

MIT Chancellor's Office Non-Gendered Class Year Usage Guidelines

In the spirit of inclusion and accuracy, the MIT Chancellor's Office (including the Division of Student Life and the Office of the Vice Chancellor) has adopted the use of non-gendered language in official documents and publications and across digital and other communications channels.

We understand that the transition (especially the use of newer terms) will be an ongoing one and that uniform use of these terms by the MIT community will take time. The short guidelines below provide additional context and information. Other offices at MIT are encouraged to adopt similar usage guidelines.

Class Designations

The term "first-year" should be used in lieu of freshman and freshmen.

Specific class designations of sophomore, junior, and senior should be used instead of upperclassman or upperclassmen. If referring to a mixed group of class years (not including first-years), "upper-level" undergraduates or "upper-level" students is preferred.

Since we are a community of both undergraduates and graduate students, clarifying first-year undergraduates vs. first-year graduate students is vital for accuracy and clarity. When referring to a combination of both groups, first-year students is appropriate.

Grammar Guidelines

When the terms "first-year" and "upper-level" are used to describe (modify) a noun, they are called phrasal adjectives, or compound modifiers. They can also function as nouns or objects within a prepositional phrase (i.e., "in the first year"). How the terms are treated grammatically depends on their placement and function with relation to the other words in the text, and/or the type of text (i.e., a title versus a sentence).

Hyphenation

Do hyphenate:

- **When used as a phrasal adjective before the noun it modifies.**
 - *All first-year students are assigned an advisor.*
 - *All first-year graduate students took advantage of enhanced orientation activities in August.*
- **When referring to an individual student, or collectively as a group of students.** (In this case, the term functions as an object or noun.)
 - *A MechE graduate student was awarded a major NIH grant even though she was a first-year.*
 - *Faculty, staff, and undergraduate first-years are actively collaborating to enhance the experiences of our undergraduates.*

Do not hyphenate:

- **When used in a title or heading, to increase readability.**
 - Office of the First Year
 - First Year Advising
- **When the term is not a phrasal adjective.** (Often, this is the case when the term appears after the noun it refers to, i.e., as part of a prepositional phrase.)
 - *Career Advising and Professional Development led a welcome event intended for graduate students in their first year.*

Capitalization

Do capitalize:

- When used in a title or heading (capitalize each word).
 - Office of the First Year

Do not capitalize:

- When not used in a title or heading, use sentence case and capitalize only the first part of the term if used to start a sentence.
 - *First-year undergraduates attend a weeklong Orientation in late August.*
 - *First-year graduate students will have many opportunities to take advantage of all the city of Boston has to offer.*

Reference: adapted from <https://yalecollege.yale.edu/first-year-upper-level-usage-guide>