



# Yukon College style guide

Writing format standards  
plus tips on writing great content

Revised April 2016

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# Why use this style guide

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Good writing is about readability and consistency.

This style guide helps ensure all College publications that reach our audiences, whether they be students, potential students, stakeholders, community partners, or employees, are of a uniform writing style and format. A consistent image helps build the College 'brand' or reputation.

## NOTES:

This guide is not meant to direct the style of scholarly, report, or creative writing.

If you are writing a report for the Yukon Research Centre, please access the *Report writing guide for authours* on the College Relations MyYC page.

## Additional resources

### Visual identity guidelines

Branding is more than just words.

This style guide is a companion piece to *The Yukon College brand: Visual identity guidelines*, found on the College Relations page of MyYC. This resource explains how to use the College logo, brand colours, fonts, icons and templates. Also available is a visual identity brand guide specific to the Yukon Research Centre.

### More marketing and communication resources

The College Relations page on MyYC also contains a useful guidelines and resources to help Yukon College staff with:

- advertising
- promotion of programs
- media communications
- choosing graphics or photography

### More writing resources

The following references have guided content in this style guide and offer additional details on Yukon College approved editing style. Borrow either from the Yukon College library, or review them at the College Relations office.

*Canadian Press Stylebook*

Online subscription available at: <http://www.thecanadianpress.com/books.aspx?id=2780>

*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*

Online subscription available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/pub/views/home.html>

### Questions

Feel free to send questions to [collegerelations@yukoncollege.yk.ca](mailto:collegerelations@yukoncollege.yk.ca).

College Relations staff can advise on best practices as well as note omissions to include in the next update!

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# Writing best practices

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If you are writing for the web, please see additional notes in the following section.

## First consider your audience

Your starting point should always be to understand who your audience(s) is and what drives them to make decisions. What do they want to know and why? If you are hoping for an action, show this clearly – not at the bottom of the page.

## Keep it simple

Be concise. Studies clearly show that readers, particularly the younger demographic, skim-read text at first, only returning for a more in-depth read if the text captures their interest or seems pertinent.

Never use a long word where a short one works well.

Use short sentences and statements to make your text clear and engaging.

**NOT CONCISE** *In our endeavour to ensure guest safety at all times, visitors please note that fire bell testing is carried out every Monday at 9.30am.*

**CONCISE** *We test the fire bell every Monday at 9.30am.*

Edit out redundant words. If it is possible to cut out a word, always cut it out. For example:

- Use 'to' instead of 'in order to'
- Use 'with' instead of 'together with' or 'in conjunction with'
- Omit 'that' or 'the' whenever possible.

*I hope ~~that~~ you can attend.*

*The tour guide will meet ~~the~~ seminar participants outside the hotel.*

Use plain English. Avoid acronyms and jargon. The broad audience that receives many College communications may have little baseline knowledge of your subject. Use words nearly any reader could understand.

Write direct sentences that don't need much punctuation. If a sentence has a bumper crop of internal punctuation, rearrange words so less punctuation is required. Separate distinct thoughts into separate sentences. However, the occasional compound sentence can offer a break in the monotonous rhythm driven by a chain of short sentences.

Keep verb tenses simple. Always use present tense if possible. Keep past and future tense simple unless a more complex verb form is essential.

*The tour guide will ~~be meeting~~ seminar participants outside the hotel.*

## Provide a logical structure

Structure your text so key messages are at the beginning and content runs in a logical order.

Make it easy for readers to see what information is pertinent to them. Consider adding subheadings. Use a series of bullets instead of a run-on sentence.

## Use active voice, not passive

In a sentence written in the *active voice*, the subject of sentence performs the action. In a sentence written in the *passive voice* the subject receives the action.

**PASSIVE** *Every night the office is vacuumed and dusted by the cleaning crew.*

**ACTIVE** *The cleaning crew vacuums and dusts the office every night.*

**PASSIVE** *The uncertainty principle was formulated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927.*

**ACTIVE** *Werner Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle in 1927.*

## Use gender-neutral language

There are no simple formulas for using gender-neutral inclusive language, but it is wise to avoid distracting readers with either a gender specific term that may be offensive or an awkward inclusive phrases such as 'him or her' or 'she/he'.

One easy approach is to use plural forms, such as 'people' instead of 'man', or 'students' instead of 'the student'.

*Students will be required to purchase their own textbooks.*

## Write for a grade 6-7 level of understanding.

Use Microsoft Word 2010 to access the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Score tool. The standard level of writing should be 6 or 7. To enable the tool in Word, click on the File tab, click on *Options*, click on *Proofing*. Make sure that *Check grammar with spelling* and *Show readability statistics* are checked. Click OK. Use the *Spelling & Grammar* tool to check the document, the grade level score will show at the end of the check.

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# Writing for the web

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To maximize the chance of a reader finding and absorbing the information you post on the web, follow the previous section on writing best practices as well as the following.

## Write in the second person

Individually engage your audience by using the "second person" instead of a more removed "third person."

*You can apply by, NOT students can apply*

## Create scannable pages

Viewers read the web differently from how they read printed pages. For a casual viewer, you have only 20 seconds to grab their attention before they click away to another place.

Web readers scan down the page for headings to find sections which are relevant, which they will then read in more detail.

If headings do not provide enough direction, they will also scan the first 17 characters of paragraphs, especially near the top of the page.

To increase scannability:

- highlight keywords
- break up text into usable 'chunks', sorted by heading
- use meaningful sub-headings (rather than 'clever' ones)
- change lists within paragraphs to bulleted lists
- consider one idea per paragraph
- start with the conclusion (inverted pyramid style)
- ensure your text is concise (short paragraphs, short sentences, short words)

## Repurpose content

When repurposing content from other media such as print publications make sure to adapt it for the web. This can mean shortening the content, breaking paragraphs more often, adding appropriate links and removing any background information you can link to elsewhere on the site.

## Consider every page an introductory page

Most users enter our site through search engines. That means the first page they see might be an interior page. Make sure content on all your pages makes sense to a user who hasn't read other pages first.

## Hyperlinks

Hyperlink the name or description of the resource, not the action.

*watch our [latest video](#), NOT to watch the latest video [click here](#)*

# Yukon College places and programs

(including abbreviation, capitalization and acronyms)

## Campuses, divisions and schools

### College

Capitalize the word 'College' as in *Yukon College*.

Capitalize 'College' when it refers to *Yukon College*.

*Many instructors at the College are unable to attend the meeting.*

Do not capitalize 'college' when it refers to colleges in general.

*They discussed universities and colleges.*

### Divisions

Use title case for division names.

*College Relations, Student Services*

### Schools

Use title case for school names.

*School of Academic and Skill Development*

Use 'and' instead of ampersand (&) whenever possible.

Do not capitalize the name of an academic discipline referring to the subject generally.

*She is taking biology courses.*

## Programs

### Capitalization

Use title case for program names.

*Environmental and Conservation Sciences*

When 'Master of', 'Bachelor of', 'Certificate of' or 'Diploma of' precedes the program title in body text, it is considered part of the proper name and should be capitalized.

Use lower case when degrees are referred to generically.

*Those who have completed a master's or bachelor's degree...*

All other references to credentials should be lower case.

### Community campus First Nation names

Whitehorse: Ayamdigut

Dawson City: Tr'odek Hatr'unohtan Zho

Pelly Crossing: Hets'edan Ku

Ross River: Dena Cho Kê'nadi

Old Crow: Alice Frost Community Campus

**TITLE CASE:** Capitalize all 'major' words, including the second half of a 'major' hyphenated word, and the first letter in every word longer than 4 characters in a heading. Remaining words should be 'small' in nature (such as 'and', 'but', 'for'), and should be lowercase.

*A Guide for Yukon College Writers and Editors*

**SENTENCE CASE:** Capitalize the first letter of the first word in the sentence or heading as well as any proper nouns; the remaining characters are lower case. The following words in the sentence or heading are unless requiring capitalization for a specific reason e.g., proper nouns, acronyms, etc.).

*A guide for Yukon College writers and editors*

When the program name is used as a title or header

Only list the credential (e.g. certificate) after the program name, if it is not listed elsewhere in the document or webpage.

*Health Care Services*

*This one-year certificate program...*

In a title or header, do not include the word 'program'.

*Health Care Services certificate, NOT Health Care Services certificate program*

In a title or header, do not precede the program name with 'Bachelor of...'

## Terms

Use 'term', not 'semester'.

Capitalize 'Fall', 'Winter', and 'Spring/Summer' when referring to terms.

## Courses

Course names

Use title case.

*Administrative Procedures*

Course reference numbers (CRN)

CRNs consist of a capitalized abbreviation and number with space in between.

*ENGL 101*

CRNs should be followed by a colon and space, and precede course names (when possible).

*ABTO 102: Administrative Procedures*

Print advertising: include CRNs with course name and description (when possible).

Course prerequisites

List course prerequisites at the end of course descriptions.

Do not include 'permission of instructor or advisor' in course prerequisite because there is a disclaimer on every course webpage that states: *Note: Depending on the circumstances, students may be granted permission from a program advisor or the course instructor to enrol for courses in which they do not have the specified prerequisites.*

## Admission requirements

### High School courses

Course name consists of title case descriptor and a number with a space in between.

*Math 10, English 12*

High school grade requirements are indicated by percentages, NOT a letter grade.

Grade requirements are placed after course name in parentheses (preceded by 'min.' and then a space).

*Math 12 (min. 70%)*

Abbreviate 'minimum' in the grade requirements.

*(min. 70%), NOT (minimum 70%)*

### YC courses

Indicate YC course grade requirements by letter grade (capitalized), not percentages.

Grade requirements are placed after course name in parentheses (preceded by 'min.' and then a space).

*BIOL 101 (min. B+)*

Abbreviate 'minimum' in the grade requirements.

*(min. B+), NOT (minimum B+)*

After the GPA, place the comparable letter grade in brackets.

*GPA 2.0 (C)*

### Tests

Always spell out test name followed by acronym, with the exception of 'GED'.

*Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test (CLBPT)  
Language Proficiency Index (LPI)*

GED must be followed by a registration trademark: GED®

Do not add 'test' to the words 'writing assessment'.

### Other

Use funder/funding, not sponsor/sponsorship.

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## People's names, titles, credentials

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Capitalize job (formal) titles that directly precede a name, but lowercase them when they stand alone or are set off by commas.

*We invited Dean Andres Richardson to speak at faculty retreat.*

*We invited the dean to speak at our faculty retreat.*

*We invited Andrew Richardson, the dean, to speak at our faculty retreat.*

If the formal title is preceded by 'former' or 'acting', use the lower case.

*Former premier Dennis Fentie...*

Be sure to list a doctorate before a name, not after the name. This emphasizes this academic credential within the post-secondary sphere.

*Dr. Karen Barnes, NOT Dr. Karen Barnes, EdD*

Think of a degree as the property of the bachelor or master, with the apostrophe indicating possession. Do not use a capital letter to describe the degree unless you're writing the formal name of a particular degree.

*John has a bachelor's degree in economics.*

*John has a Bachelor of Economics.*

Someone studying for a credential they have yet to achieve is a *Master's student* or a *PhD candidate*.

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## Formatting text

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Please see *The Yukon College brand: Visual identity guidelines* found on the College Relations page of MyYC for information on:

- fonts
- logos
- brand colours
- useful templates

### Headings and titles

Use sentence case for headings or titles.

*Registration information for students*

Although title case is used for program, school, divisional and course names (see page 7) any words in a heading or title which are not part of these names require sentence case.

*Northern Justice and Criminology program  
welcomes new instructor*

**TITLE CASE:** Capitalize all 'major' words, including the second half of a 'major' hyphenated word, and the first letter in every word longer than 4 characters in a heading. Remaining words should be 'small' in nature (such as 'and', 'but', 'for'), and should be lowercase.

*A Guide for Yukon College Writers and Editors*

**SENTENCE CASE:** Capitalize the first letter of the first word in the sentence or heading as well as any proper nouns; the remaining characters are lower case. The following words in the sentence or heading are unless requiring capitalization for a specific reason e.g., proper nouns, acronyms, etc.).

*A guide for Yukon College writers and editors*

## Bold, italics and underlining

Use italics for the names of books, magazines, plays, courses, conferences, reports, etc.

Avoid underlining as this is associated with hyperlinks. A good substitute for underlining is to bold words or sentences that need emphasis.

## Paragraphs

Do not indent paragraphs.

The objective in formatting paragraphs is to make the words as easy as possible for the viewer to read.

- Avoid using block margins (right and left justified), as the imposed extra spacing creates distracting 'rivers' of white. This is especially obvious with narrow columns. Most publications work best by only right-justifying text, allowing the left to be jagged.
- Avoid 'orphan' hyphens which are sometimes imposed by the software program. It is better to place the full word in the line below. In order to drop a word to the line below without prompting paragraph spacing, press ENTER while holding SHIFT.

Do not allow hyperlinks to split over lines. Instead drop the whole hyperlink to the line below.



## Space between sentences

Only one space goes between sentences, not two, as this also creates distracting 'rivers' of white space. Although double-spacing after a sentence was standard with typewriters, this was before the use of modern fonts which now space correctly.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

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## Acronyms

An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters or groups of letters of words in a set phrase or series of words (e.g., YT for Yukon Territory).

As a rule, spell out acronyms upon first use, and follow with the abbreviation in parentheses. In a multi-page document, consider spelling out the acronym at the top of pages or any section where the reader might start reading about the subject.

*Health, Education and Human Services (HEHS)*

Form the plural of an acronym by adding an 's' without an apostrophe.

*FAQs, CDs*

## When to use a period with acronyms and abbreviations

Omit periods in all-capital abbreviations and acronyms unless they are geographical or refer to a person.

*YRC, NISJ, BSW, SALT*

Abbreviations that begin and end in a capital letter do not need periods.

*PhD, U of A*

Abbreviations that end in lowercase letters need periods.

*B.Sc., B.Eng.*

## Common abbreviations

- e.g.,
- i.e.,
- etc. (when a series ends with etc. in the middle of a sentence, set off 'etc.' by commas)

*She ate her sandwich, vegetables, dessert, etc., before class.*

- Adv. for Advanced
- Beg. for Beginner
- f. for fax
- t. for telephone
- c. for cell phone
- min. for minimum
- Prof. for Professor

## Provinces and Territories (as used by Canada Post)

- AB for Alberta
- BC for British Columbia
- SK for Saskatchewan
- MB for Manitoba
- ON for Ontario
- QC for Quebec
- NB for New Brunswick
- NS for Nova Scotia
- PEI for Prince Edward Island
- NL for Newfoundland and Labrador
- NWT for Northwest Territories
- YT for Yukon Territory
- NU for Nunavut

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# Contact information

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## Phone and fax

Separate phone numbers with periods, not dashes or brackets around the area code and include the area code.

*t. 867.668.9595*

Use the following abbreviations in front of numbers:

- 't.' for telephone numbers
- 'f.' for fax numbers
- 'c.' for cell numbers

*t. 867.668.8762, f. 867.668.8777, c. 867.334.6849.*

## Email

Do not precede an email address with the word 'email'. Only use the actual email address.

*science@yukoncollege.yk.ca; NOT email: science@yukoncollege.yk.ca*

Do not underline the email in documents that are to be print only (e.g., letters or posters).

## Web

When referring to a website in body text:

- Do not precede the URL with 'Web:' or 'http:/' or 'www'.
- Do not italicize.
- If at the end of a sentence, punctuate.

*yukoncollege.yk.ca/programs.*

- Do not underline URL in printed material.
- Allow electronic documents and websites to automatically hyperlink to the webpage and underline the URL. Do not alter the colour of the linked URL.

When listing a website as display text (large, bold text):

- Do not precede the URL with 'Web:' or 'http:/' or 'www'.
- Do not italicize.
- Do not underline.
- Do not include a slash or punctuation at end of URL.

*yukoncollege.yk.ca*

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# Units of measurement

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## Numbers, money and percentage

Spell out numbers under 10, and use numerical values for all others, except millions. Exception: always spell out a number that starts a sentence.

*Twenty-six students enrolled in the course; 17 passed but nine failed.  
Use one million, but 2.6 million, a \$2-million drop in funding.*

Use metric units of measurement. The names of metric units are usually spelled out in a paragraph, but this is not applicable when depicting a list of data or creating a quantitative report.

*A 20 kilometer run, NOT a 20 km run*

Metric unit abbreviations do not use a period except at the end of a sentence, never take 's' in the plural.

Insert space between number and unit of measurement (except time – see below).

*15 km*

A number less than one has a zero before the decimal.

*0.25 km, NOT .25 km*

Remove double zeros when referring to dollars.

*\$15, NOT \$15.00*

Always use numerals when writing percentages, unless the number starts a sentence. Spell out the word 'percent' unless referring to statistics.

*He was 99 percent sure she would show up.  
Responses to this year's survey were 53%, as opposed to last year's 48% return.*

## Time and date

Unless you are preparing press releases\*:

Do not put spaces between the time and following 'am' and 'pm'.

*David gets up at 6:02am.*

Remove double zeros behind the hour.

*8:30am to 9pm (NOT 9:00pm)*

For a range of time in a schedule, announcement or list, insert an 'en' dash.

*Bookstore hours: 8am–6pm*

Spell out the name of the month if it is used on its own. If it is used before a specific date, abbreviate the month, adding a period.

*The month of September is beautiful. The course starts on Sept. 9, 2016.*

\*For advertising and the web, Yukon College has chosen to notate time differently than the Canadian Press Stylebook. This is because our core offerings are described by numbers and times, and extra spaces, periods and zeros make the content less readable.

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# Punctuation

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## Ampersand (&)

Use 'and' instead of ampersand (&) whenever possible. In headings or when space is tight, the ampersand is acceptable.

## Apostrophes

Use an apostrophe to denote possession or a contraction.

*The instructor's credentials  
Don't take the Main Street to work.*

Do not use an apostrophe to pluralize a group of numerals.

*The 1920s*

Do not use an apostrophe to pluralize an acronym or abbreviation.

*The SEC is hosting a workshop featuring four CEOs.*

## Bulleted and numbered lists

Do not use '; AND' in bulleted lists.

*WRONG! DO NOT:  
Students are requested to:*

- *come with a tent and sleeping bag;*
- *dry all meals; AND*
- *wear appropriate footwear.*

Use a semi-colon and 'OR' between bullets where there is an option for the reader. Use upper case for the word 'OR' and do not close bulleted list with punctuation.

- *Completion of English 11 and 12, Math 11; OR*
- *ENGL 090 or ENGL 050 (min. B-)*

For short bullets of a few words, do not capitalize each bullet and do not add punctuation at the end.

*Global survival kit:*

- *metal box*
- *survival knife*
- *compass*
- *fire-starter*

But if the bulleted material is longer or would stand on its own, capitalize the first letter of each bullet and use periods at the end of each.

*In this project, the equipment shall consist of:*

- *Three red sleeping bags rated to -5 degrees C.*
- *Three orange camping pillows, meeting approved comfort levels.*
- *Three spare blue blankets.*

Each bullet within a list should have the same logical and grammatical structure.

## Colons

The colon is used to introduce a list of items.

*The bookstore specializes in three subjects: art, architecture, and graphic design.*

Do not, however, use a colon when the listed items are incorporated into the flow of the sentence.

*The bookstore specializes in art, architecture, and graphic design.*

A colon is used to introduce an example, amplification, a formal statement, or a quote longer than a small sentence. Generally do not capitalize the first letter of a sentence that follows a colon unless it is within a quote or needs emphasis.

*The rule may be stated thus: always listen to your dog.*

*The President stated: "We should have a good, working friendship with Canada."*

## Commas

Put commas between the elements of a series but not before the final 'and', 'or' or 'nor' unless that avoids confusion.

*Tuition, ancillary fees and textbook costs all add up.*

*Professional coaching will build muscular strength, balance, flexibility and aerobic fitness.*

Use a comma after an introductory clause or long phrase.

*Under the pile of papers, we found his essay.*

Use a comma between two or more adjectives that precede a noun, when the commas could be separated by 'and' and still make sense.

*The tall and wide structure > The tall, wide structure*

However, omit commas if they could not be separated by 'and' and still make sense.

*A former and secret agent > A former secret agent*

## Dashes (hyphen, en and em)

A hyphen is the shortest type of dash and its only purpose is to link compound words.

An 'en' dash belongs with ranges of time, numbers, pages, years or other items.

*1998–2005*

An 'em' dash is the longest dash and should be used with a space on either side. (It can be found by using the *insert symbol* command on most software)

Use an 'em' dash instead of a colon to emphasize a further explanation of a preceding statement.

*He is afraid of two things — death and the physics test.*

Use a pair of 'em' dashes to separate a sudden change in thought from the rest of the sentence.

*The student – who was usually late – showed up before the presentation.*

## Ellipses (omission marks)

The ellipsis is three periods and indicates the omission of quoted material. Put a space before and after it.

*The decision of the instructor ... depends on the length of the essay.*

## Hyphenation

Hyphenate words that are used as compound adjectives **before a noun**.

*A part-time job, BUT she works part time.*

*Up-to-date information, BUT the information is up to date.*

Use hyphens to form compound words.

*Twenty-five pages, mother-in-law*

Do not hyphenate words beginning with the prefixes 'pre', 'post', 'semi', 'anti', 'sub', etc., unless it is followed by a duplicated vowel or consonant.

*Preregister, antiwar, re-enroll*

## Quotation marks

Use a comma to separate a direct quote from the rest of the sentence.

*"I added the course," said Karen Barnes, president, Yukon College.*

Commas and periods always go inside the quotation marks.

*"The course was very informative," said Kirstin Jones, "I now feel ready for work."*

Semicolons and colons always go outside the quotation marks.

*She never liked the poem "Dover Beach"; in fact, it was her least favourite of all.*

*He clearly states his opinion in the article "Of Human Bondage": he believes that television has enslaved and diminished an entire generation.*

Question marks, exclamation marks, and dashes go inside quotation marks when they are part of the quotation, and outside when they refer to the whole sentence.

*Where is your copy of "The Raven"?*

*"How cold is it outside?" my mother asked.*

## Semi-colons

Use a semicolon to separate statements too closely related to stand as separate sentences.

*Some people write with a computer; others write with a pen or pencil.*

Use a semicolon to separate phrases that contain commas such as items in a complicated list.

*I have been to Whitehorse, Atlin, and Dawson in the North; Vancouver and Victoria in the South; and Halifax, St. Johns, and Charlottetown in the East.*

# YC spelling guide – A to Z

A - D	E - O	P - Z
<p>A Wing A-level Aboriginal (not aboriginal) Admissions Office Applied Arts Division Applied Science and Management Division Athapaskan B.Ed. B.Sc. bachelor's degree Bachelor of... behaviour behavioural B-level C Wing centre certificate (lower case 'C') Certificate of... child care College (upper case when referring to Yukon College) College Achievement Test (CAT) College Placement Test Co-operative CO-OP co-operative co-operation co-operate coordinate (n) coordinator co-register co-requisite coursework daycare decision-making diploma (lower case 'D') Diploma of... Drop-In Centre</p>	<p>e.g., eco-tourism Elders (not elders) email enrol; enrolment; enrolled; enrolling exceptionalities ext. fetal fieldtrip fieldwork First Nation (when referring to one nation) First Nations (not first nations) focus; focuses; focusing; focused Foodsafe full-time health care i.e., interdisciplinary internet labour immunization login (noun) log in (verb) Kinnikinnick Kaff master's degree Master of... mobile trades training trailer multicultural multimedia multidisciplinary Nakwaye Ku Child Care Centre the North (capitalize when preceded by 'the') northernized numeracy Office of the Registrar (not Registrar's Office) online onsite</p>	<p>para-professionals part-time percent practice (n) practicum (sgl) practicums (pl.) practise (v) preceptorships prerequisite recordkeeping regionalised rivers (lower case when referring to more than one) Takhini and Yukon rivers Samay Thla seasons (lower case) shop work socio-cultural term (not semester) term 1, 2, 3, 4 (not roman numeral) theodolites Tlingit Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Tutchone T Wing U.S. Vice President videoconference (all forms) web page(s) website(s) work world workflow workforce worldview Writing Assessment YG (not YTG) Yukon College Assessment Yukon government or Government of Yukon</p>

# Commonly misused words and phrases

## Alumni, alumna, alumnae, and alumnus

One male is 'alumnus'. A group of males is 'alumni'.

One female is 'alumna'. A group of females is called 'alumnae'.

However, a group is made up of men and women, you're 'alumni' again. That is why 'alumni' is used most often; it can be gender neutral.

## Affect and effect

'Affect' is always a verb and means 'to influence.'

*Tom's home-brewed chili will affect your digestion for several hours.*

'Effect' is almost always a noun and means 'result'.

*John substituting salt for sugar had a vile effect on the Christmas cookies.*

## Back up and. backup

'Back up' is the verb usage. 'Backup' is a noun.

*Back up the files before you turn off the computer and save the backup on a floppy disk.*

## Can and may

'Can' refers to the mental or physical ability to accomplish something.

*You can press 222 on your phone for security.*

'May' implies permission.

*Sharon may borrow my car, if she promises to fill the tank.*

## Its and it's

'Its' is the possessive form.

*Hold the bag by its handles.*

If you can write it as 'it is', use the apostrophe.

*I can't tell if it's raining outside or not.*

## Practice and practise

'Practice' is a noun, while 'practise' is a verb.

*The doctor has a practice in Ladysmith. When I was a kid, I hated to practise the piano.*

## Set up and setup

Use 'set up' as a verb (no hyphen). Use 'setup' as an adjective.

*Before you set up your new computer, check instructions. Setup times may vary.*

## That and which | Who and that

'That' introduces a restrictive clause, further identifying the subject, and therefore is essential for the sentence to make sense. The clause should not be separated by a comma.

*The picture that hangs in the hall is painted by a Yukon artist.*

'Which' introduces a nonrestrictive clause, a clause that could be omitted without affecting the meaning of the sentence. The clause should be separated by a comma.

*The iPad, which connects to the iCloud, was created by Apple.*

Use 'who' in reference to people.

*The instructor who knows the most about this subject is away sick today.*

## Your and you're

'Your' is the possessive form.

*Good luck on your presentation.*

'You're' is the contraction of 'you are'

*He said that you're doing a great job.*