Sept 6, 2023

ORED Panel Discussion – notes for the main folder

**Tips of the Writing Trade:**

The Office of Public Affairs at Mississippi State University has created guidelines for all published materials, including all print and social media formats. All colleges are required to follow OPA rules for published material.

OPA follows the Associated Press Stylebook. Sometimes, AP rules and the rules for academic writing conflict. In such cases, AP rules take precedence. For example, most academic regulations allow for the “Oxford comma,” or the last comma in a series. (I like apples, bananas, and grapes.) However, AP **does not** allow an Oxford comma. (I like apples, bananas and grapes.)

Below are some of the main AP rules to help you understand some of the rules we follow when writing:

**academic departments**. Capitalize the formal name of departments, such as the Department of History. But lowercase “history department.” Spell out “and” in department names: “Department of Anthropology and Middle Eastern Cultures,” not “Department of Anthropology & Middle Eastern Cultures.”

**composition titles** (e.g., books, movies, plays, poems, songs, journals). Put quotation marks around the names of all such works except the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material/journals. Do not use italics.

**doctor**. Do not refer to a person as “Dr.” within an article. “Dr.” may be used to refer to someone in a quotation only. OPA does not refer to Dr. Keenum as “Dr.” in any article. He is identified as Mark E. Keenum first, and “Keenum” in subsequent references UNLESS someone is referring to him in a quote. (ex: “I have worked for Dr. Keenum for 20 years,” said John Smith.)

**italics**. AP does not italicize words in news stories.

**magazine names**. Capitalize the initial letters of the name but do not place it in quotes. Lowercase magazine unless it is part of the publication’s formal title: Harper’s Magazine, Time magazine.

**program**. Do not capitalize the word program. African American Studies program, Gender Studies program, PGA Golf Management program.

**titles**. Capitalize titles before names, lowercase titles after names.

**What Merits a News Release?**

The following **elements of newsworthiness** should be considered.

**—Impact or Significance**

**—Timeliness**

**—Exceptional Quality or Novelty**

* Anything out of the ordinary or unusual may have more news value. The classic example remains: Dog bites man—no story. Man bites dog—story.

**—Human interest or broad appeal**

**—Grants, Awards, and Scholarships**

**—New Hires and Promotions, Faculty Activities**

* OPA news releases on new hires and promotions generally are those at the director level and higher. However, colleges/units will internally publicize new hires and promotions as deemed appropriate.
* OPA encourages and welcome news and information on faculty research that has the potential to or is making an impact on society in some way. These stories can be very powerful and tell how MSU faculty are leading the way and are passionate about making a difference.
* Faculty authors or co-authors on published books or in major, well-known journals such as Science and Nature among others, are encouraged to let OPA know about this work or contact the communications specialists in the respective college/unit.

**Other House Style Guidelines**:

1. Mississippi State University should be mentioned within the first paragraph of the story.

2. When possible, if there is an affiliation with a college or department, include that somewhere in the story.

3. Brevity is necessary. News articles need to hover around 500 words. We simply do not have room to thank everyone for their role in various research, awards, successes, etc…

When a news release is not the most appropriate method for communicating information, other options that may be considered include:

* college and departmental website news features
* web announcement on MSU homepage
* campus calendar item on MSU homepage
* Maroon MEMO weekly employee e-newsletter
* advisory notifying media in advance of events or activities
* photo and cutline sent to media
* Our People employee/student web article on MSU homepage
* State Spotlight photo feature on MSU homepage
* social media (several options)
* Alumnus magazine, particularly Campus News or Statements section
* internal email announcements (approved by respective VP, generated through ITS)
* The Conversation

For help, contact:

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