



## **NOW publishing standards (April 2011)**

University Communications Services

The following guidelines were produced by University Communications Services (UCS) to ensure content published on NOW and its newsletters is vivid, accurate, concise and informative. Please follow these writing tips to guarantee event notices, stories, news briefs or news releases are accessible to all NOW readers: students, faculty, staff, alumni, media, decision makers and the general public.

While these at-a-glance writing tips were drafted for easy perusal, UCS uses the 16th edition of *The Canadian Press Stylebook* and the second edition of [The Canadian Oxford Dictionary](#) for more detailed style and spelling questions. If you have any editorial questions not addressed in these standards, please email Internal Communications at [internalcomms@concordia.ca](mailto:internalcomms@concordia.ca). For questions regarding French terminology, please consult the [search engine](#) developed by Concordia Translation Services.

Remember online content should be accessible to people with low vision, too. For more information on accessibility, please refer to the [Web Accessibility Initiative](#).

### **Story length:**

- NOW stories should be at least 200 words in length but no more than 500 words.
- Exceptions to word-length apply to features originally published in the Concordia University Magazine and Journal.

### **Opening sentence:**

- Because several units supply content for NOW, avoid the following lead for department, Faculty or institutional announcements: "Concordia University is pleased to announce ..."
- An institution or unit is not a person and cannot be pleased, delighted or thrilled.
- With 12 to 16 stories on NOW and its newsletter formats, all items must carry different leads, should appear neutral and refrain from emoting announcements that state how a unit feels about the event.

### **Alternatives for opening sentences:**

- Let news be news. Opt for creative and straightforward ways to begin announcements.
- A wrong lead would be: "The JMSB is thrilled to announce the recruitment of top talent ..."
- A better sentence would be: "A leading expert on hipster culture, professor Zeynep Arsel has joined Concordia's John Molson School of Business ..."

### **Avoid addressing readers as "you":**

- Avoid addressing readers directly, e.g. "You don't want to miss this event."

**Don't expire news:**

- Write dynamic leads so readers can assess why this news is important *today*.
- NOW items must remain fresh. Do not put dates of past events in the first sentence. If an event takes place in the future, the date can be included in the first sentence, but don't lead with it: Put it at the end of the sentence.
- Never begin news with "last week," "last month," "last year," "yesterday," "tomorrow," "next weekend," etc.

**Headlines:**

- Headlines for stories should be three to eight words long.
- Headlines should surprise or entice, e.g. "And the honorary degree goes to ..."
- Only the first word of a title should be capitalized, unless it includes a proper name.
- Avoid using Concordia University in headlines — except to announce major funding grants, distinctions or anything to do with the president, i.e. "Concordia moves up in Maclean's ranking" or "Concordia president to visit China."

**Subheads:**

- Stories must include a subhead so readers may immediately seize the subject matter.
- Subheads should always include the Concordia name.
- Only the first word of a subhead should be capitalized, unless it includes a proper name.
- Subheads must be at least 12 words and no more than 20 words long and should resemble a well-crafted Twitter update, e.g. "Concordia photography professor wins Prix du Québec."

**Blurbs:**

- Stories must also include a blurb of about 20-30 words.
- Blurbs should follow the same guidelines as subheads (above), but should be longer and more detailed.

**Dates:**

- Because NOW also targets external audiences, date-sensitive news should spell out exact day, month and time of events; e.g., Monday, September 13 at 10 a.m.

**Phone numbers:**

- The proper way to write numbers is: 514-848-2424, ext. 4880.

**Addresses:**

- Don't assume people know where major buildings stand. Always specify exact locations of venues, e.g. Room H-763, Henry F. Hall Building (1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W.).
- In cases where buildings do not have official names, please note address, e.g. Room FA-102 (1260 Mackay St.).
- Use English format for "Blvd." and "St." etc. but use hyphens in the Quebecois style (e.g. "St-Laurent Blvd." not "boulevard Saint-Laurent") for Quebec place names.

**Event notices:**

- Many event notices are missing key information, e.g. the event will be held at Concordia. Add essential details so that anyone may understand who, what, when, where and why. When and where should be clearly highlighted on separate lines (see Appendix 2 below).
- A clear event notice would be: "The lecture, presented by the Concordia Department of Biology, will be held on Saturday, October 2, at 2:30 p.m., in Room H-763 of the Henry F. Hall Building (1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W.)."

- See Appendix 2 below for the event notice template showing what elements to include and how.

#### **Avoid acronyms or colloquialisms:**

- Items published on NOW must avoid internal lingo and colloquialisms.
- Avoid acronyms. Upon first reference, spell out entire department or Faculty names, preceded by the Concordia name.
- Online content can be repurposed — via external sites, blogs, tweets etc. — so please include references to the relevant department, Faculty, unit etc. to ensure Concordia does not lose its identity.
- If a lengthy name is used more than once, add the acronym in parentheses after first reference and use acronym thereafter: “The Concordia John Molson School of Business (JMSB) ranked first. JMSB student Jane Doe says she’s thrilled by the recognition.”

#### **Capitalization of names:**

- Proper names — prizes, awards, Faculties, departments etc. — must be spelled out and capitalized, i.e. Department of Sociology and Anthropology (not sociology department).
- Capitalize all proper names (e.g. Twitter not twitter; a tweet is lowercased).
- Consider appropriate appellations — lecturer, professor, researcher, scientist, staffer, Concordian, dean etc. — to avoid redundancy when a person is quoted several times in a story, e.g. says the dean; says the president.

#### **Says or said:**

- Write stories in a uniform, active voice and opt for the present tense.
- Use the active word “says” rather than the passive “said” when quoting people.
- Reports on past events such as lectures, however, require past tense “said.”
- Example of “says” versus “said”: “Galileo says the earth is round: ‘The earth is not flat. It is round, like a ball,’” he said in an interview, once, with the Globe and Mail.

#### **Quote attribution:**

- When a person is quoted, use this opportunity to immediately introduce who is speaking and provide their full name, title, department or affiliation to Concordia.
- An example? Loners and antisocial kids who reject other children are often bullied at school — an accepted form of punishment from peers as they establish social order. “For groups to survive, they need to keep their members under control,” says lead researcher William M. Bukowski, a professor at the Concordia Department of Psychology and director of its Centre for Research in Human Development.

#### **Avoid passive words; opt for clarity:**

- Retaining attention — especially online — is a challenge, so please use active language.
- Avoid words that finish with “ing.” Always opt for a clear explanation.
- An example of passive and unclear sentence: “Professor XYZ is *researching* a new *controlling* mechanism that may one day *augment farming* and *food producing*.”
- A clear and active sentence that still retains an “ing” word would be: “Professor XYZ is researching ways to boost farm efficiency and increase food production.”

#### **Font:**

- Employ the same font type and size — from headline to final sentence.

#### **When to use italics:**

- Use italics for proper journal names.

- Use italics for titles of cited movies, plays, TV shows, books and music albums/CDs.
- Place quotation marks around titles of TV episodes, book chapters, and magazine and newspaper articles.

**Brand online content:**

- Items published on NOW should include a **related links** section — at the end of each document — to promote departments, Faculties or affiliated institutions related to the story.
- Links are resources that encourage readers to stick longer to Concordia's website.
- Extra navigation tools allow Concordia better positioning in [Webometrics surveys](#).
- Adding related links can give potential students direct access to information about a department or professor featured in a story.

**Dos and don'ts of web links:**

- If possible, avoid external links that push readers outside the Concordia domain.
- Do not hyperlink words throughout a brief, except where essential, because too much hyperlinked text can be jarring to read.
- Do not embed links in a Word document. It is better to have the text for the link followed by the full URL. Whoever posts it will embed the links online.

**When to drop http:// or www:**

- When a story is sent to UCS staff for publication, provide complete web address to allow a webmaster to hyperlink online references.

**Descriptive paragraphs:**

- Avoid extraneous descriptive paragraphs, otherwise know as boilerplates, in news releases published online. Exceptions are for news releases printed for news conferences.
- Boilerplates were invented for the fax era and when information about institutions wasn't readily available. Descriptive paragraphs are redundant for anything published online.

**Writing references:**

- Examples of an effective [event listing](#), [news brief](#), [news report](#), [announcement](#), [news release](#) and [research news release](#) can be consulted online.

## Appendix 1

### **News release or story necessities:**

The following are the essentials to include in any news release or story:

#### **Title:**

Three to eight words max

#### **Subhead:**

Concordia name or relevant department, Faculty, or unit etc. should be included.

#### **Blurb:**

A quick synopsis telling the reader what the story is about, the blurb should be longer and more detailed than the subhead.

An opening paragraph should contain one or two sentences to provide context. Keep text light so it remains easily understandable, especially online. Crucial elements — who, what, when, where and why — can sometimes be mentioned in the second or third paragraph.

Provide a quote in the second or third paragraph. Use this quote to immediately introduce the speaker and provide their full name, title, department or affiliation to Concordia.

Unless it concerns a complex matter, a news release or story should not exceed 500 words.

#### **Partners in research:**

If a study or project received special grants, mention funders to provide visibility.

#### **Related links:**

- Add any relevant websites from department, research centre, Faculty or external group

#### **Source:**

Name, coordinates, relevant website etc.

## Appendix 2

### **Event notice necessities:**

The following are the essentials to include in any event notice:

**Title:** Date - Event Name (abbreviate all months to three letters, period, space, number, space, hyphen (not em dash), space, event name)

**Blurb/subhead:** Twelve to 20 words.

### **Introduction and event description:**

**When:** Day of week, date, time (spell out day of week and month)

**Where:** Full Building Name (give address in parentheses)

### **Any additional information not previously mentioned:**

#### **Related links:**

- bulleted
- includes description of link and full URL
- include more than less