Athabasca University

BRAND GUIDELINES

Welcome to Athabasca University's Brand Guidelines.

Thank you for helping us maintain a strong and consistent brand for Canada's Open University.

Contents

The AU Brand Workflow

Step 1

Familiarize yourself with AU and its core brand elements.

AU's Story ›
Find out more about AU's story on our website.

Overview of AU's Brand ›
Get a holistic view of AU's core brand elements

Step 2

Get the AU brand assets.

AU's Brand Asset Pack ›
Download the latest official logos, images, and other key brand assets.

Step 3

Consult the brand guidelines that apply to your work.

Visual guidelines ›
For all visual aspects of the AU brand, including how to use the logo.

Editorial guidelines ›
For all written aspects of the AU brand, including how to write for social media.

Have questions about our brand?
Need support applying it?

Contact Athabasca University's Brand & Marketing department.

📞 780.421.5852   ✉ brandmarketing@athabascau.ca

OVERVIEW OF THE ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY BRAND

Our Vision

Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities

Our vision explains our ever-reaching goal for the future. We are creating an open access, flexible, and inclusive education model which:

- inspires and supports all students and members of the university to succeed,

- welcomes and respects all learners in an equitable environment,

- builds strong collaborative relationships to achieve excellence.

Our Mission

Athabasca University, Canada's Open University, is dedicated to the removal of barriers that restrict access to, and success in, university-level study, and to increasing equality of educational opportunities for adult learners, worldwide. We are committed to excellence in teaching, research, and scholarship; and to being of service to the general public.

Our mission defines our approach towards the future we envision for our students and for ourselves.

All of our actions are rooted in the idea of putting our students first. We believe in creating equal opportunities, and in giving access to post-secondary education by embracing the diversity of all learners and supporting their ambitions.

Our Position

Athabasca University transforms learning and allows all students to reach their highest potentials by providing open-access, flexible, online education.

AU's position highlights the University's strengths. These unique properties are what sets AU apart from its competition:

Transforming Learning

A unique learning environment that elevates the full digital literacy of our students and staff.

Open Access

A path to university degrees for everyone.

Flexible

Learning models that adapt to the needs of the student.

Online

Leaders in distance education and online delivery.

Our Values

At Athabasca, we value and support the potential of each of our students. We value accessible, inclusive, and flexible education of the highest standards. And we value collaboration to provide and bring communities closer.

These values are AU's standards and principles that drive the organization's beliefs and behaviours:

Integrity

We are guided by ethics and the principles of honesty and fairness in all our actions, engendering trust within and beyond our university community.

Community

We are one university. We achieve more together. We embrace collaboration and connectivity among our diverse individual community members and their teams.

Adaptability

We are flexible, receptive, and creative. We respond to the changing needs of the University and its learners, with courage and continuous improvement.

Respect

We foster respect by contributing to an environment in which every individual is valued.

Excellence

We ask bold questions, promote new ways of thinking, and focus on those things at which we can excel, to enhance the quality of all that we do.

Our Commitments

Investing in ourselves and others

We are committed to a growth culture that celebrates success, superior performance, action, and persistence towards our vision. We are purposeful in the training, development, and deployment of our employees throughout the University. We actively create and foster the culture we choose to have.

Traditional ways of knowing

We seek to listen and work with Indigenous learners and their communities, to understand how Athabasca University may most effectively support Indigenous learners, their community success, and how we may be a meaningful partner in the journey towards reconciliation and decolonization.

Shared responsibility

Grounded in equity, we are a cohesive community that brings together learners, faculty, staff, and alumni as valued members of the AU community. We share the responsibility for the success of the University and all of our communities, recognizing that we are an active partner in a broader system.

Accountability

We are empowered to take action and demonstrate mutual accountability among our learners, faculty, staff, and community by operating by the principles of openness and transparency.

Transforming

In a global, complex, and increasingly fast-changing world, we embrace transformation to ensure that we foster a resilient, flexible, and creative environment to achieve our highest potential.

Technology

We are committed to exploring emerging technologies and implementing creative solutions to provide greater value to the University; and to the full digital literacy of both learners and our staff.

Our Personality

At AU, we are caring and inclusive, welcoming all with equal opportunities. We are focused on driving all learners to reach their true potentials. Our confidence and forward-thinking views let us lead by example, and provide outstanding academic experiences.

Athabasca University's personality guides the voice and tone of communications and experiences related to the AU brand.

Caring
Warm, helpful, and approachable, but not overbearing or condescending.

Inclusive
Open-minded, fair, and welcoming without differentiating.

Focused
Passionate about learning, and driven to help all learners succeed.

Confident
Leading by example to inspire the potential and strengths of everyone.

Forward Thinking
Curious, innovative, and determined to provide outstanding student experiences.

VISUAL BRAND GUIDELINES

Also in this document:

Standard Layout

For general applications. This logo should be used in the majority of contexts.

Vertical Layout

For use when the visual composition is better suited to a vertical logo.

Layout and colour modifications to the logo are not permitted.

Please use official AU brand assets only.

Download the official **Brand Assets Package**.

Logo Clear Space

The 'a' symbol defines the minimum protected space around all versions of the logo.

0.25 in

0.25 in

Minimum Print Size

The shield should never be less than 0.25 inches tall.

Layout and colour modifications to the logo are not permitted.

Please use official AU assets only.

Download the official
Brand Assets Package

Choosing the right logo treatment

Choose the colour scheme that provides the most contrast and legibility.
Priority should be given to the coloured versions of the logo.

Athabasca University
FACULTY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Faculty Logo Example
The complete selection of faculty logos is available in the official Brand Assets Package.

Athabasca University
FACULTY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
RAIC Centre for Architecture

Department Logo Example
The complete selection of department logos is available in the official Brand Assets Package.

Layout and colour modifications are not permitted.

Please use official AU brand assets only. For exceptions, or to request new logos, contact AU's University Relations Department.

Download the official
Brand Assets Package

Stand-Alone Shield Graphic

For use as a supporting graphic element to strengthen
Athabasca University's visual brand presence.
See pages 17-18 for examples.

Creative use of the shield is permitted, but the following guidelines must be followed:

The shield graphic should:

- never be rotated, distorted, or modified.
- never be unreasonably obstructed
  in its visual presentation, unless explicitly
  permitted by AU.
- always remain recognizable as Athabasca
  University's shield.
- always use AU's primary orange
  colour whenever possible.

Please use official AU brand assets only.

Download the official
Brand Assets Package

Athabasca University
Brand Colours

AU Orange

Print
PANTONE 165 C
CMYK 0 79 94 0

Digital
RGB 239 101 52
HEX #FF671F

On the web, this colour
may only be used for
regular text above 18 pts,
or bold text above 14 pts
(for acccessibility).

AU Blue

Print
PANTONE 534 C
CMYK 95 74 7 44

Digital
RGB 27 54 93
HEX #1B365D

AU Grey

Print
PANTONE COOL GRAY 9 C
CMYK 30 22 17 57

Digital
RGB 117 120 123
HEX #75787B

AU Light Blue

Print
PANTONE 307 C
CMYK 100 22 2 18

Digital
RGB 0 107 166
HEX #006BA6

Primary Colours

For prominent use across all branded materials.
These are also the colours used in AU's logo.

Secondary Colours

For when a layout calls for a broader colour
palette. For accessible web content,
do not use these colours for text.

Colour Accessibility

Accessibility is important to Athabasca University. For this reason, it is essential that the above
HEX or RGB colour codes are used for digital purposes. Directly converting the official PANTONE
or CMYK values to RGB or HEX may result in colours that are not compliant with accessibility
requirements. Find out more about accessibility on page 19.

Athabasca University
Typography

Open Sans

Open Sans Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Open Sans Bold

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz**

Primary Font

For general use in headings and
copy across all print and web uses.

Century Schoolbook

Century Schoolbook Regular

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Century Schoolbook Bold

**ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz**

Secondary Font

To create emphasis as a display font, and
for body text in longer print documents.

Using Open Sans

Open Sans is an open-source typeface and is
freely available from Google Fonts. Being an
open source font means that it can be used
for private, commercial, web, and print uses,
without restriction.

**Download Open Sans
from Google Fonts.**

Using Century Schoolbook

Century Schoolbook may require the purchase
of a licence.

Contact the University Relations Unit for more
information on how to access Century Schoolbook.

If Century Schoolbook is unavailable, Georgia
may be used as a substitute typeface.

Athabasca University Photography

📷 Photography Guidelines

Athabasca University does not want to be overly prescriptive in its use of photography, but when selecting or producing images it is important to maintain a sense of top-tier professionalism and visual integrity; in both composition and image quality.

Be aware of your audience and provide them with bold images that they can relate to, or feel inspired by, Choose images that will leave them with a memorable and positive impression of AU afterwards.

Use quality image files

Images should never be pixelated or blurry. This can generally be achieved by never enlarging images during placement. Images in print documents must always have an effective resolution of 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or higher. For example, a 3x3 inch image should measure at least 900x900 pixels.

Personal smartphone photography is prohibited for promotional or on-brand materials unless professionally captured.
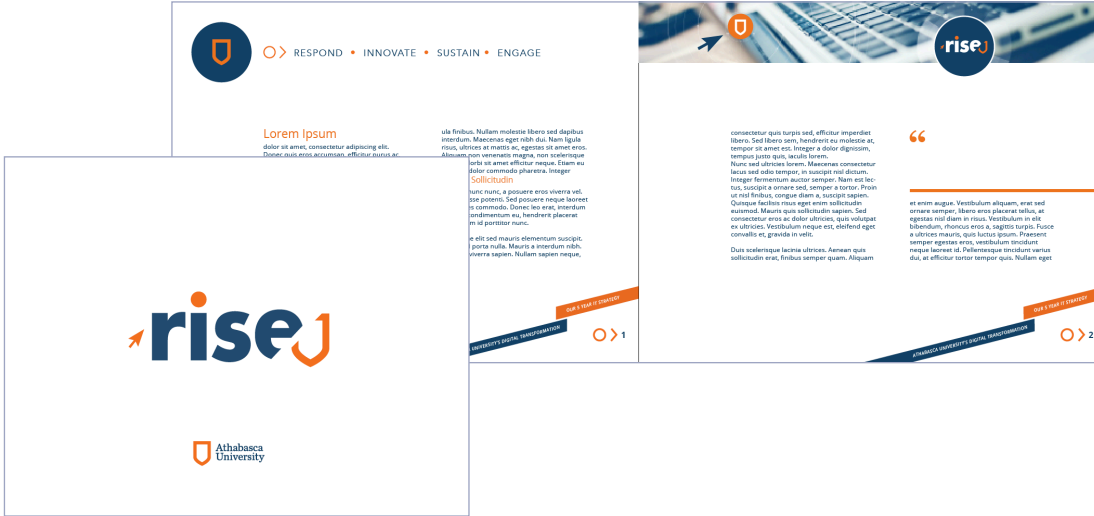
University Publications

Collateral

Sample Applications
Marketing

Marketing &
Recruitment Campaigns

Student-Facing
Events & Promotion

Web Accessibility Guidelines

Athabasca University is proud to offer communications that are accessible to all audiences.

When creating web content, please follow the W3C's WCAG 2.0 level AA web accessibility standards. This will ensure that all content can be read by everyone, regardless of visual impairments or other reading difficulties.

Colour contrast and font sizes

Visit W3C's quick reference guide for WCAG 2.0 level AA guidelines.

Requirements that impact visual design are generally found under Guideline 1.4.

Meeting WCAG 2.0 level AA web accessibility standards requires that text and neighbouring colours maintain acceptable contrast ratios and sizing. These ratios can be measured by using one of many online colour contrast checkers.

Example of an online colour contrast checker.

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📞 780.421.5852

✉ brandmarketing@athabascau.ca

EDITORIAL BRAND GUIDELINES

Voice and Tone

Laying the foundation for crafting empowering content that is rooted in the Athabasca University brand, its values, and its personality.

What is the difference between Voice and Tone?

While AU's voice is based on our unique brand personality, our tone is based on our audience and the emotional context of a given situation.

Your tone might be upbeat and excited when you're announcing your promotion to your family, and very different when you console a friend who just lost their job. Your tone might be upbeat and excited when you're announcing your promotion to your family, and very different one when you're consoling a friend who just lost their job. The same applies to AU brand's voice and tone. Our voice doesn't change, but our tone adapts to whatever the situation requires.

Our Voice

We believe that education can, and should, be accessible to everyone — and our voice represents this. Athabasca University's voice is:

Welcoming

Friendly, warm, and inclusive towards all audiences.

Authentic

Human and relatable rather than stodgy and technical.

Direct

Focused and instructional without being abrupt.

Confident

Positive and assuring without being condescending.

Choosing a Tone

Voice is a constant but tone varies. A consistently cheerful tone, for example, may inspire your audience in one scenario, but alienate them in another. As a result of poorly adjusted tone, your message—however valuable or well-intended—will likely be lost on your reader.

Before you begin crafting your content, consider these three elements to make sure you strike the right tone:

1. Content type: What are you writing?

2. Reader: Who are you addressing?

3. Reader feelings: What state of mind is your reader likely in?

Let's assess a hypothetical Athabasca University scenario based on these considerations:

Situation: *AU receives the following email:*

"Hello there, I would like to know more about IELTS requirements for undergrads to apply at AU. Could you give me some information? Thanks. Shuang"

Content type:
Direct email

Reader:
Prospective student

Student feelings:
Interest, Curiosity

Tips:

- Be helpful and straightforward. Your priority is to directly answer the user's question(s).

- Be conversational and personable. This is a direct interaction with a person looking for your help.

- Avoid over-marketing and terminology they might not be familiar with.

- Don't overwhelm the reader with links and information that aren't directly relevant to their inquiry.

Example response #1:
You have the information required:

Hello Shuang,

I'm happy to help. You'll need a minimum IELTS score of 6 to be able to apply for any degree at AU, unless you have completed a secondary or post-secondary degree in an English-speaking country. The document I've attached describes the complete process and regulations around English proficiency tests and should help you get started.

Feel free to reach out anytime if you have further questions!

Thanks,

[Your first name]

Example response #2:
You don't have the information required

Hello Shuang,

Thanks for reaching out. Our AU Learner Support team (copied on this email) will be happy to provide all the info you need about the IELTS and other English proficiency test options. They'll be in touch with you within the next 48 hours.

Let me know if there's anything else I could help you with!

Thanks,

[Your first name]

Our Approach

This is how we develop user-focused, web-friendly content that stays true to the Athabasca University brand and its values.

Writing Goals and Principles

From website content to social posts or newsletters, for every piece of content we publish we aim to:

Respect and value our audience

Use your content to contribute to an environment in which every individual is valued. Be conscious of their time by informing simply and directly, instead of over-marketing. Always use inclusive and culturally appropriate language.

Educate in an accessible way

Provide your readers with the precise information they need, along with opportunities to learn more. Keep in mind that you are the expert in your field, and your readers may not be familiar with knowledge or terminology that is common to you.

Support learners

Think of the needs of your readers first. Guide them in a helpful and friendly way that engenders trust in our institution as an ally on their journies.

Foster community

Connectivity among our diverse individual community members matters to us. Consider your content a chance for connection. Create the beginning of a conversation by encouraging feedback and collaboration.

Inspire new ways of thinking

Write content to empower your readers. Avoid unnecessary layers of complexity but instead, highlight possibilities and encourage them to reach for their goals.

To achieve those content goals, we make sure our writing is:

Clear

Accessible content is good content for everyone. Choose plain language and simple sentences over cleverness and industry jargon.

Relatable

We create content for people. Don't fall into the trap of sounding like a computer. All of our content — from faculty news to email responses — should be friendly and personable.

Helpful

Write in a way that suits the situation. Consider your medium and your reader's level of knowledge, as well as their state of mind and immediate needs.

Concise and Relevant Content

Our content should always be valuable,
share-worthy, and digestible by all
of our readers. We can achieve this by:

Conveying a clear message

From a spontaneous tweet to an
informative blog post, whatever your
medium, your message should instantly
be clear. In the digital age, readers are
more likely to move on than they are to
dig deeper to find what may be relevant
to them. Especially when crafting long-
form content, structuring your content
(see page 26) right will help your message
stand out.

Engaging our readers

Wherever you can, choose the active
voice over the passive voice (see
page 29). Refrain from over-iterating
points you already made. Use positive
language over negative phrasing that can
sometimes sneak in. Avoid turning verbs
into nouns, and if one sentence runs over
more than two lines, consider breaking it
up to keep your content digestible.

Being part of the conversation

Timing your content according to
what the world, country, or industry is
talking about, can make a considerable
difference in how many eyes will see
your work, and how much your readers
will engage with it. Familiarize yourself
with trending hashtags on Twitter, use
Google Trends to check for current
common search terms, and stay aware of
important Canadian Commemorative
and/or International Days your content
could align with.

Reader-friendly Content Structuring

When reading a book or a magazine article, we take the time to read, word-for-word. On the web, however, readers scan information searching for only the bits of content that are relevant to them. To accommodate this online reading behaviour, there are a few methods we use to make long-form content more reader-friendly.

Important things first

The first and second paragraphs of an article or page are the sections people are most likely to read. That's why the essence of your content should be right at the beginning, to get your message across and to entice further reading. In journalism, this prioritising strategy is called "the inverted pyramid".

Break things down

Large portions of text can overwhelm the reader, while bite-sized paragraphs and subheadings support content-scanning, and provide a clear narrative to your audience. Images or other visual elements not only help to break up text blocks but also increase the attractiveness of your content. When you are dealing with a lot of data, using tables or bulleted lists, help to create a clear information structure that's easy to absorb. Use your own judgement when applying these tips, as too much of any method can have the opposite effect.

Summarize in headings and subheadings

Using headings to structure your paragraphs is a way of providing a content outline, especially for quick readers. Each heading/subheading should convey the core message of the following paragraph, in the active voice, and include a related keyword (see page 27).

Search Engine Optimized (SEO) Content

Optimizing Athabasca University's content for search engines is essential to allow users that are not already on our website, to find us. By optimizing our on-page content for search engines, we can increase a page's rankability, and reach a wider relevant audience. Here are some SEO aspects to pay attention to when writing content for the Athabasca University website:

Write with the user in mind

Search engines provide users with a list of links that offer the most relevant content and, hence, the best user experience. Help your reader quickly complete a specific task, or offer a clear solution to a problem, by staying concise and relevant (see page 25) and structuring your content in a reader-friendly way (see page 26).

Naturally include keywords

Keywords are the words and phrases in our web content that enable people to find Athabasca University's pages via search engines. To understand what your keywords could be, imagine what a Google user would have to type in the search bar to find your page.

Phrases like "online university Canada" or "accredited online degrees" are keywords that are highly relevant for Athabasca University overall, but, depending on what you are writing about, your content will likely include more specific keywords. For example, when writing content about an AU student's successful career after completing a Social Sciences Master's degree, "social sciences master's", "social sciences career", or "social sciences success story" would be applicable keywords to use within the story.
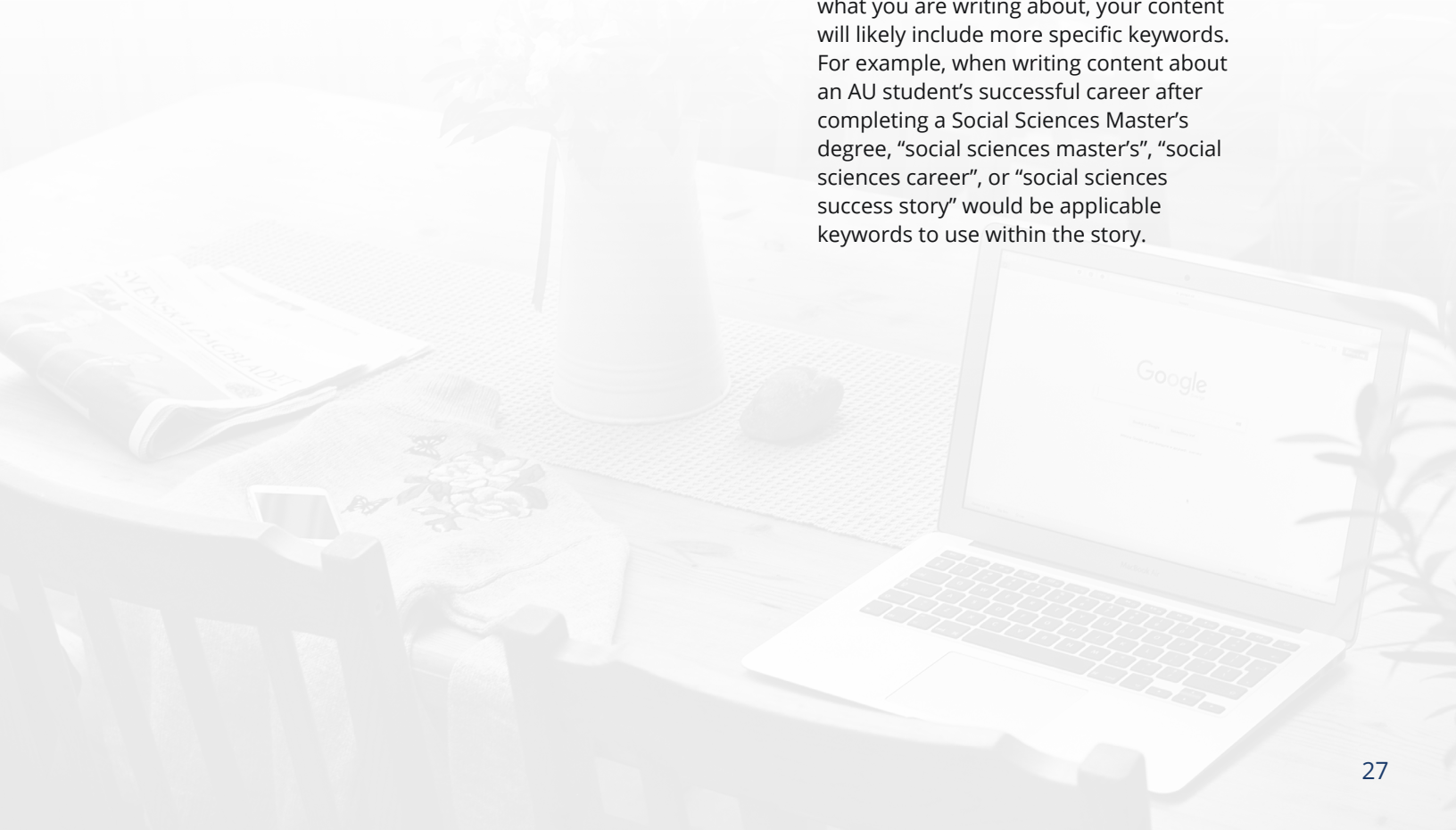
To help search engines contextualize your content, there are various places to strategically incorporate keywords:

Page Title

Limited to 50 to 60 characters by Google. Should include primary keyword and brand name.

URL

Should include the keyword and be as identical to the page title as possible.

Meta Descriptions

Needs to describe the page content in a user-enticing way. Can also include keywords.

Image Title

Should include the keyword.

Alt Text

Every image should include descriptive alt text, possibly including a keyword.

Headings & Body Copy

The main heading (H1) on a page should include the primary keyword. Including primary keywords throughout sub-headings and copy can be beneficial as well. However, use with caution, as Google punishes intentional overuse of keywords, referred to as "keyword stuffing".

Write strong page titles and headings

Page titles appear both in search engines and when hovering over a browser's title bar. They are the first and most important pieces of information receives to interpret a page's meaning. Headings appear within the body text of the webpage, and are chronologically organized from main (H1) to sub-headings (H2s, H3s, H4s and so on). Much like when writing an essay, while there may be multiple sub-headings there should always only be one main heading that conveys the page's content.

To help search engines match your content to a relevant Google user's search term, make sure to write a page title and main heading (H1) that clearly reveals your page's content, and includes a relevant keyword.

Example: You would like to publish a blog article about the advantages of online education.

Keyword(s)

Online education, online education advantages

Page Title

Advantages of Online Education | Blog | Athabasca University

Article Main Heading (H1)

The Advantages of Online Education

Our Style

Various rules of grammar, spelling, and mechanics to help us present our content in one consistent style to our readers on all platforms.

Active Voice

To be direct and personable in our writing, we prefer using the active voice over the passive voice. The active voice allows us to sound more human, write more engagingly, and make instructions easier to follow.

Passive Voice Example

The case number must be included in your submission to the faculty representative. It will be required for future inquiries.

Active Voice Example

Include the case number in your submission to the faculty representative. You will need it for future inquiries.

Inclusive Language

Whether you're writing internal or external-facing content, it is a priority for Athabasca University to address readers in a way that is representative of our brand values. To make our university a welcoming place to work and to learn, we want to create a sense of belonging for everyon,e by writing in a way that is respectful, inclusive, and fair. Here are some guidelines when writing about people:

Age

Only include information about a person's age if it is essential to bring your message across. Never use age-related labels like "young" or "old".

Gender

Use "they/them/theirs" as gender-neutral pronouns, choose neutral nouns over gendered ones (Example: use "chairperson" instead of "chairman".), and avoid gendered phrases (Example: "manpower"). When in doubt about a person's preferred pronoun, ask, or use their name instead of making assumptions.

Ethnicity

The diversity of our community should reflect in the language we use. Avoid any assumptions you might make based on a person's appearance, accent, location, or your own ethnicity.

Disability or conditions

Only address a person's disability, physical or mental condition if it is strictly relevant for what you're writing. Do get their permission. Focus on ability when referring to people, rather than resorting to stereotypic images that can feel depersonalizing. (Example: Use "staff/students who are visually impaired" instead of "the blind").

Canadian Spelling

In nearly all cases, Athabasca University's content should adhere to Canadian spelling and terms, so remember to set your computer language default to Canadian English. There are exceptions where American spelling is and can be used A few common examples:

- behaviour (CE)—behavior (AE)
- centre (CE)—center (AE)
- organization (AE) instead of organisation
- realize (AE) instead of realisation

Specific Words and Phrases

We use the terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal', to describe our nations. While they are often used synonymously, we prefer the use of 'Indigenous' rather than 'Aboriginal' unless specified otherwise.

We don't use the terms 'Native' or 'Indian' unless they are specified as the preferred title by the person we are referring to. When unsure about how to correctly address a member of our nations, ask them for their preference.

As mandated by the Canadian Press Style, we want to make sure to always capitalize the terms 'Métis', 'Inuit', 'Indigenous', and 'First Nations'.

When in doubt, about how to correctly use words or phrases related to First Nations, please get in touch with CWIKR, cwikr@athabascau.ca.

aA

Capitalization

We follow a few *Canadian Press* style capitalization rules to support AU's editorial professionalism, and to add clarity to our content:

- Do capitalize the first word of every sentence, and of every full-sentence quote.

- Do capitalize Indigenous, Indigenous Peoples, Inuit, First Nations, and Métis.

- Do capitalize proper nouns, including names of individuals, races, languages, places, and institutions.

- Do capitalize the titles of government bodies, departments, and agencies.

- Don't capitalize personal titles unless they precede a name. More detail in the "Names and Titles" section (see page 33).

- Don't capitalize after a colon unless it is preceded by a proper noun or a full sentence.

Capitalization rules for headings and titles vary a little between style guides. Here are our rules of thumb:

- Capitalize text headings as if they are sentences.
- Capitalize the first word and all other words normally capitalized (such as proper nouns).

Example heading/title:

"The right capitalization makes our titles shine."

Punctuation

Use of punctuation affects meaning (sometimes drastically), and adds clarity to our writing. While, overall we follow British punctuation rules, here are some notes to help us use punctuation consistently in any form of Athabasca University content:

Commas

At Athabasca University we use the Oxford comma. Therefore, in a list of three or more items, include a comma before the conjunction.

Oxford comma example:

"This section highlights commas, quotes, contractions, and dashes."

Quotes

We use double quotation marks ("x") to mark the beginning/end of direct speech, and to mark a phrase that is being discussed, or that is being directly quoted from somewhere else. Single quotation marks ('x') are only used to set off quoted material inside a quotation.

Contractions

Contractions (you're *vs.* you are) give your writing a more casual and conversational tone. Feel free to use them on social media, in newsletters, or in direct email exchanges, if you see fit. Avoid them in AU website content and if you're writing content that will be translated for international readers.

Dashes

We prefer the em dash (long dash) over the en dash (short dash). Note that there is no space added on either side of an em dash. You can use it in two instances:

- to mark off information that is not essential to understand the rest of the sentence, and

- to show other kinds of breaks in a sentence where a comma, semicolon, or colon, would traditionally be used.

You'll find the em dash by holding "Option" + "Shift" + "-" on Macs or by holding down the ALT key and typing 0151 on the numeric keypad on PCs.

Content Types

Some hands-on tips for the planning and creation of digital and print content elements specific to their medium.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

If there is any chance your reader might not be familiar with an acronym or abbreviation, make sure to spell it out (specifying the shortened version in parentheses) the first time you mention it. For all following references, you can then use the abbreviation or acronym.

The same applies to our brand: spell out 'Athabasca University (AU)' when you first write it before proceeding with the 'AU' acronym.

Example 1

First use: "Central Standard Time (CST)
Second use: "CST"

Example 2

First use: "Athabasca University (AU)"
Second use: "AU"

Names and Titles

Following CP Style, we use two basic ways to render academic titles, names, faculties, and departments:

Names and Titles

When the title of the person precedes the name in a sentence.

In this case, there are no commas before the name; and all names, titles, and proper nouns are capitalized.

- Athabasca University Communications and Community Engagement Director Chris McLeod will join the conference.

  or

- Athabasca University Faculty of Business Dean Dr. Deborah Hurst said she is pleased with the appointment of Dr. Janice Thomas to chair, Organizational Analysis.

When the title follows the name of the person in a sentence.

In this case, there is always a comma after the name *and* before the title; and the title is lowercase.

- Chris McLeod, director, Communications and Community Engagement, Athabasca University, says AU has met its deadlines with respect to the Government of Alberta's requests.

  or

- Dr. Deborah Hurst, dean, Faculty of Business, Athabasca University, said she is pleased with the appointment of Dr. Janice Thomas to chair, Organizational Analysis.

! **Side note:** The Vice-President's title should always be hyphenated.

2018

Numbers, Dates, and Times

Numbers

In titles, sub-headings, and social media posts, we often use numerals. In body copy, we like to spell out numbers one through nine, and use numerals for numbers 10 and greater. The same applies to ordinal numbers. We spell out first to ninth, and describe anything greater, with numerals. If the number starts a sentence, spell it out.

Example:

"Alison came in first in this year's running competition while her older brother ranked 12th."

Dates

We use the full, four-digit year, and spell out the day of the week and the month. Feel free, however, to drop the year if the information is not needed in the context. Abbreviate the day or month only if space is an issue—on social media, for example.

Example:

"This year's Spring Meet 'n' Greet will be hosted on Thursday, March 15."

Times

We use numbers to convey time of day— and except for noon and midnight—, a colon to separate hours and minutes, lowercase a.m./p.m (use periods to separate letters). We don't use ciphers (double zeros) to express whole hours and we don't repeat a.m./p.m. to express a duration if it is redundant.

Examples:

"The meeting is scheduled from noon to 2 p.m., tomorrow."

"The exam will take place today, from 4 to 6:30 p.m. at the Faculty of Business building."

Use of Emojis

Emojis are another way to add personality to content

Feel free to use them deliberately as you see fit on social media, in newsletters, and direct email exchanges. We don't use them on the AU website or in any official documents.

Website Elements

While the content and purpose of each web page on the Athabasca University site varies, there are some general guidelines we keep in mind when planning new copy.

Structure for online readers

Remember to introduce the most important information first, as the top paragraph is what people are most likely to read. Break your content into digestible paragraphs, and provide a clear structure by incorporating descriptive headings. This will support the quick-and-easy understanding of our content, and improve scanability of our pages for readers who are looking for specific information.

Find more tips on how to ensure your long-form content is optimized for our digital readers in the "Reader-friendly Content Structuring" section on page 26.

Use descriptive links

Links should provide information about the associated action or destination. Wherever possible avoid "click here" or "learn more." Instead, write the sentence as you normally would, and link relevant keywords.

Example:

"Find out what to expect at AU."

Don't forget SEO

We always write for our users first, not search engines. However, by adhering to the following Search Engine Optimization (SEO) best practices, we can make a big difference when it comes to helping people and search engines, find our content on the web:

- Lay out your content in a way that helps readers quickly complete a specific call-to-action or offers a clear solution to a problem, by being concise and relevant.

- Give every image descriptive alt text. A person who can't see the image should receive the same information from this as someone who can.

- Make sure your URL, page title, and main heading accurately convey the page's content. Use keywords in these elements to highlight key information.

Dive into more SEO details in the "Search Engine Optimized Content" section (page 27).

Resources

Giving further context and advice as to how to organize content and meet our brand standards before publishing

Blog or news Content

Being consistent in our branding doesn't mean that as a writer for AU you need to be shy about showing personality in your content.

You're the expert in the area you're writing about and, as an important piece of AU's identity, we are proud to show that our blog contributors are as diverse as our audience is.

When writing for the blog or our news sections, familiarize yourself with the points outlined in the "Our Style" section, and take a look at the "Concise and Relevant Content" piece to help you plan and schedule a topic that's timely and shareable.

Email Newsletters

While there may be various channels for email campaigns across our organization, note that any email newsletter distributed should follow the points outlined in the "Our Style" section and apply our general "Writing Goals and Principles".

We like to use email newsletters as a method for empowering and engaging our students. The majority of today's smartphone users check their emails most regularly on their mobile devices. Therefore, when an email newsletter, keep in mind that our audience is likely to view the content on a small screen.

Being concise, to the point, and providing directly actionable information is a priority for this type of content. Implement a clear information hierarchy that conveys essential information in the first paragraph, and close with a strong call-to-action. Avoid including too many links and descriptive details in your email copy, as they will distract the reader from completing the action you want them to take. Feel free to implement images

that comply with our "Visual Brand Guidelines" (see page 8) as you see fit. Be sure to include an unsubscribe link, the Athabasca University mailing address, and permission reminder in the footer of each newsletter.

Before sending your next email newsletter, take a look at the "Email Newsletter Checklist" (see page 40) to help you optimize the most important elements of your campaign.

Social Media Content

Athabasca University has a presence on most major social media platforms. We use social media to regularly correspond with our audience and share content that inspires and helps our students succeed.

Our writing for social media follows the "Our Style" guidelines (see page 29) and the points highlighted in the "Concise and Relevant Content" section (see page 25). Since some social media platforms have a character limit, we generally keep our social media copy as short and engaging as possible. Feel free to use contractions and common abbreviations ("info" for "information") but never sacrifice grammatical correctness and punctuation to make your content fit.

Commonly used branded AU hashtags across all channels are: #AthabascaU, #AthaU, #myAU, #askAU

Commonly used non-branded hashtags relevant to our brand are: #OnlineLearning, #OnlineEd, #AlwaysLearning, #Education, #OpenAccess

Here are some additional helpful points for our most frequently used social media channels:

Facebook

We generally use Facebook to share information about these topics:

University news and events, internal awards and achievements, outage updates, AU media mentions, contests, useful tips for students, evergreen content, and recruiting.

Content: Images (see our "Visual Brand Guidelines" on page 8), videos, articles, links, and copy.

Length: No character limit, but aim for a maximum of two short sentences.

Hashtags: Hashtags aren't as popular on Facebook as they are on other social media platforms. To open your post to a larger discussion, you might still implement one or two hashtags that fit contextually.

Tagging: To tag AU in a Facebook post use @athabascau.ca.

Twitter

We generally use Twitter to share information about these topics:

University news and events, internal awards, staff and student achievements, outage updates, AU media mentions, useful career tips for students, evergreen content, and recruiting.

Content: Images (see our "Visual Brand Guidelines" on page 8), videos, articles, links, copy.

Length: 280 characters per tweet (but keep closer to 140 if you can). If you have more to say, include a link to a blog post or article. bit.ly can shorten long web addresses to help you optimize your writing space.

Hashtags: Hashtags are a big conversation driver on Twitter. However, this should not encourage you to hashtag every other word. Instead, use two to three hashtags wisely, by connecting your post to timely and relevant topics or audiences. Our hashtag is #AthaU.

Tagging: To tag AU in a Tweet, use @athabascau.ca.

Instagram

We generally use Instagram to share information about these topics:

University news and events, awards and achievements, motivational quotes, and themed content.

Instagram is an image-based social channel and the priority piece of content is the image itself.

Make sure you have permission to post the image. Many images have copyright. Check before you post and always err on the side of caution. Seek permission from the photographer if the image is not an AU original photo. Always give credit to the photographer if you are using royalty-free photography.

Content: Images (see our "Visual Brand Guidelines" on page 8) and videos.

Length: 2,200 characters per post. That doesn't mean we should be using them all. Instagram idriven by visuals and hashtags, so keep descriptive captions to a minimum of one or two sentences. Feel free to add an emoji.

Hashtags: Much like Twitter, hashtags are a big conversation driver on Instagram as well. You are allowed to add up to 30 hashtags per post but we recommend to focus on only those that are relevant and useful. Add them in a new comment on your post to keep things cleaner. Our hashtag is #AthaU.

Tagging: To tag AU in an Instagram post, use @athabascau.ca.

LinkedIn

We generally use LinkedIn to share information about these topics:

University news, awards and achievements, AU media mentions, professional development articles, evergreen content, and recruiting.

Content: Articles, links, long-form posts, images (see our "Visual Brand Guidelines" on page 8), videos.

Length: No limit but don't write a novel. LinkedIn is an appropriate platform for longer posts. Format your long-form posts like blog posts (see page 36).

Hashtags: It is general best practice on LinkedIn to support your post with three to five related hashtags unobtrusively added to the end of your post.

Timing Content Right

When it comes to publishing any type of content, good timing is key to making your contribution seen, shareable, and of most value to our audience.

At Athabasca University, we often create content that ties into current national or international themes (such as Mental Health Awareness Month, Aboriginal Education Awareness Month, and World Water Day), as well as ongoing campus initiatives. Therefore, before getting started on your next blog, email campaign, or social media post, make sure to be aware of upcoming internal initiatives, current public conversations, and important Canadian Commemorative and/or International Days your content could contribute to.

Get in touch with the AU Communications unit if you need help figuring out the perfect publishing time for your contribution.

Web and Blog Content Checklist

- ✓ Make sure copy adheres to the AU grammar and spelling rules as defined in 'Our Style'.

- ✓ Check for capitalization consistency in titles and headers.

- ✓ Write reader-friendly content hierarchy and paragraphs.

- ✓ Drop unnecessary words, jargon, sentences, and links.

- ✓ Ensure URL, page title (50-60 characters), and all headings describe the applicable content.

- ✓ Set a meta description that very briefly describes your content to search engine users.

- ✓ Make sure all links are descriptive links.

- ✓ Double check that all links point to the right place.

- ✓ Make sure any visuals included in your content comply with our 'Visual Brand Guidelines'.

- ✓ Ensure that every image is titled accurately and has descriptive alt text.

Email Newsletter Checklist

- Use your faculty name and Athabasca University as the 'from name'.

- Keep your 'subject line' minimal and descriptive.

- Make sure the 'pre-header text' (shows up next to the subject line in an inbox) provides the recipient with enough information about your email's content to entice them to open it.

- Ensure that any call-to-action clearly communicates the next step(s) to the recipient.

- Use a linked button to highlight the action you want readers to take after reading your email.

- Minimize the number of links included in your copy to avoid leading readers away from completing the email's main goal.\

- Make sure any visuals included in your content comply with our 'Visual Brand Guidelines'.

- Include descriptive alt-text for all images.

- Be sure to comply with Canada's CAN-SPAM and CASL rules. Comply with European Union's GDPR rules.

- Include an unsubscribe link, AU's mailing address, and a permission reminder in the footer of each email.

- Send a test email to double check all links work and everything displays well. Keep in mind that recipients are very likely to view your email on a mobile device.

Social Media Checklist

- Consult our 'Social Media Content' guidelines to select the appropriate channel to share your content.

- Be aware of trending online topics, Canadian Commemorative, and International Days to time your post right.

- Follow the AU *grammar* and *spelling* rules as defined in 'Our Style' when preparing copy.

- Make sure any visuals included in your post comply with our 'Visual Brand Guidelines'.

- Ensure your copy meets the character limit of your desired social channel.

- Research relevant hashtags to include in your post using Twitter or Google Trends.

- Include one of the following branded hashtags if applicable: #AthabascaU, #AthaU, #myAU, or #askAU.

- If your post will be shared on more than one social channel, prepare one version per channel, complying the best practices for each, as defined in our "Social Media Content" guidelines.

- Use bit.ly to shorten URLs.

- Encourage message sharing through your faculty and team members.

- Check back daily to respond to comments and messages.

Email Guidelines

Email Signature

All Athabasca University employees should use the following approved email signature, for internal and external communications. Text formatting specifications are available in the example below. The required shield image is included in the AU Brand Assets Package. You may also link to the shield image at the following URL: http://www.athabascau.ca/

Firstname Lastname, MBA [bold, 11 pts, #1B365D]
Director, Communications and Community Engagement [regular, 9 pts, black]
Athabasca University

Office: +1 780 123 4567
Cell: +1 780 123 4567
Toll free (Canada and U.S.): 1-800-788-9041, ext. 2917

Athabasca University respectfully acknowledges that we are on and work on the traditional lands of the Indigenous Peoples—Inuit, First Nations, Métis—of Canada. We honour the ancestry, heritage and, gifts of the Indigenous Peoples and give thanks to them.

Out-of-office reply

All Athabasca University employees should use the following approved out-of-office reply message when unavailable:

Thank you for your message. I am currently out of the office, with no [alternatively: limited] email access. I will be returning on [Date of Return].

If you need assistance before then, please contact [contact's name] at [contact's email address]. Otherwise, I will respond to your emails as soon as possible upon my return.

Warm Regards,

[name]

[signature]

Have questions about our brand? Need support applying it?

Contact the University Relations Unit.

📞 780-421-5852

✉ brandmarketing@athabascau.ca