct: You should review policies, update procedures, and train staff members.

When writing series within sentences, you can create smoother flow by maintaining consistent word forms throughout:

Correct: The proposal addresses cost reduction, efficiency improvement, and quality enhancement.

Incorrect: The proposal addresses reducing costs, improved efficiency, and quality enhancement.

Complex sentences with multiple clauses require careful attention to maintain parallel structure, especially when describing similar actions or qualities:

Incorrect: Department heads who demonstrate leadership, maintain high standards, and are supportive of professional development will receive recognition.

Correct: Department heads who demonstrate leadership, maintain high standards, and support professional development will receive recognition.

Verify parallel structure by checking these elements during revision:

- Use consistent verb forms throughout lists.
- Maintain uniform grammatical patterns.
- Apply consistent sentence structure to similar ideas.
- Check for consistent tense and voice.
- Verify balanced construction in comparisons.

Subordination for Emphasis

You should use main clauses for important information while placing supporting details in subordinate clauses to control reader attention effectively. Readers naturally give more



attention to main clauses, so you can guide their focus by choosing which information receives primary emphasis versus secondary treatment.

Emphasize your most critical information by placing it in main clauses, since readers automatically prioritize these grammatically dominant structures:

Correct: You must submit travel requests by Friday although exceptions may be granted for emergency situations.

Emphasis on: You must submit travel requests by Friday

Supporting detail: exceptions may be granted for emergency situations

Correct: The new policy improves efficiency while maintaining quality standards.

Emphasis on: The new policy improves efficiency

Supporting detail: while maintaining quality standards

The position of subordinate clauses affects how readers process the relationship between ideas, with beginning subordination creating context before the main point:

Beginning subordination: Although *budget constraints limit options*, you can still implement cost-effective solutions.

Middle subordination: The training program, which *includes online modules*, requires completion within 30 days.

Ending subordination: You should attend the meeting unless *scheduling conflicts prevent participation*.

You can strategically assign different types of information to main versus subordinate clauses based on what readers need to act on versus what provides helpful context:

Important information in main clauses:

- Required actions and deadlines
- Key policy changes and updates
- Essential procedures and requirements
- Critical safety and compliance information

Supporting information in subordinate clauses:

- Background context and explanations
- Optional procedures and alternatives
- Historical information and comparisons



- Additional resources and references

Sentence hierarchy:

Correct: You must complete mandatory training before accessing laboratory facilities, even though previous experience may seem sufficient.

Incorrect: Even though you must complete mandatory training, previous experience may seem sufficient before accessing laboratory facilities.

Improve your subordination by applying these strategies:

- Place most important information first
- Use subordinating conjunctions effectively
- Create clear relationships between ideas
- Guide reader attention through sentence structure
- Emphasize action items and requirements

Sentence Structure

In the simplest terms, a sentence is a group of words that express a complete thought, with most sentences containing a noun and a verb (though there are exceptions). The construction and structure of a sentence can vary and will determine the type of sentence you are dealing with.

Dependent and Independent Clauses

A group of words that include a subject and a predicate (i.e., a noun and a verb) and can stand alone as a complete thought is called an independent clause. A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence and requires an independent clause for it to make sense.

Independent clause: The movie was excellent (this expresses a complete thought and does not require clarification to make sense.)

Dependent clause: Though the movie was excellent (this is an incomplete thought, it does not make sense on its own. An independent clause is required to clarify it.)

When a dependent clause begins the sentence, you should separate the dependent and independent clauses with a comma.



Example: Though the movie was excellent, the theater was a little dilapidated.

Note: The above example will still make grammatical sense if the clauses were to swap places.

S-V-O Structure

English uses the Subject-Verb-Object (S-V-O) sentence structure for most simple sentences. This means your subject comes first, followed by your verb, followed by your object.

Example: Cindy drove her car.

In the example above, Cindy is the subject, driving is the action she is performing (verb), and her car is the object.

Types of Sentences

Sentences can vary in length and complexity, with the most basic form being known as a simple sentence. Oxford Dictionary defines a simple sentence as: “a sentence consisting of only one clause, with a single subject and predicate.”

Examples:

- Bob walked to the store.
- Susan watched television.

A compound sentence, as defined by Oxford Dictionary, is “a sentence with more than one subject or predicate.” The independent clauses are joined by a comma, semicolon, or conjunction.

Examples:

- Horror movies can be enjoyable, but some are too violent.
- John Carpenter is a master filmmaker; his place in movie history is assured.

If you use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses into a compound sentence, you should not use a conjunction, as in the second example.



Complex sentences, according to the Oxford dictionary, are sentences “containing a subordinate clause or clauses.” In other words, it is a sentence consisting of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause.

Example: Though he is best known as Freddie Krueger, Robert Englund is a classically trained actor.

In the example above, the first clause is dependent as it does not express a complete thought. The second is independent because it clarifies the first clause, but can also stand alone as a complete sentence.

A complex-compound sentence is a sentence consisting of two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. You can use complex-compound sentences to keep your writing varied and prevent it from sounding too stiff and repetitive.

Examples:

- Carl dropped the plate and it shattered, but he managed to save the glass.
- Sometimes when he was sleeping, Jimmy felt too hot under the covers, and he would turn on the fan to help cool down the room.
- Though the fuel gauge was on “E”, Sarah kept driving since she knew there was a gas station just two miles down the road.

Prepositional Phrases

A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, an object, and sometimes (but not always) a modifier. A preposition illustrates relationships between words in a sentence, usually indicating the when, where, why, or how of a sentence, and a modifier makes a change to the object in some fashion.

Example: Jessie arrived at 10 o’clock.

If you were to add a modifier to the above sentence, it might read as:

Modified: Jessie arrived at 10 o’clock, after the store closed.



Clarity and Cohesion

Effective writing requires clear and logical organization throughout your documents. If your document lacks the proper flow, structure, or consistency it will confuse the audience so you must prioritize clarity and cohesion when writing.

Logical Flow Between Ideas

A properly organized document can build naturally from one idea to the next, ensuring readers never feel lost while reading your writing. You must use a structure that orders ideas across sections and connects paragraphs to guide your audience through the content systematically.

Structure ideas so that each one builds on or prepares for the next, creating natural progression through your content:

Problem → Solution

Question → Answer

Before starting your draft, you should outline the main points you want to cover in your writing. After your draft, you can summarize the purpose of each paragraph to test whether the structure works effectively.

Use topic sentences to bring focus to your main points and set expectations for your documents. This helps the audience accomplish several goals:

- Anticipate the content of your writing
- See how it connects to the previous concepts
- Skim more easily when needed

When you have poorly ordered content, it forces the audience to re-read and connect your concepts themselves. You should ask yourself these questions when reviewing your draft:

- Do examples appear when the audience expects them?
- Are my concepts properly supported with evidence?



Proper Use of Transitions

Transitions connect ideas and show relationships between them, such as cause, contrast, and sequence. Without transitions, your writing can become disconnected, even if all the concepts are individually strong.

You should understand these common relationships and the transitions that reflect them:

Relationship	Transitions
Addition	Also, in addition, moreover
Contrast	However, nevertheless, on the other hand
Cause and Effect	Therefore, as a result, consequently
Clarification	In other words, specifically
Sequence	First, next, subsequently, lastly, finally

Transitions help clarify logic and avoid audience assumptions. When left without clear connections between concepts, audiences tend to try to “fill in the blanks” to get a complete picture, which can lead to misunderstanding.

You should note that transitions are not just used to link sentences together but can also link back to concepts in previous paragraphs. This creates connections between different sections of content throughout your document.

Consistent Point of View

Point of view refers to the perspective from which your document is written. If you switch between different points of view, it can confuse the audience and detract from the professionalism of the document.

You must choose the point of view that is appropriate for each type of document you are writing:

First-person:

- Internal communication
- Application letters
- Project proposals

**Second-person:**

- Instructions and guides
- Training documentation
- Announcements

Third-person:

- Policies and reports
- Evaluations
- Meeting minutes

Point of View	Example
First-person	We will update the policy before it is sent to the department chairs.
Second-person	You should update the policy before sending it to the department chairs.
Third-person	The staff should update the policy before sending it to the department chairs.

You should use second person in documents where you give directions like guides and manuals. Third person is more appropriate for evaluations or meeting minutes where objectivity is essential.

Paragraph Unity and Development

When you are writing your paragraphs, present one idea, develop it fully, then move smoothly to the next idea. Paragraph unity and development helps your audience understand what you are trying to communicate, whether through quick communication or longer documents.

Begin each paragraph with a clear focus by asking yourself:

- Does this paragraph have only one main idea?
- Have I gone off-topic or added any unrelated information to the paragraph?

Develop and support these main ideas with evidence and elaboration. The types of evidence and elaboration vary depending on the type of document you are writing:



- Examples
- Data
- Explanations
- References

You can structure your paragraphs to improve readability and strengthen your discussion using this sequential order:

Type of sentence	Purpose
Topic sentence	States the main point of the paragraph
Support	Provides facts, examples, data, etc.
Explanation	Helps to interpret or explain the support
Transitioning or concluding sentence	Connects to the next idea or summarizes

Transitioning and concluding sentences help you accomplish several functions in your document:

- Strengthen the paragraph's point
- Help to connect to the next idea
- Help the audience come to a conclusion

Audience Adaptation

You must understand your audience to maintain useful communication and writing. Your writing must be adapted to meet the audience's expectations, knowledge levels, professional standards, and backgrounds to ensure your message reaches and engages readers effectively.

Register Flexibility Across Contexts

Register refers to how formal the language in your document is, and you must use the register that is most appropriate for your audience and purpose. There is a wide range in tone when dealing with university communication and writing, requiring careful attention to context and audience expectations.



When writing documents like reports, you need a more informative and professional register. Other forms of communication like emails should be more direct but still maintain professional standards throughout.

You should avoid contractions, slang, or vague terms to maintain inclusivity and formal tone. Instead, you should use precise nouns and strong verbs that convey your message clearly and professionally.

Formal: All students must submit their assignments by Friday.

Informal: You guys got to turn in your stuff by Friday.

You may use a more conversational tone for communications like emails between colleagues, but you should not use this regularly for other written documents like reports or policy statements.

When documents include both formal and informal tones, you must follow these guidelines:

- Shifts in tone must be deliberate and purposeful.
- Avoid blending the tones within paragraphs.
- Match the tone to what the audience expects from that document type.

Disciplinary Writing Conventions

Each field within the university has some differences in format and writing expectations and you must adapt to these specific conventions to maintain each department's professional standards.

You should understand the most common variations in expectations across disciplines:

- Citation and formatting style (APA, MLA, CMOS)
- Preferred sentence structures and complexity levels
- Using passive versus active voice

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields may prefer you to use passive voice, maintain conciseness, and prioritize the presentation of data. When writing for humanities, you may use a more narrative tone and incorporate theoretical frameworks. However, for strictly administrative writing, you should prioritize clarity and align with university guidelines for the document type.



The audience will expect documents to reflect the standards of their specific field. When you do not follow expected standards, the audience may not trust the information being presented, even if the content is well-supported. Knowing the audience's disciplinary background helps you determine how to write most effectively for their expectations.

Cultural Sensitivity in Language

UCF includes people with diverse backgrounds, so your writing must reflect inclusive values and avoid unintentionally harmful or exclusive language. You must be mindful of language choices that could exclude or offend members of the university's community. For more information on inclusive writing refer to the *Accessibility* chapter.

Avoid assumptions based on gender, ability, race, religion, and other personal characteristics:

Avoid:

- Assumptive gendered language
- Cultural generalizations or stereotypes
- Age-related assumptions or stereotypes
- Offensive language for the disabled

You should use inclusive language that acknowledges diversity without minimizing anyone's identity. Use practices like they/them pronouns when gender is unknown and refer to groups by their preferred and accurate terms like Indigenous and LGBTQ+.

Maintain inclusivity by asking yourself these questions when writing:

- Could this unintentionally offend or exclude someone?
- Am I using anything like metaphors that may not be clear across cultures?

Adapting Complexity to Reader Needs

At UCF, always consider how much your audience already knows, especially when writing academic, professional or official documents. If your content is too complex or includes excessive jargon, it may confuse the audience or make comprehension difficult. However, if your writing is too simple, it may sound condescending or fail to convey necessary information effectively. Complexity requirements may need accessibility considerations; for more information on plain language refer to the *Accessibility* chapter.



You should consider these factors as you begin writing:

- What does the audience already know?
- What information am I introducing them to?
- How familiar will they be with the content's terminology?

When using acronyms, technical terms, or field-specific language, you should follow these practices:

- Define the term when you first use it.
- Try to avoid using multiple abbreviations in one paragraph.
- Consider including glossaries for mixed audiences.

When introducing difficult concepts, you should use examples from the audience's experience that help them understand unfamiliar content through familiar contexts.

Incorrect: Students should apply concepts from feminist theory, such as patriarchy and intersectionality, in their writing.

Correct: Students should apply how social systems that favor men (patriarchy) affect characters, and how different identities like race and gender overlap to shape experiences (intersectionality) in their writing.



INFORMATION FLUENCY

Information fluency is the ability to think critically while engaging with, creating, and utilizing information and technology regardless of format or platform (Illinois State University). As a part of UCF, ensure all information produced on its behalf is attributed to the guidelines in this chapter.

Importance of Information Fluency in a Digital Era

Navigating information in the digital era is essential because digital spaces are filled with misinformation and conflicting sources, increasing research time and frustration. With the sheer amount of information available, it requires careful and critical thinking not only to find data but also to synthesize and interpret sources to aid your research most effectively.

Evaluating Information Credibility

Ensuring information is credible is an important component of information fluency. Discerning credibility when using the internet, where information and content can be produced at random and can therefore be purposefully or unintentionally misleading, is critical to success in an online world.

In this section, you will learn:

- How to recognize biases in news organizations
- How to use multiple sources to cross-check sources
- How to analyze Artificial-Intelligence (AI) imagery and text to determine if it can be used as a credible source

The CRAAP Method

The Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose (CRAAP) Method is a simple yet efficient tool used to help writers assess the credibility and reliability of information sources they find. Keeping the CRAAP Method in mind as a precursor helps sift out unsuitable sources, helps you make informed decisions, and reduces the spread of misinformation.



Currency

Currency refers to how up-to-date the information is and whether it reflects the most recent knowledge or developments in a given field. When evaluating a source, it is good practice to check the publication date or the most recent update. In rapidly changing areas like technology, healthcare, or policy, outdated information quickly becomes irrelevant or even misleading.

For academic and professional work, especially within a university setting like UCF, it's important to prioritize recent publications, typically from the last five years, unless using older sources for historical context. Using current sources ensures that your work remains relevant and grounded in the latest research data.

Relevance

Relevance assesses how well a source connects to your specific topic or research question. A relevant source should offer information that directly supports your argument, analysis, or understanding of the subject.

Consider whether the content is written for the appropriate audience (such as scholars, professionals, or the general public) and whether it meets the level of depth your work requires. In university-level work, using sources that are loosely related to your topic can weaken the clarity and focus of your writing. Choose materials that contribute to your objective, avoiding those that are too general or off topic.

Authority

Authority refers to the expertise and credibility of the source's author or publisher. When evaluating authority, ask whether the author has relevant qualifications or affiliations that make them a reliable voice on the topic.

Sources that DO have authority:	Sources that DO NOT have authority:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scholarly journals (JSTOR, EBSCO)• Government agencies (NIH, NOAA, NIST)• Reputable news organizations• Sources published within the last ten years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Posts from social media• Sources that lack evidence of research (citations, scholarly references)• Sources published over ten years ago



- Sources from established authors and experts

Information from: "Credible/Non-Credible Sources." Fletcher Technical Community College https://library.fletcher.edu/citation_help/sources

Be cautious with anonymous or user-generated content unless it can be independently verified. For academic and institutional communication, UCF faculty and staff should rely on sources authored by recognized experts or organizations with a track record of accuracy and integrity on the subject matter.

Accuracy

Accuracy involves determining whether the information presented is correct, well-supported, and verifiable. Reliable sources back up claims with data, citations, and references to other credible work. Be wary of material that lacks evidence, contains factual errors, or uses emotionally charged or sensational language.

It's also important to cross-check information with other trusted sources to confirm its validity. At UCF, using inaccurate sources not only undermines the quality of research or instruction but could also harm the university's reputation. Always prioritize factual correctness and thorough documentation.

Purpose

Purpose addresses the reason the information exists, whether it is intended to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell. Understanding a source's purpose helps you evaluate its objectivity and potential bias. Informational or scholarly sources aim to present facts and research, while persuasive sources may push a particular viewpoint or agenda.

Commercial content may try to sell a product or service under the guise of information. Recognizing these motivations is key to critically interpreting the source's content. For academic and professional use at UCF, sources should primarily aim to inform or educate, with minimal bias and transparent intentions.

Bias Detection and Influence

News websites are a great way to find information on the latest events, but each organization has its leanings, and you must be ready to account for that. Thankfully, there is a chart easily found at [adfontesmedia](#) that helps find multiple sources with varying



leanings. While news sites are not generally an acceptable source for research, staff and professors may pull from news articles when discussing current events.

Using Caution

Use news sources cautiously and only when appropriate to the context of your work. While news websites can provide timely information on current events, they often carry political or ideological biases that can influence how stories are reported. As such, news articles are generally not acceptable as primary sources for academic research due to their lack of peer review and potential for partiality.

Usability of News Articles

News articles can be useful for illustrating recent developments, public reactions, or media narratives, especially in classroom discussions, opinion pieces, or communications that reference current events. When using news sources, UCF faculty, staff, and students should seek multiple perspectives and rely on well-established, reputable outlets. Consuming media bias charts can help ensure balanced coverage. Ultimately, news should supplement, not replace, credible academic or primary sources, and its role should be contextualized within the writing.

Artificial Intelligence as a Credible Source

Technology is improving at a rapid rate; as such, it is important to analyze the legitimacy of sources across all media, including video, photos, and text. Note, the information regarding Artificial Intelligence and its usage is constantly changing and updating. It is best practice to stay up-to-date with current details and updates regarding the use of AI as a research tool. A key aspect of information fluency is the ability to evaluate sources.

Video and Images

To check the legitimacy of images and video, Pace University recommends employing AI or Not, reverse Google search an image, and TinEye—applications that allow users to reverse search images and locate their origins.

Text

AI detection tools such as GPTZero are often incorrect and unreliable. It is better to detect AI using your intuition. Look for unusual sentence structure, repetition of information, content that is too vague, check the credibility of quotes within text (Are they accurate or real?), and sources used, if any.



Evaluating Misleading or Incorrect Charts

Charts and other visual displays can be intentionally skewed using various methods. Any charts you use should be screened for the sort of manipulation before you use them for evidence.

Consider these parameters:

- Identify the intent
- Information is too simple. Does it leave out information? Is it too vague to be used as data?
- Identify any bias. Who created the chart? Who or what was surveyed to collect data?
- Visualization does not match the character of the information. e.g., a pie chart used to visualize time-based data would be better suited for a line graph.
- False calculations
- Identify information on the x-axis and y-axis. Do they correlate?
- Look for citations that are specific to the field the data pertains to.

Ethical Use of Information

It is important to ensure that any content repurposed is attributed to the correct owners and not misused. Not ethically utilizing information can lead to more serious implications on behalf of UCF.

AI as a Source

You should always be transparent about the usage of AI in your work. Acknowledge where you used it and how it was applied. The Publishing ethics page created by Cambridge University Press in partnership with the Modern Language Association (MLA) states, “AI use must be declared and clearly explained in publications such as research papers, just scholars are expected to do with other software, tools and methodologies” (Cambridge University Press, 2025). If any biases or discrepancies are present within the usage, it is best practice to always be transparent on how you acquire information from any source.



APA Format

The American Psychological Association (APA) style guide states, “If you’ve used ChatGPT or other AI tools in your research, describe how you used the tool in your Method section or a comparable section of your paper” (McAdoo, 2023). AI tools are acceptable, but they must be properly acknowledged and explained.

Example (In-text quote): (Company name, year) → (OpenAI, 2025)

Example (Bibliography): Company. (Year of version). *AI tool name* (version of application) [Learning Large Model]. URL. → OpenAI. (2025). ChatGPT (Jul 24 version) [Learning Large Model]. <https://openai.com/>.

Example (Image): Company. (Version year). *AI tool name* (Version number) [Description of tool]. URL. → OpenAI (2025). DALL-E (Version 2) [Artificial Image Generation software]. <https://openai.com/index/dall-e-2/>

MLA Format

The Modern Language Association (MLA) Style Center does not acknowledge AI tools as authors, stating, “We do not recommend treating the AI tool as an author. This recommendation follows the policies developed by various publishers, including the MLA’s journal *PMLA*” (MLA Style Center, 2025).

Alternatively, the guide recommends paraphrasing the AI prompt in the in-text quote and including the prompt in the Works-Cited citation. MLA in-text citations are typically written with the last name of the author and the page number of the citation. However, MLA does not recognize AI tools as authors.

Instead, paraphrase your prompt:

Example (In-text quote): (“Prompt paraphrased”) → (“Explain the dramatic irony”)

Example (Bibliography): “Prompt description” prompt. *AI tool name*, Version, Company name, Date generated. URL. → “Explain the dramatic irony of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare” prompt. ChatGPT, 24 July, version, OpenAI, 28 Jul. 2025, <https://openai.com/>.



Example (Image Citation): “Prompt description” prompt, AI tool used, version, company name, date generated, and a link to the source. → “Surrealist painting of a gothic castle” prompt, DALL-E, version 2, OpenAI, 28 Jul. 2025, <https://openai.com/index/dall-e-2/>.

CMOS Format

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) recommends putting the citation in a footnote or endnote. Additionally, the manual discourages citing AI tools like ChatGPT in bibliographies. URLs that redirect to AI chat logs cannot be used or accessed by others and require login credentials.

Example (prompt included): AI tool name, response to “prompt description,” Company name, date generated. → ChatGPT, response to “Explain the dramatic irony of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare,” OpenAI, July 28, 2025.

Example (prompt NOT included): Text generated by AI tool name, Company name, date generated, URL. → Text generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, July 28, 2025, <https://openai.com/>.

Example (Image): Company name. Response to “prompt description.” AI tool name, date generated. URL. → OpenAI. Response to “Surrealist painting of a gothic castle.” DALL-E, July 28, 2025. <https://openai.com/index/dall-e-2/>.

Citing Sources

Refer to the *Electronic Documentation* chapter for information:

Avoid:

- Avoid ethically simplifying information
- Avoid “dumbing down” information without stating that you did or explaining your reasoning.
- Avoid taking quotes out of context
- Avoid taking partial quotes, especially from parts of speech, without giving context.



Relating Information from Different Sources

Synergizing multiple sources is the most effective way to form a strong argument and provide clear, meaningful information. While using one website, especially a reputable one, for all your information needs may be easier, it opens the possibility of one website having biases that are now shown in your work, or rare cases, reputable websites having false or not up-to-date information. This can be minimized by cross-referencing sources and ensuring to use a variety of sources from different organizations.

Quoting versus Paraphrasing

Quoting is the act of pulling directly from the original text. Paraphrasing references content from the original text in a brief, summarized format. Both techniques require citations as they are not original and reference outside research.

Incorporating Original Content Alongside Sources

Sources stemming from different media may present similar information, but formatting can differ from medium to medium. It's important to assess how similar, accurate or cohesive the sources are from one another. Sometimes, different sources may work well together, while others clash.

Understanding Web Safety and Resources

Staying safe on the worldwide web is crucial when protecting your personal information, such as your identity or documents. Additionally, web safety and etiquette is imperative to follow when it comes to respecting others online. This section explores the best practices and common resources one may use to navigate the web safely.

Top-level Domains

A top-level domain (TLD), according to CLOUDFLARE, is "... everything that follows the final dot of a domain name." (CLOUDFLARE, n.d.). For example, the website "UCF.edu" would be the top-level domain or TLD. For you, this indicates what kind of institution runs the website or what its purpose is.

This can help you filter out any commercial businesses that may not be a reliable source, or can help you only look at educational institutions. The TLD is a powerful tool you can leverage to filter websites and begin to understand their purpose just from a glance at the website name.



There are many top-level domains, and the next section will go over the most important ones to you:

- **Education (.edu) Domain**

To register a website with the “.edu” domain, the creator must process their website through a non-profit organization called Educause. Educause is the sole registrar of all “.edu” domains; therefore, their website lists the requirements to be given an “edu” domain/website.

Some of the requirements are that the organization must be a U.S.-based postsecondary institution, must be accredited by an institution recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, and many others (Educause, n.d.). This means that websites with the “.edu” TLD have been thoroughly checked and, at the very least, are backed by proper educational institutions. These websites are among the most trustworthy and should be one of the first places you look for information.

- **Commercial (.com) Domains**

It is one of the most popular TLDs and can be registered by anyone. This makes it a bulk of the websites you see online. Even if the “.com” TLD can be anyone does not mean specific sites cannot be reputable or trustworthy. These sites just need to be thoroughly checked before you do anything on them.

In addition, many subjects may be harder to find on other website types. For instance, many technical sources can be found on industry leader websites like CISCO, which is a major telecommunications company. This TLD is varied in its reliability, and as with anything on the internet, it is advised to be cautious with anything not from a trusted source.

- **Government (.gov) Domains**

This domain is controlled by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), which is the premier cybersecurity agency for the US government. To be eligible for this domain, the website needs to be run by a federal, local, or state government. This provides the maximum level of trustworthiness a website can get.

Government sites are safe to browse and hold many resources provided by the US government. For instance, the CISA’s website releases updates and alerts on major things happening in cybersecurity. Many “.gov” websites are full of



information and can be extremely helpful to get official information on a topic or service.

- **Organization (.org) Domains**

Although this domain appears official, it can be registered by anyone. Usage of “.org” TLDs should be treated like “.com” TLDs. Unless you are positive that the website is credible, it is best to be cautious of these websites just as you would be of any random website you come across. “.org” can be official-looking, but always be careful of these TLDs, as some could be malicious sites posing as legitimate ones.

Web Security and Safety

The web can be a dangerous place if you do not take the proper precautions. There is a wide range of threats to your information and the security of your computer or device. Before you go onto the web, there are a couple of things you will need to do:

Downloading AdBlock

The Adblock extension is recommended by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the United States government's cybersecurity agency. This extension currently has over 290,000 ratings and is a featured extension on the Chrome Web Store.

Steps to download: Go to the Chrome extension store and download “AdBlock” → Enable this extension in your extensions tab (the puzzle piece-shaped icon located on the top right of the window) → Click on the extension to open it and follow the interface to turn it on if it is not already.

Securing your Browser

Always make sure your browser is completely up to date. Do not wait to install a new update, as they usually carry security measures against new forms of attacks on the web. Most modern browsers are secure; however, it is recommended to further secure them by blocking third-party cookies. It is best practice according to the CISA to “Block third-party cookies and remove those already on your browser.” (CISA, n.d.).

This can be done by going to your browser's security and privacy settings and blocking all third-party cookies, as well as if on Chrome, you can add a block request to your



internet traffic to stop sites from tracking you. This is an easy but effective step to securing your browser without compromising usability.

Drive-By Downloads

A “Drive-By Download” is when you visit a malicious website, and the website immediately tries to install a file (usually malware) onto your computer. Even though AdBlock should block this, there can still be pop-ups that will bypass this protection. If they are successful, they will install malware onto your computer, which is a breach of security. The best way to protect your device is to let a website fully load. Do not immediately click on any links or buttons until you know where they lead.

Safely checking for Unsafe Redirects

This can be done by hovering your mouse over the button, image, or link. In the bottom left of your browser, it will show the link that you will be redirected to. This link can look official, but check for misspellings or letters that do not look right. Occasionally, malicious websites will use letters from non-English alphabets to mimic a legitimate website. This is a common trick on malicious websites to trick you into downloading malware or redirecting you to a more malicious site.

Download Attempt Blocked

Some malicious sites will try to download a file automatically upon opening. This will get blocked by your browser, and you will be notified that a download was attempted. This is usually in the top right of your window. If this happens, it is recommended to immediately close that browser tab and to perform a virus scan with your antivirus of choice. You can also check the downloads folder of your computer for any recent downloads. However, a virus scan will be able to find the malware even if it has hidden itself upon download.

Fake Websites

Many websites can copy and look exactly like the official website of whatever company they are copying. These websites will then prompt you to log in with your credentials and later use them for cyber attacks on your account. This is the main way they compromise your data. This is why it is always important to check the full address of the website. The same tricks used in unsafe redirects apply here.

Check whether it has the correct TLD, as that is sometimes the only difference. These are all good ways to make sure if a site is legitimate, but the absolute way is to search for the site on your own. You can see if the address is correct based on other links that come up.



Assuming you are searching for a legitimate company, they will usually have multiple sections of their website that can be accessed from the web. This should create multiple links to click on. If they all lead to the same website, this is a great indicator that it is real.

Buttons on Fake Websites

Most professional websites will have buttons on the webpage that redirect you to other pages of the website. These buttons will have the same text at the bottom left of the browser window and will appear to depress or change color on your screen. Most fake websites do not implement these features and are just a picture of the website they seek to copy. You can check these buttons for malicious redirects or having no redirect at all. This will help you investigate whether it is a real website or not.

Checking for a Secure Connection

Another important aspect of a website to check is whether you have a secure connection. This can be checked in two ways: first, by looking at the address and seeing whether “https” or “http” is there. If “https”, it is a secure connection; if not, the connection is not secure, and it is most likely a fake website.

A second way to check is to click the lock or other button directly to the left of the address in your browser window. This will show you whether the connection is secure and whether the certificate (another authentication measure browsers use) is valid. The site should not be immediately trusted if there is a secure connection, but this can tell you how safe a website is to input important information into.

Fake Download Buttons

These are usually on websites that claim to host files you want to download. While the site may be legitimate, sites like this usually have ads to generate revenue. These ads are not vetted and may display a “download now” button, usually green in color. This is not the real button of the website and will most likely download malware or redirect you to a malicious website.

This is mostly blocked by the ad blocker you downloaded onto your browser; however, this threat can sometimes slip through. It is important to be vigilant about what buttons you click on websites, especially if there appear to be multiple of the same one. If the real button cannot be found, it is recommended to leave the site and find another hosting the file you want.



Zero-trust Principle

The best way to stay safe online is to always be skeptical of anything presented to you. The CISA has a great policy for this concept, “ZT principles assume the entire network is compromised. That point of view provides a collection of concepts and ideas designed to minimize uncertainty by enforcing precise, least privilege per-request access decisions within information systems and services.” (CISA “zero trust”, n.d.). What this means is that “ZT” or Zero Trust, provides a good mindset to always deny access to anything you do not fully trust on your computer.

This style of security is usually called the principle of least privilege. If a website asks for permission you do not understand or tries to manipulate you into downloading something, do not trust it. If you do not trust a website, click away and find a more legitimate source. Being informed and cautious are your best weapons against the cyber threats you will face every day on the internet.



RESEARCH SKILLS

Research skills form the foundation of scholarly inquiry and are essential for both faculty-led projects and student mentorship. Whether guiding undergraduates through their first independent study or pursuing complex research, it is critical to approach the process with clarity, structure, and purpose.

This chapter outlines key components of effective research practice, beginning with how to craft a focused and meaningful research question. It then explores evaluating information, developing a realistic and strategic research plan, and employing practical methods for note-taking and data gathering.

Defining a Research Question

Defining a clear, focused, and feasible research question is the cornerstone of any successful research endeavor. Whether guiding a funded project, preparing a manuscript, or mentoring undergraduate researchers, a well-formulated research question provides clarity, direction, and intellectual rigor.

From Topic to Thesis

Start with a topic, narrow the focus, and formulate the research question. The question must be open-ended. Considering a specific angle in a modern context, no matter the topic, is a good way to refine the question into a central claim. When mentoring students, encourage exploratory questioning before finalizing a research plan.

Assessing Feasibility

Assessing feasibility includes ensuring the research question is answerable within available resources and constraints. Common constraints may include time, research access, research practicality, and originality. It is good practice to assess feasibility early, especially when applying for funding or designing student capstone projects.

You should be able to define the boundaries of the project and ensure if the research question is manageable. This prevents scope creep, a common problem where the goal



of a project constantly grows beyond the ability of the team. Avoiding this problem is crucial in any project.

Also recognize that research question structures vary across disciplines. In STEM, questions often lead to testable hypotheses, but in the humanities, questions may be interpretive or theoretical. For cross-disciplinary work, ensure the research question is understandable and relevant across fields.

Finding and Accessing Information

Finding information for a project hinges on access to necessary tools, data, and personnel. Researchers should assess the resources required to carry out their study. Digital or analog, faculty and students alike should adopt consistent systems for recording sources, insights, and evolving ideas. Data collection methods should be appropriate for the research design and carried out systematically.

Using Search Engines Effectively

You can modify queries to sway the relevancy in certain directions. By adjusting search items such as search modifiers or boolean operators, you can guide the search engine toward more specified information. Use operators as signals to further specify a search. These modifiers can help you find webpages with specific keywords, which is resourceful if a topic has an expansive scope.

Search modifiers and boolean operators (AND or NOT):

- **AND:** Use this when you want two or more phrases to be included in results.

Example: Knightro AND Citronaught history

- **NOT:** Use this when you want to exclude a word or phrase from results.

Example: Knightro NOT Citronaught history

- **OR:** Use this for multiple related topics to broaden your search.

Example: Knightro OR Citronaught history



- **Quotes (""):** Put quotes around key words or phrases that must appear in webpage titles.

Example: College mascots similar to "Knightro"

To determine if search results are ideal for your research, look for keywords, recency, and the most reliable-sounding domain. For more information on finding the most credible sources, refer to the *Research Skills* chapter.

Accessing Databases

Databases are collections of peer-reviewed and accurate information. An academic database can hold a myriad of detailed information on a wide variety of topics. This resource is extremely useful as the data and the findings are fine-tuned to specific topics. The UCF Research Guide webpage, located on the UCF library website, provides users with a list of UCF databases organized in alphabetical order. Ordering systems in tables helps you find exactly what you need and filters out unnecessary information.

Popular databases from the UCF Library Webpage:

Database	Content
ABI/INFORM ProQuest	Full-text journals. Dissertations, working papers, key business and economics periodicals, country and industry-focused reports, and downloadable data.
Academic Search Premier EBSCOhost	Articles from journals: 3,100 journals, 2,750 are peer-reviewed.
APA PsycInfo EBSCOhost	Published by the American Psychological Association (APA), articles from journals.
CINAHL Ultimate EBSCOhost	Nursing and Allied Health Literature. Articles from journals, conference proceedings, dissertations, and theses.



ERIC EBSCOhost	Education Resource Information Center. Educational literature and research. Journal articles, research reports, curriculum, and teaching guides.
JSTOR	Full-text research journals and eBooks.
MEDLINE EBSCOhost	Created by the National Library of Medicine. Authoritative medical information on medicine, nursing, dentistry, veterinary medicine, the health care system, and pre-clinical sciences.
Nexis Uni	Information about specific companies, executives, or industries.

Google Scholar is the most commonly used academic search engine, offering free access to a large amount of scholarly, often peer-reviewed, literature. Using this tool allows you to find reliable sources consistently. Google offers an advanced search feature to simplify cutting results without using operators.

Accessing Google Scholar Advanced Search: Open Chrome → Search “Google Scholar” → Click the three horizontal lines at the top left of the page to open the sidebar menu On the Google Scholar page → click fifth option: Advanced Search → Input keywords into the appropriate box for each field.

Note: The function of each box is simply explained by the text within the interface.



Find articles	
with all of the words	<input type="text"/>
with the exact phrase	<input type="text"/>
with at least one of the words	<input type="text"/>
without the words	<input type="text"/>
where my words occur	<input checked="" type="radio"/> anywhere in the article <input type="radio"/> in the title of the article
Return articles authored by	<input type="text"/> e.g., "PJ Hayes" or McCarthy
Return articles published in	<input type="text"/> e.g., J Biol Chem or Nature
Return articles dated between	<input type="text"/> — <input type="text"/> e.g., 1996

Planning and Strategy

A necessary research plan can help guide your research project and give the team direction when things go wrong. A good research plan can easily organize a complicated project into an easy-to-follow checklist that can be altered on the fly when obstacles hinder progress.

Time Management and Milestones

You can create a timeline by turning your deadline into a series of manageable checkpoints and breaking the project into phases. By splitting the process into manageable chunks, the research can be less overwhelming and adhere more closely to the timeline.

Staying on Track

Staying proactive and on track through regular check-ins and the use of progress trackers can help avoid last-minute cramming or straying off course. Keep yourself and any team you work with accountable.

Research Logs and Journaling

A research log is similar to a diary. If you are conducting research or documenting time, record every trackable detail about the research. You should maintain a research log if it



aids in analyzing sources and recording progress, which you may reference when necessary.

Research logs should include:

- Search Details (Date and Time, Websites used, Keywords and Filters applied)
- Sources Found (Titles and brief notes. Why was it selected? Citation links)
- Process Notes (activities accomplished that day, decisions made, questions that came up)

Journaling should include details such as research credibility, timing, variables, citation insights, dead ends, and the databases or tools you used. Try to keep track of your research details, project notes and the overall progress you are experiencing. More extensive note-taking and data gathering techniques are described in the following section.

Note-Taking and Data Gathering

Effective organization techniques, such as note-taking and data gathering, can greatly enhance research processes when creating documents for UCF. Common methods for staying on track with notes or data include printing, utilizing drives, or saving links to a document with summaries or key points. You can also code notes by topic, theme, or source type, making your navigation and reference of large amounts of research information easier.

Note-taking Methods

The Cornell method is the most effective note-taking method. The page is divided into three sections: Cue, notes, and summary. The notes section is used to write down facts, the cue section is used to write down questions, and the summary section is used to explain what you learned. This allows you to understand the information thoroughly by recording information, analyzing the information, and coming up with conclusions.

However, the most common and time-efficient strategy is the Outlining method, which keeps notes organized in a numbered list or bullet points. Headers and indentation are used to separate information and indicate importance. More specific details fall underneath headers and are indented further to the right.

Other useful methods:

- Mapping method: Notes branch off from one another, creating a visual of ideas.

- Charting method: Columns and rows are used to break notes into categories. Columns define categories, and rows contain the information.
- Sentence method: notes are written in short sentences. Information is often abbreviated.

Citation Management Software

Citation tools are digital applications you can use to collect and organize sources. Particularly, citation management software can be a powerful tool to organize your multiple sources. These can help your workflow be more efficient and your sources easier to track.

Free Citation Software:

Software	Assets
Zotero-	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Browser add-on (Firefox and Chrome)• Accessible on different devices• Offline access• Free• Share citations with others
Mendeley	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible on different devices• Offline access• Free• Share citations with others
EndNote	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible on different devices• Offline access• Free• Share citations with others• Cite from PDF



DOCUMENT DESIGN

The design of a document defines its identity and purpose. When writing professional documents, you need to think about each element of the layout and how they affect one another. Incorporating structure and document design into your document creates a visual rhetoric pertaining to the type of document while also maintaining a professional tone. This chapter focuses on the principles of document design and their characteristics: alignment, contrast, and grouping.

Alignment

Every element requires adjustment of its position through alignment. You can use alignment to maintain consistency throughout a document and also organize your document's design. The positions of elements can be both vertically and horizontally aligned.

Horizontal Alignment refers to the placement of elements on the x-axis, including left, center, right, and justify.

- **Left:** Defaults elements to the left, used for body text and standard writing.
- **Center:** Positions elements in the horizontal center of a space, used for standalone images, headings, and titles.
- **Right:** Aligns elements to the right, used for headers, footers, and additional information (i.e. your name, date, department)



The justify alignment setting creates a block text that makes sure all lines in a paragraph are the same length and width, creating spaces between words to fill in the space or container of the element. You can justify text in news articles and block-text writing, which may apply to UCF brochures, flyers, and advertisements.

Justify versus Center:

Justify	Center
The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major.	The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major.

Alignments should be used logically and consistently to maintain professionalism. For example, if you use center alignments for headings, all headings in the document should be centered. Alternatively, if your body text is left-aligned, the standard for documents related to business, law, or finance, the alignment should stay consistent throughout the document.

Correct alignment usage:

Certifications The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major.	Certifications The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major.
---	---

Incorrect alignment usage:

Certifications The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major.	The University of Central Florida offers different certifications based on your major. You can find further information on our website.
---	--

Vertical alignments are placements of elements respectively on the y-axis. In a document, there are top, bottom, and middle alignments.

- **Top:** Element is at the top of document or space ignoring margins.
- **Middle:** Element is in the middle of space within a document.
- **Bottom:** Element is at the bottom of the document or space ignoring margins.



When using vertical alignments for graphic and image elements, the image's dimensions can change based on scaling. The width and height may be fixed to fit the alignment.

Contrast

Elements and their adjustments create visual contrasts within documents. Different emphases can be created with typography, color, bold, and italics. Refer to the chapter on *Accessibility* to see how to professionally accommodate sizing and color of elements for impaired vision and color blindness.

Typography

Typography is the art of styling the appearance and display of text. Typography enhances legibility and visual appeal in documents, including typeface, emphasis, and hierarchy. You should use and design fonts based on the standard for professional documents and other types of writing for UCF, which will be discussed in *Font Types*.

Font Types

Choosing a font type depends on the audience and type of document. There are different categories for each font, provided below. Sans serif and serif are the most common fonts to use.

Each font falls under a specific category:

- **Serif:** These fonts have extra strokes at the top, bottom, or ends of letters, that create a professional appeal.
 - Times New Roman, Georgia, Palatino
- **Sans serif:** These are fonts without serif, or extended strokes in letters. They are popular in documents for their simplicity and legibility.
 - Arial, Helvetica, Verdana



- Gotham, Knockout (UCF specific)

GOTHAM

THIN / EXTRA LIGHT / LIGHT / BOOK / MEDIUM / BOLD / BLACK / ULTRA

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890['];,./
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Gotham font in different styles

<https://www.ucf.edu/brand/brand-assets/typography/>

KNOCKOUT

HTFB / HTF2 / HTF28 / HTF29 / HTF30 / HTF4 / HTF47 / HTF48 / **HTF49** / HTF50 / HTF51 / HTF67 / HTF68 / HTF69 / HTF70 / HTF71 / HTF72 / **HTF73** / **HTF74** / HTF90 / HTF91 / **HTF92** / **HTF93** / **HTF94** / HTF31 / HTF32 / HTF33 / HTF34 / HTF51 / HTF52 / HTF53 / HTF54

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ1234567890['];,./
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Knockout font in different styles

<https://www.ucf.edu/brand/brand-assets/typography/>

- **Script:** These fonts are elegant and resemble handwriting, used for signatures, brochures, or flyers.

- *Dancing Script, Caveat*

- **Display:** Like script fonts, display fonts are only used for decoration and design.

- *Lobster, SILKSCREEN*

- **Monospace:** These font styles have fixed width between each letter to fill up the same amount of space, used for coding scripts, typewriters, playwrights, or screenplays.

- *Roboto Mono, Courier Prime*

Serif fonts have a professional look for printing, which includes legal documents, research papers, and reports. The default font for professional UCF documents is Times New Roman.

Sans serif fonts are preferred in web and online usage. The UCF website uses Gotham and Knockout specifically to strengthen brand identity. Other sans serif fonts can be used for brochures, flyers, emails, financial reports, and other online documents.



You should avoid using script, display, or monospace fonts unless for decoration. For example, monospace or digital-themed display fonts can be used to advertise UCF College of Engineering and Computer Science (CECS) events and flyers.

Font Consistency

Professional documents should always remain a consistent font to avoid confusion and lack of legibility. Combining both sans serif and serif in a body paragraph or for different headings is not advised as the document loses uniformity and appeal.

Correct font usage:

Heading This is a sentence.	This is a sentence. This is another sentence.
--------------------------------	--

Incorrect font usage:

Heading This is a sentence.	This is a sentence. This is another sentence.
--------------------------------	--

Font Size

The size of a font determines the legibility and appeal of a document. You should keep the font size consistent for the body of the document. The size of headings should be consistent and refer to the hierarchy of headings: <h1>, <h2>, and <h3>. More information on headings can be found in the *Grouping* section of this chapter.

The font size should be legible across print and web formats, while remaining proportional (e.g., size 12 pt font). You should adjust font size based on which sections and elements of the document are intended for emphasis and visual hierarchy.



Correct size usage:

<p>Heading This is a sentence.</p>	<p>This is a sentence. This is also a sentence. This is another sentence.</p>
--	---

Incorrect size usage:

<p>Heading This is a sentence.</p>	<p>This is a sentence. This is also a sentence. This is another sentence.</p>
---	---

Typefaces

Typeface is the design of a type, either digitally or on print. Some fonts will have typeface, or families, which include options for the lighter and bolder variations of the specific font. Font families have the same type of font in different weights and choosing a typeface in the family will change the stroke and thickness of the text.

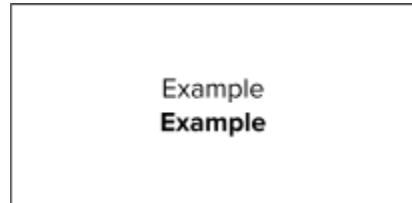
Montserrat Light
Montserrat Normal
Montserrat Semi Bold
Montserrat Bold
Montserrat Black

Geometric sans serif font Montserrat in different typefaces under the Montserrat font family (Entire family not shown)



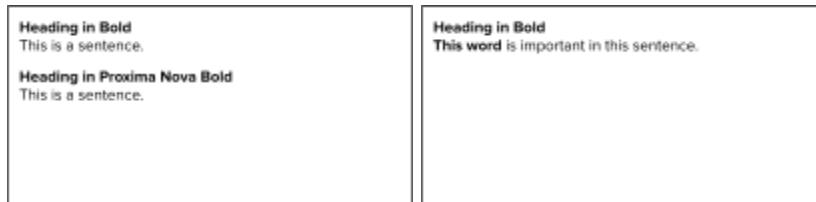
Bold

Using a bold emphasis makes a specific text have a larger stroke, visually consistent with the fonts labelled as bold in a font family, such as Montserrat Bold. However, the bold emphasis is less thick than other typefaces labelled Extra Bold or Black.

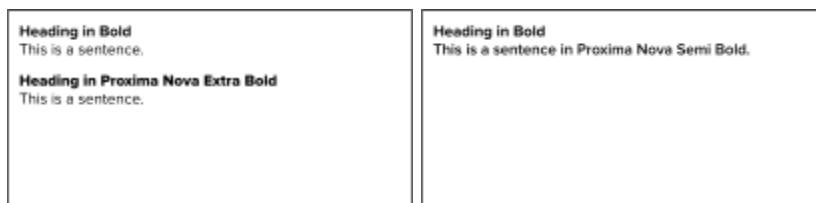


Bold is used as an emphasis which directs important words, texts, and headings according to the hierarchy of the document.

Correct bold usage:



Incorrect bold usage:



Italics

Italics are similarly used for both contrast and emphasis. Italics will appear as slanted text, used in body text and citations to emphasize a specific word, phrase, or reference.

Example
Example

Use italics for	Example	Do not use italics for	Example
Reference longer works	Books, films, studies, journals	Reference short works	Websites, articles, poems, songs
Words and phrases	Different languages, scientific names	Punctuation	Commas, exclamation marks, question marks, quotations
Punctuation inside citation	I.e., a study called <i>How do animals communicate interspecies?</i>	Headings and titles	Headings, titles, labels can be bolded, not italicized

Hierarchy

Your document should follow a hierarchy which arranges elements in their relative importance. Visually hierarchy improves legibility by guiding readers to different focal points, overall increasing the flow and logic of professional documents. Headings have their own set of hierarchical indicators, seen in the *Grouping* section of this chapter.

Example:





Using all hierarchical and contrasting elements will create stronger document design.



Following a structure organizes which elements are larger or bolder in your document. A document of one singular size and appearance will be difficult to read without elements of contrast and a proper hierarchy.

Line Spacing

Text and items are spaced out between each line, excluding the new line. Line spacing defines how far apart each line of text or element is between one another.

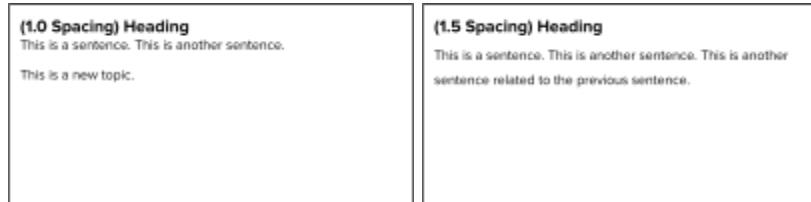
Size	Example	Usage
1 pt	Knightro's favorite study spot is the second floor of the Student Union.	Research papers, articles, business letters
1.15 pt	Knightro's favorite study spot is the second floor of the Student Union.	Default spacing setting for professional documents
1.5 pt	Knightro's favorite study spot is the second floor of the Student Union.	Website, peer reviews, advertisements
2 pt	Knightro's favorite study spot is the second floor of the Student Union.	APA or other documentation styles, editorials



You should ensure the document formatting produces a visually professional presentation through appropriate line spacing usage and paragraph breaking (through new lines), enhancing readability and organization.

Additionally, for drawing reader attention on advertisements and websites, spaced out text (1.5 pt or 2.0 pt) is advised for legibility.

Example:



The information should flow logically and be separated when appropriate. When moving onto a new topic under the same section or heading, use a new line to separate large blocks of texts.

Color

UCF has an official color palette that represents its identity, which includes black and gold. Usage of colors creates an exclusive reference for documents written and published by UCF, maintaining its identifiable brand preserved across all formats.

Colors that should be avoided are schemes such as pale text on dark fields that bring out inadequate contrast. See more about inadequate color combinations in the *Accessibility* chapter's section on *Color Blindness*. The use of the official palette guarantees visual integration and professionalism, bearing UCF authorship.



UCF branding colors in different opacities
<https://www.ucf.edu/brand/brand-assets/colors/>



Correct color usage:

Title This is a sentence.	Website Title Heading This is a sentence.
-------------------------------------	---

Incorrect color usage:

Heading This is a sentence.	Title This is a sentence.
---------------------------------------	--

Grouping

Document design groups elements based on their position in the hierarchy mentioned in the *Contrast* section. You can use headings, gridlines, and page-breaks to format and position the information of a document, creating the logical flow of professional documents.

Headings

Headings act as titles for the beginning of a document and the beginning of each section. Headings in documents indicate the importance of the overall section. Level one headings are the main headings for each section, and each section can have subsections with smaller headings.

The body text and headings' attributes should be consistent throughout each subsection as shown below:



Title <h1>
Heading <h2>
This is the body text.
Subheading <h3>
This is the body text.

Heading <h2>
This is the body text.
Subheading <h3>
This is the body text.
Subheading <h3>
This is the body text.

Level One <H1>

Level one headings serve as the most important titles in documents. For instance, level one headings can be chapters in longer documents such as books and research papers or sections on a website. The font size should be larger than the rest of the level headings or the same size as the title of the document.

Level Two <H2>

Level two headings are slightly smaller than level one headings, but still larger than level three headings and the body font size. You use level two headings to label subsections within a level one heading that still serve as the main ideas of that section.

Level Three <H3>

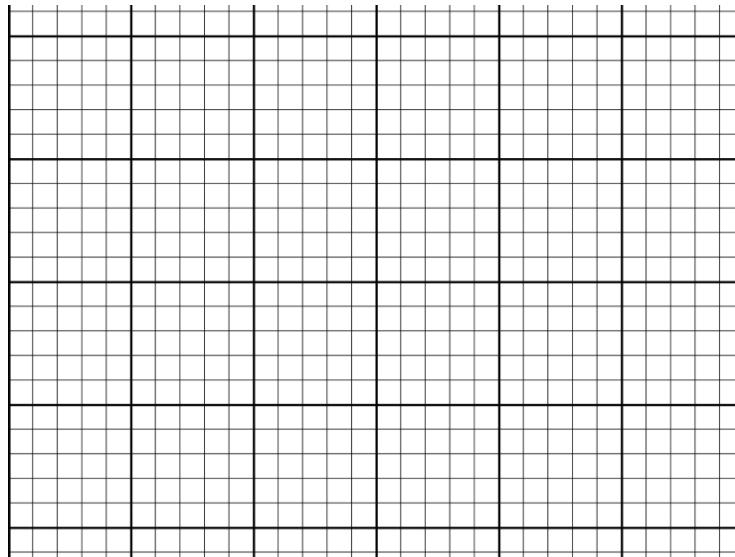
Level three headings are the smallest of the three level headings. The font size of level three headings should be larger than the body text and smaller than the other two headings. These headings are less significant than the preceding headings but can be used to further explain a level two heading.

Gridlines

Gridlines are horizontal and vertical visual aids that help organize and align data that keep the UCF document looking professional and leveled. Enabling gridlines in a document can help you balance and find the correct positioning for elements, similar to a leveling tool.

Gridlines can also be used for graphical data, but this is less common except for financial reports and data documents. For proposals, presentations, and reports, you use gridlines

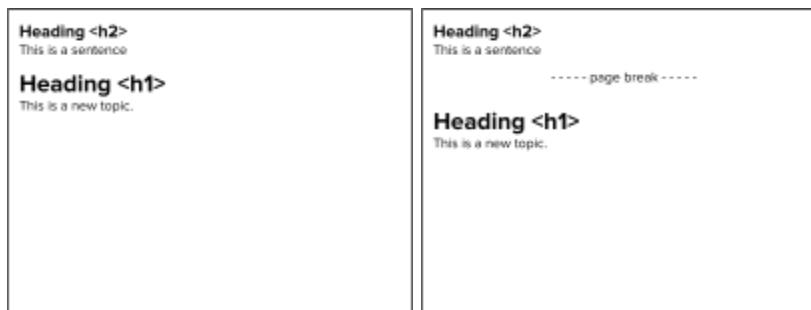
to place logos, constants, and other inserted elements into their correct placements. This creates balance and logic within the document.



Page-breaks

Page breaks are breaks in the page where continuous writing splits into two pages, adding another page to the overall document. You can improve document organization through adding page breaks whenever they are due. A page break separates two texts or topics completely from one another.

Example:



The image consists of two side-by-side rectangular boxes. The left box contains the following text:
Heading <h2>
This is a sentence
Heading <h1>
This is a new topic.
The right box contains the same text, but with a horizontal dashed line separating the two sections:
Heading <h2>
This is a sentence
----- page break -----
Heading <h1>
This is a new topic.

The first example has a level one heading `<h1>` proceeding with a level two heading. You should avoid writing like this as the transition from one topic to another is awkward without the white space from a page break.



Page breaks are needed when the chapter changes, or switches to a different topic dramatically. A subheading of the same or lower level (<h2> or <h3>) can simply use a new line or space character to start another paragraph or heading.

Headers and Footers

Headers and footers are texts that go inside the margin area at the top and bottom of each page. Headers can consist of information of the author or the current title or subject of the document. This includes the author's name, the date, contact information, small logos, and for reports and books, what chapter the page of the document is currently on.



An example of headers that go before the text of a document that include UCF logo and contact information
<https://www.ucf.edu/brand/brand-assets/stationery/>

Footers include page numbers, the author's name, the UCF department and document title, and sometimes a logo if the header does not already include one. However, for reports, papers, longer documents, and assignments, footers are mostly used for displaying the page number.



Lists

Documents can use ordered lists with either symbols, Roman numerals, bullet point, numbers, or letters. For each list and sub-list, the indentation shifts by one to the left. Each item on a list should share the same size, font, sentence structure, and symbol depending on which list or sub-list the item is on.

List	Example	Usage
Bulleted	List #1: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Item 1● Item 2● Item 3	Listing singular items, sentences, definitions
Numbered	List #2: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Item 12. Item 23. Item 3	Rules, chronological order, order of importance
Tiered	List #3: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Item 1<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Subitem 1○ Subitem 2● Item 2<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Subitem 1● Item 3<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Subitem 1○ Subitem 2	Hierarchy, each sub-list connects to the previous bullet point, indentation increases left shift

Each item in a list should have consistent structure. For instance, if a list item starts with a verb, all the other items should also start with a verb.

**Advertisements:**

- **Social media** - Use digital platforms to advertise product
- **Billboards** - Attract audience across different geographical locations
- **Commercials** - Promote product through television breaks

Each main item is bolded in the bulleted list, followed by an en-dash and a description of the item using an improper and imperative sentence structure that begins with a verb. To understand more about sentence structure, refer to the *Writing Styles* chapter under *Sentence Construction*.



GRAPHICS

Graphics are an important element of documents that allow for examples and demonstrations of the information provided in the text. This includes logos, graphs, maps, tables, images, videos, and even the text itself. There are other types of graphics used in other visual formats, but these are the ones most important for documents.

Logos

Logos are graphical representations of organizations, brands, or a company. There are a few logos present in this document, representing UCF. This expresses UCF as an organization supporting this document and that this document was expressly made for them, by them.

UCF Logo Types

UCF has three main logos it uses to represent different departments. The primary logo used by UCF is the Pegasus that represents the educational departments. Their secondary and tertiary logos are the golden 'UCF' and the golden knight logo, used to represent their sports teams. These logos represent UCF and are used to promote unity, clarity, and consistency.

Logos have some rules about their placement as shown in this chapter:

- They are to be placed at the beginning of the document or in the header/footer
- They should respect the margins of the document
- If in an email, they are placed to the left of the signature.



UCF Logos Commonly Used
<https://www.ucf.edu/brand/brand-assets/logo-identity-system/>



Figures

A figure is any graphical element that is used to convey information. There are several types of figures used for document design, including graphs, maps, tables, fonts, videos, images, and photos. What all of these graphics have in common is that they are intended to support the text by adding visual context for the information provided.

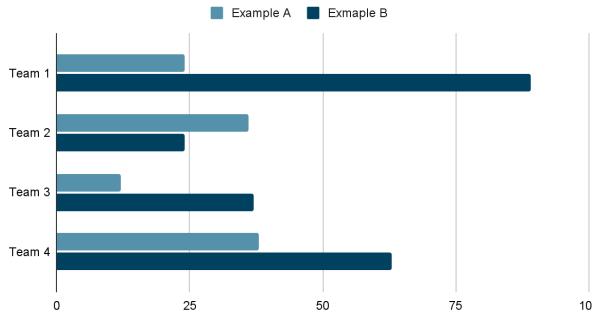
Graphs

Graphs help provide a visual representation of quantitative data in the text. There are different ways to approach this with different connotations and results.

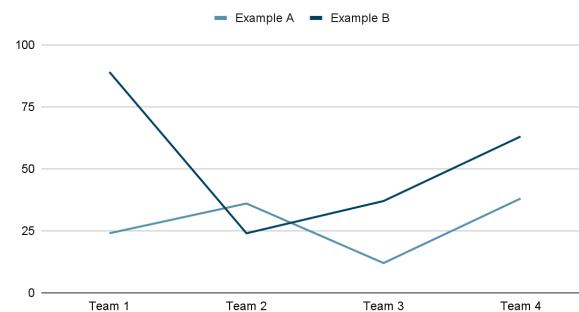
There are three main graphs and charts used in documents:

- **Bar Graphs** compare data from different groups.
- **Line Graphs** analyze change to a group over a period of time.
- **Pie Charts** visualize how groups affect the whole as a percentage.

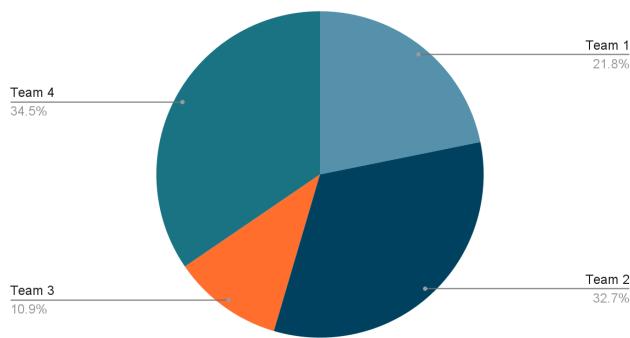
Example Bar Graph



Example Line Graph



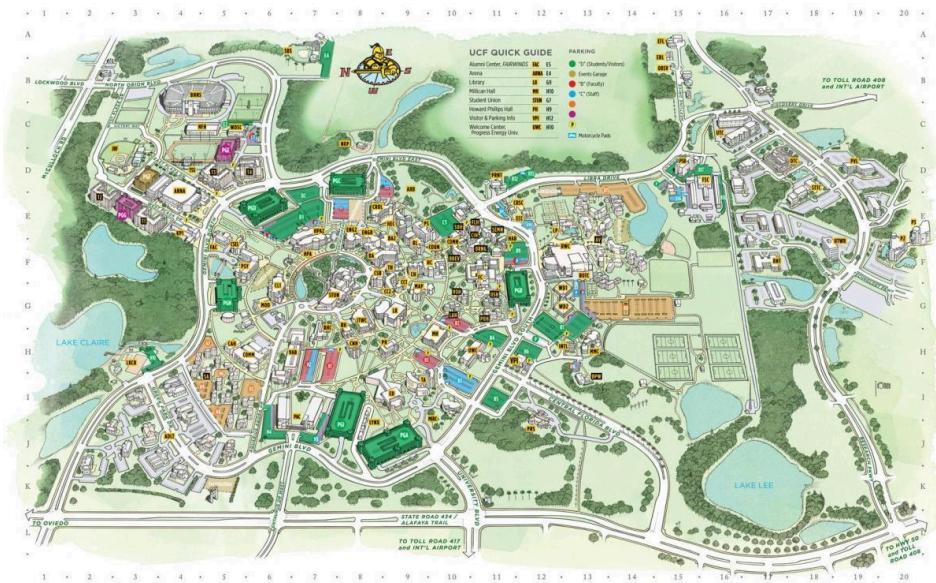
Pie Graph Example



Images made in Google Suite connected to example Excel sheets

Maps

Maps provide a visual for typographic data. It is important to make note that a map may be included as a separate document or file depending on its purpose. They include details such as structures, typographic items, a compass, and a key to all navigation help. Maps in documents will be of UCF structures, the overall campus, or the UCF parking system.



Map of UCF provided by maps-orlando
<https://maps-orlando.com/ucf-map>

Tables

You can use tables for the same purpose as graphs while containing less visual information. Tables allow you to organize information based on similar traits both quantitative (numerical data) and qualitative (descriptive data).

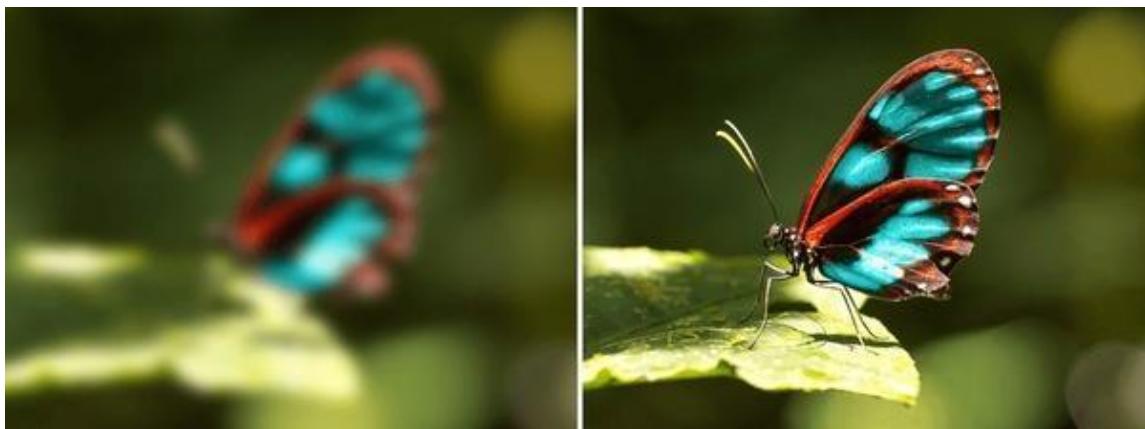
Example Table	Do you like Cats or Dogs?	Number of Team Members
Team 1	Cats	5
Team 2	Dogs	7
Team 3	Dogs	3

Images and Photographs

Images and photographs add depth and further explanation to documents. They help add context to complex ideas, depicting to the audience what may be too difficult to comprehend with just words. However, images and photographs can also be used in simpler situations to add variety and enhance the overall feel of a document. The number of images also defines visual rhetoric, though, and it is advised you strike the correct balance depending on the type of document you are creating. For example, a brochure may use more images than a financial report.

All images used for the university should follow these steps:

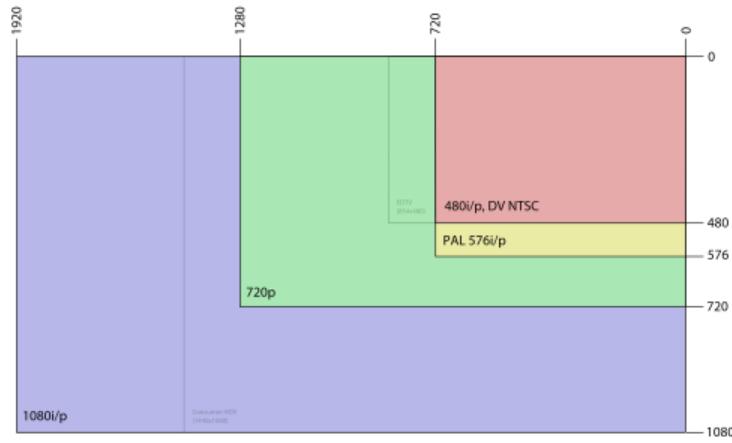
- Be high resolution to maintain the visual detail
- Have an evident purpose, backed by supported written content
- Follow all styling guides of the document



Blurry vs Non-blurry imagery by ShutterStock.
<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-photo/simulation-sight-without-myopia-collage-before-2146598101>

Videos

Videos are an enhancement for digital formats. Short clips are popular for events and instructions in UCF documents. All videos should be properly compressed in an acceptable resolution and include captions when possible; avoid automatic replays to limit distractions. The standard resolution for any video is 1080p (1920 x 1080 pixels).



Resolution Example
<https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/1080i>

Personal Headshots

Headshots may be used for important highlights such as profiles of faculty members, student features, and special news for the university. All shots are to be professionally photographed following the standard for the situation it is being taken for. They can also be made clickable to bring the user to the profile of who is being photographed for further clarity.

When using headshots, it is important to follow some rules:

- The photo should be high resolution with appropriate contrast
- It should have a clear view of the individual's face
- Attire should match what's required for the document/event

All headshots should follow the other image rules laid out in this document to maintain consistency across the page and layout. This is especially important when displaying more than one headshot, such as a team or a department. Text and spacing should also match the style-guide.

Image Characteristics

Imagery used in official UCF documentation must be properly rendered, informative, and backed up by the context. Consistent styling is to be used for all images, as well as a proper proportional aspect and location on the document.



Ensure images are properly cited as captions below the image using a font smaller than the body text font. See the *Captions* section of this chapter to read further about captioning graphics. Images on the UCF website do not require citation if they are photographed for advertisement and branding.

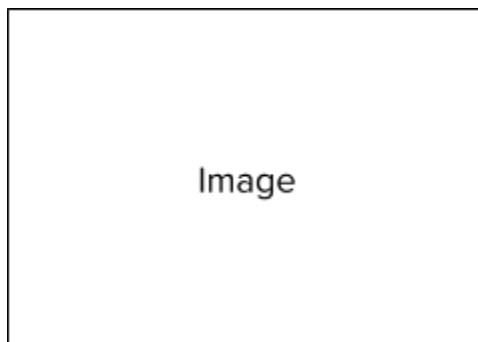
Size and Alignment

Size and alignment are important elements of the visuals. All imagery should follow these steps for clarity and readability:

- Be properly scaled to not go into the margins and make use of the space
- Mind the margins and paragraph spacing
- Make sure the images are aligned with other images or text to unity
- Place the image centered and size it to fill the space to half an inch of the text, this mimics an indentation to further help break up the text
- Line the images on top or next to each other in a meaningful way as shown in this document

Captions

Images and videos should include proper captions below them. The captions can help add further context to the visuals and credit where they are from. The caption should be clear to understand and concise to explain what the image or video is. Videos benefit from a separate transcript or embedded subtitles to avoid a large block of text in a caption as they contain much more context scene-to-scene.



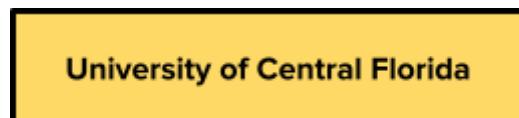
This is an example of an appropriately sized and aligned caption.



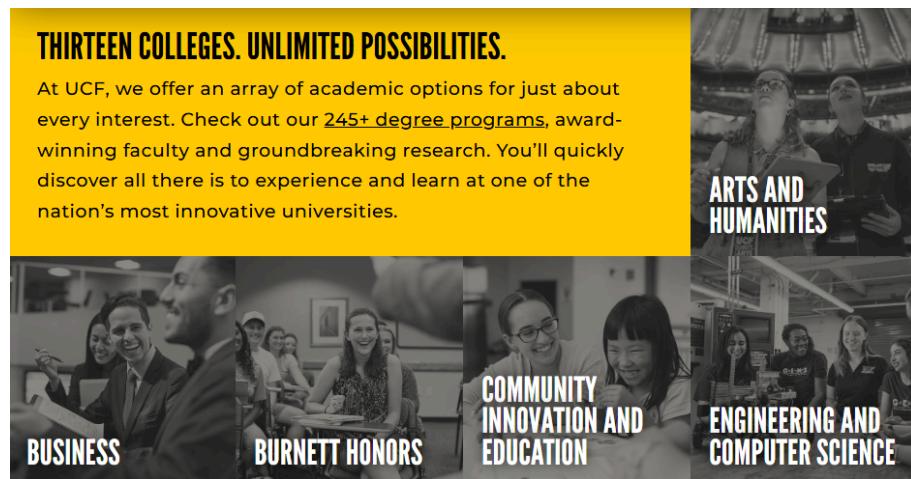
Shapes

Shapes are used to organize the content, support the pages, and highlight important information. Blocking out the text into parts, adding rounded edges to a photo, or making a specific design out of a graphic can help convey certain emotions you want presented in the document. It is recommended to use simple squares and rectangles to stay neutral, avoid bias, and keep a formal demeanor.

Example:



The UCF website uses the elements of shape and color to create contrasting headings and widgets, attracting users and audiences to interact with the website. Logos and graphics in documents use square and block shapes as well.

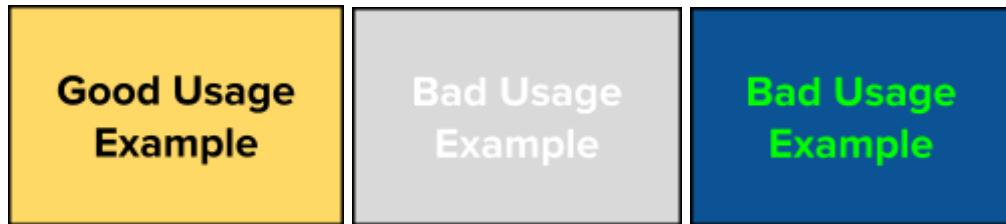


The UCF website formats both the text and images into smaller squares. The text overlaps the shapes to create visible contrast.
<https://www.ucf.edu/>

Contrast in Graphics

Contrast in graphics is a foundational principle in visual communication in documentation design. These practices ensure accessibility, clarity, and a visual hierarchy that helps readers process and comprehend the information more effectively and efficiently.

Instead of utilizing random or dull colors, contrast means intentionally choosing colors and design elements that aid the reader understand the reader.

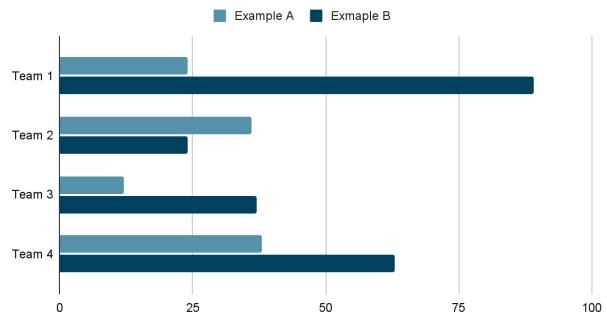


Graphic	Usage
Photos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Maps use contrast to differentiate places and service<ul style="list-style-type: none">Specific colors represent specific UCF buildingsHeadshots are consistent with clear and professional backgroundsOther photos use high contrast and imagery to maintain UCF brand
Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Subtitles and overlaying text must be visible and contrast with video content<ul style="list-style-type: none">Readability (See <i>Accessibility</i> chapter)Shapes utilize contrast for strategic emphasizing of important areas<ul style="list-style-type: none">Outlines, bold colors and shadows

An example of contrast in graphics is graphs, which use distinct colors and contrasts to separate data clearly. Tables benefit immensely from switching row coloring, bold and contrasted headers, and shaded or highlighted sections to make scanning and paraphrasing easier for the reader.



Example Bar Graph



In the bar graph, both variables are the same hue, but with different contrasting shades that clearly differentiate the two.



ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTATION

Electronic documentation refers to digitally created files used for sharing and storing information. This includes resources such as administrative forms, research materials, and syllabi. In the UCF community, information and resources must be easily accessible to all. Providing digital documentation allows different users to efficiently obtain sources that are clear and accurate.

Acceptable File Formats

All electronic documents should be saved in formats that support universal usability for UCF students and faculty. It is also important to include transcripts embedded in these files. Reference the table below:

Document Files	Image Files	Video Files	Audio Files
.DOCX	.PNG	.MP4	.MP3
.PPTX	.JPEG	.AVI	
.XLSX	.TIFF	.MOV	
.PDF			

Appropriate Uses for File Formats

Different file formats are best suited for various types of content and uses.

For documents:

- .DOCX files are used for editable text documents, such as reports or essays.
- .PDF files are ideal for sharing final versions that should look the same on any device and are harder to edit.
- .XLSX and .PPTX are Microsoft Office formats for spreadsheets and presentation slides, respectively.

For images:

- .JPEG is best for photo sharing due to its small file size and wide compatibility.
- .TIFF is used for high-quality, uncompressed images in professional settings.
- .PNG is best suited for images with transparency.

**For video:**

- .MP4 is the most common format for video because it balances quality and compression, and its high compatibility makes it ideal for sharing.
- .AVI is best used in Windows-based environments where high-quality video is needed.
- .MOV is Apple's video format, and works best in Mac and iOS ecosystems.

File Organization and Naming Conventions

A vital aspect of handling electronic documentation is ensuring files are neatly arranged and properly categorized throughout UCF's digital space. When it comes to achieving easy search and archiving, establishing a consistent file naming system is key. Clear, descriptive names that reflect the content of each document prevent ambiguity and confusion. This, along with a logical folder structure, ensures a neat and efficient experience when dealing with electronic files.

File Naming System

Establishing what format to use when naming a file, there is no definite structure that fits all documents. Naming conventions may vary depending on the type of files you are handling, but there are key universal parameters that can be followed to ensure consistency and searchability across a group of files.

Metadata

Metadata, as the name implies, is any information that helps to describe said information. For file naming conventions, this is information that can be useful as you decide a format that helps in making files distinct from each other while at the same time easily searchable.

Some examples of metadata used for file naming include:

- Dates
- Project name
- Student/faculty name
- ID number (UCF ID, NID, etc.)
- Version number (if the file has had multiple iterations)



Formatting Metadata as a File Naming Convention

Abbreviations can be used as you incorporate metadata into your file name. When shortening information, select a standardized parameter that makes naming between files consistent. A common abbreviation practice is to use letter codes that are two to three characters in length.

Some options include:

- Jane Doe = “JAN” (Use the first three letters of an individual’s first name)
- John Doe = “JD” (Use the first letter of their first and last name)

If your file is a project, abbreviations can also be applied (project 1 = P1).

Ensuring File Name Uniqueness

Names and abbreviations within a file name should be accompanied by additional specific information. ID numbers can provide a key that can help a file be distinguished from similar records or projects.

Examples:

- John Doe NID = jo346830
- Jane Doe ID = JAN8409873

Best Practices for Naming Conventions

There are many approaches for naming conventions of files. These guidelines can often become overwhelming, especially as standards can vary by field. For the purpose of the UCF Style Guide, here are the best practices you will follow:

If the files have to be sorted alphabetically:

- Keep the name or its abbreviation at the beginning of the file name.

If the date of the file is more important:

- Include that at the beginning so the files are sorted chronologically.
- Use ISO 8601-format (YYYYMMDD or YYYY-MM-DD) for dates.

Remember for spacing (Use one format):

- dashes (-)
- underscores (_)



- capitalize the first letter of each word.

Version numbers can be added at the end of the file name:

- Example: (for “project 1”, P1_v01_rendered).

Documenting Naming Conventions

Once you have settled on a format based on your metadata, make sure all files within the same category or folder stick to the same rules. Most importantly, keep your naming convention documented by including a separate text file (such as a README.TXT) that explains the rules that you created. Naming conventions should only use alphanumeric characters, dashes, and underscores, and file names should be 32 characters or less in length.

File name using first name initial, last name initial, dash, UCFID, dash, ISO 8601-format date, a descriptor, and version number:

- JD-8356353-20250729-report-v01.pdf

File name for a project using ISO 8601-format, underscore, abbreviated project name, short descriptor, and version number:

- 20250623_P2_renovation_v02.tif

File Organization

It is important to understand how folders (also called directories) help keep things in order, like labeled digital boxes for documents. A simple folder setup works well when you only have a few related files. If you are handling a lot of different types of files, you might need a more detailed system, using folders inside folders. Folders may also be referred to as a hierarchy or tree structure to group documents by category or purpose.

Standardizing Folder Structures

Establishing a clear and consistent folder structure is essential for maintaining organization and ensuring the documents are easy to locate, access, and manage through their lifecycle. A good practice is to create standardized folders that reflect the status of each document.

**Examples:**

- “Draft” contains working files still under development or review.
- “Published” contains documents that are finalized and ready for official use.
- “Archive” stores files that are older or outdated for future reference.

While the applications of this system may vary based on necessities, this general practice promotes clarity and version control while also reducing confusion, duplication, and the risk of using outdated files.

Reorganizing Existing Folders

While it might be easy to plan a folder structure from scratch, reorganizing existing files is often necessary. To start, get a clear view of what’s already in a folder. Most directory explorers allow users to manipulate file views and sorting for an efficient review of contents.

In Windows File Explorer, specifically, you can use built-in view options:

- On the top menu options, go to view. Switch to the Details view.
- Click any of the column headers (Name, Date Modified, Type) to sort files and group similar items together.
- Change icon size based on necessities. Small icons or lists are helpful for scanning many files at once. Large icons are better for image-heavy folders.

These tools make it easier to spot duplicates, old files, or misplaced content so you can decide what to delete, move, or archive as you clean up folders.

Storage, Backups, and Access

Proper storage, backup, and access practices are essential to ensure that important documents are protected, recoverable, and securely managed. Reliable document management depends on consistent storage habits, regular backups, and controlled access.

File Storage Options

When working with UCF documentation, files can be saved locally or in the cloud. When using a local option, a file is stored in a hard drive that can only be accessed from the physical device it is plugged into. While this might be a good practice for isolating a file



from networks, it might also be detrimental if the file needs to be backed up regularly. If the drive is physically damaged or lost, it might be hard to impossible to recover a file.

Cloud Storage

A common file storage practice for organizations such as UCF is to use a cloud storage service. These services provide synchronized access for files from any device that is able to obtain the authorization to enter a UCF account. For the university, the cloud service associated with student and faculty accounts is Microsoft's OneDrive. All email communications, as well as any files you choose to upload to this platform, are protected, monitored, and well backed-up.

OneDrive Access

There are multiple ways OneDrive access can be set up. Web-based access allows you to see files stored in the cloud from your web navigator, where you may download them to your local storage as needed.

You can use any browser to enter your UCF account using Microsoft's login portal:

- Go to login.microsoftonline.com and access your UCF account.
- Enter your OneDrive storage through the Apps option on the left-side menu (may also appear as an icon on the top-left menu).

OneDrive can also be set up for access using your local Windows File Explorer. When logging into a desktop using your personal Microsoft or UCF account, folders can be moved into OneDrive so your local documents are synchronized to the cloud.

Shared Files Through the Cloud

Another advantage of cloud technologies is being able to perform live collaboration for documents. Other platforms, such as Google Drive, are good places for non-sensitive project information and collaborative files. Users can be granted access to a document (such as a .docx project) so that they may perform edits, changes, or copies of a file.

Backup Practices

While the backup process tends to be highly automated in cloud platforms, if you choose to store your data within personal, local drives, consider using the 3-2-1 rule for performing backups.



Follow the 3-2-1 rule below:

- Keep three separate copies of date
- Use two different storage media devices (such as one copy on your laptop, one copy on the cloud)
- One copy off-site from your location (in case of natural disaster or theft)

For both cloud and local storage, also consider regularly saving copies of a document throughout various phases of its lifecycle. In certain cases, as the project is being completed, many changes are made that might be difficult to revert afterwards if needed. You may save these copies in a separate, properly labeled folder to distinguish them from the main document.

Access Control

In order to securely store, access control needs to be properly configured. Access for files within an organization can be regulated based on authority. A common practice for this is to use the principle of least privilege. This means that each user and application accessing a file is given the minimum requirements they need to perform their intended tasks based on their role and position.

Access Control for Google Drive

A common example where access control is applied is when using a collaborative .docx file in Google Drive.

When sharing a document:

- Review who has permission to view, comment, or edit.
- If you are working collaboratively in a project, it is a good idea to give your collaborators permission to edit.
- If your file is being shared publicly to anyone with the link, consider limiting the permissions to only view to prevent anyone from making unwanted changes.

Access Control for Mac and Windows

Access control permissions can also be configured through file properties on both macOS and Windows operating systems, especially when working with files stored on shared drives or network drives.



By adjusting the file's access control settings:

- Manage who can view, modify, or execute the file, helping to maintain appropriate levels of security across your team or organization.
- Network administrators can enforce broader access policies across the organization using tools like Active Directory, which allows centralized management of user permission and settings.

Security

Maintaining strong document security is essential to protecting the university's digital infrastructure and the privacy of its staff. Certain documents with sensitive information need to be handled with care so that they are never shared to the wrong section of a network or published. Files must be checked for viruses or malware before being uploaded to the university's servers. Following established security regulations ensure documents are being accessed by properly authorized individuals and reduce the risk of potential cyberattacks.

Protect Sensitive and Personal Information

When creating or sharing documents, be mindful of personal or sensitive details that should not be made public.

Avoid:

- Personal phone numbers
- Internal office numbers
- Direct email address

Individuals with access to internal system information like server names, network paths, or configuration details should also ensure none of these critical details are found in publicly available documents. Contact information meant for public use such as general department contacts (phone number or emails) is acceptable to include in documents.

Keeping Network Access Secure

In order to protect UCF's systems from unauthorized logins, make sure the following practices are applied:

- Do not share network credentials, passwords, or authentication details in documents, even among trusted team members.



- Unauthorized access, even if unintentional, can pose serious security risks. The university must follow the principle of least privilege, meaning individuals should only be given access necessary for their roles.
- Access permissions should be reviewed periodically and removed when no longer needed.

File Safety and Malware Prevention

Malware infections can have serious consequences for the university's systems and users. A single compromised file can spread across the network, disrupt access to critical services, damage or corrupt data, and expose confidential information, affecting not only IT but also students, faculty, and operations. Implementing safeguards against malicious code is a fundamental part of maintaining system integrity and preventing disruptions to university operations.

Scanning Files for Viruses

Before uploading or distributing any files through university systems, always scan them for viruses or malware, especially if its origin is from a nonreputable external source.

Untrusted sources for files include:

- Unsecured or suspicious websites that might be flagged as such by a browser
- Free-file sharing sites
- Pop-up ads
- Fake software updates
- Portable drives from unverified sources

Use trusted antivirus software and keep it updated. Windows devices include Microsoft Defender Antivirus built in, which is an effective tool to find and quarantine local files with potential malware hidden.

Using Trusted Platforms for File Sharing

To prevent accidental malware transmission or unauthorized access, avoid opening files sent directly via email or through messaging apps. Instead, upload and share documents using university-approved platforms like official cloud storage or internal servers. These platforms offer access control and audit trails that enhance security.



User Awareness and Security Guidelines

All users, including students, faculty, and administrative staff, share the responsibility of protecting the university's information systems.

Everyone should stay informed about current security practices, including:

- Identifying phishing attempts, such as checking for suspicious sender addresses, avoiding clicking unknown links, and reporting suspicious emails to UCF IT.
- Securing sensitive data by using strong passwords, enabling multi-factor authentication, and storing files in approved, encrypted systems.
- Responding to potential threats, which you can do by immediately reporting unusual activity, disconnecting your device from the network if you suspect malware, and following university incident response procedures.

Be sure to complete any cybersecurity training provided by university administrators and remain up to date about new security practices they may implement. This may include updated authentication requirements, emerging phishing threats, malware trends, or changes to university platforms and systems.



ACCESSIBILITY

In order to ensure all materials produced for UCF are accessible to all, certain procedures are to be followed by all writers. These accessibility guide lines have been chosen to ensure documents adhere to The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and can be understood by all regardless of disabilities. In addition, inclusive language guidelines are included to ensure material is appropriate for all readers.

The Importance of Accessibility

At UCF, it is important that your material is accessible to a wide range of individuals, and inclusive to all readers, regardless of physical or mental disabilities, race, religion, and/or sexual orientation. Disabilities come in many forms and by carefully selecting your language, document design choices, and incorporating technology you can write material that all people can clearly understand. Proper accessibility also includes writing inclusively so no individuals or groups are excluded in your writing choice.

Common Disabilities and Accessibility Options

Disabilities can be physical, mental, or both. It is important to create documents that people with disabilities have the ability to access and understand. Below are sections about common disabilities and writing methods to help keep documents accessible to those individuals.

Neurodivergencies

According to Stacey Reed, a Sr. Technical Writer for Wavelo, 15-20% of people in the world have some sort of neurodivergent disability that may impact their ability to read content you produce. Many of the practices found later in this chapter will focus on the topic of plain language, which is one of the easiest ways to ensure your writing is accessible to neurodivergent readers. You are encouraged to write short and clear sentences, break complex topics down into smaller, more digestible pieces, provide clear headings and subheadings, and more discussed in the plain language section of this chapter.

Color Blindness

There are many forms of color blindness, and very rarely full blindness to all colors. It is important to choose color combinations that contrast well, and avoid as many common

color blindness combinations as possible. This extends from text colors, to graphics and charts. Color deficiency is something faced by over 300 million people worldwide, and is more common than one would think.

Types of Color Blindness

- Red-Green (deuteranomaly) is the most common form, making it hard to distinguish between red and green.
- Blue-Yellow (tritanomaly and tritanopia) is the second most common form. Individuals have a hard time distinguishing between red and yellow, or blue and green colors.
- Monochromacy is the rarest form and individuals with this disability see no true colors, only shades of grey.

Color Iconography and Symbolism

Instead of writing “WARNING” in all red text, accompany the text with a graphic to draw the reader’s attention to that section of information. Ideally, you can also use bolder or larger text to draw attention to readers who have a hard time distinguishing the color method. When creating graphs, charts, or maps consider differentiating colors with a texture such as stripes or dots to ensure color blind individuals will be able to differentiate the data sets. Accompany charts and graphs with alt-text context so that screen readers can also remain accessible to color blind individuals.

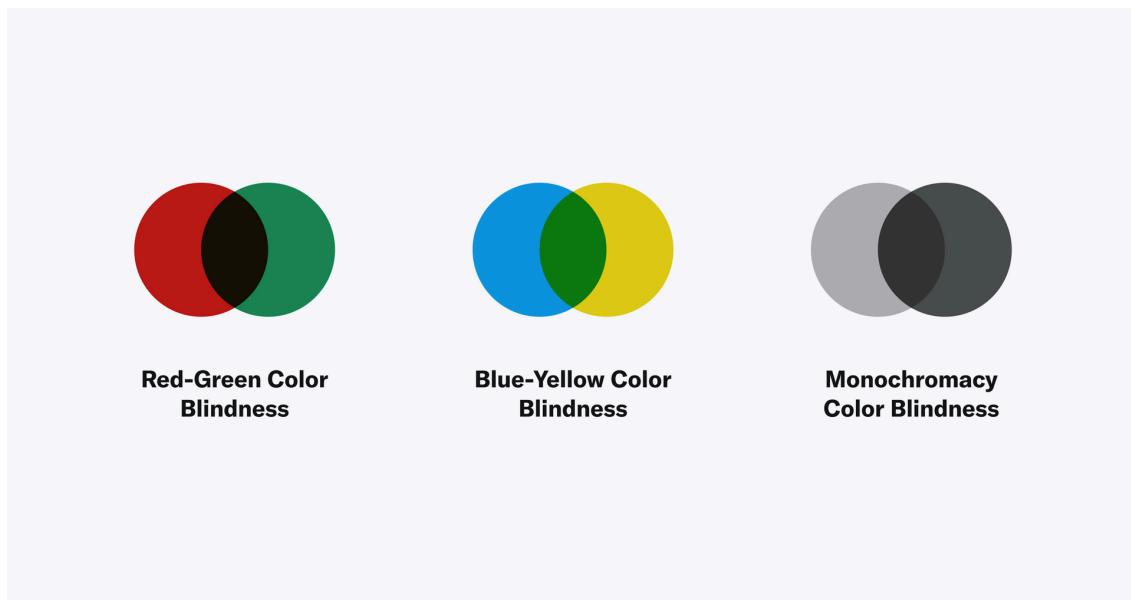


Chart depicting different forms of color blindness. From AudioEye
<https://www.audioeye.com/post/8-ways-to-design-a-color-blind-friendly-website/>

Choose Colors That Contrast Well

Picking colors that contrast well help them stand out better. In addition to contrasting hues, contrast by brightness as well. This helps avoid the colors looking blended or muddy to color blind individuals.

Avoid Certain Color Combinations

There are certain color combinations that are hard to distinguish if a user is color blind. Below, provided by AudioEye, are certain combinations to avoid due to the types of color blindness and contrast issues:

- Green and Red
- Green and Blue
- Green and Black
- Green and Brown
- Green and Gray
- Light Green and Yellow
- Blue and Purple
- Blue and Gray

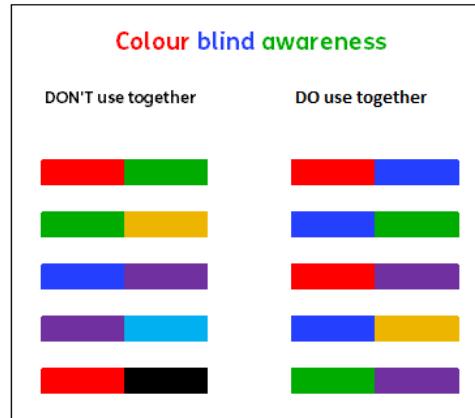


Chart of combinations to use or avoid for color blind accessibility.
From FullFact: <https://fullfact.org/blog/2016/feb/colour-blind-awareness-full-fact-graphs/>

Impaired Vision

Visual impairment is a fairly common disability. Visually impaired individuals may have a hard time reading or focusing on text or images. Employ certain practices to ensure documents remain accessible to the visually impaired found in the following subsections.

Typography and Spacing

Use simple, serif fonts like Times New Roman for print and sans-serif fonts like Arial for digital screens. This ensures word recognition and clarity for those reading the documents. Body texts should be between 12 pt to 14 pt, footnotes should be no smaller than 9 pt. Headers should maintain proper styles which are accessible through the documentation platforms.

Avoid decorative fonts to prevent overlaps between letters that appear similar. It is imperative that fonts are consistent throughout the document to avoid accessibility issues. Ensure proper spacing between headers and body paragraphs. Proper spacing helps with readability by creating white-space, and a visual distinction between paragraphs and ideas.



Print Materials

To maintain accessibility and readability, specifically for users with visual needs, it is crucial to use a high contrast between text and background. Ensure that documents are structured with organized lists, clear headings, and labeled tables. It is also important to be descriptive with color choices, pair them with labels or patterns to guide the reader. Avoid using settings like “Print to PDF” for accessible PDF files. Using OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software is important for ensuring that documents are accessible to screen readers.

Screen Readers and Alt-Text

Include informative and concise alt-text for informative images; if an image is explicitly decorative then mark it as such to skip in screen readers. For charts and graphics, include a summary in text describing their elements. Double-check that heading, tables, and lists are structured correctly so the screen readers can interpret the information in logical order. Avoid using animations that lack relevance in the document as it can lead to accessibility issues.

Closed Captions

When providing video content, it is crucial to include closed captioning. Creating a transcript without errors is ideal, as automatic captioning can return incorrect translations. Be sure to use accessible media players like Mediasite or YouTube.

Use:

- Synchronous timing
- 1–3 lines per screen
- 3–7 display
- Sans-serif font
- Correct capitalization
- No more than 32 characters per line

Document Accessibility Features

In order to maintain accessible documents, consider using the following tools and practices when writing:



Tool or Practice	Disability or Tech Issue	Explanation
Plain Language	Neurodivergent Disabilities	Plain language is easier for those with neurodivergent disabilities to focus on and understand. It is also helpful for non neurodivergent individuals to parse information quickly.
Screen Readers	Visually Impaired	Screen readers narrate a document so the visually impaired can understand when they may have trouble reading the document. Apply “null attributes” to any images to not confuse screen reading software.
Alt-Text	Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Color Blindness, Technical Issues	Proper alt-text ensures the image is inaccessible in a web document for example, the alt-text provides context to what the image is. It also provides context so that color blind individuals may understand the graph better.



Captions	Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired, Color Blindness, Technical Issues	Captions can accompany video and ensure the hearing impaired have access to the content within the video. Captions are available if the video is not available at all, providing a local backup of the video information always accessible.
High Contrast and Color Combinations	Visually Impaired and Color Blindness	By implementing high contrast colors, you ensure the document is accessible and easier to follow for those with color blindness or visual impairment as it stands out more. In addition, avoiding certain color combinations helps color blind individuals differentiate.
Physical Backups	Technical Issues	Provide a physically accessible backup so that in the event of power or internet outages, or technical skills, all documents are accessible somewhere physically for everyone to access.



PLAIN LANGUAGE AND INCLUSIVE WRITING

When writing at UCF, it is imperative that your language is clear and concise, easy to understand, and does not exclude any individuals. By adhering to plain language and inclusive writing, you ensure that your writing is both easy to understand, and accessible to all. Remember the UCF motto: bold, modern, and entrepreneurial.

Plain Language

Plain language is the practice of writing clearly and plainly so that everyone can understand and find the information they need quickly. Writing with plain language means that individuals who have disabilities that impair their ability to focus for significant lengths of time can quickly and efficiently parse information. For those who do not have disabilities, it can make complex information more digestible and understandable.

In 2010, the United States Government passed the Plain Writing Act and published the official plain language guidelines for all agencies to follow when writing. These guidelines have been adapted to ensure UCF writers are writing in plain language to help with accessibility. Plain language also avoids idiomatic and colloquial language, allowing for translation software to process the information more clearly.

Writing for Your Audience

It is important to consider your audience when writing. This means adapting your language and vocabulary for the intended audience. You want to ensure what you are writing is appropriate for your audience. Do not “dumb down” your writing, but consider including context or examples for more complex topics. For example, if writing about a complicated research topic, provide relatable context for your audience to gain a deeper understanding without having to dive into a research session.

Guide the Audience to Necessary Information

Focus on delivering the most relevant and important information up front, with clarification further on. By providing the necessary information first, your reader immediately knows what information will be in this section, and if that section is relevant to what they are searching for or if they should move elsewhere.



Organize Your Information

State the most important information, and the topic of the paragraph first. Put additional context or explanations towards the end of the paragraph. If the topic is too large or has too many additions to it, consider breaking it into subsections under the overall topic. Avoid having too much information in one section, instead add a subsection.

Write in Order

Write in an order that flows logically. Order your processes or events from beginning to end, in chronological order. This creates clarity, allowing readers to focus. Additionally, write topics using deductive reasoning, meaning from general to specific writing. This creates a logical flow to the content.

Useful Headings

Break topics into sections using headings. Headings organize your information into blocks that the reader can use to find what they need quickly and effectively. Use statement headings, rather than topic headings. Focus on clarity and being concise when writing headings, and when possible, prioritize noun-based headings.

Inclusive Writing

Inclusive writing is a practice that focuses on welcoming everyone. It specializes in avoiding words and phrases that exclude people based on their nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or gender. By following inclusive writing guidelines, all university material will be accessible to all. It is important to follow as UCF is a university with a diverse population and publishes material that is read all around the world.

Use Gender Neutral Language

Use gender-neutral pronouns when writing. Pronouns such as they/them are inclusive to everyone. In addition, avoid assuming genders. Instead of saying “ladies and gentlemen”, say “everyone.”

Use Respectful Language

Avoid words that demean or devalue individuals and groups. All individuals who write or produce documents on behalf of UCF should follow the essential rule of respecting yourself and others in the way we communicate.

**Incorrect:**

- “I hired a cleaning lady for my home.”
- “There are a lot of homeless people near campus.”

Correct:

- “I found a great housekeeper to help me keep on top of my home duties.”
- “There is a significant amount of people without homes in the area.”

Testing and Compliance

Before publishing any material, it is important to ensure all UCF produced material is accessible and scales properly. These crucial steps are a final check and step to making your material accessible to all, regardless of disability; or in other cases, technical issues will not disrupt your message.

Accessibility Checking Software

Many common writing softwares feature accessibility tools. PDF files can be checked for compatibility and accessibility issues using the proprietary Acrobat Accessibility Checker. Microsoft also creates a first party Accessibility Checker for all Office 365 tools (Word, Powerpoint, Excel, etc.) that checks a document for issues that may make reading hard for disabled users. More detailed information can be located on the respective websites for these tools.

Screen Reading Software

Screen readers are unique pieces of software that translate text, images, buttons, and other elements on a screen into spoken word or braille so visually impaired individuals can access the materials.

Test Multiple Screen Readers Manually

While there are many screen readers in use and supported, WebAIM, an organization focused on web accessibility, polled many screen reader users and determined NonVisual Desktop Assistant (NVDA) and Job Access With Speech (JAWS) were the most prominent choice. All individuals producing or writing documents for UCF should manually test their documents with these two tools to ensure proper function with these two screen readers. In addition, assign “null attributes” to not confuse screen readers.



Audit and Verify Compatibility

Compatibility with technology can erode over time. Check all electronic documents yearly to ensure they continue to display properly, all sources are accessible, and screen readers remain effective. It is important to use supported file formats that are up-to-date with UCF guidelines. Practice testing documents to identify potential compatibility issues before they are finalized. Confirm that hyperlinks are functional, alt text is provided for images, and media is transcribed. Keep track of changes made throughout audits to maintain a history of revisions for the document.

Check Compatibility with Major Updates

While yearly audits are important, not all software releases their major updates at the same time. Whenever there is a major update for your writing software, accessibility checker, screen reader, or any software used, perform an audit to guarantee your document remains compatible. It is also important to update your software as much as possible ensuring everything is saved and presented properly. However, avoid selecting pop ups that appear to be a required update.

Do not update if you see:

- Urgent Language like “Your computer is infected!” or “Immediate action required!”
- Spelling and grammar errors
- Unexpected pop-ups
- Difficulty closing the pop-up
- Aggressive tactics that may try to scare you

Offline Access

Offline copies of printed material are to be archived in the UCF library for access in the case of internet outage or personal technology issues that will take lengthy resolution times. This is to ensure access to these documents are available at all times, regardless of technical issues.

Feedback and Accessibility Feature Requests

Please submit all feedback regarding accessibility issues and requested features to the UCF Student Accessibility Sources (SAS) website located on the UCF site. SAS focuses on working collaboratively with students to create an inclusive environment for everyone, “...happy to discuss any course or campus barriers that may be preventing access to education and an equitable campus experience for students.”



CONCLUSION

On behalf of all of the hardworking contributors of this style guide, thank you for taking the time to engage with the chapters of this document. Your commitment to bold, modern, and entrepreneurial standards helps strengthen UCF's mission of creating purpose-driven documents. The guidelines, tools, and standards discussed in the UCF Style Guide will act as a living resource. You are encouraged to revisit them often by leaving feedback to ensure exemplary communication for future users.

Feedback Focus Areas

It's important to consider that as UCF writing evolves, so will this guide. User feedback is imperative to ensure continued consistency, clarity, and alignment with the style guide's intended goals. Below are the common feedback focus areas to help you provide constructive and effective feedback.

Writing Style

Compile writing style feedback with tone, point of view, and word choice in mind. Always consider how your suggestions can improve UCF's brand and voice: bold, modern, and professional. Likewise, send feedback on any jargon that is not clearly defined, bias, exclusivity, or passive voice. With your input, the guide's writing style will continue to uphold a standard of clarity and ease of use for future users.

To submit your feedback, please send to [Jose Almonte](#)

Grammar and Mechanics

If the style guide does not reflect its own rules of grammar and mechanics, content may lead to confusion and must be updated accordingly. Grammar and mechanics feedback should cover proper spelling, punctuation, and capitalization throughout the document. Consider any instances of run-on sentences, parallelism, and fragments when making suggestions about content consistency.

To submit your feedback, please send to ch403167@ucf.edu



Formatting and Design

Written content in the style guide that is overshadowed by visual inconsistencies can further lead the user astray. Consider sending formatting and design feedback if you notice any issues with page layout, logical hierarchy, typography, or other visual elements such as tables or images that limit user accessibility.

To submit your feedback, please send to [Ariela Appadoo](#)

Documentation

Send documentation feedback if any in-text or works-cited pages display errors in MLA formatting, links, or refer to less than credible sources. Attribution of quotes, data, and visual elements must be relevant and accessible as well.

To submit your feedback, please send to [Aala Omar](#)



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