

# Writing Style Guide

*Updated: March 2026*

The DWFI/NWC Writing Style Guide provides a framework for ensuring consistency and clarity in all written communication for the organizations. It is a tool to help staff communicate effectively to meet the needs of various audiences. The guide will be updated, as needed, to include new references.

## General style rules

- Follow Associated Press Stylebook rules for general composition:  
<https://www.apstylebook.com/online/>
- Follow University of Nebraska–Lincoln style guide for academic references:  
<https://ucomm.unl.edu/university-style-guide/>

## Font standards

- Use Arial for headlines
- Use Calibri 12 pt., single spaced for sub-headings and body copy

## DWFI and NWC specific style standards

- Proper full name on first reference, Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska
- Use acronym DWFI in subsequent references. May use “institute” (with lowercase “i”) to avoid redundancy. May repeat use of Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute where appropriate, such as titles or unfamiliar audiences. Do not use “Water for Food.” Do not use “Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute.”
- Use NWC after first reference of the Nebraska Water Center, part of the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska. May repeat use of Nebraska Water Center where appropriate.
- Phone numbers: Use dots, not dashes: (+1) 402.472.5500. Include (+1) to indicate North American calling code for international audiences.
- Use “[Insert Year] Water for Food Global Conference” on first reference.

## To appear at the end of all news releases

### **About the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska**

The Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute (DWFI) at the University of Nebraska was founded in 2010 to have a lasting and significant impact on achieving more food security with less pressure on scarce water resources by conducting scientific and policy research; using the research results to inform and advise policymakers; and sharing

knowledge through education and communication. DWF's vision is for a food and water secure world: one in which global food security is ensured without compromising the use of water to meet other vital human and environmental needs. Learn more at [waterforfood.nebraska.edu](http://waterforfood.nebraska.edu).

### **Word counts for bios**

- Plenary Speakers: 200-250 words
- Panelists, Moderators, Others: 150-175 words

### **General guidelines for bios**

- Follow AP Style
- Eliminate unnecessary capitalization
- For consistency, use roughly the same order for each speaker's bio: what he or she does, interesting facts about his or her work, past roles that are relevant to a current one, educational background, special boards/committees/responsibilities and honors or awards.
- In the lead, try to explain the speaker's research interests or the impact of his or her work. The position name is already included in the data section and doesn't need repeating.
- In most cases, do not include the years in which people received their degrees, unless it's recent. Exceptions have been made for board certifications.
- To save space and make the narrative flow easier, avoid resume-style descriptions of how long somebody stayed with an organization.
- Ensure consistency among speakers for each event. For example, if listing Ph.D. following one speaker's name, be sure to include it for all speakers who have a Ph.D.

### **Additional Style Notes**

#### ***Academic degrees, departments, titles***

Use AP style

#### ***Acronyms***

OK on second reference. When using them, put them in parentheses after the first reference. Eliminate acronyms used only once. When included in a title, acronym is okay, but be sure to include full name in first sentence with acronym in parentheses.

#### ***Adviser***

Not advisor, per AP style and UNL Style Guide

#### ***Agtech***

One word, no hyphen

#### ***Benefiting, benefitting***

One “t,” not two

***Book titles, presentation names, publication names and similar***

Italicize

***Bulleted lists***

OK to use bullets, rather than dashes. Put a space between each bullet and the first word of each item in the list. Use periods at the end of each sentence in a bulleted list. Use no punctuation at the end of a single word or single phrase in each section of a list. Capitalize the first word following the bullet.

***Business Model Canvas***

Capitalize the first letter of each word. Used frequently in the DWFI policy’s teams work and refers to a strategic management tool to quickly and easily define and communicate a business idea or concept.

***CEO***

OK to use in all references, per AP style

***CGIAR***

CGIAR on all references

***Commas in a series***

Follow AP style for using commas in a series. In general, do not put a comma before "and" in a comma series (do not use the oxford comma). However, add a comma if it helps avoid confusion. When listed items are long in a sentence, or the items include commas themselves, it is okay to use semi-colons (or “super commas”) for clarity. i.e. For lunch, we had mushroom soup in a martini glass; salad with turnips, lentils, and squash; and seafood choucroute.

***Courtesy titles***

Avoid using, as not everyone specifies a courtesy title on the conference registration form. In most cases, the educational background in a speaker’s bio will specify his or her advanced degrees.

***Decision-makers, decision-maker***

Hyphenate

***Degree titles:***

Not possessive for Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, Master of Business Administration, etc. Possessives ARE needed for more “general” degree descriptions and are lowercase e.g., He holds a master’s degree in soil science. Spell out degree names instead of using abbreviations. Use punctuation in credentials, e.g., Ph.D. not PhD.

***Doctoral/doctorate***

Doctorate is a noun; doctoral is the adjective: A person may have a doctorate, but not a doctorate degree.

***Dr.***

Per AP Style, avoid use of the honorific title Dr. in reference to an academic who has earned a doctorate. Use "Ph.D." after the name instead. Use Dr. in first reference as a formal title before the name of an individual who holds a medical degree only.

***Drought tolerant***

No hyphen

***Em Dash***

No space before or after the em (—) dash. i.e. She wanted the answer—the truth—at any cost.

***Faculty Fellow***

Title designation for a Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute Faculty Fellow. Capitalize in all instances. While this contradicts AP Style, it is the preferred treatment by our DWFI Board of Directors for prestige.

***FAO***

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Not Agricultural. FAO is acceptable on second reference to this United Nations agency.

***Geographic locations***

Include country along with city and state. Example: "Lincoln, Nebraska, USA" unless messaged for a U.S.-only audience.

***Groundwater***

One word

***Headers and Subheaders***

Use down style (Need for action, not Need for Action)

***High Plains Aquifer***

Official name of the Ogallala Aquifer. When messaging to more general audience use "Ogallala Aquifer." When addressing a more technical audience, "High Plains Aquifer" is more appropriate.

***Institute***

Lowercase on second reference after referring to the Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute at the University of Nebraska. This rule also applies to other organizations that include the world institute.

***Interdisciplinary***

Not inter-disciplinary

***Initials***

No spaces after periods. (Ex: Judith C.N. Lungu, not Judith C. N. Lungu)

***Job titles (including Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Board of Supervisors and similar)***

Lowercase and spell out titles when they are not used with an individual's proper name (e.g., U.S. Committee on Irrigation and Drainage Board of Directors). Capitalize formal titles when they are used immediately before one or more names. A formal title generally is one that denotes a scope of authority, professional activity or academic activity. Other titles serve primarily as occupational descriptions: astronaut John Glenn, movie star John Wayne, peanut farmer Jimmy Carter.

***Lake McConaughy***

Use full name, not Lake Mac.

***Life cycle analysis/life cycle assessment***

Life cycle is two words, no hyphen

***MENA***

Acronym referring to the Middle East and North Africa region.

***Micro-irrigation***

Hyphenate. (micro-irrigation technologies, micro-irrigation techniques)

***Millions, billions***

Use figures except in casual uses (see AP style)

***Nebraska's Natural Resources Districts***

Resources, not Resource. You may drop Nebraska's if messaging makes the location clear.

***Next-generation***

Hyphenate when used as an adjective. (next-generation sequencing)

***No-till***

Hyphenated.

***Non-consumptive***

FAO's style is one word, hyphenated

***NU System***

Use as the abbreviation for the University of Nebraska system. “The NU system” is preferred on second reference. Do not use UN.

***Numbers***

Use AP style

***Per capita, per-capita***

Hyphenate when used as an adjective. (per-capita grain production)

***Policymaker, policymakers***

All one word

***Presentation titles***

The titles (including style) should match the website and program.

***Rainfed***

Not rain-fed

***Rainforest******Rainwater******Robert B. Daugherty Foundation******Runoff***

One word

***Sandhills******Smallholder***

no hyphen (smallholder farmers)

***State abbreviations:***

Use AP style for copy: The names of the 50 U.S. states should be spelled out when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base. e.g., Dick Cavett is a native of Lincoln, Nebraska. (not Lincoln, Neb.)

***Sub-Saharan Africa***

AP style is “sub-Saharan Africa” with the first s lowercase unless it starts the sentence.

***Sugarcane***

One word

**Surface water**

Two words (surface water resources, surface water efficiency, surface water runoff).  
Surface and groundwater

**Transdisciplinary**

Not trans-disciplinary

**United States, U.S.**

Abbreviate as U.S. in general references. In quotes, use United States if the speaker used that phrasing. For organization titles that include “United States,” use the proper name when spelling out on first reference.

**University**

Capitalize only when using with the rest of a formal title, such as “University of Nebraska at Omaha.” When speaking of the University of Nebraska in general, or other universities in general, lowercase.

**University of Nebraska at Kearney**

In written communication, when first mentioned or cited, the full name, “University of Nebraska at Kearney,” should be spelled out, immediately followed with “UNK” in parentheses (UNK). Thereafter, references should cite “UNK.”

**University of Nebraska–Lincoln**

Remember the en dash! In written communication, when first mentioned or cited, the full name, “University of Nebraska–Lincoln,” should be spelled out and used prior to or in conjunction with “Nebraska,” or “the university.” Per campus branding guidelines, avoid using “UNL.”

**University of Nebraska Medical Center**

In written communication, when first mentioned or cited, the full name, “University of Nebraska Medical Center,” should be spelled out, immediately followed with “UNMC” in parentheses (UNMC). Thereafter, references should cite “UNMC.”

**University of Nebraska at Omaha**

In written communication, when is first mentioned or cited, the full name, “University of Nebraska at Omaha,” should be spelled out, immediately followed with “UNO” in parentheses (UNO). Thereafter, references should cite “UNO.”

**USAID**

U.S. Agency for International Development

**USDA-ARS**

Spell out in the data section, abbreviate as USDA-ARS in copy

***Valmont Industries***

Proper name

***Water-scarce, water-stressed***

Hyphenate when used as an adjective. (water-scarce regions)

***Water use efficiency***

No hyphen

***World Bank***

Proper name of this organization. Lowercase “the” when it precedes World Bank unless it is starting the sentence.