

LSU

COPYWRITING

SECTION 02
JANUARY 2021 UPDATE

BRAND VOICE

LSU's brand is about passion and perseverance. The brand voice echoes these sentiments. Language is spirited and aspirational, and comes together in a way that celebrates life and learning.

The copy should follow the brand tone: spirited and dedicated. The copy itself should invite the reader to learn more about LSU and discover the myriad opportunities and experiences only the university can offer.

HEADLINES

Headlines need to be intriguing, attention-grabbing, bold, interesting, and inviting. There are two distinct types of headlines: primary and secondary.

Primary headlines are to be used for high-profile elements and executions such as covers and divider pages in publications, website landing pages, and social media profiles, as well as print, out-of-home, and digital display ads. All primary headlines should begin with the word "fierce" and answer one of two questions: "What is LSU fierce for?" or "What does LSU do fiercely?"

Secondary headlines are to be used in places such as sections within brochures, trifold, reports, and web pages. They should not use the word "fierce" but should strive to convey the energy and urgency "fierce" implies. Try to make them single-minded and confident so even if someone reads nothing else on the page, they will come away with an important message.

Whether writing primary or secondary headlines, remember: be bold, be disruptive, and always, always be positive.

Sample primary headlines:

Fierce for the Future.

Fierce leads the charge.

Fierce inspires the next generation.

Fierce is what we are.

Sample secondary headlines:

The stakes are too great for cautious ideas.

Progress doesn't happen by accident.

No one outworks us. No one outdreams us.

BODY COPY

When writing body copy, keep in mind your audience and the marketing message you are ultimately attempting to communicate. Your writing style should be appropriate to that audience so it resonates and rings true. Remember your goal is not to put words on a page but rather to carry on a conversation.

Be clear and concise. Use enough words to engage and communicate your message without overexplaining. Most importantly, be assertive. Choose “do” and “will” over “can” and “might.” Fierce for the Future is about being bold and confident. Your goal is to generate enthusiasm, inspire, and ignite pride.

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATIONS

One key thing to know when creating messages about sensitive subject matter is that it is important to be mindful of the language you are using, but that no message can ever be created so perfectly that no one is able to find some issue with it. If someone does object to a well-intentioned post, always begin by listening carefully to the issue raised as well as the worldview that it represents. The person speaking out may have good insight or may be feeling pain from a personal experience and simply needs the opportunity to be heard, but substantive and thoughtful revision may also be required.

Below are a few helpful tips that may help your communications team with drafting more inclusive messaging.

American Psychological Association (APA) Inclusive and Bias Free Language

Writing inclusively and without bias is the new standard, and APA’s new publication manual (7th edition) contains a separate chapter on this topic. The guidelines provided by APA help authors reduce bias around topics such as gender, age, disability, racial and ethnic identity, and sexual orientation, as well as being sensitive to labels and describing individuals at the appropriate level of specificity.

Some examples include:

- The singular “they” or “their” is accepted and endorsed as a gender-neutral pronoun.
 - Not Advised: A researcher’s career depends on how often he or she is cited.
 - Preferred: A researcher’s career depends on how often they are cited.
- Instead of using adjectives as nouns to label groups of people, descriptive phrases are preferred.
 - Not Advised: The poor
 - Preferred: People living in poverty
 - Not Advised: Blacks
 - Preferred: Black individuals, Black people, Black communities

- Instead of broad categories, you should use exact age ranges that are more relevant and specific.
 - Not Advised: People over 65 years old
 - Preferred: People in the age range of 65 to 75 years old

Members of Underrepresented Communities

When speaking of members of the university community, avoid using the term “minority”; this term can be received as micro-aggressive. One better phrase to describe someone might be “a person from an underrepresented community.” For example, “In seeking to diversify our faculty, we aim to increase the number of professors and instructors from underrepresented communities.”

Race and Ethnicity

When discussing race, the first letter should always be capitalized: for example, the “b” in Black.

Whenever possible, and when the person you are writing about is comfortable with doing so, use the most specific terms possible to describe an individual’s account of their ethnicity and use the term that individual has chosen to self-identify (for example Mexican American, or Brazilian American, or Uruguayan) to avoid flattening the distinct experiences of different communities.

The terms Hispanic, Latino/a/@/x, and Chicano/a/@/x are non-interchangeable, and care should be taken to ensure they are used appropriately.

The terms “Asian” and “Asian American” are very broad; Asia comprises numerous countries and is home to more than half the global population. Again, use more specific terms when possible to describe an individual’s account of their ethnicity: for example, refer to your subject as Pakistani American or as Japanese American, or Kazakhstani.

The terms “Native American” and “American Indian” are generally interchangeable, though “Native American” is preferred in federal communications. These terms, however, should only be used to describe two or more persons from different tribal affiliations; when writing about an individual or a specific tribe, use their preferred tribal affiliation.

When writing about a group of people under circumstances that make it important and relevant to describe the group members, while also making it impossible to ask each member how they self-identify, defer to the language used by representatives of the group to refer to the group members collectively, or the language used to refer to the members collectively in public-facing materials or media, or the relevant institutional or organizational aegis that has brought this gathering together (for example, “members and supporters of the Black Women’s Empowerment Initiative” or “leadership representatives from Asian American Ambassadors at LSU, Latinx at LSU, and the Native American Student Organization at LSU”). Depending on context, and if it is possible to solicit self-identifying language from some but not all participants, it might be appropriate to refer to the group

as including members who self-identify as "x, y, and z," so as to indicate that not every member of the group might identify in the same ways.

The Diversity Style Guide includes more than 700 terms related to race/ethnicity, disability, immigration, sexuality and gender identity, drugs and alcohol, and geography. It offers definitions of each term, with the understanding that the usage of these terms continues to evolve, and that one should always defer to how an individual self-identifies.

LGBTQ+

The language for describing the lives, identities, and experiences of members of the LGBTQ+ community continues to evolve, and regularly updated resources like the [LSU LGBTQ+ Project's terminology page](#) are helpful for understanding the nuances of specific terms. Here are a few guidelines for general usage, offered with the understanding that language is as alive as the people who use it to claim their true and authentic selves.

When writing about LGBTQ+ individuals, ask these individuals ahead of time how they would like to be identified within the text, what pronouns they use, and what courtesy title (if applicable) they prefer.

Persons with Disabilities

When writing about people with disabilities, use "people first" language, unless someone specifically prefers to self-identify with "identity-first" language: that is, write "a person with a disability," instead of "a disabled person." The "people first" convention is preferred in the U.S. and is the style prescribed by the APA and used by federal legislation including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Even though this is the preferred default in American contexts, there are members of the disabilities community (especially within the deaf community and among those with autism) who prefer "identity-first" language, and that preference should be respected. In text, with a phrase like, "[name], who identifies as a disabled person," or, often, "[name,], who identifies as autistic."

Religion and Faith

When it is relevant and important to mention someone's religious affiliation, defer to the way the individual self-identifies. In general, though, ensure that reference to religious affiliation is made only when necessary, and that the representation of religion or religious affiliation is as specific and precise as possible; there is much diversity of opinion and practice within any faith system, and within any congregation, and care should be taken to distinguish between individual members of a faith community and the faith or faith community as a whole. **The Diversity Style Guide** offers helpful usage recommendations for specific terms and vocabulary related to numerous faith systems, including on how to manage religious titles.

Additional Resources:

- [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Recommended Reading List](#)
- [LSU Racial Equality Experts](#)

EDITORIAL STYLE GUIDELINES

Resources

Strategic Communications recommends the following publications as guides:

- The Associated Press Stylebook
- Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary
- Strunk & White's Elements of Style

The following recommendations are LSU style as decided by Strategic Communications. Unless otherwise noted below, LSU style defaults to AP style.

University Style

- When referring to a college, it is acceptable to say either "The LSU College of Engineering" or "LSU's College of Engineering."
- Use an ampersand (&) instead of "and" within college/department/unit names: "Department of Geography & Anthropology." As a general rule, this is the only place where ampersands should be used in body copy.
- On first reference, use the full, official name of a unit, college, or department. If the same unit is frequently referenced, subsequent references may be abbreviated: "The College of Humanities & Social Sciences houses the Department of English. Humanities & Social Sciences also maintains research units like the English Language & Orientation Program."
- There are no periods or spaces in "LSU." Refer to the university as "LSU," not as "LSU and A&M College." When speaking to an international audience, use the full name "Louisiana State University."
- Unless it is within the full name of the university (i.e., Louisiana State University), lowercase "university" when referring to LSU (i.e., the university).
- Both Louisianan and Louisianian are acceptable. Whichever you prefer to use, be consistent within your document.
- Use "telephone" instead of "phone." Standard telephone structure is 225-578-1234. To indicate a facsimile number, specify "Fax" before the number.
- Avoid using courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Ms., Dr.) within paragraph text or cutlines. On first reference, use "PhD" or a professor's title to establish expertise. Use a husband's and a wife's first names: "John and Mary Smith," never "Mr. and Mrs. Smith." Courtesy titles are allowed in donor lists to satisfy donor wishes.
- When referring to grades, put letters in quotes to avoid confusing the reader. For example: He made an "A."
- Use "Did You Know?" rather than "Did U Know?"
- Use "first-year" or "first-time" student rather than "freshman."

- Use “advisor” rather than “adviser.”
- Use “students” rather than “coeds.”
- When addressing international students, be aware of cultural differences. While American students may identify with the Memorial Tower, Tiger, or school colors, for example, those symbols may have different meanings for international students.
- Use gender-neutral language such as “chair” or “chairperson” (rather than “chairman”), “police officers” (rather than “policemen”), and so forth.
- Use “people with disabilities” rather than “handicapped people.”

Internet Standards

- Correct spelling and capitalization standards are as follows:
 - email
 - home page
 - internet
 - online
 - web
 - website
 - web page
 - web address
 - webmaster
- As a general rule, use the shortest URL possible to link to your destination. For most web addresses, “www” is not required. When writing web addresses, you should include “http://” only if it is required in order for your link to work or if it includes a variation of “http://.” Examples: Did you know you can visit <https://www.google.com/accounts/> to register for a Google account? Students may complete applications for admission and student aid online at lsu.edu/admissions, the website for LSU’s prospective students.
- Check all website addresses for accuracy.
- Web addresses should always be lowercase and be clearly identifiable whether in a print document or a digital/online format. For print, bolding the URL is sufficient, provided you do not intend to generate a digital PDF. If your file is made digital or the URL is being used in a digital format, underline web addresses and set text in a color different than the body copy. This ensures accessibility standards are being met.
- Verify the suffix—.com, .edu, .gov, .net, .org—of websites before printing them.
- Web addresses should not be separated onto multiple lines of text. If a line break occurs at a web address, move the entire address to the following line or rewrite your sentence to avoid the line break.
- When writing a web address in your copy, avoid placing the address at the end of the sentence, as the end punctuation can confuse the reader: “Visit lsu.edu to learn more.”
- The @ symbol should only be used in association with e-mail addresses or social media account/user names, never as a substitution for the word “at” in general body copy or headers (e.g., “The forum is at LSU.” not “The forum is @ LSU.”).

Dates and Numbers

- For dates, use the following forms:
 - 2004–05; not 2004–2005
 - 4 p.m.; not 4 PM
 - May 10, 2005; not 10 May 2005
 - 1990s; not 1990’s
 - avoid superscripts: 10; not 10th
- Spell out whole numbers below 10. Use numerals for 10 and above.
- Within text, spell out “percent” but use numerals: “7 percent.” For statistical data relayed in charts or graphs, the percentage symbol (%) is appropriate.

Capitalization

- Position and job titles of persons should be lowercase unless followed by a name: “The president,” “the dean,” “professor,” but “President Alexander,” “Dean Smith,” “Professor Jones.”
- Degrees should be capitalized when the complete name of the degree is given, as in “Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, Doctor of Law, Doctor of Medicine.” If the complete name is not given, use lowercase: “He earned a bachelor’s degree.”
- Use lowercase “gpa,” without periods, or spell out “grade point average.”
- Use lowercase for seasons, as in “fall semester 2019.”
- Capitalize “residential college” only if the full name is given: “Mass Communication Residential College,” but “He is enrolled in a residential college.”
- When referring to academic disciplines, only names of languages are capitalized: “She’s an English major,” but “My major is chemistry.”

Punctuation

- For clarity, use an Oxford or serial comma before the conjunction in a series of three or more items: “LSU, North Carolina State, and Auburn.” Exception: If you are writing for news media (e.g., press releases), it is acceptable to forgo Oxford commas, as is the standard for such communication.
- No comma is necessary before an ampersand, even if it is the serial comma before the last item in a list.
- No comma is necessary before “Jr.,” “Sr.,” or any numeral suffix.
- There should only be one space after periods and colons.
- When abbreviating academic degrees, do not use periods: “BA, PhD, MS, MBA, JD.”
- It is not necessary to write “degree” if the full name of the degree is given. For example, it is sufficient to say “Master of Science” rather than “Master of Science degree.”
- “African American” and “Native American” do not need hyphens.

- The following words should be hyphenated:
 - first-year or first-time students
 - on-campus and off-campus (as adjectives)
 - pre-professional and other academic fields beginning with “pre”
- “ly” compounds are not hyphenated: “recently written” (as adjective) not “recently-written.”
- Use a colon to introduce items in a series that rename or amplify material that precedes the colon. If the items are lengthy, use a semicolon to separate them; otherwise, use the semicolon only as a “weak period” to separate closely related independent clauses (as in this sentence).
- When hyphenating words, the second word should only be capitalized if it is a proper noun (e.g., non-Louisiana).
- Commas and periods are placed inside quotation marks; colons and semicolons are placed outside. Depending on meaning, question marks can appear either inside or outside quotation marks.
- When using a dash to amplify a phrase or show a break in thought, use an em dash (—) rather than an en dash (–) or hyphen (-).
- No space is needed between dashes or slashes and surrounding text. For example, use “and/or” rather than “and / or”; “Alzheimer’s disease destroys many lives—and families—every day” rather than “Alzheimer’s disease destroys many lives — and families — every day.”

Word Choice and Sentence Structure

- Whether you write in second person (you) or third person (he or she) depends on your audience. Whatever the case, be consistent throughout your document.
- Whatever the purpose of your publication, assume an audience of intelligent nonspecialists. Avoid technical jargon and abbreviations (unless identified at least once in the beginning of the document). When a specialized vocabulary is unavoidable, be sure to define terms clearly in lay language.
- Avoid redundancy. State your message once in the strongest, most precise language possible.
- Remove unnecessary phrases from your copy. For example, there is no need for the phrase “in order” in this sentence: “In order to participate, students must attend the informational workshop.”

University Approval

If your publication contains academic course or degree information, text should be approved by the Office of the University Registrar. Reputation-defining materials (as outlined in PS-10) should be sent to approvals@lsu.edu for review and approval prior to printing. A minimum of two to three business days are required for review; longer items may require more time.