

The Florida State University News & Public Affairs Office uses the Associated Press stylebook as a guide for all publications and news releases sent to journalists or the public. Our own style manual, below, is intended to be a handy guide that addresses the most frequently asked questions and most common mistakes. Our goal is to ensure a consistency of quality in printed materials throughout the university.

News & Public Affairs is the official news bureau of Florida State. If you are writing a news release, it should conform to this style guide, then be sent to News & Public Affairs for editing and dissemination to the press. This guide is not a complete manual, and we recommend the purchase of an Associated Press stylebook, which is available in local bookstores. For particular kinds of writing, other style manuals may be appropriate, and we are happy to make recommendations.

This guide will be updated regularly, and questions are welcome. To suggest additions or revisions, please contact the director, Browning Brooks, at 644-4030; [bbrooks@mailers.fsu.edu](mailto:bbrooks@mailers.fsu.edu).

## A

**academic degrees** – It is preferable to spell out academic degrees. Capitalize formal names of degrees (Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Arts in Religion, Doctor of Philosophy). But if abbreviations are used: B.S. (Bachelor of Science), B.A. (Bachelor of Arts), M.S. (Master of Science), Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy), (Ed.D. Doctor of Education) (J.D., Juris Doctor), do not use the word degree after the abbreviation. (She has a B.A. in religion; NOT She has a B.A. degree in religion). Use an apostrophe with bachelor's and master's degrees, (NOT bachelors and masters degrees).

**academic departments** – Do NOT capitalize names of FSU departments, but do capitalize names of colleges (meteorology department, College of Arts & Sciences). Capitalize institute, center and program when used as part of the official name (Center for the Advancement of Human Rights, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience, Program in Neuroscience, Creative Writing Program). Capitalize the university's six major divisions: Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Finance and Administration, Research, University Relations, Academic Quality and

External Programs.

**academic honors** – Lowercase cum laude, magna cum laude and summa cum laude. Foreign words that are frequently used in English do not have to be italicized.

**academic titles** – Capitalize and spell out formal titles such as professor, dean, director, president, vice president, professor emeritus and chairman when they precede a name. Lowercase in other uses. Lowercase modifiers (history Professor Maxine Jones, department Chairman Hunt Hawkins).

**ACC** – Atlantic Coast Conference; 12 universities are members.

**accept, except** – Accept means to receive. Except means to exclude.

**addresses** – Abbreviate and capitalize St., Ave., and Blvd. with a numbered address; spell out and capitalize without a number. Road, Alley, Highway and all other similar words are always spelled out. Always use numerals for street addresses. Spell out and capitalize First through Ninth streets (45 Eighth Ave.; or Eighth Avenue). Abbreviate north, south, east, west if there is a number in the address (8888 Maple St. N.; Maple Street North).

**Admissions Office** – No apostrophe.

**adviser** – NOT advisor.

**affect, effect** – Though they can be both verb and noun, affect is almost always a verb and effect is usually a noun. Affect as a verb means to influence. (The weather will affect the football game.) Effect as a noun means the result. (The effect of the storm was a messy game). Effect as a verb means to bring about, to cause (The professor will effect changes in vaccines with his research).

**afterward** – NOT afterwards.

**all right** – NOT alright. Hyphenate if used as a modifier (He's an all-right

guy.)

**alma mater** – Do NOT capitalize.

**alumnus, alumna, alumni, alumnae** – Alumnus refers to a man who has attended a school (plural: alumni). Alumna refers to a woman (plural: alumnae). Use alumni when referring to groups of men and women. Anyone who has ever attended Florida State University is an alumnus or alumna but not an alumni unless he or she has been cloned.

**a.m., p.m.** – Lowercase and use periods. Don't be redundant (NOT 12 a.m. midnight; NOT 8 a.m. this morning; NOT 12 noon)

**among** – Generally, between refers to two items, and among refers to more than two. Among is preferred over amongst.

**anyone, any one** – Anyone can pass this test (general reference). Any one of them can pass this test (singling out one person in a group).

**as, like, such as** – As introduces a clause. Like compares similar nouns and pronouns and must have an object. (She provides a syllabus, as she should. The young teacher directs her class like a veteran). "Such as" is used to provide a specific example. (It would be nice to go to a movie, such as the one now playing at the Student Life Building.)

**Association of American Universities** – AAU on second reference.

**attorney general, attorneys general** – Note plural form.

**auditor general, auditors general** – Note plural form.

## **B**

**between** – Between shows a relationship between two items. Use among when more than two items are involved.

**biological science** – Note: no "s" in FSU's department of biological science.

**blacks** – This is Associated Press style, but African-American (hyphenated) also is acceptable.

**Board of Governors** – Official name is Florida Board of Governors. A 17-member panel, including a faculty representative, student representative and the Florida Commissioner of Education, that oversees Florida's 11 state universities; governors on second reference.

**Board of Trustees** – Official name is Florida State University Board of Trustees. A 13-member panel, including a faculty representative and student representative, that oversees Florida State University. The trustees on second reference. For current composition of board, go to <http://www.fsu.edu/~trustees/>

**building names** – Capitalize names of campus buildings and the word building (Westcott Building). On second reference, lowercase unless the whole name is used. (The building houses the administration).

## C

**call letters** – Use all caps. Use a hyphen to separate the type of station from the call letters (WFSU-TV, WFSU-FM).

**campuswide** – One word, no hyphen. Also citywide, countywide, statewide, nationwide, worldwide.

**can, may** – Can refers to the ability to do something. May refers to permission being granted or denied to do it.

**capital, capitol** – Tallahassee is the capital of Florida. The Florida Legislature meets in a building called a capitol. The U.S. Capitol is in Washington, D.C.; the U.S. capital *is* Washington, D.C.

**chairman, chairwoman** – Chair also is acceptable. Do NOT use chairperson unless it's what the organization formally calls the position. Capitalize when used as a title immediately preceding a name.

**chancellor** – Capitalize preceding a name; lowercase on second reference.

**class names** – Lowercase courses and classes (he took a photography class), but uppercase if part of the proper name (he took Photography 101).

**classroom** – One word.

**coach** – Capitalize before the name, not after (Coach Bobby Bowden; the coach said).

**coed** – NOT hyphenated. Do NOT use to refer to a female college student. Acceptable when referring to coed residence halls.

**College Level Academic Skills Test** – CLAST on second reference.

**committees** – Capitalize names of committees. Lowercase second references. (The task force is making a report.)

**Communication, College of** – Note no “s.”

**composition titles** – Capitalize the main words and put quote marks around titles of movies, books, plays, speeches, songs, poems, works of art, etc., except the Bible and reference books, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries and almanacs. For more detailed information, consult a stylebook.

**computer science** – Note no “s” for FSU department of computer science.

**courtesy titles** – University Communications conforms to AP style and universal journalism practice. Like virtually all American university public relations operations, we do not use the courtesy titles Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., on news releases or in publications. We use Dr. only for a medical doctor, dentist or veterinarian, not a Ph.D. The designation Ph.D. may be used after a name, however, in rare cases where confusion might result, e.g. a faculty member at the College of Medicine who holds a doctorate but not an M.D.

**curriculum** – Curricula or curriculums is acceptable for the plural form.

## D

**dates** – Spell out days of the week and months without specific dates (December 2005). Abbreviate months with days (Dec. 1, 2005) except for months with short names that are never abbreviated (March, April, May, June and July). Do NOT use a comma when a specific date is not included (December 2005; fall 2005). A comma should follow the year in a specific date. (Fall semester begins Aug. 29, 2005, and will be exciting).

Also:

- Do not use the word “on” before a date unless excluding it would be confusing. (NOT: fall semester begins on Aug. 29).
- Do not use the words “from” and “to” for dates and times. Use a hyphen. (The conference will be Nov. 10-11; The event will be 8 a.m.-4 p.m.)
- Do not use “st,” “th,” or “rd” with dates (Halloween is Oct. 31, NOT Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>).
- For decades or centuries, do not use an apostrophe. (The 1960s were a time of tremendous growth on campus.)
- Do use an apostrophe for an abbreviation of school years. (She was president of the Class of '45.)

**days of the week** – Do NOT abbreviate in regular text.

**defamation, slander, libel** – See Appendix to this manual. In doubt about whether something you are about to publish as fact may be defamatory? Contact the Office of the General Counsel for guidance.

**degrees** – See academic degrees.

**dimensions** – Spell out inches, feet, yards and use numerals to show size and dimensions. Hyphenate everything if the description is used as a compound modifier. (She is 6 feet tall. FSU just signed a 6-foot-tall player. The room will need an 8-by-10 rug. That shark was a 7-footer! The hurricane dumped 8 inches of rain in one day.)

**doctorate, doctoral** – Doctorate is a noun. Doctoral is an adjective. (She

holds a doctorate from FSU. She holds a doctoral degree from FSU. NOT: She holds a doctorate degree.)

**dollars** – Always lowercase. Use figures and the \$ sign, but do not use a hyphen unless the amount is a modifier. (The book cost \$20; the \$6-million building; the budget is \$900 million.) A specified dollar amount is considered a singular item and takes a singular verb (They said \$400,000 is the right amount.)

**dormitories** – Do NOT use. FSU calls them residence halls.

**Dr.** – Dr. is used as a formal title only for a medical doctor, dentist or veterinarian.

## E

**earth** – Capitalize when referring to the name of the planet. Lowercase otherwise (down-to-earth).

**editor in chief** – Capitalize as part of a formal title, but no hyphens.

**ellipsis** – Used to indicate that one or more words have been deleted in text. Should use up three letter spaces, no spaces between the dots.

**e-mail** – Hyphenate. See “Internet usage” entry for more computer terms.

**Emeritus, emerita** – Place emeritus after the title and capitalize it or place it after the name and lowercase it (Professor Emeritus Joe Smith; or Sally Smith, professor emerita).

**emigrant, immigrant** – An emigrant leaves a country. An immigrant comes into a country.

**en route** – Two words.

**ensure** – Means to guarantee. Insure refers to insurance.

**entitled** – The right to do or have something; NOT the same as “titled.”

(She was entitled to become a full professor. Her book is titled...)

## **F**

**farther, further** – Farther refers to physical distance. (He walked farther on the campus.) Further refers to an extension of time or degree. (The researcher will look further into the mysteries of Alzheimer's.)

**federal** – Capitalize when used as part of a formal name of a government body but lowercase when used as an adjective (federal loans).

**Federal Bureau of Investigation** – FBI is acceptable in all references.

**Federal Emergency Management Agency** – FEMA is acceptable on second reference.

**fewer, less** – Use fewer with numbers, less with bulk amounts. (He has less time for his hobbies than last year. The price is less than \$100. Fewer than 10 students signed up for the club. Fewer people applied for the job.)

**flier, flyer** – Flier is the preferred spelling for a pilot or a poster. Flyer is the proper name of some transportation lines.

**Florida Legislature** – The Legislature on second reference.

**Florida State University** – The word “The” at the beginning of the university's name is included only in the most formal uses and in historical documents. Use of “The” is not standard practice and is not used by the news media.

**forecast** – Present and past tense, NOT forecasted.

**former** – Always lowercase.

**Fort** – Do NOT abbreviate for cities or military installations. (Fort Myers, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Pendleton).

**forward** – NOT forwards. (Unless referring to multiple basketball players

who hold the position of forward).

**freshman** – Do NOT capitalize, but do capitalize a class designation. (She is a freshman. The Junior Class is in charge of the event.) Plural is freshmen. Same rules for sophomore, junior and senior.

**front-runner** – Hyphenate.

**full-** – Hyphenate in a compound modifier. (full-length, full-page, full-time job; but he works full time).

**fund raising, fund-raising, fund-raiser** – Fund raising is a noun and is two words. (The Foundation is responsible for fund raising). Fund-raising is an adjective (The fund-raising campaign is almost over). Fund-raiser is a noun and always refers to a person, not an event. (They hired a fund-raiser; NOT: They held a successful fund-raiser last month).

## G

**good, well** – Good is an adjective and should not be used as an adverb. When used as an adjective, well means healthy, proper. As an adverb, well means in a satisfactory manner.

**go-between** – A noun.

**goodbye** – NOT goodby or good-bye.

**governor** – Capitalize and abbreviate as Gov. or Govs. when used as a title before a name or names.

**GPA** – Grade point average. No hyphens, no periods.

**Graduate Record Examination** – GRE on second reference.

**grant-in-aid, grants-in-aid** – Note plural form.

**greater** – Capitalize when used to describe a community and its surrounding region (Greater Tallahassee).

**group** – Takes a singular verb. (The group is deciding on its recommendations to the president).

## **H**

**half-** – Follow Webster's New World Dictionary. If not found there, then generally hyphenate.

**head-on** – Hyphenate.

**health care** – Two words.

**historical periods** – Spell out first through ninth centuries and use numbers with 10<sup>th</sup> and higher. Lowercase century. (This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century.) Capitalize names of well-known eras and events (The Great Depression, World War II).

**Homecoming** – Capitalize when referring to FSU's Homecoming events.

**home page** – Two words.

**hometown** – One word.

**honorary degrees** – Any reference should make clear the degree was honorary. Dr. generally is not used before the recipient's name.

**hot line** – Two words and lowercase unless it's part of a formal name and written as one word).

**house of representatives** – Capitalize when referring to a specific body (Florida House of Representatives).

**hyper-** – In general, no hyphen.

## **I**

**in, into** – Do NOT use "in" without the addition of "to" when the meaning is to enter. ("He burst into the room" means he entered the room

in a hurry. “He burst in the room” means he already was in the room when he came apart.)

**“in”** – When used to mean popular, put quotation marks if it’s followed by an object. (Getting through school faster is the “in” thing to do. Sandals are in this season.)

**inside** – Don’t follow with “of.” (She remained inside Westcott.)

**insure** – Refers to insurance. Ensure means to guarantee.

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## **INTERNET SECTION:**

**cyberspace** – One word, lowercase, no hyphen.

**disk, disc** – Use disk when referring to computer disks. Use disc for everything else.

**dot-com** – Hyphenate.

**DVD** – Capitalize. The acronym for digital video disk is acceptable in all references.

**e-mail** – Hyphenate.

**home page** – Two words.

**Internet** – Capital I. “Net” on second reference, capital N, no apostrophe.

**intranet** – Lowercase.

**jpeg** – One word, lowercase.

**listserv** – One word, lowercase.

**online** – One word, lowercase, do NOT hyphenate.

**photo credits** – Photo credits for screen captures should say “from the Web” or “screen capture.”

**URL** – Capitalize. The acronym for Uniform Resource Locator is acceptable in all references.

**Web site, Web page** – Each is two words, capital W.

**World Wide Web** – Three words, capitalize. The Web on second reference.

**workstation** – One word.

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**island** – Capitalize only as part of a formal name.

**its** – Possessive. No apostrophe.

**it's** – A contraction for “it is.”

**its'** – No such word exists.

**J**

**jargon** – Avoid it, or if you must use it, explain it to the uninitiated.

**Jr., Sr.** – Do NOT precede with a comma. Do NOT use a comma with Roman numerals (Tom Jones II).

**judgment** – NOT judgement.

**K**

**kids** – Use children unless describing goats.

**know-how** – Hyphenate.

## L

**last, past** – Do NOT use last to describe a span of time or an event when the real meaning is past. (FSU has been coed for the past 58 years; NOT FSU has been coed for the last 58 years). The latter begs the question: last 58 years *of what? Of the Ice Age?* (which, by the way, is capitalized).

**Legislature** – Acceptable as second reference for Florida or U.S. Legislature. Capitalize on second reference if referring to a specific statehouse.

**less** – See fewer.

**-less** – No hyphen before it if used as a suffix (clueless).

**liaison** – Two “i”s, one “s.”

**lie, lay** – Lie means a state of reclining. (lie, lay, lain, lying). It can mean an untruth (lie, lied, lying). Lay means an action is being taken, and it requires an object (lay, laid, laying).

**like** – See “as.”

**local** – Irrelevant, don’t use it. Be specific instead.

**long term, long-term** – Hyphenate if used as a modifier. (They will achieve their goals in the long term. They will achieve their long-term goals.)

## M

**majors** – Do NOT capitalize majors unless they are stated as part of an official degree. (She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Religion. She majored in religion.)

**media** – Always use a plural verb. NOT medias.

**memorandum** – Accepted style for plural is memorandums.

**miles per hour** – The abbreviation mph, with no periods, is acceptable for all references.

**million, billion** – Always use numbers unless meant in a casual way (I wish I had a million dollars; She gave \$2 million to the university.)

**mix up, mix-up** – Mix up is a verb. Mix-up is a noun and an adjective.

**months** – Always capitalize. See “days” entry.

**Mother Nature** – Capitalize.

**Mr., Miss, Mrs., Ms.** – See courtesy titles.

**multi-** – In general, no hyphen. (multimillion-dollar building, NOT multi-million-dollar building).

## N

**National Collegiate Athletic Association** – NCAA on second reference.

**noon, midnight** – Noon is 12 p.m. Midnight is 12 a.m. Do NOT precede either one with the number 12. The word stands alone.

**nearly** – Do NOT use with numbers. Use almost. (The budget was almost \$1 billion; NOT: The budget was nearly \$1 billion).

**numbers, No.** – Spell out numbers below 10 except when describing dimensions. Use numerals for 10 and above. Do NOT start a sentence with a numeral; spell out the number. Use No. with a figure for showing rank. (The department ranked No. 3 in the nation this year.)

## O

**office** – Capitalize only when part of an official name. (The Office of Homeland Security; the president’s office.)

**on** – Do NOT use before a day or date.

**over** – Means physical location. Do NOT use with numbers or amounts. Use more than. (FSU has more than 38,000 students; NOT: FSU has over 38,000 students).

## **P**

**page numbers** – Capitalize page when used with a number. (Page 56)

**part time, part-time** – Hyphenate if part of a compound modifier. (She teaches part time; she has a part-time job.)

**people, persons** – Use person only for an individual. Use people, NOT persons for the plural. Persons should be used only as part of a title or in a quote. (NOT: This scholarship is offered to all persons with an interest in computer science.) People takes a plural verb. (The people of North Dakota are digging out from the blizzard.)

**percent** – Always use numerals and always spell out the word percent. Do NOT spell out numbers (5 percent, NOT five percent).

**phenomenon, phenomena** – Note the plural.

**premier, premiere** – A premier is the top leader in a government or an adjective meaning the first in importance or rank. (He was the premier artist of his genre). A premiere is the first performance of a play, concert or movie.

**principal, principle** – Principal means most important, first ranked, leading authority. (The school has a new principal. She is the principal researcher in that discipline.) Principle means a basic doctrine, truth or law. (The Seminole Creed helps students understand the university's principles.)

**professor** – Capitalize before a name but do NOT capitalize a subject connected with it. (She has dance Professor Elizabeth Patenaude for that class.) Do NOT abbreviate. (Professor Patenaude; not Prof. Patenaude). Do not continue in second reference; use the last name only.

**protester** – NOT protestor.

**proved, proven** – Proved is the past tense of prove. Proven is an adjective. (He proved the theory. He took a proven course of action.)

## Q

**quotation marks** – Use double quote marks to surround a quote and single quote marks if necessary within a quote. A period or comma goes inside quote marks at the end of a sentence. (“It was Patrick Henry who said, ‘Give me liberty or give me death,’ “ the professor told the class.) For many more punctuation rules, consult the punctuation section of the AP stylebook or other stylebooks.

## R

**race** – Capitalize names of races, but lowercase black and white (Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, African-American, black students, white students).

**radar** – Lowercase. An acronym for radio detection and ranging.

**ratios** – Use numbers and hyphenate. (A ratio of 5-to-1; or a 5-to-1 ratio).

**regions** – In general, capitalize regions of the United States and lowercase north, south, east and west when used as directions. (He carried the Southeast in the election. He is going north to the mountains.)

**reign, rein** – Reign refers to a monarch’s time as ruler. A rein is used to steer a horse (pull back on the reins; give free rein to).

**right of way, rights of way** – Note plural.

**room number** – Capitalize room when used with a number. (Room 114, Westcott Building).

**ROTC** – Acceptable on first reference for Reserve Officer Training Corps. No periods.

## S

**saint** – There are rare exceptions, but saint almost always is abbreviated as St. in the names of cities and locations (St. Petersburg, St. Paul, St. Jude Children’s Hospital, St. Louis).

**seasons** – Lowercase, along with derivatives (summertime).

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools** – SACS on second reference.

**state of the art** – No hyphens unless used as a compound modifier. (The new computer system is state of the art. That department installed a state-of-the-art computer system.)

**states** – Spell out unless accompanied by the name of a city. Consult the AP Stylebook for state abbreviations. Do NOT use postal abbreviations except when writing full addresses, including a ZIP code. (Tallahassee, Fla.; not Tallahassee, FL.)

## T

**teenager, teenage** – No hyphen. NOT teenaged.

**that** (conjunction) – Use that to introduce a dependent clause if the sentence would be confusing without it. Consult a stylebook for examples of when it must be used. When in doubt, include it.

**that, which, who** (pronouns) – *This is so easy!*

- That and which refer to things. Who refers to humans (or animals with names). (WRONG: He is the professor that teaches the child psychology course. RIGHT: He is the professor who teaches the child psychology course. WRONG: Which department is it who is going to sponsor the lecture? RIGHT: Which department is it that is going to sponsor the lecture?)

- That is essential, identifies specifically the previous word or phrase and does not take a comma. (“I’m going to the restaurant that is on Tennessee Street,” means there are no other restaurants on Tennessee Street, only one,

and I'm going to it.

- Which introduces a nonessential clause, a by-the-way thought, and always takes a comma. (I'm going to the restaurant, which is on Tennessee Street," means there may or may not be other restaurants on Tennessee Street, but the one I'm going to is located there.

**theater, theatre** – Stick to the American spelling, theater. But it's the Florida State University School of Theatre.

**toward** – NOT towards.

## U

**under way** – Two words. Pretty much always.

**unique** – Either it is unique or it isn't. Don't pile on modifiers. There is no such thing as "fairly unique."

**university** – Lowercase in all uses except as part of the official name of a university.

**U.S.** – Use only as an adjective. Use United States as the noun. (The United States is located between Canada and Mexico. The U.S. flag is red, white and blue.)

## V

**VIPS** – Acceptable in all references for very important persons.

## W

**well** – Hyphenate as part of a compound modifier (well-known, well-rounded).

**who, whom** – Who is used when a person is the subject of a sentence or clause. (Who is speaking?) Whom is used when a person is the object of a verb or preposition. (Whom would you like to hear speak?)

**who's, whose** – The first is a contraction for who is. The second is

possessive.

**word-of-mouth** – Hyphenate.

**Y**

**yearlong** – One word, no hyphen. Also weeklong and daylong.

**years** – Use numerals. Remember: 1950s needs no apostrophe, but '60s does because it is an abbreviation. Beginning a sentence with numerals is acceptable but very awkward. Try to rewrite the sentence instead. (FSU welcomed its largest student body yet in 2004. NOT: 2004 saw FSU's enrollment rise to a record level.)

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## **APPENDIX:**

### DEFAMATION

Defamation is a type of written or oral speech that is not protected by the First Amendment. Libel usually refers to the written version and slander to the oral. There are various ways to define defamation, and subtleties among various types of it, but generally it involves the making (publishing) of false statements that damage another's reputation or diminish the esteem in which one is held or the respect or good will one is accorded.

Recent litigation has reminded the University of the common law duty that publishers and editors owe to non-public figures (private citizens) to not negligently publish defamatory material about them. In 1984 the Florida Supreme Court found that "reasonable care is not too much to expect and that it encourages responsible reporting. . ." *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Ane*, 458 So. 2d 239 (Fla. 1984). Negligent fact checking by a University employee before publishing defamatory material about a private citizen can cause the University to be found liable for monetary damages for actual injury to that private citizen, including personal humiliation and mental anguish and suffering, as well as injury to reputation. All publishers of publications, whether hard copy or Internet, that FSU sponsors, should exercise reasonable care that anything put out as fact is accurate.

Publishers and editors should also be aware that a higher standard than that of mere negligence must be met by a public official or public figure plaintiff who alleges defamation. Such a person must prove that a defamatory falsehood was published with "actual malice" –i.e., with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard of

whether it was false or not. However, publishers and editors can be found to be personally liable for damages in such instances.

If you are ever in doubt about whether something you are about to publish as fact may be defamatory, you can contact the Office of the General Counsel for guidance.