

Montana Catholic Newspaper Style Sheet

RULE 1: Keep it short. Please do not exceed the word limit that the editor gave you. If you don't, your article may be shortened considerably. Do not use three or four words when one suffices. Avoid repetition, redundancies and hyperbole.

RULE 2: You are writing for a newspaper. Some rules of capitalization, punctuation and abbreviation are different from the style of writing most of us learned in school. Paragraphs are not as long and involved.

RULE 3: Be sure to include the 5 W's – who, what, when, where and why – and how, if applicable. If reservations are required for a coming event, include the deadline.

RULE 4: Use third person. Only on rare occasions will we run a column or feature written in first person (I, me, my, mine, our, ours), or with unattributed advice mentioning “we, they, you, your, yours.”

RULE 5: Use active voice. “Jane Johnston is the new president of the St. Casimir Parish Council” is active voice. “Jane Johnston has been appointed president ...” is passive, and needlessly wordy.

Capitalization

Avoid unnecessary capitalization; if in doubt, don't.

The general rule is to capitalize proper names of people, organizations, book and other publication titles and geographical names. A short title before a proper name can be capitalized but a long title should go after the name.

- Capitalize B.C. and A.D., but type a.m. or p.m. in lower case.
- Most acronyms can be in all caps; omit periods unless the result would spell an unrelated and/or inappropriate word.
- Do not use superscript or subscript.

Punctuation and fonts

Use Times New Roman 10-point font; make sure punctuation marks match the font.

- Quote marks go after the comma or period at the end of a quote. A quote within a quote requires single marks, such as: “I said, ‘spell it out,’ ” the teacher repeated.
- For a year or decade written like this, the ‘60s, the quote mark needs to go the other way (closed quote, which looks like this: ’60s). You can find it under Insert, Symbol in Microsoft Word.

Abbreviate or spell out?

Spell out Father, Monsignor, Bishop, Archbishop, Sister and other religious titles before the person's name on all references.

- In dates, abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. – but spell out other months and days of the week.
- State names standing alone are spelled out. For city and town, abbreviate most states, e.g., “Sheridan, Mont.” If you include a mailing address, use the post office abbreviation and zip code, e.g., P.O. Box 1729, Helena, MT 59624.

Style books

Catholic News Service and Associated Press style books, available in the Montana Catholic office, contain many more examples. If you find a difference for the same listing in both books, use the CNS version. Web sites to consult include www.utexas.edu/visualguidelines/abbreviations.html; www.samford.edu/groups/unirel/stylemanual and grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar.

A learning tip

Save a copy of what you submit and compare it with what is published. Specifically check for edits made to improve clarity and to fit in the available space.