Top 10 AP Style Guide

Week 1: Abbreviations

► Abbreviate junior or senior after a name, but don’t use a comma: John Jones Jr.
► The names of the 50 U.S. states should be spelled out when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city, town, village or military base. No state name is necessary if it is the same as the dateline. Dime Box in Texas? Dime Box. (If you’re addressing students in Texas.) Norman in Oklahoma? Norman, Oklahoma.
   Never – and I mean NEVER -- use U.S. Postal Service abbreviations: TX, AL, etc. If you don’t know how to abbreviate a state for a dateline, LOOK IT UP IN THE STYLEBOOK.
► Abbreviate months with six or more letters if they are used with a specific date: Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec. Spell out the others (five or fewer letters).
   No: August 13 or Jun. 6.
   But always spell out the month when it is used without a specific date.
   Yes: It happened in August.
   No: It happened in Aug.
► On first reference, don’t put an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses after an organization or government agency’s name. On second reference with lesser known organizations, use methods similar to the following to refer to the organization rather than using an acronym:
   First reference -- Committee to Fight Smoking.
   Second reference -- the committee, or the anti-smoking group.
   Certain organizations and government agencies are so well known by initials or acronyms that those can be used on second reference and sometimes on the first:
   CIA, FBI, IBM, NATO. (No periods on any.) Your readers’ ease, not yours, is the cardinal rule. I hate gobbledygook initials and so do your readers.
► Abbreviate and capitalize company, corporation, incorporated, limited and brothers when used after the name of a corporate entity. Co., Corp., Inc., Ltd., Bros. Don’t place a comma between the company name and the abbreviation.
► The abbreviation mph (no periods) is acceptable in all references for miles per hour. The abbreviation mpg is acceptable only on second reference for miles per gallon.
► Don’t abbreviate academic degrees. Use bachelor’s and master’s (with a comma) for B.S., B.A., M.A., M.S. or Ph.D. He holds a master’s in philosophy.
► Do not abbreviate in text:
   ■ Names such as Robert (never Robt.) or Charles (never Chas.)
   ■ Names of week days unless – and only unless – you use them in a table.
   ■ Percent as % except in tabular form.
   ■ Cents as ¢.
   ■ And as & (ampersand) unless the ampersand is an official part of the name (Procter & Gamble).
   ■ Christmas as Xmas.
   ■ Professor. Never Prof.

Any time you start to abbreviate, THINK OR GRAB YOUR STYLEBOOK.

Week 2: Capitalization

► Capitalize proper nouns and common nouns such as party, river and street when they are part of a full name for place, person or thing.
Examples: Democratic Party or Mississippi River.

► Within the same story, lower case these common nouns when they stand alone in subsequent references.

Yes: the party leaders met.
No: the Party leaders met.

► In all plural uses, lower case the common noun elements.

Yes: The Democratic and Republican parties.
No: The Democratic and Republican Parties.

► Lowercase spring, summer, fall and winter unless the season is used in a formal name: Winter Olympics.

► Capitalize the word room when used with the number of the room: Room 200, Burdine Hall.

Capitalize the proper names of buildings, including the word building if it's part of the proper name: the Empire State Building.

► Capitalize specific geographic regions and popularized names for those regions: Midwest, the South Side of Chicago, the Panhandle, West Texas (not Western Texas), South Texas, Eastern New Mexico (not East New Mexico), Southern California (not South California). Uncertain? LOOK IT UP.

► The same rule applies for some geological regions. Check to be certain. For instance: Permian Basin, the Hill Country.

► Lower case academic departments except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: the English department, the history department, or when department is part of the official and formal name: University of Texas Department of Astronomy

► Capitalize: U.S. Capitol and the Capitol when referring to the buildings in Washington D.C., or to state capitols. U.S. Congress and Congress when referring to the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. U.S. Constitution (with or without U.S.), Bill of Rights, First Amendment.

► Capitalize city, county, state, federal, city hall, courthouse, legislature, assembly, etc., when part of a formal name, or without the name of a city or state if the reference is specific: Austin City Hall, Texas Legislature.

► Nationalities and Race: Capitalize proper names of races, tribes, nationalities, etc. (Note: Only use ethnicity or race when identification is pertinent to story).

Arab, Caucasian, Eskimo, Hispanic
Lowercase: black, white, mulatto.

► Do NOT capitalize: first lady, administration, presidential, first family, seasons of the year or years in school (freshman, sophomore, etc.)

Week 3: Numbers and Letters

► Fractions. Spell out amounts less than 1, using hyphens between the words: Two-thirds, three-quarters.

► Generally, spell out numbers less than 10. The 13 exceptions to this rule are:

- Addresses: 6 Maple St.
- Ages for people and pets, but not inanimate objects: The 2-year-old girl, the five-year-old building.
- Cents: 5 cents.
- Dollars: $5.
- Dimensions: 6 feet tall, 9-by-12 rug.
- Millions, billions: 3 million people.
- Percentages: 4 percent.
- Proportions: 2 million.
- Speed: 7 mph.
Temperatures: 8 degrees (but zero degrees)

Times: 9 a.m.

- Use Arabic numerals for numbers with two or more digits. Two dogs, 21 cats
- Don't use extra zeros with sums of money: $6 not $6.00.
- Measurements: Use figures and spell out inches, yards, feet, etc. Hyphenate adjective forms before nouns.
  
  The dining room is 8 feet by 12 feet. It's an 8-by-12 dining room.

- For days of the month, use only numerals, not nd, rd or th.
  

- For decades of history, use numerals and use apostrophes to show numbers omitted.
  
  Don't forget the 1950s. They rocked around the clock in '57.

- Lowercase century and spell out numbers less than 10.
  
  He couldn't remember the second century because he was born in the 21st century.

- In figures of more than 999, use commas to set off each group of three numerals (except for years).

- Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. One exception -- years: 1942 was the year the Europeans discovered the Americas. The only number you can use at the start of a sentence is a year. Spell out any other number, but don’t crowd the beginning of a sentence with a long, big number. No: Three million, four hundred thousand people live in Dallas County. Yes: More than 3.4 million people live in Dallas County.

- Plural forms: When you make a number plural, it gets an s but no apostrophe. Yes: The 1920s. No: The 1920's.

- Single letters like K's get the s and an apostrophe.

- Multiple letters like ABCs get the s but no apostrophe.

**Week 4: Titles**

- Usually spell out titles with names used in direct quotes with the exception of Dr., Mr., Mrs., Miss and Ms.
  
  We don't say, "Gov. Perry is coming to town." We say, "Governor Perry is coming to town."

- It's Professor, never Prof.

- When using the title Rev. before a name, precede it with the word the.

- Capitalize formal titles before a name. Lowercase them and set them off with commas after a name. It's best to "park" a long title behind the name.
  

- Don't capitalize titles that are only job descriptions: lawyer, welder, mechanic, etc.

  The children admired astronaut Eileen Collins.

- On first reference, use a person's full name, including the middle initial, and use her title if it's important to the story. On second reference, use only the last name with no title.

  In this example, for instance, we assume that on first reference the person was called Dr. Maria Vasquez. The following are possible second-reference uses: The doctor agreed. Vasquez agreed. She agreed

- Use the title and first and family names on first reference: President Barack Obama, not just President Obama
People are only boys and girls until age 18. Ladies and gentlemen generally are terms designating behavior. Use men and women to specify gender.

**Week 5: Addresses/Directions**

- Abbreviate avenue (Ave.), boulevard (Blvd.) and street (St.) when a complete address is given. Never abbreviate Road, Drive, Terrace or others. Memory device: those starting with BAS may be abbreviated.
- Without a complete address, spell it out. The correct forms are 320 N. Guadalupe St., North Guadalupe Street, Third Street and 42nd Street.
- Lowercase compass directions (north, south, east, west).
- Capitalize when directions refer to a region:
  
  - She came from the Midwest but couldn't wait to drive west toward Texas.
  - Fried chicken is a Southern specialty.
  - Rain from this storm is likely to head east.

**Week 6: Time Elements**

- Don't be redundant with time elements: 10 a.m. this morning should be 10 a.m.
- Use noon or midnight rather than 12 p.m. or 12 a.m. 12 noon is redundant.
- Don't use extra zeros, do use periods with a.m. and p.m.
  
  - Yes: 6 p.m.
  - No: 6:00 p.m., 6 pm, 6 o'clock.
- Days: **Unless you are writing an online version of your story that will be read the day you write it,** use the words today, this morning, tonight only in direct quotes or in phrases not referring to a specific day:
  
  - College students work much harder than those of a decade ago.
- Day or Date? Avoid redundant references such as next Monday or last Monday. Use Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc., for days of the week within seven days of the current date. Use the month and figure for dates outside that.
  
  - The first bake sale will be Wednesday. The second one will be Jan. 25.
- Don't use on unless necessary for clarity.
  
  - The meeting will be held Monday.
  - Jerry met Sally on Monday.
- For days of the month, use only numerals, not nd, rd or th.
  
  - Yes: Aug. 2, Sept. 3, Oct. 4
- Generally follow this order: time, date, place (remember the abbreviation TDP).
  
  - The show opens 8 p.m. Jan. 12 in Bass Concert Hall.

**Week 7: Written Works**

- Newspapers: Capitalize the publication's proper name, including the word the if that's part of it. Austin American-Statesman, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, The Daily Texan. Do not underline or use quotation marks or italicize (italics are used here only to conform with other Top 10 examples).
- Magazines: Lowercase the word magazine if it is not part of the formal title. Capitalize titles but don't put in quotes, don't italicize.
  
  - Did you read Time magazine this week?
Compositions: Capitalize the principal words and put quote marks around the titles of movies, books, operas, plays, poems, songs, television programs, works of art, lectures and speeches. Do not underline or italicize titles.

She read "Water for Elephants" by Sara Gruen.

Reference materials: Capitalize, but don't put quote marks around or italicize books that serve primarily as reference. These include almanacs, dictionaries, handbooks and encyclopedias.

Software: Capitalize, but don't put quote marks around or italicize the names of software such as Windows or iOS.

Week 8: Punctuation


The national flag is red, white and blue.

Set off a person's age with commas.

Gabe McCarthy, 15, and Grace McCarthy, 10, are (sometimes) great children.

Commas/Quotations: Always place commas and periods inside quotation marks. Use a comma to introduce a complete, one-sentence quote within a paragraph, but don't use one to introduce an indirect or partial quote.

Dave Garlock said, "You must learn Associated Press style to make it in journalism." He said otherwise you would be "doomed to fail."

Use a semicolon to set off a series within a series. In this case, use the semicolon before the conjunction.

I have lived in Tulsa, Okla.; Daytona Beach, Fla.; Gainesville, Fla.; Houston, Texas; and Austin, Texas.

When two or more adjectives express a single concept, use hyphens to link all the words in the compound:

Four-year study. 12-member council. 28-year-old woman.

Do not link the words with hyphens when the adverb very is part of the group: Not: a very-good time.

Do not link the words with hyphens when you have adverbs ending in -ly as part of the phrase. Not: An essentially-remembered rule.

Week 9: Specific Words/Spellings

forward (not forwards).
backward (not backwards).
afterward (not afterwards).
toward (not towards).
T-shirt.
likable (not likeable).
goodbye.
teen, teenager (n), teenage (adj). No hyphen. Don't use teen-aged.
all right (not alright).
gray (not grey).
doughnut (not donut).
ax (not axe).
vice president (no hyphen).
thetaer (unless part of the proper name is Theatre).
Kitty Litter, Kleenex, Bubble Wrap and Dumpster (all are trademarked).

Week 10: Obituaries (AP style and general practice)
► A funeral is scheduled, not held. Funeral services is redundant.
► Mass is celebrated, not said. The word is capitalized.
► Titles: Check the proper title for a rabbi, minister or priest. Don't routinely use Father or Pastor as a title; use the Rev. For a rabbi, use Rabbi before the name on first reference. Check AP listings of major denominations for the title clergy use. On second reference, simply use the clergy member's last name.
► Do not use euphemisms. In news obituaries, people die. They don't pass away, depart this earth or do anything else.
► People die of injuries suffered in an accident, not received.
► Unless you want to be sued, people die following surgery, not as a result of surgery.

This guide to commonly used rules from The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual is based on a version created by retired Professor Griff Singer, with additional contributions by Professor Rusty Todd and Lecturer Diana Dawson.