

Writing for the GSU Website

Guidelines and Rules for Content Owners



Governors State
UNIVERSITY

1 University Parkway, University Park, IL 60484

To all who write for our new website;

First I want to thank you for your hard work and commitment to this important initiative. In today's highly competitive environment we must give particular attention to communicating GSU's big ideas. The new website will tell that story in ways no other medium can — particularly to prospective students.

Change is never easy, but that has never deterred us at GSU. As we take ownership of web content as never before, we'll all experience a learning curve — and that's great. What could be better in this learning community?

I look forward to seeing all your excellent work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elaine P. Maimon". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Elaine" being the most prominent part of the signature.

Sincerely,
Elaine P. Maimon
President

Introduction

The new GSU website will be a complete redesign of one of our most important tools in attracting new students, making connections with our communities and raising awareness of all our university has to offer.

What follows are guidelines and rules for content owners and writers. They are designed to ensure consistency and effectiveness across the entire site.

Format

The first paragraph is the most important one. Keep it short – even one sentence – and tell the reader what's most important to know about this page.

Use short paragraphs. Research shows that short, concise paragraphs and bulleted lists keep readers engaged, while long paragraphs can discourage readers.

Write like a reporter, using the inverted pyramid style. The most important information goes at the top of the paragraph, then follow with details and other information.

Guide the reader through each page by using subheads.

Edit ruthlessly. Pare your content until it contains only the essential message.

Use bold face sparingly. Bold should be used for headings and then rarely for any other emphasis. Too much bold makes text harder, not easier, to read.

Italics should also be used sparingly. Italics on the web are hard to read. When long paragraphs are in italics you are making the text harder to read, not giving it emphasis. Exceptions are book titles and other style points as outlined in the AP Stylebook, 2013 edition.

Use all caps sparingly. Research shows text in all caps is harder to read than mixed case.

Do not underline text. On the web underlined text signals a link. Giving a sentence an underline for emphasis is misleading.

Avoid exclamation points.

Don't be afraid to use contractions, they're closer to the way people really talk – exactly what we're aiming for. (That's great. vs. That is great.)

Tone, Language and Message

GSU has been known as a place for innovation and big ideas since our founding. That's an important message for all visitors to our site. Make sure that your content focuses on how your programs keep that spirit of innovation alive. Be sure to highlight new offerings or programs that have received attention and recognition from professional, academic or other sources.

The stylebook for public-facing communications – including the GSU website, online advertising, print or television advertising, posters, etc. – is the AP Stylebook 2013 edition (See “Before you publish” for the online resource.) The rules of APA Style®, detailed in the publication The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, are for use in academic writing.

The primary audience for the GSU website is prospective students. Remember you are writing for them. Secondary audiences are parents, community members, prospective faculty and staff, the media, legislators, alumni and donors.

GSU is a welcoming place. For many readers the website will be their first chance to get to know us. Keep the language on your pages both clear and friendly. While content should avoid being too casual, keep it conversational without using slang, jargon or colloquialisms.

Don't waste space welcoming the reader to your landing page. Most web readers see “welcome” content as filler. Get directly to the information the reader is looking for.

Mission statements are important, but not on the landing page for your department or college. However, you can capture the essence of your mission in reader-friendly tone and language.

When the content talks directly to the reader, use second person singular (you, your). When referring to GSU, use first person plural (we, our).

GSU is a campus full of energy. Avoid using the passive voice. Active voice is not only more direct and less cumbersome; it will give the reader a clearer picture of our personality.

Stay away from “GSU speak” or terms and references that are part of our own campus language and that only current students, faculty or staff would easily understand.

GSU is one brand. Do not create a separate brand for your college or department. Do not modify the logo. The current tagline for GSU is Big Ideas Live HereSM. Contact the Marketing Department for help and approval before using the tagline or the GSU logo.

Know the Competition

As you create website messages for prospective students, keep in mind that they will be weighing GSU against the rest of their “shopping list” of colleges and universities. Our goal is to move GSU to their “apply” list.

It’s always helpful to know what our competitors are saying about their offerings. That is particularly important now that GSU is becoming a four-year university. Our competitive set is changing. Instead of standing alone as the region’s only upper division university, we’re now competing for students, faculty, staff and donors with every other college and university in northern Illinois and northwest Indiana – and then some. Visiting the sites of other universities is a good way to understand how they are appealing to our audience and how we can communicate and differentiate the benefits of GSU.

Never, ever cut and paste

Respect copyright laws. While it’s good to know what our competitors are saying, cutting and pasting their content is never allowed. Even using another university’s content with minor edits is not allowed. Using the content of other websites not only violates copyright law, it means using language that fails to accomplish our site’s primary goal – differentiating GSU from other universities and making us the logical choice for prospective students.

The GSU website is our brand. It is distinctly ours. And distinctly new. That means that all sections must be rewritten. Cutting content from pages on the old GSU site and pasting them into the new site won’t accomplish the consistency of language and tone that is the trademark of effective websites. The top 100 pages of the site have been written for you and provide a good guide for language and style.

Before and after you publish

Proofread your content. *Then proofread it again.* Do not depend on “spelling and grammar” software functions. Misspellings and typos erode the university’s credibility.

If you include a link to a site not owned by GSU, check to ensure the link is live. Refer to GSU Web Policy for questions about linking to other sites.

Review your content at least once a month. Outdated information has the same effect as misspellings and typos. If you include events on your pages, remove that information the day after the event. No later.

If you have language, punctuation or style questions, refer to the AP Stylebook online (www.apstylebook.com). For information about the GSU concurrent user subscription to this site, contact the Marketing Department.

Helpful tips for writers new to the AP Stylebook:

While The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association will continue to guide writers for academic purposes, the AP Stylebook will be the guide for writing on the GSU website, for all communications to external audiences and for some internal communications such as the GSU VIEW.

There are two differences between AP and APA styles most writers will notice first:

AP style for commas in a series: “Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series: The flag is red, white and blue.”

AP style for acronyms and abbreviations: “Do not follow an organization’s full name with an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses or set off by dashes. If an abbreviation or acronym would not be clear on second reference without this arrangement, do not use it.”