

# Editorial Style Guide



University of Iowa Health Care

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## Style guide purpose

This guide is a supplement to the University of Iowa's editorial style guide. Find it at [brand.uiowa.edu/messaging](https://brand.uiowa.edu/messaging).

Refer to it for more guidance on:

- Headings, subheads, and titles
- Academic and medical degrees
- Abbreviations
- Punctuation and grammar
- Capitalization
- Numbers and numerals
- Bolding, italicizing, and font styles
- Pronouns and avoiding gender-biased language

For all other editorial style guidance, we follow the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook. Find it at [apstylebook.com](https://apstylebook.com).

For logos, graphic identity, and templates, visit the [brand hub](#) on *The Loop*.

## Table of Contents

Voice and tone .....	Pages 4-5
Writing for accessibility .....	Page 5
Bulleted lists .....	Page 6
Comma in a series .....	Page 6
Dashes .....	Page 6
Dates and times .....	Pages 6-7
Headings and subheadings .....	Page 7
Phone numbers .....	Page 7
Text styling .....	Page 8
Naming conventions .....	Page 8
University of Iowa, UI, university .....	Page 8
University of Iowa Health Care .....	Page 9
University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center .....	Pages 9
University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine .....	Page 10
University of Iowa Physicians .....	Page 10
University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital .....	Pages 10-11
Other names and naming guidelines .....	Page 11
Locations .....	Pages 11-13

## Voice and tone

Write in the voice of a friendly and caring expert—with confidence, warmth, empathy, clarity, and credibility.

### Voice

Approachable, confident, and conversational. Write using the active voice.

### Tone

Straightforward, warm, welcoming, easy to understand. Second-person voice is encouraged, addressing the audience as “you” and “your,” and the organization as “we.”

### Word choice

Avoid clichés, such as world-class, cutting-edge; use terms like state-of-the-art very selectively. Avoid writing that a patient “suffers from” or “is afflicted with” a disease or condition. This is an oversimplified, and sometimes crude, characterization that can suggest pity.

### Reading level

Content should be written at a sixth to eighth grade reading level:

- Advanced: Some advanced prescriptions can obstruct circulation.
- Patient-friendly: Some medicines can block blood flow.

### Be direct.

Write succinctly and to the point. No one has time for fluff.

*Example: Use MyChart to refill your prescriptions online.*

### Be accurate.

Content should always be proofread for mechanical errors, voice, tone, and style.

### Be clear.

Don't disappoint our audience by being vague. Instead of, “MyChart has several features you're going to like,” tell them specifically what they will find.

*Example: Use MyChart to text your doctor, see your test results, refill prescriptions, and schedule appointments.*

### Be meaningful.

Don't just list the features, state the benefits.

*Example: A multilayer CT scan sees and reads deep layers of the body to provide the most thorough and accurate diagnosis.*

**Be familiar.**

Use language that's familiar to users and avoid jargon or clichés.

*Example: You'll find free parking next to the building.*

**Be confident.**

Provider and caregiver confidence inspires patient confidence and comfort.

*Example: You'll have a team of specialists to help you through each stage of your surgery and recovery process.*

**Be honest.**

Stick to the facts. Only make claims we can support and promises we can keep.

**Be human.**

Write conversationally as though you were interacting with a patient. Use personal pronouns—we, our, you, your—instead of institutional formality. Spell out acronyms and avoid obscure terms.

**Be respectful.**

Most important, write in a way that's direct, clear, and respectful of the audience, rather than patronizing or overly empathetic.

*Example: The dietitian on our diabetes care team can answer your questions about choosing the right foods for you.*

## Writing for accessibility

Writing for accessibility improves usability for all users. We don't want to confuse patients, employees, students, or volunteers because of accessibility challenges. Accessible content improves search engine performance and most importantly, improves our audience's understanding of health topics.

**Creating accessible content**

Writers should check the reading level of their copy using a tool such as the "spelling and grammar tool" found in Microsoft Word. This tool measures an approximate grade-level for reading as well as an "ease of reading" index. Creating accessible content across UI Health Care web properties should follow these guidelines:

- Write for a reading level of eighth grade, or lower.
- Spell out abbreviations and acronyms.
- Use descriptive text for links (rather than "click here").
- Use headings and subheadings to give content a clear organization scheme.
- Avoid directions like "look here" or "see below."
- [Follow WCAG guidelines](#) for making PDFs and other file types accessible.

## Bulleted lists

Use bulleted lists to break up text containing information that can be listed for easier scanning. Follow these guidelines:

- Capitalize the first word of each bullet item, even if only one word.
- Use punctuation at the end of bulleted items only when a complete sentence is contained entirely within that bulleted item.
- Introduce lists with a clear, descriptive sentence or phrase.
- Whenever possible, use bulleted lists for 10 items or fewer. Break longer lists into multiple shorter lists.
- Keep your bulleted items consistent. If some items begin with verbs, begin all items with verbs. In short publications, such as brochures, structure all your lists similarly.
- Nested or sub-lists should use the open circles instead of solid bullet points.

### Types of lists

- **Bulleted lists** should be used when order is not relevant. For lists of single words, consider alphabetizing your items.
- Use **numbered lists** (1, 2, 3, etc.) to demonstrate an order or sequence (such as a step-by-step process or ordered by priority).
- If the list is meant to be a **checklist**, check boxes are okay instead of bullets.

## Comma in a series

Always use the serial/Oxford comma with three or more items in a series (e.g., “Faculty, staff, and students.”)

## Dashes (UI)

**Em dashes** (—) used in a sentence carry no spaces on either side: “With the help of her three daughters—Jan, Ellie, and Fern—she made it through her treatments.”

**En dashes** (–) should be used instead of hyphens in ranges of inclusive dates, times, and numbers: “2007–2015.” See the “Dates and times” section for details.

## Dates and times

List in order the time, date, then location. For example, “...from noon to 1 p.m. Thursday, June 5, in the Patients’ Library (Elevator F, Level 8).”

## Time spans

- In a story or announcement, the use of “to” is preferred to show a range of time (7 to 8 a.m.; 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.). For text used in a bulleted item, a callout, marketing collateral, or other graphic design pieces, an en dash with no spaces (not a hyphen) may be used (7–8 a.m.; 11 a.m.–1:30 p.m.).
- Spell out noon and midnight; use these terms instead of 12 p.m. and 12 a.m.

## Dates

- Include the day of the week before the date if referring to an upcoming event (“Thursday, Sept. 1”), but the day of the week is not necessary when referring to a date in the past or if the specific day of the week is not essential to the story (“...arrived home on Sept. 1. Three days later, his spleen ruptured.”).
- Do not include the year if the event occurs in the current year. Include the year if the event occurred in a past year or will occur in a future year. Exceptions are allowed in which the current year may be used for event posters or other graphic design pieces.
- Do not use 24-hour or military time.

## Headings and subheadings

Use sentence style capitalization (capitalize only the first word, proper nouns, and first word after a colon) for web pages and stories, including news releases, publications, *The Loop*, and Noon News, as well as all subheads in a document.

Use headline style (capitalize all major words in the title, including prepositions of five or more letters) for titles of:

- Graphic design pieces (flyers, etc.)
- Patient education materials
- Titles of events, awards, lectures, and courses (see UI guide for more on this)

## Phone numbers

- “Phone numbers should use hyphens and no parentheses.
- On the web, phone numbers should carry the initial “1”: 1-319-356-1616
- In print, do not include the initial “1”: 319-356-1616

## Text styling

- Emphasis: To convey emphasis, **boldface** is acceptable, but use sparingly.
- Avoid italics, all caps, or underlining for emphasis.
- Underlining conveys a link and can be misleading.

## Naming conventions

The following includes naming conventions, accepted acronyms, abbreviations, and references for UI and UI Health Care entities.

### Names (of people)

Use credentials after a person's name instead of "Dr." prior to it: e.g., "Jane Doe, MD," instead of "Dr. Jane Doe." In subsequent references, refer to them by their last name only.

### Health care

Always two words unless part of a proper noun that spells it as one word: "Cigna Healthcare," for example. Always use two words when referring to University of Iowa Health Care.

### Payer

"Payer" is preferred over "payor."

### Residents and fellows

At first mention, a resident or fellow should be referred to as a "resident physician" or "fellow physician." Subsequent mentions may use simply "resident" or "fellow."

## University of Iowa, UI, university

- For external audiences, spell out "University of Iowa" on first reference.
- For internal communications, "UI" may be used on first reference in all contexts.
- Subsequent mentions of "University of Iowa" may be shortened to "UI," even when subsequent mentions are part of a longer name, such as UI Health Care.
- When using "UI" on its own, use "the UI." For example, "... earned his bachelor's degree at the UI."
- Lowercased "university" is acceptable on subsequent references when the context is clear and if "university" is not part of a proper noun. For example, "... when she joined the university."
- "UI" is acceptable in story headlines or subheads. It must be spelled out at first reference in any text below the main title.



## University of Iowa Health Care

### Definition

University of Iowa Health Care encompasses the tripartite mission of research, education, and patient care.

University of Iowa Health Care also refers to the clinical enterprise of our health system.

### Guidelines

Do not use “the” in front of University of Iowa Health Care, UI Health Care Stead Family Children’s Hospital, or UI Physicians.

- Exception: “the” is acceptable if UI Health Care is used as a modifier or as part of a proper noun: “... the UI Health Care team responded to the crisis” or “...spent her entire career with the UI Health Care Program in Operational Excellence.”

## University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center

- The legal name of the medical center at 200 Hawkins Drive is University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center. The former Mercy Iowa City hospital location is now University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Downtown.
  - All hospital-based billing locations, except the Medical Center Downtown, are under the University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center license. The downtown campus has a separate license because it operates under an open medical staff model.
- In writing, context is key. In text, stories, etc., it is not necessary to use the full, legal name (University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center) because text, stories, etc. are not legal documents related to billing, compliance, etc.
- It is acceptable to use the shortened “University of Iowa Health Care” as a location: “She received treatment **at University of Iowa Health Care.**”
- Do not use “UIHC” in text—internally or externally.
- For any location where provider-based billing applies, “University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center” or “University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Downtown” appears on the front door, behind the reception desk, and on all patient communications. For legal and billing reasons, this specific wording informs patients when they enter a facility that they are being treated as hospital patients.
- Examples for signage on the front door, reception desk, billing/legal/compliance documents, and patient communications (e.g., appointment reminders):
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center, University campus
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center, North Liberty campus
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Stead Family Children’s Hospital
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Iowa River Landing
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Coralville, Heartland Drive
  - University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Dialysis Center North Liberty, Lions Drive

- University of Iowa Health Care Medical Center Downtown
- Examples for use in text, stories, and other editorial content:
  - "...offering OBGYN services at our medical center on the university campus."
  - "...when the UI Health Care campus in North Liberty opens in 2025."
  - "...says Smith, who sees patients at the UI Health Care clinic on Heartland Drive in Coralville."
  - "...at UI Health Care's downtown campus."
  - "...a pediatric nephrologist at University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital." ("Stead Family Children's Hospital" is acceptable on subsequent references.)

## University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine

- On first reference for external audiences, spell out "the University of Iowa Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine." If "University of Iowa" has previously been spelled out on first reference, "the UI Roy J. and Lucille A. Carver College of Medicine" is acceptable.
- You may shorten to "the UI Carver College of Medicine" or "the Carver College of Medicine" on subsequent references or anytime for internal communications.
- Do not use "CCOM."
- Do not use "University of Iowa Health Care Carver College of Medicine" or any combination of "UI Health Care" and "Carver College of Medicine."
- "The college" (lowercase) is also acceptable on subsequent references when the context is clear.

## University of Iowa Physicians

University of Iowa Physicians is the multi-specialty medical and surgical group practice of University of Iowa Health Care.

## University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital

- On first reference, use the full name: "University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital." If "University of Iowa Health Care" has already been spelled out, "Stead Family Children's Hospital" is acceptable on subsequent references.
- Never use "University of Iowa Children's Hospital" or "UI Children's Hospital."
- Do not use "SFCH" except when referring to the university's official building code as part of the campus mailing address.
- You may use "children's hospital" (lowercase) on subsequent references if the context is clear.
- Janice and Bruce Ellig Children's Library: Use the full name on first reference and "children's library" on subsequent references.
- Children's Café at UI Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital (Level 1)

- Gerdin Family Lobby (Level 1)
- UI Stead Family Department of Pediatrics (Name of academic department in the Carver College of Medicine)

## **University of Iowa Health Care Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center**

- Do not use “the” before the name (“... at University of Iowa Health Care Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center.”)
- On subsequent references, it’s OK to write “Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center” without including “UI Health Care.” Additionally, “Holden” (“at Holden”) and “the cancer center” (if the context is clear) is acceptable on subsequent references.
- Do not use “HCCC.”

## **Mission Cancer + Blood, part of UI Health Care**

- Mission Cancer + Blood joined UI Health Care in January 2025. It comprises more than 20 community cancer clinics across Iowa.
- On first reference, write “Mission Cancer + Blood, part of University of Iowa Health Care” (“UI Health Care” is acceptable if “University of Iowa Health Care” has already been stated). Note: Include a single space on both sides of the plus sign.
- “Mission Cancer + Blood” (or “Mission” if the context is clear) is acceptable on subsequent references.
- These naming guidelines apply only to Mission Cancer + Blood clinics/locations.

## **Other names and naming guidelines**

- Department of Nursing Services and Patient Care (use full name)
- Francois M. Abboud Cardiovascular Research Center
- Fraternal Order of Eagles Diabetes Research Center
- Iowa City Veterans Affairs Health Care System (or Iowa City VA Health System) if referring to the entity; Iowa City Veterans Affairs Medical Center (or Iowa City VA Medical Center) if referring to the building/location.
- Iowa Neuroscience Institute (not Neurosciences)
- Magnet, Magnet Recognition Program, or Magnet-recognized hospital; avoid describing Magnet as an “award.”
- Orthopedics (not orthopaedics)
- Pappajohn Biomedical Institute (based in the Pappajohn Biomedical Discovery Building)
- Parking Ramp 1, Parking Ramp 2, etc. (no “Hospital” in the name)
- University of Iowa Health Care Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center (no “the” before the name)
  - “Holden Cancer Center” or “cancer center” on subsequent references
  - Do not use “HCCC”

## **Locations**

## Medical center locations

The medical centers should follow the following naming structure when being used to identify a building on the website or on wayfinding materials. Do not use these names in copy. Instead, refer to them as the medical center on the appropriate campus.

- Medical Center University
- Medical Center Downtown
- Medical Center North Liberty

## Clinic locations (for signage, billing, patient letters, etc.)

- Naming structure clinic locations: University of Iowa Health Care City, Street
  - Include street numbers if there is more than one UI Health Care location in that city and on that street.
- Examples of the new structure:
  - University of Iowa Health Care Bettendorf, Lincoln Road
  - University of Iowa Health Care Muscatine, 3465 Mulberry Avenue
  - University of Iowa Health Care Iowa River Landing

- University of Iowa Health Care, Iowa River Landing
  - Use UI Health Care Iowa River Landing or UI Health Care Iowa River Landing East on subsequent references.
  - Never “Iowa River Landing” on its own unless referring to the area of town.
  - Avoid “IRL,” especially for external audiences.
- Walk-in locations
  - There should be no space in QuickCare as an official name of a clinic location. Examples:
    - University of Iowa Health Care QuickCare, Iowa City, Mormon Trek Boulevard
    - University of Iowa Health Care QuickCare, Iowa City, South Clinton Street
    - University of Iowa Health Care QuickCare, Iowa City, Sycamore Street
    - University of Iowa Health Care QuickCare, North Liberty
  - Capitalize Urgent Care when used in the official name of the clinic location. Examples:
    - University of Iowa Health Care Urgent Care, Cedar Rapids
    - University of Iowa Health Care Urgent Care, Iowa City
    - University of Iowa Health Care Urgent Care, Davenport
    - University of Iowa Health Care Urgent Care, Coralville

### **Locations within buildings**

- Medical center on the university campus
  - Always include the elevator and level for any location in this format: (Elevator F, Level 1)
  - Leave room numbers outside the parentheses: W462 GH (Elevator BW, Level 4)
  - For University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children’s Hospital, list the level only, no elevator: (Level 1)
- University of Iowa Health Care Iowa River Landing:
  - List the level only, no elevator: (Level 3)
- Medical center on the downtown campus
  - List the level only, no elevator (Level 2)
- Use suite numbers, if needed, to help with wayfinding
  - Example: University of Iowa Health Care Iowa City, North Dodge, Suite 2000

### **Building and unit abbreviations**

- Spell out the name of pavilions on first reference for all audiences, with the abbreviation in parentheses. For internal communications, the abbreviations may be used for subsequent references (For example, 2189 RCP).
  - Boyd Tower (BT)
  - General Hospital (GH)
  - Roy J. Carver Pavilion (RCP)
  - John Colloton Pavilion (JCP)
  - John Pappajohn Pavilion (JPP)
  - Pomerantz Family Pavilion (PFP)
- This rule also applies to buildings.
  - Bowen Science Building (BSB)
  - Carver Biomedical Research Building (CBRB)
  - Center for Disabilities and Development (CDD)
  - College of Medicine Administration Building (CMAB)
  - Eckstein Medical Research Building (EMRB)

- Health Care Support Services Building (HSSB)
  - Medical Education Building (MEB)
  - Medical Education Research Facility (MERF)
  - Medical Research Center (MRC)
  - Medical Laboratories (ML)
  - Pappajohn Biomedical Discovery Building (PBDB)
- And units:
  - Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU)
  - Center for Disabilities and Development (CDD)
  - Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU)
  - Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)
  - Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU)
  - Pediatric Specialty Clinic (PSC)
  - Surgical and Neuroscience Intensive Care Unit (SNICU)