

STUDENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

STYLE GUIDE

This guide is for **public-facing communications** for campus programs, social media, infographics, annual reports, newsletters, web content, email campaigns, and other marketing and communications efforts.

Branding is the marketing practice of actively shaping your departmental brand.

Your brand is the recognizable feeling that your department evokes. It is about perceptions that live in the minds of everyone who experience them: students, faculty and staff, community members, media, Ram Fam, etc.

Inconsistency confuses and may alienate your audience. A style guide is important because it helps your department communicate in a consistent way across all teams and channels.

As a department, make a list of 3-5 adjectives that describe your brand. This will set the tone for both design and writing. It may also be helpful to talk about what your brand is not with your team. Communicate these along with your values, mission, and vision to your creative team before designing.



BRANDING VS. MARKETING

BRANDING IS WHY

BRANDING IS LONG-TERM

BRANDING IS MACRO

BRANDING DEFINES TRAJECTORY

BRANDING BUILDS LOYALTY

BRANDING CREATES VALUE

BRANDING IS THE BEING

VS



MARKETING IS HOW

MARKETING IS SHORT-TERM

MARKETING IS MACRO

MARKETING DEFINES TACTICS

MARKETING BUILDS RESPONSE

MARKETING EXTRACTS VALUE

MARKETING IS THE DOING



WCUPA.EDU/DOSACOMMMARKETING

DECIDE THE TONE

Before beginning a project, ask these questions and let the answers set the tone of your piece: _____



- ◆ ***Who is doing the talking?*** Are you speaking as the institution, the department, or as a student?
 - Speaking as the University needs to sound more formal and official
 - Speaking as the department must still sound professional but can be more conversational
 - Speaking as a student can be the most informal and conversational but should still sound professional

- ◆ ***Who are you talking to?*** Is your audience students, faculty, staff or administrators, parents/families, or other paraprofessional staff? When writing or designing for students, think from their perspective and:
 - Assume they have no prior background knowledge of WCU. Often we refer to things in slang that most students may not know
 - Ask what information they need *right now* to avoid overloading them with information you can share later. For events, think about the information you can add to the RamConnect site later

- ◆ ***What's the purpose of your piece?*** Is it:
 - Transactional** Are you sharing important information or giving instructions about something?
 - Promotional** Are you promoting a specific event?
 - Relationship/Community Building** Are you trying to build their relationship with the University or your department? Are you trying to build their identity as a Golden Ram?

A piece can be one, two, or even all three of these things, but the most effective communications will be clear on their primary purpose. It's better to have multiple, targeted communications rather than one that tries to do too much.



CHOOSE GOOD IMAGES

Using a poor-quality picture not only takes away from the effectiveness of your piece, but it could also project an unwanted image of your department or the University, so follow these guidelines:



- ◆ *Look for diverse and inclusive photos*
- ◆ *Check the photo quality*
 - If it's out of focus or highly pixilated, find another image, or use an appropriate stock photo or even an icon in its place
 - If the photo is too dark or too bright, try adjusting the brightness with a photo editor. Sometimes a small tweak will help.
- ◆ *Inspect the photo closely using the “bingo” method*
 - Visualize the photo as a bingo card with individual squares
 - Check each square for anything that is unsightly, inappropriate, or visually distracting like overflowing trash cans, litter on the ground, or shirts with inappropriate images, slogans or language
- ◆ *Crop the photo judiciously*
 - Crop your photo to remove any issues you spotted or choose another photo if the problem area can't be cropped or masked in some way (sometimes a well-placed graphic element or text-box can hide a problem area)
 - Follow these rules of thumb for cropping:
 - Make sure the photo is cropped so that the viewer focuses on what you want the subject of the photo to be
 - Remove anything that detracts from the photo. Perhaps you have a wide-angle campus shot — is the image more compelling if you eliminate some of the extraneous background?
- ◆ *Avoid using photos with students wearing other college's gear*
- ◆ *Look for stock photos* of campus and students on the *Communications and Marketing for Student Affairs* website: www.wcupa.edu/DOSACommMarketing

FOLLOW BASIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- ◆ ***Make sure you have the information you need on your flyer.*** Do a quick check after you've created it:
 - Who, What, When, Where, How to Register, Department Logo
- ◆ ***Leave white space.*** The eye needs a place to rest. Wall-to-wall images or text:
 - Are visually overwhelming
 - Take away from your message
 - Reduce reading comprehension
 - Discourage your audience from engaging with your piece
- ◆ ***Edit, edit, edit.*** What does the reader need to know? Is every piece of information that's on your graphic essential? Is there a way to use fewer words and still convey what's important? For example, program flyers frequently look like this:

Event: March Madness
Date: Wed., March 3, 2021
Time: 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Location: Sykes Ballrooms

Just put the information and skip the extraneous “event”, “date”, “time”, etc.
- ◆ ***Practice the Rule of Thirds.*** Here's a helpful piece from Canva about this design principle: <https://www.canva.com/learn/visual-design-composition/>

While we're talking about Canva — Canva templates are your friends, whether it's using a template or browsing them for inspiration.



MAKE SURE IT'S READABLE/ACCESSIBLE

To aid overall readability and accessibility for people with visual impairments:

◆ *Use high contrast.*

Think light fonts against dark backgrounds or dark fonts against light backgrounds

◆ *Use accessible fonts*

It's best to use the official University fonts that you can download on the Communications and Marketing for Student Affairs website:

www.wcupa.edu/DOSACommMarketing

- Sans Serif fonts work best on screens: Ariel, Calibri, Century Gothic, Helvetica, Tahoma, Verdana
- Serif fonts work best for anything printed: Cambria, Garamond, Georgia, Times New Roman

You don't have to limit yourself to these fonts, but be aware that anything highly stylized, particularly many script fonts, may be an issue for some individuals or screen readers. Watch out for this when using Canva templates. Some of the templates look great but use fonts that aren't accessible.

◆ *Use a large enough font size*

It's better to use fewer words with a larger font than it is to use more words with a smaller font.

The general rule for PowerPoints is that 24 is the smallest point size you should use. It's okay to go to lower but try not to go below 16 points. The 24-point rule also helps you stick to the other rule about PowerPoint slide decks — less is more! If you have too much information on a slide, people will read the slide instead of listening to the presentation.



EDIT YOURSELF

◆ *Proofread. Proofread again.*

- If you've been working on something for a long time, have someone else proofread it because you'll stop seeing your mistakes after a while, plus a second set of eyes is always a good idea
- Proofread your piece once, then proofread it again backwards. Reading backwards forces your brain to focus on each individual word
- Don't rely solely on spellcheck. It will not pick up when you've used their instead of there or mixed up then with than, for example
- Be sure to double check:
 - The spelling of people's names
 - The proper names of campus offices
 - All days, dates and times

◆ *Use action words, and remember this rule:*

Strong verbs, short sentences (borrowed from Malcolm Gladwell's podcast Revisionist History). On short pieces like flyers, graphics, and social media posts, start sentences with a verb, for example:

"Join us March 3" instead of "The Office of New Student Programs invites you to join us on March 3"

◆ *Rework prepositional phrases.*

- Look for common prepositions (in, at, on, by, of, to, for) and see if you can rework the wording to eliminate them. For example, instead of saying "Orientation will be held by New Student Programs on the following dates," try "New Student Programs will hold Orientation on ..."
- Count the prepositional phrases in your sentences —if you have more than three, make it two sentences or you risk losing your reader
- Use possessives. Really – don't be afraid of that apostrophe. What sounds better, "the students of the University," or "the University's students?" *Here's a caveat — use a prepositional phrase if the possessive is awkward. For example, "My sister's friend's daughter is coming to Orientation" would be better as "The daughter of my sister's friend is coming to Orientation."*



BE CONSISTENT WITH GENERAL FORMATTING

◆ *Colors*

- Use WCU's official Pantone colors:
Purple (PMS 269)
Gold (PMS 123)
- Use appropriate accent colors:
Elemental Purple (PMS 7449; Canva 291024)
Accent Purple (PMS 7657; Canva 3f1a37)
Elemental Gold (Pantone Yellow; Canva fce715)
Accent Gold (PMS 7555; Canva f4c242)
- For Canva Pro Accounts: Save in your Brand Kit. Student Affairs departments want to be consistent with the University's brand in our public communications.

◆ *Social Media Graphics*

- List your department website as wcupa.edu/orientation
- Use bitly or tinyurl links to help your audience get to your event site easier
- Have some call to action such as "Register soon!" or "Go to our website for more info"

◆ *Times*

- Note times followed by a space and a capital AM or PM. Don't use :00 for times that are on the hour. For example:
1 PM
1:30 PM
- You can omit the space before AM or PM if space is tight (1PM)
- You can include the :00 for times that are on the hour if you're trying to keep things parallel or aligned, such as for a schedule:
7:30 – 8:00 AM – Check In
8:00 – 9:30 AM – Welcome and Overview
- When putting a time range, only use AM or PM at the end of the range, unless it spans morning and afternoon/evening. For example:
7:30 - 11:30 AM
10 AM – 2:30 PM

◆ *Use West Chester University or WCU.* Avoid using just West Chester.

◆ *Capitalize the word University* when you are specifically referring to West Chester University.

◆ *Preferred: email, not e-mail.* Check with your department on other words like this for consistency.

◆ *Omit www or http/https before websites.* Readers understand that wcupa.edu is a website.

◆ *Use the short link to campus websites if there is one.*
For example: wcupa.edu/financial or wcupa.edu/housing.

◆ *When using quotation marks,* periods and commas always go inside the quotation marks.

Canva Accounts

Provide your creators with the login information for your departmental account. Because multiple people will be using your Canva account, here are some best practices:

- Work in the department's Canva and not a personal account. If you subscribe to Canva Pro version, it gives you more graphics, fonts, resizing capabilities, brand kit, etc.
- Give your project a clear name so others know what it is
- If something is a draft, put DRAFT after the name so it's clear that it's still a work in progress. Once it's finalized, remove DRAFT from the name

If you've created multiple drafts, delete extra draft copies and only keep the final version.

Large Scale Public Marketing

University Communications Office of Publications, Printing, and Editorial Services oversees the creation and production of all University publications to ensure professional design, content, printing, and distribution. Whether your piece is intended for internal or external audiences, their participation ensures your publication not only meets University standards but is produced in the most cost-efficient manner. Working closely with Marketing, they help you to create external materials that help you to meet your goals while staying in step with University-wide branding and messaging.

They can help you with all facets of publications production, including:

- Concept
- Design
- Content (writing, editing, photography, illustration)
- Budgeting & Estimating
- Printing
- Mailing and Shipping

To start your project, [fill out a Work Order Form](#).



**This guide has been adapted from the New Student Programs 2021 Style Guide*