



AP Style: Formatting and Guidelines

General Guidelines

- Associated Press (AP) style is used with journalistic writing. Since journalism requires many writers and editors to work together on a single piece, AP style ensures consistency in formatting.
- AP style highlights consistency, clarity, accuracy, and brevity.

Punctuation

- Place punctuation inside quotation marks.
 - “I love the University of Mary Washington,” University President Troy Paino said. “It has been a wonderful place to work.”
- Oxford comma usage is prohibited; journalists view it as something that takes up copy space.
 - INCORRECT: Coffee is served at Panera, the Top of the UC, and For Five Coffee Roasters
 - CORRECT: Coffee is served at Panera, the Top of the UC and For Five Coffee Roasters.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: The Oxford comma, or a serial comma, is the comma used before the last item in a list that includes three or more things (as seen in the following examples). Writers will use the Oxford comma to try and eliminate any misinterpretation of information.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: This is the Oxford comma. It distinguishes the second and last item of the list to avoid grouping things together that are actually separate.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: There is no Oxford comma in this sentence; the Top of the UC and For Five Coffee Roasters aren't separated by a comma and therefore could in theory be grouped together by a reader. However, not having the Oxford comma saves a character space which publishers prioritize.

Names

- The first time someone is mentioned, use their first and last name. After the first reference, only the last name is used. You should not include any courtesy titles (Mr., Miss, Ms., Mrs., etc.) unless it is a part of a direct quote or to help distinguish between two people with the same last name.



Titles and Abbreviations

- Formal titles should be capitalized before a person's name. Informal titles can be in lowercase. Titles that don't reference somebody's name, come after somebody's name, and/or appear before somebody's name and are separated by a comma should also be in lowercase.
 - Correct examples:
 - Senator Kaine
 - Evan Bayh, a senator from Indiana
 - The senior senator from Indiana, Dick Lugar
- If a person mentioned has a medical or political title, the first reference of that person is the only time the title needs to be referenced, outside of a direct quote.
 - Example titles that are required before a person's full name, or first reference:
 - Dr.
 - Gov.
 - Lt. Gov.
 - Rep.
 - The Rev.
 - Sen.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: His formal title is capitalized and precedes his name.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: 'Senator' in this sentence, even though it is a title, acts more as a describing factor and therefore is not necessarily tied to the name. That is why it can be in lowercase; it is separate from the proper noun of his name.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Similar thing in this example as the previous one, just that the descriptive factor is before the person's name instead of after.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: Note: "Dr." should only go before medical doctors. MDs get the "Dr." in front of their name, while other doctoral degrees, such as PhDs, do not.

Acronyms

- Acronym use often depends on the context of the writing. Acronyms like FBI, CIA, and NASA, which are common, can be used in references, whereas an acronym like EPA, which is less widely known, should only be used after a first complete reference.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: The AP Stylebook provides more specific examples of what is common and what is not, but a general rule of thumb is to think about your target audience and what they will already know (for example, writing FCC the first time may be appropriate for a US audience of broadcasting professionals, but you may want to write it out as Federal Communications Commission for a more general audience), or if the abbreviation could be ambiguous.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: For the example of the EPA, you would initially write it as "the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)" and then subsequently can just use EPA, to guarantee your audience knows what EPA stands for in the context of your article.



Numbers

- A sentence should not start with a numeric figure, unless there is a specific year referenced.
 - Correct examples:
 - Two hundred people attended.
 - 1776 was an important year.
- Roman numerals are used to discuss the sequence of events that have the same title. Roman numerals can also be given to different people in the same family who have the same name.
 - Correct examples:
 - World War II
 - Queen Elizabeth II
- To talk about **ordinal numbers**, you should spell out *first* through *ninth*. 10th and above can be written in numeric form.
 - Correct examples:
 - He hit second base at the game.
 - It was their 11th straight win.
- Ordinal numbers that indicate political or geographic order should always use numeric figures.
 - Correct examples: 3rd District Court, 9th ward
- **Cardinal numbers** less than 10 should be spelled out and more than 10 can be in numeric form.
 - Correct example: The man has two brothers and 14 cousins.
- There might be specific instances on how you should format cardinal numbers. For example, at the beginning of a sentence, all cardinal numbers – even those greater than 10 – must be spelled out.
 - Correct example: Forty-five minutes later, I was on my way downtown.
- References to money amounts should be in numeric form. **A number of cents or any amount of money above 1 million should have the amount spelled out** (cent, million, billion, trillion, etc).
 - Correct examples:
 - 10 cents
 - \$31.98
 - \$7 million
 - \$100,200

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: Ordinal numbers are numbers used to describe the order of information.

Speaking and Writing Center [11]: This is an example of an ordinal number indicating a political order. District courts are a way to separate regions in a state by which courthouse cases are sent to, which makes district courts a political order.

Speaking and Writing Center [12]: This is an example of a number indicating a geographical order, as the 9th ward is a distinct neighborhood in New Orleans.

Speaking and Writing Center [13]: Cardinal numbers are numbers that describe the amount of something in a set group.

Speaking and Writing Center [14]: This rule for cents is to avoid having a zero in the dollar space (ex. \$0.91), while this rule for money above 1 million is to avoid having too many zeros.

Speaking and Writing Center [15]: As this is under 1 million, you would still use the numeric form of the number.



Addresses

- When writing a full address, abbreviate words like avenue (Ave.), boulevard (Blvd.), and street (St.) and any directional cues necessary. However, the words “alley,” “drive,” and “road” should be spelled out completely.

- 1781 Springfield Blvd.

Speaking and Writing Center [16]: A full address is a specific location with a number and street name listed.

- When writing a street name or direction without a numbered address, the name and direction should be capitalized and completely spelled out.

- South Ninth Boulevard.

Speaking and Writing Center [17]: Note how “boulevard” is spelled out here. This example is not a full address; there is no number associated to mark a specific location on this boulevard. Therefore, the word “boulevard” in this example should be spelled out as it is the name of the boulevard rather than a complete address.

- If a street name includes a number, numbers 1-9 should be spelled out, but 10 and above can be in their numeric form.

- South 10th Boulevard

Speaking and Writing Center [18]: “10th” is part of the road name, so the “10th” remains in the numeric form.

- 104 S. Second St.

Speaking and Writing Center [19]: “104” is the building number, which is why it is in numeric form. “Second” is part of the road name, which is why it is spelled out.

Age

- Ages should be in numeric form. When a person’s age is used as an adjective or part of a noun, hyphens should be used.
- Correct examples:
 - The driver is 35 years old.
 - A 19-year-old girl.
 - The discount is for 70-year-olds.
 - The boy, 9, and his cousin, 14.
 - The youth club is only for those who are 13-15 years old.



Compositions

- Titles of books, songs, TV shows, games, poems, lectures, speeches, and artwork should be in quotation marks.
 - She was reading “Frankenstein” on a bench.
 - Before each game the choir sings “The Star-Spangled Banner.”
- The names of magazines, newspapers, the Bible, or catalogues should not be in quotation marks.
 - He reads The Washington Post in the morning with his coffee.
 - She reads the Bible before going to bed.
 - I found a bible on the bookshelf.
- No title should be underlined or italicized.

Speaking and Writing Center [20]: In this example, 'bible' is fully lowercase because of the indefinite article used with it: "a". Since you're not referencing a specific version or definitive copy of the text, it should be in lowercase.

Dates, Months, Years, and Days of the Week

- All dates should be in numeric form and should not include *st*, *nd*, *rd*, or *th*.
 - Correct example: April 3
 - Incorrect example: January 12th
- Months are capitalized and spelled out when referenced.
 - Correct example: In February, they started planning the fundraiser.
- Only the months *Jan.*, *Feb.*, *Aug.*, *Sept.*, *Oct.*, *Nov.*, and *Dec.* should be abbreviated with specific dates.
 - Correct example: Jan. 19, June 17
- Commas are not needed when referencing a month and year, but should be used when given a date, month, and year.
 - Correct examples:
 - May 2004
 - June 12, 1987
- When you are referencing a particular decade or century, use the letter 's' but no apostrophe. Only use an apostrophe when referencing a decade that excludes some numeric forms.
 - Correct examples:
 - The 1800s
 - The '80s
- When referencing something that occurred the day before an article is published, do not use the word 'yesterday,' write the day of the week on which the event happened. All days of the week should be capitalized and not abbreviated.
- If a referenced event happened more than seven days before an article is published, use the month, spelled out except for months that require abbreviation, and the date in numeric form.

Speaking and Writing Center [21]: Here is a use of the comma, as you are giving a specific date in addition to the month and year.

Speaking and Writing Center [22]: Here the apostrophe is present because you've removed the 19 part from the 1980s. The apostrophe is acting as a stand-in for excluded information.



Time

- Most stories don't need to include the exact time something happened. When you want to reference a more specific time of day, you should use numeric figures but spell out *noon* and *midnight*. A colon should be used to separate hours and minutes, but you should not use :00.
 - Correct examples:
 - 1 p.m.
 - 4:30 a.m.

Speaking and Writing Center [23]: Note that AP style requires the use of periods in 'a.m.' and 'p.m.'

Datelines

- A dateline is a reference to where an outside story originally came from. Newspapers generally center around one area, so any coverage that is outside of that area needs to be introduced with the originating location.
- Datelines include the city name in all capital letters and usually the state name at the beginning of the article.
 - Correct example: ST. PAUL, Minn. - Ramsey County Public Schools...
- While in most instances, you should include both the city and state, there are some cities which do not require the state name along with them:

Speaking and Writing Center [24]: This is only placed at the beginning of the article; it's not a location-specific thing you need throughout the article.

Atlanta	Houston	Philadelphia
Baltimore	Indianapolis	Phoenix
Boston	Las Vegas	Pittsburgh
Chicago	Los Angeles	St. Louis
Cincinnati	Miami	Salt Lake City
Cleveland	Milwaukee	San Antonio
Dallas	Minneapolis	San Diego
Denver	New Orleans	San Francisco
Detroit	New York	Seattle
Honolulu	Oklahoma City	Washington



State Names

- When a state name is used in the body of text or as part of a headline, it should be spelled out.
- State names should be abbreviated in the dateline text, photo captions, lists or tables, and credit lines.
- Here is how each state should be abbreviated in AP style:

Ala. (Alabama)	Md. (Maryland)	N.D. (North Dakota)
Ariz. (Arizona)	Mass. (Massachusetts)	Okla. (Oklahoma)
Ark. (Arkansas)	Mich. (Michigan)	Ore. (Oregon)
Calif. (California)	Minn. (Minnesota)	Pa. (Pennsylvania)
Colo. (Colorado)	Miss. (Mississippi)	R.I. (Rhode Island)
Conn. (Connecticut)	Mo. (Missouri)	S.C. (South Carolina)
Del. (Delaware)	Mont. (Montana)	S.D. (South Dakota)
Fla. (Florida)	Neb. (Nebraska)	Tenn. (Tennessee)
Ga. (Georgia)	Nev. (Nevada)	Vt. (Vermont)
Ill. (Illinois)	N.H. (New Hampshire)	Va. (Virginia)
Ind. (Indiana)	N.J. (New Jersey)	Wash. (Washington)
Kan. (Kansas)	N.M. (New Mexico)	W.Va. (West Virginia)
Ky. (Kentucky)	N.Y. (New York)	Wis. (Wisconsin)
La. (Louisiana)	N.C. (North Carolina)	Wyo. (Wyoming)

- Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah are not included because they are never abbreviated.



Dimensions

- Any dimension written (height, weight, etc.) includes numeric forms and spelled out units of measurement.
 - Correct examples:
 - She is 5-foot-7.
 - He grabbed a 2-inch pen.
- When referencing an amount of miles, any distance below 10 is spelled out and any distance over 10 should be in numeric form.
 - Correct examples:
 - I ran three miles.
 - The flight covered 1,112 miles.

Speaking and Writing Center [25]: Note that the numeric form is connected to its corresponding unit of measurement with a hyphen.

Technological Terms

- Here are the correct spelling and capitalization formats for common technological terms:
 - download
 - eBay Inc.
 - e-book
 - e-book reader
 - e-reader
 - email
 - cellphone
 - Facebook
 - Google, Googling, Googled
 - hashtag
 - IM (IMed, IMing; for first reference, use instant messenger)
 - internet
 - iPad, iPhone, iPod
 - LinkedIn
 - social media
 - smartphone
 - Twitter, tweet, tweeted, retweet
 - World Wide Web, website, Web page
 - YouTube
- Things that start with a lowercase letter (eBay, e-book, e-book reader, e-reader, iPad, iPhone, iPod) will be capitalized when it is referenced at the start of a sentence.
 - EBay, Inc. was founded in 1995.

Speaking and Writing Center [26]: IM is an abbreviation for instant messenger or instant message. You should have a full reference of what IM means in the context of your writing before you use the abbreviation.