



## Punctuation and Voice Guide

### Punctuation

**apostrophe** Use in place of omitted letters and numbers : *You've, rock'n'roll, Class of '99, the '30s theme*. Use to show plural of a singular letter: *I need to dot the I's and cross the T's; the Oakland A's*. Do not use to show plural of multiple letter combinations: *CDs, JPEGs*.

**capitalization (general)** Capitalize all specific Alpha Sigma Tau personnel, boards, and committees: *The Nominations Committee met last week. During the meeting, the committee came up with a new nominations chart*.

**comma** During a series listing, use the serial (or Oxford) comma before the last conjunction: *My sisters, my advisor, and the fraternity/sorority advisor of the campus met for a meeting*. Use commas to separate independent clauses (both sides of the sentence need to be able to stand alone) when they are joined by any of these seven coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*. *She submitted the report, but the advisor did not see it. She coordinated the event but is not going*.

**dashes** An en dash (–) is used when writing about a range, like years or pages (*pg. 55–64*). An em dash (—) is mostly used to set apart a phrase or clause. Neither has a space on either side.

**dates** A comma always follows the day and the year of a date in a sentence: *The Sorority was founded on November 4, 1899, in Ypsilanti, Michigan*.

**geography** A comma always follows the city and the state in a sentence: *The Sorority was founded in Ypsilanti, Michigan, at Michigan State Normal College*.

**hyphens** Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words. The fewer the hyphens the better; use them only when not using them causes confusion. *Small-business owner* but *health care center*. Hyphens are not dashes.

## Punctuation (cont.)

**compound modifiers** When a compound modifier—two or more words that express a single concept—precedes a noun, use hyphens to link all the words in the compound except the adverb *very* and all adverbs that end in *-ly*: *a second-period goal, a greyish-blue skirt, a know-it-all-attitude, a very fun event, an easily remembered number.*

**semicolon(;**) In general, use a semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma can convey, but less than the separation than a period implies. Both sentences on either side of the semicolon need to be able to stand alone. *The latest issue of The Anchor is being printed; it should arrive in mailboxes later this week.*

**to compare a series** Use semicolons to separate elements of a series when the items in the series are long or when individual segments contain material that also must be set off by commas: *The meeting consisted of Effie Lyman, Alpha Sigma Tau Chief Executive Officer; Carrie Staehle, Alpha Sigma Tau National President; Ada A. Norton, Alpha Sigma Tau Vice President of the National Foundation; and Abigail Pearce, Alpha Sigma Tau National Vice President.*

**spacing** In sentences, use a single space after a period at the end of a sentence, after a semicolon, and after a colon.

## Grammatical Voice

In grammar, the **voice** is the usage of a verb that indicates whether its subject acts (active voice) or is acted upon (passive voice).

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.

**Active:** The Vice President of Finance *believes* the chapter *must place* a limit on the budget.

**Passive:** *It is believed* by the Vice President of Finance that a limit *must be placed* on the budget by the chapter.

**Active:** Research *shows* that high stress *can negatively impact* grades.

**Passive:** *It was shown* that grades *can be negatively impacted* by high stress.

**Active:** The dog *bit* the man.

**Passive:** The man *was bitten* by the dog.

**Use the active voice whenever possible.** Writing in active voice makes your meaning more clear and concise for readers and keeps the sentences from becoming too complicated or wordy.

### **Tips:**

- Look for a "by" phrase (e.g., "by the dog" in the last example above). If you find one, the sentence may be in the passive voice. Rewrite the sentence.
- If the subject of the sentence is somewhat anonymous, see if you can use a general term, such as "research" above.

### **When to use passive voice:**

There are sometimes good reasons to use the passive voice:

- To emphasize the action rather than the actor: "After long debate, the proposal *was endorsed* by the Executive Committee."
- To be tactful by not naming the actor: "The procedures *were* somehow *misinterpreted*."
- To describe a condition in which the actor is unknown or anonymous: "Every year, thousands of people *are recruited* into fraternities and sororities."
- To create an authoritative tone: "Visitors *are not allowed* after 9 p.m."

Copied from *The Writer's Handbook*, The University of Wisconsin – Madison, with slight alteration