Simmons
UNIVERSITY

Style GUIDE

Table of Contents

Simmons University Style Guide

The Simmons Style Guide covers style rules particular to Simmons University, as well as some selected grammar and punctuation rules. This guide applies to any communications produced by Simmons University.

If you have a general question about grammar or punctuation that is not specific to Simmons and not included in this guide, we recommend referencing the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Simmons University has a subscription to the Chicago Manual of Style, which is accessible if you are on the Simmons campus, or if you are using the Simmons VPN while off-campus. Instructions to use the VPN can be found at [servicedesk.simmons.edu](#). The VPN then requires one additional configuration step, which is outlined on page 2.

The Simmons Style Guide will be periodically updated by University Communications. If you have a question, suggestion for an addition, change, or correction, please email ucomms@simmons.edu.

If you have questions about social media, please review the [Simmons Social Media Policy](#) or contact the Lead Social Media Strategist at social@simmons.edu.
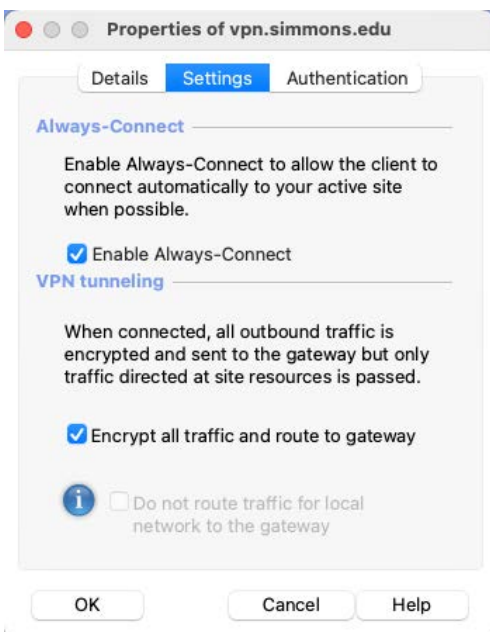
VPN Configuration

If you are using the Simmons VPN (the Endpoint Security VPN application) to access the Chicago Manual of Style, you will need to go to "VPN Options."

Then select "Properties."
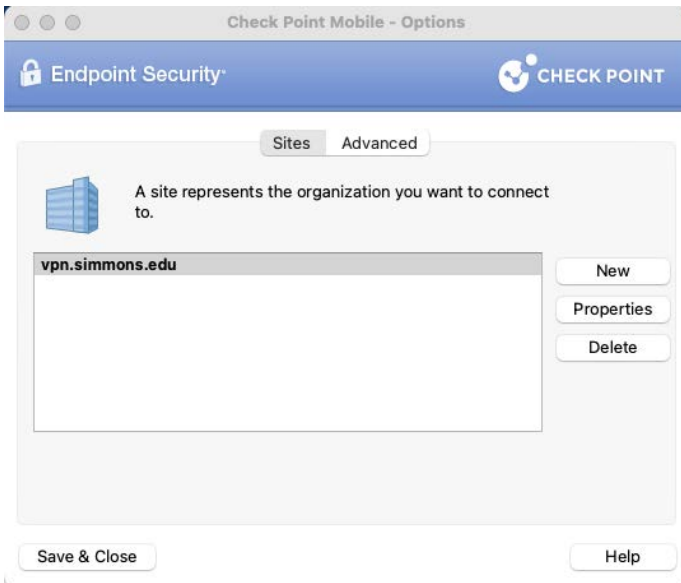
Then make sure "Encrypt all traffic and route to gateway" is checked.

Simmons-Specific Rules

University Name

References to the University:

- For formal use and first mention, use "Simmons University."

- For informal use and second mention, use "Simmons" or "the University."

Capitalize the word "University" only when it refers specifically to Simmons:

- The University completed its very successful $100 million "Campaign for Simmons."

The possessive of Simmons is Simmons with an apostrophe after the final "s," without an additional "s":

- Simmons' (not Simmons, Simmon's, or Simmons's)

Simmons alumnae/i may refer to "Simmons College" on their resumes or other personal materials, but any official or University-produced materials must use "Simmons University."

Schools

For formal use and first mention, use the full name of the school preceded by "Simmons University" or followed by "at Simmons University."

- Gwen Ifill School of Media, Humanities, and Social Sciences

- School of Library and Information Science

- School of Management

- School of Nursing

- School of Sciences and Health Professions

- School of Social Work

On second mention, the "Simmons University" may be dropped and named schools may use a shortened identifier.

- Gwen Ifill School

Second mention in internally facing documents may use the school acronyms.
Never use school acronyms in formal or externally-facing communications.

- Ifill

- SLIS

- SOM

- SON

- SSHP

- SSW

When referring to Simmons alumna Gwen Ifill:

- Formal use and first mention: Gwen Ifill '77, '93HD

- Informal use and second mention: Gwen Ifill or Ifill

Offices and Departments

For formal use and first mention of Simmons offices and departments, precede the department name with "Simmons University":

- Simmons University Department of Biology

Second mention in externally-facing documents can be shortened to:

- Simmons Department of Biology or Simmons Biology Department

Second mention in internally-facing documents can be shortened to:

- Department of Biology or Biology Department

Capitalize the first letter of each word when referring to the official name of a Simmons office or department:

- Children's Literature Department

- Department of Biology

President, Trustees, and Leadership Team

References to President Wooten vary according to the context:

- Formal use and first mention: President Lynn Perry Wooten

- Informal use and second mention: President Wooten

References to Provost Stephanie Cosner also vary according to context:

- Formal use and first mention: Provost Stephanie Cosner

- Informal use and second mention: Provost Cosner

For formal use and first mention of the board of trustees, precede the name with "Simmons University":

- Simmons University Board of Trustees

Second mention can be shortened to:

- Board of Trustees

Capitalize "trustee" only when it is used as a title:

- Trustee Regina Pisa is chair of the Simmons University Board of Trustees.

- Linda Paresky recently retired from her position as a trustee.

Capitalize "dean" only when it is used as a title:

- Formal use and first mention: Heather Shlosser, Dean of the School of Nursing

- Informal use and second mention: Dean Shlosser

References to other members of Simmons leadership (example formatting):

- Formal use and first mention: Kerri Brophy, Vice President, Chief Marketing, Enrollment, and Communications Officer

- Informal use and second mention: Brophy (not Ms. Brophy)

Academic Degrees

Capitalize when the full name of the degree is used followed by its acronym. Second mention can use acronym only; do not include periods.

- Bachelor of Science (BS)

- Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP)

- Master of Social Work (MSW)

Do not capitalize general references; include an apostrophe "s":

- bachelor's degree

- master's degree

Academic Programs, Minors, and Courses

Do not capitalize references to academic programs, minors, or concentrations in editorial running text, such as Simmons news articles or *Simmons Magazine*, except for proper nouns such as languages and geographic locations:

- Sarah Simmons majored in biology at Simmons.

- Sarah Simmons majored in East Asian studies at Simmons.

Capitalize the proper names of academic programs, minors, or concentrations in marketing materials, such as program webpages, catalogs, and newsletters, in order to identify these as formal programs.

- Our Political Science program offers outstanding…

Capitalize course titles and include quotation marks:

- "Modern Europe II: 1890-Present"

Alumnae/i

When referring to graduates of Simmons, we recommend using the term "alumnae/i" for all general references, rather than "alumnx," unless referring to a specific individual's gender or a group of individuals. In that case, use "alumna" for one woman or "alumnae" for a group of women; alumnus for one man or alumni for a group of men. For nonbinary or genderqueer students, the shortened "alum" may be used.

Class and Class Years

Capitalize the word "Class" only when it refers to a specific class:

- Class of 1965

- Our Class enjoyed its 30th Reunion.

For undergraduate alumnae/i, include an apostrophe before the class year:

- Jane Simmons '36

For graduate school alumnae/i, include an apostrophe before the class year, and follow the class year with the degree designation. There is no space between the year and degree designation.

Please note that for many graduate degrees, the abbreviation will just be MS or MA, e.g., for a "Master of Science in Library and Information Science" the degree abbreviation would be "MS". If the degree with its subject area is not included below, e.g., a Master of Science in Nursing, then it is likely considered an MS, MA, or PhD and the subject area is not included in the degree name or the abbreviation.

- Janelle Smith '15MS

- Julie Simmons '77MSW

Abbreviated designations for master's degrees:

- EdS = Education Specialist

- MA = Master of Arts

- MAT = Master of Arts in Teaching

- MBA = Master of Business Administration

- MFA = Master of Fine Arts

- MHA = Master in Health Administration

- MPH = Master of Public Health

- MPP = Master in Public Policy

- MS = Master of Science

- MSEd = Master of Science in Education

- MSN = Master of Science in Nursing

- MSW = Master of Social Work

Abbreviated designations for doctorate degrees:

- DNP = Doctor of Nursing Practice

- DPT = Doctor of Physical Therapy

- DSW = Doctor of Social Work

- PhD = Doctor of Philosophy

For students who have completed a certification:

- Use "C" without a space between the year and the letter ('03C).

For alumnae/i with multiple degrees from Simmons, put the degrees in chronological order, starting with the oldest, and separate with a comma:

- Janice Simmons '87, '03MS

For alumnae/i with dual degrees from Simmons, put the degrees in alphabetical order (including the degree name, "Master of…" and then on the degree subject/area if the degrees are the same) and separate with a comma, with certificates always listed last:

- Ellen Smith '11MA, '11MS

- For Master of Arts in Children's Literature and Master of Science in Library and Information Science: Library Services to Children

- Abby Simmons '19MSW, '19C

- For Master of Social Work with Certificate in Trauma Practice

For recipients of an executive education program:

- Use "EE" without a space between the year and the letter ('02EE).

For honorary degree recipients who graduated from Simmons, separate the dates with a comma and use "HD" without a space between the year and the letter:

- Lisa Mullins '80, '05HD

NOTE: With some fonts, when typing an apostrophe at the beginning of a numeral, the computer defaults to a "backwards" apostrophe. To correct this, type two apostrophes in a row and delete the first one.

NOTE: The Master of Arts in Business degree that was previously offered by Simmons has been retroactively converted to a Master of Business Administration (MBA), with the approval of the Registrar's Office, and the Master of Business Administration (MBA) name should be used instead.

References to Gender

Simmons strives to maintain a gender-inclusive tone in its communications and recommends using neutral language throughout and avoiding gendered terms unless referring to a specific individual's gender or pronouns.

Replace "daughter" with "student" to avoid assumptions about gender expression and familial relationships:

- "Your **student** will meet with **an** advisor," rather than, "Your **daughter** will meet with **her** advisor."

The Simmons mascot, Stormy the Shark, is non-gendered. Instead of using gendered pronouns, simply refer to Stormy by name:

- Stormy loves Orientation! See photos of students with our beloved mascot.

For references to graduates of Simmons, see "Alumnae/i" on page 6.

Simmons Events

Capitalize specific Simmons events:

- Commencement
- Convocation
- Move-In Day
- Orientation
- Reunion

Capitalize conferences:

- Simmons Leadership Conference

Use quotation marks for conferences that have a theme:

- The Simmons Leadership Conference "Creating Impact," featured several dynamic speakers.

Simmons History

Refer to the University Archives website at simmons.edu/library/archives for information on the official history of Simmons University, including a list of University presidents, milestones for building projects and fundraising campaigns, timelines, and more.

Simmons Sharks

When referencing a group of Simmons students as "Sharks," use a capital "S". Shark-themed language should be used primarily by Simmons Athletics and not in external communications for the wider University.

- The Simmons Sharks beat UMass 5-2.

Grammar and Punctuation

Dates

Only use dates on a webpage when absolutely necessary. Remember that if a date gets put onto a page it will need to be updated quickly after the date passes. Nothing makes a webpage look old faster than a date that has passed.

- Spell out the full month.

- Do not use date ordinals (i.e., February 2nd, March 15th). They are not read properly by most screen reading devices. Use February 2, March 15, etc.

- Avoid the use of figures for dates (i.e., 1/2/2024).

Em Dashes

When using dashes to set out a section of a sentence, do not use two hyphens. Instead, use an em dash symbol. For screen readers, it is important to include a space before and after the em dash. This is a departure from Chicago, but important for accessibility.

- The workshop included a variety of tips — from job hunting to networking — for recent graduates.

Numerals

For ease of readability, both in print and web, write out numbers one through nine, and then for 10 and up, use numerals.

- Six of our students were invited to attend the Simmons Leadership Conference.

- We have 11 NCAA Division III athletic teams.

Serial Commas

Use a serial or "Oxford" comma before the words "and" and "or" when used in a series of three or more items:

- Laura participates in lacrosse, cheer club, and SGA.

U.S.News & World Report Ranking

U.S.News is one word; "and" is represented by an ampersand symbol; the complete title is italicized:

- *U.S.News & World Report*

The first reference to this publication should be "*U.S.News & World Report,*" with no space between "S." and "News."

"*U.S. News*" may be used for second mention and is italicized with a space between "S." and "News."

Writing Web Content

The basics of good writing hold true in any context. On the web, you still have to know your audience, organize your thoughts, and strive for clarity in expressing them. There are, however, pitfalls to avoid and opportunities to seize that are specific to writing content for the web.

Print vs. Web

What is different about writing for the web? Reading on the web is a different experience from reading a printed page. It's slower and less comfortable for people's eyes. On the web, people become impatient more easily, and they are accustomed to skimming rather than reading every word on a page.

Readers typically scan a page for relevance before committing to reading the details. If a page is hard to scan, people will find it easier to search for a new page rather than to continue reading. Studies have shown that users need to find the content they are looking for within four seconds of landing on a page or they will look elsewhere and they may not come back. Effective writing takes these issues into account. By paying attention to a few simple guidelines, you'll be able to create web content that succeeds at communicating with your readers.

Text Formatting

HEADERS

- H2 (largest header size): Use Chicago headline capitalization.
- H3 & lower: Capitalize the first word and any proper nouns.
- Do not use colons at the end of headers. The fact that it is a header implies that the content beneath it falls under that category.

BODY TEXT

- Use sentence case for capitalization.
- Avoid using all capitals for emphasis as it is harder to read.
- Bold is best used for smaller headlines, or at the beginning of short paragraphs or bullet points to help ease skimming.
- Use italics for emphasis only when absolutely necessary. It makes text harder to read.

UNIVERSITY-SPECIFIC ACRONYMS

- Don't assume the reader knows all of the acronyms.
- Spell out the full term on first use on a page, followed by the acronym in parentheses. Subsequent uses can then refer to the acronym alone.

Writing Tips

- Be succinct. Use plain language — never use two words when one will do. If there's a shorter, simpler way to say something, do it that way.

- Use short sentences. Break long sentences into smaller ones.

- Keep paragraphs short.

- Keep the total word count down, especially on top-level pages. Some experts recommend 50% fewer words on the web than in printed materials.

HELPFUL TOOL: EVALUATE YOUR CONTENT WITH THE HEMINGWAY APP

- The goal is to have clear, concise messaging in succinct language. [This tool rates your content in terms of readability](#) and has suggestions for improving it for use on your webpages.

Writing with Accessibility in Mind

- **Images:** Provide alternate text for every image and captions when it is not clear what an image is or how it relates to the nearby content.

- **Videos:** All videos on the website must be captioned.

- **Dates:** Avoid using date ordinals (i.e., use March 2 instead of March 2nd)

- **Links:** Do not use URLs as links on a page unless absolutely necessary. Use text to describe where the link will take the user, or a call-to-action button. Site visitors who use the site with assistive technology like a screen reader have the ability to generate a list of links. If full URLs are on the pages, then all they would hear would be the screen reader reading the letters in the URLs. We want them to hear "How to Apply," "view student organizations," "request a campus map," etc.

- **Content position on the page:** Avoid the use of directional words such as "see the list below". Due to the responsive nature of the website, it is not always going to be a given that the text you predict to be "below" will actually be "below." This also makes it difficult for screen reader users to understand. The content that is "below" should have a clear header so that users can find it easily.

Facilitate Scanning

Eye tracking software has shown that people read differently online to how they read in print. Most readers tend to:

- scan around 25% of the content

- decide in less than 10 seconds whether a page is relevant

- follow an F-shaped reading pattern, scanning the first few words of each heading

Content should be designed to be easy to scan and follow common reading patterns.

- Use headers to break up sections of content. This not only helps users scan the page but also aids with Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Google indexes pages using the title of the page first, and then H2 and H3 headers. Headers should therefore contain helpful keywords when possible.

- Guide the reader's eye to key information

  - Use bullets instead of comma-separated lists.

  - Use subheadings (remember not to use colons at the end of headings).

  - Choose straightforward, unambiguous language; resist the urge to be clever.

  - Put the most important information first so that it will be visible on the first screen without scrolling.

Avoid Web Clichés and the Use of Click Here

- **Avoid obvious or redundant statements,** such as "Welcome to the Communications website!". The title of the page is enough to let the user know the page they are on.

- **Avoid using statements like "On this webpage you will find..."** to describe the content on the page. Instead use headers to make the content scannable.

- **Avoid using placeholders** such as "This page is under construction" for content that is not ready. If the content isn't ready, the page shouldn't exist.

- **Avoid using the term "click here".** See the Links section for more on avoiding this language).

Links

- For accessibility purposes, **do not use URLs as links** on a page unless absolutely necessary. Use text to describe where the link will take the user.

- **Keep link text short and concise**, using relevant keywords related to both the destination page as well as the surrounding content. Links should be a call to action.

- **For buttons (CTAs), use a call to action word** whenever possible (e.g., download, preview, request). This makes it easier for someone using the website with a screen reader to understand the destination for the button link.

- **Avoid using "click here" or "here".** Make links descriptive to entice a call to action. Use a descriptive link that indicates where the link goes, e.g., "Read more about How to Apply", which is more helpful to users than a non-descriptive link. Instead of "click here to apply" try "Apply now".

- **Accessibility note:** Site visitors who use the site with assistive technology like a screen reader have the ability to generate a list of links. If every link said "click here" then all they would hear would be a list of "click here, click here, click here". We want them to hear "How to Apply", "view student organizations", "request a campus map", etc.

- **Avoid over linking**, as it hinders readability. Superfluous links may distract your reader from what you are trying to communicate.

- **Do not duplicate links on a single page** unless your page is long and too cumbersome for readers to locate the first reference. Add the link to the first reference.

Organizing Tips

- Manage the level of detail.

- The top level of a site should be the most general, with deeper pages containing the details. Avoid the common trap of putting everything on the home page because everything is important. Instead, provide a logical and obvious path to the content.

- Use anchors (jump links) sparingly.

Creating New Pages

WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO CREATE A NEW PAGE?

- **When you are adding completely new content to the site,** such as a new program, department or initiative.

- **When you are adding content that will be referenced from more than one other page.** In order to manage redundancy, you should create a new page for content that will be referenced from more than one page. Other pages can then link to that content instead of repeating it. This increases the likelihood that the content will remain up-to-date – if the content exists in more than one place it is more likely that one place will be updated but not the others. For example, the admission policy for transgender students is explicitly spelled out on the admission policies page. This content should not be repeated on other pages. Instead, link to the admission policies page.

- When updating pages that already exist, the general rule of thumb is to only create a new page when the content needs to be quickly accessed from more than one other page. For example, the "Tuition and Fees" page is linked from many places throughout the site.

- **When a page is too long to be easily scanned.** You can consider creating

multiple pages if a page requires more than three scrolls to see all of the content, but as long as all of the content on the page is related and has headers so that it is skimmable it can likely remain as one page.

FAQs: How and Why to Avoid Using Them

In general, it is not a good idea to create FAQ pages on a website.

- **They duplicate information:** If that information really matters to users, it should form part of a wider well-structured, user-centric journey on the site.

- **They create content overhead:** An FAQ needs to be monitored and maintained and risks confusing users if not kept up to date.

- **They are often made up and are NOT actually frequently asked:** FAQs are often used to provide an easy way to answer a "question" where the answer should be found in the main content.

- **They are difficult to navigate:** Long lists of questions don't make finding information easy. Well-structured content with headers and bullets to facilitate scanning make finding information easy.

- **They are repetitive and slower to read:** Every question typically starts with who, what, where, when, how, or why. This makes the content repetitive and slower to consume, forcing people to read the full sentence every time.

Instead of creating FAQ pages:

- Find out what users want to know through research.

- Publish the information next to other relevant content, where people will naturally look for it.

- Use nested headings, short sentences, and well-laced keywords to make the content easy to read. Often the "questions" can be reconfigured as headers within the main content.

Additional Resources

- [Jakob Nielsen: Writing for the Web](#)

- [Applying the 5 W's of Reviewing Web Content](#)

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