

Montana Catholic Newspaper Style Sheet

RULE 1: 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. See style books listed below. Articles should include: strong leads, a body of the article which develops and delivers on the lead, and a definitive conclusion.

- **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.
- **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.”
- **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.
- **Avoid clichés.** Bone of contention, spread like wildfire, dropped like a ton of bricks. These are just a few of the tired phrases to avoid.
- **Readers like specifics**, so please provide them. “She has a master's degree in English literature” rather than “She is highly educated.”

RULE 2: 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. **Standard submission length is 400-650 words.**

RULE 3: We reserve the right to edit submissions. If your submission must be completely reworked, the article may not be published or it will be published in its edited form and your byline will not appear. Edited submissions **are not** subject to submitter's review prior to publication. **Provide a contact name, phone number and e-mail with each submission;** typically the contact information will be that of the author.

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 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.

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 stylebooks, 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; www4.samford.edu/communication/stylemanual/ and grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar.