

# McDonald Observatory Style Guide

## Other Style Guides to Use

- UT's Style Guidelines: <https://brand.utexas.edu/messaging/editorial-style/>
- UT System Style Guidelines: <https://www.utsystem.edu/sites/branding/writing-style-guide>
- If you are unable to find what you're looking for, follow AP Style guidelines.

## Grammar

### General Punctuation

- Use one space after a period
- Use serial commas, also known as Oxford commas
- Use commas when they add clarity
- 82-inch (not 82")

### Time and Date

- 7 a.m., 7:30 p.m., Noon-4 p.m.
- June 20 (not 20th)
- Months: Spell out the full name

### Phone Numbers

- Don't use parentheses for area codes: XXX-XXX-XXXX (not (XXX) XXX-XXXX)

### Email

- Use lowercase for emails, e.g., [john@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:john@austin.utexas.edu) (not [John@Austin.UTexas.edu](mailto:John@Austin.UTexas.edu))

### Websites

- Lower case URLs:
  - [mcdonaldobservatory.org](http://mcdonaldobservatory.org)
  - [stardate.org](http://stardate.org)
  - [astronomy.utexas.edu](http://astronomy.utexas.edu)
  - [mcdonald.utexas.edu](http://mcdonald.utexas.edu)
- Exclude "www"
- By and large, it is best practice to write out and link the website's name/description rather than its URL.
  - Visit the [professor's website](#) (not visit ProfessorWebsite.com)

### Numbers and Measurements

- Spell out one through nine and use numerals for anything larger
- Spell out "percent" and "degree"
- Use British imperial units as the default, generally followed by System Internationale units in parentheses:
  - 500 degrees Fahrenheit (300 C)

- 40 million miles (64 million km)
- 50 feet (15 meters)

## Titles and Degrees

### Composition Titles

- Use Title Case for titles: Capitalize principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters.
  - [This website](#) is a handy tool to check capitalization
- Italicize movies, books, magazines, TV shows, and newspapers.
  - *StarDate* magazine
  - *Alpine Avalanche* newspaper
  - Do not italicize the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material. This includes almanacs, directories, dictionaries, encyclopedias, gazetteers, handbooks, and similar publications.
  - Note: The StarDate radio program does not use italics.
- Use quotation marks for exhibits, events, songs, television shows, computer games, poems, lectures, speeches, and works of art.
  - The “Preserving Dark Skies” exhibit
  - “In the Path of Totality” event
  - Do not use quotation marks around such software titles as WordPerfect or Windows.
- Names of websites and apps are capitalized without quotes
  - Facebook, Instagram, Zoom

### Professional Titles

- No courtesy titles: Dr., Prof., Mr., Ms., etc.
- Capitalize formal titles (those that indicate authority) used immediately before a name and not set off by commas: President Jay Hartzell, UT President Jay Hartzell, but “UT’s president, Jay Hartzell.”
- Use lower case for titles that are set off by commas, titles not used with a name, and titles that refer to occupation. AP views “professor” as an occupation instead of a title, therefore it’s professor Lopez, associate professor Gwen Lopez, assistant professor Gwen Lopez. Exceptions to this rule occur when “professor” is paired with an honorific modifier, such as Professor Emeritus Joshua Ball, Regents Professor Natalia Mbewe or Distinguished Teaching Professor Kevin Cokley. Endowed professorships should be capitalized all the way through, e.g., “He is the Robert Elliott Professor of Dance.”

### Degrees ([source](#))

We follow AP style for degrees and specialties. Use periods in degrees, e.g., B.A. and Ph.D. Degree abbreviations with more than two letters (other than Ph.D.) do not get periods, e.g., MBA, BBA, MSTC, MFA. Formal degree names (Master of Science, Bachelor of Fine Arts) are capped and not possessive, but degree specialty/major is not capped:

- The Cockrell School offers a Master of Science in engineering management.
- The Cockrell School offers a master’s in engineering management.

- The Cockrell School offers a master's in practically any type of engineering you can think of.
- The Cockrell School offers numerous master's degrees.

Using full years in conjunction with degrees is preferable. After all, UT has now awarded degrees in three different centuries. "He's part of the Class of 2021." Using the final two digits of a year is acceptable in some cases, but be sure the apostrophe points down and to the left, e.g., Class of '28, B.A. '28.

### Acronyms and Initialisms

In content intended for the public, avoid the use of acronyms/initialisms. They are jargon. For content intended for an in-group that is familiar with the acronym/initialism, best practice is to first use the full term, then switch to the acronym/initialism.

Some acronyms/initialisms commonly used for in-groups include:

- AL – Astronomers Lodge
- BOV – Board of Visitors
- CNS – College of Natural Sciences
- GMT – Giant Magellan Telescope
- HET – Hobby-Eberly Telescope
- HJS – Harlan J. Smith Telescope
- HPF – Habitable-Zone Planet Finder
- HRS – High-Resolution Spectrograph
- LRS – Low-Resolution Spectrograph
- MGO – McDonald Geodetic Observatory
- MRS – Medium-Resolution Spectrograph
- REU – Research Experience for Undergraduates
- SVN – Special Viewing Night

### Frequent Terms and Their Capitalization

Name	Capitalized?	Term to Avoid
<b>Facilities and Buildings</b>		
Observatory	Yes, when referring to McDonald Observatory.	
Frank N. Bash Visitors Center Visitors Center	Yes. Capitalize Visitors Center when referring to the Observatory's.	
Astronomers Lodge	Yes	
David G. Booth Director's House Booth House	Yes	House A
<b>Telescopes</b>		
Telescope	Yes, when used as part of a proper name.	
Hobby-Eberly Telescope 10-meter Hobby Eberly Telescope	Yes	
Harlan J. Smith Telescope	Yes	

107-inch Harlan J. Smith Telescope 107-inch (2.7-meter) Harlan J. Smith Telescope		
Otto Struve Telescope 82-inch Otto Struve Telescope 82-inch (2.1-meter) Otto Struve Telescope	Yes	
36-inch telescope 36-inch (0.9-meter) telescope	No	
30-inch telescope 30-inch (0.8-meter) telescope	No	
McDonald Geodetic Observatory	Yes	
<b>Public Programming, Outreach, Membership</b>		
Livestream Livestreaming	No	Live stream Live streaming
Distance learning	No	Virtual visits
Astronomy Field Trip	Yes	
Star Party Star Parties	Yes	
Special Viewing Night	Yes	
Friends of McDonald Observatory Friends	Yes. Capitalize "Friends" when referring to the membership program.	
McDonald Observatory and Department of Astronomy Board of Visitors Board of Visitors	Yes	
General Admission	Yes	
Cancel, canceled, canceling, cancellation	No	Use the American spelling rather than the British, which prefers two "l"s
Buy tickets	No	Reserve passes
Night sky friendly lighting	No, unless it's part of a program title.	Night-sky friendly lighting (hyphenated)
<b>Terms and Phrases (for non-scientific writing)</b>		
Galaxy Cluster Nebula	Yes, when part of the proper name (but not on their own, including second references to specific objects).	
Solar system objects: Moon, Sun, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, etc.	Yes	
Asterisms: Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Summer Triangle	Yes	
Evening Star Morning Star	Yes	

Universe	No. Note: In scientific papers it is common to capitalize Universe.	
Solar system	No	
The “c” in McDonald when the rest of the name is capitalized: McDONALD OBSERVATORY	No	
West Texas Far West Texas	Yes	
“The” in The University of Texas at Austin	Yes	
Magazine in <i>StarDate</i> magazine Radio in StarDate radio	No	