

# AP STYLE HIGHLIGHTS

## Topic 1: Abbreviations

- ▶ Abbreviate junior or senior after a name, but don't use a comma: **John Jones Jr.**
- ▶ All state names are spelled out in the body of the text, even when used with city name.
- ▶ 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).

*Yes: Aug. 13, June 6.*

*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.*

*Yes: It happened in August 2018. (Note: No comma.)*

*No: It happened in Aug. 2018.*

- ▶ 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.)** Check the stylebook for specific agencies. 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; do not put a comma between main part of name and abbreviation. **Co., Corp., Inc., Ltd., Bros.**
- ▶ The abbreviation *mph* (no periods) is acceptable in all references for miles per hour. The abbreviation *mpg* is acceptable on all references for miles per gallon.
- ▶ Don't abbreviate academic degrees. Use **bachelor's and master's** for B.S., B.A., M.A. and M.S. *He holds a master's in philosophy.* Use Ph.D. or **doctorate** (preferred).
- ▶ Do not abbreviate or use symbols in text for:
  - *Names of weekdays unless – and only unless – you use them in a table*
  - *Cents as ¢.*
  - *And as & (ampersand) unless the ampersand is an official part of the name (Procter & Gamble).*
  - *Christmas as Xmas.*

**Any time you start to abbreviate, THINK AND GO TO YOUR STYLEBOOK TO CHECK.**

## Topic 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, lowercase these common nouns when they stand alone in subsequent references.

*Yes: The party leaders met.*

*No: The Party leaders met.*

▶ In all plural uses, lowercase 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*.

▶ Nationalities and race: Capitalize proper names of races, tribes, nationalities, etc.

*Arab, Caucasian, Inuit, Hispanic, Cherokee, Latino, African American (note NO hyphen in any construction such as this), Black*. Lowercase: *white*.

**Consider carefully when and if you need to note a person's race and how the subject would like to be identified. Specificity is best when possible: *The family is Cuban.* (rather than "*The family is Latino.*") Look to the stylebook for further guidance.**

▶ *Latinx*: Use in quotations, names of organizations or descriptions of individuals who request it. Should be accompanied by a short explanation. "*Hernandez prefers the gender-neutral term Latinx.*"

▶ Some words in everyday language are actually trademarked nouns that should be capitalized: Xerox, Kitty Litter, Kleenex, Bubble Wrap and Styrofoam, among others.

Unless used in quotes, avoid using these unless you mean the actual brand:

NO: *She reached for a Kleenex.*

YES: *She reached for a tissue.*

### **Topic 3: Titles for people**

▶ 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.**

*Austin Police Chief Brian Manley or Brian Manley, Austin's police chief. But:*

*Sen. Chuck Grassley, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Not: Senate*

*Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley.*

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

*The children admired astronaut Eileen Collins. If you're not sure whether a title is formal or descriptive, put it after the name, where it will always be lowercase.*

- ▶ On first reference, use a person's full name, including the middle initial if preferred, 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.*

- ▶ People are only *boys* and *girls* until age 18. Use *men* and *women* or other references to specify gender or sex when it is pertinent. If someone identifies as other than male or female, check the AP Stylebook because terms are quickly evolving; we want to ID people correctly and respect how they identify themselves while also avoiding confusion for our readers. Current guidance is: “When using they/them/their as a singular pronoun, explain if it isn’t clear in context: Morales, who uses the pronoun they, said they will retire in June.”

#### **Topic 4: Numbers and Letters**

- ▶ Generally, spell out numbers less than 10; *two dogs, 21 cats*. The exceptions to this rule are:

- *Addresses: 6 Maple St.*
- *Ages: The 2-year-old girl, the 5-year-old building.*
- *Cents: 5 cents.*
- *Dollars: \$5.*
- *Dimensions: 6 feet tall, 9-by-12 rug.*
- *Highways: U.S. Route 1.*
- *Millions, billions: 3 million people.*
- *Percentages: 4% (use the percent symbol)*
- *Proportions: 2 parts water.*
- *Speed: 7 mph.*
- *Temperatures: 8 degrees. Use numerals for all except zero. Use the word “minus” for temperatures below zero: minus 5 degrees.*
- *Times: 9 a.m.*

- ▶ Don't use extra zeros with sums of money: \$6 not \$6.00.

- ▶ For days of the month, use only numerals.

*Yes: Aug. 2, Sept 3, Oct. 4.*

*No: Aug. 2nd, Sept. 3rd, Oct. 4th.*

- ▶ For ordinal numbers (numbers that designate order), spell out *first* through *ninth* and use numerals for another else: *He finished in 32nd place. She teaches fourth grade.*

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

- ▶ 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 decades of history, use numerals and use apostrophes to show numbers omitted.

*Don't forget the 1950s. Professor Quigley still listens to music from the '80s.*

- ▶ 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).

▶ For sums in the million and billion range, consider using decimals and rounding if exact figure isn't vital. *1.2 million, not 1,200,000.*

▶ Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. **Two exceptions – years and letter/number combinations.** *2020 was the year Joe Biden was elected president. 3D movies are increasingly popular.* Spell out any other number, but don't crowd the beginning of a sentence with a long, big number and look for ways to rewrite to avoid starting with a number: *Joe Biden was elected president in 2020.*

**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.*

### **Topic 5: Addresses/ Directions**

▶ Abbreviate avenue (*Ave.*), boulevard (*Blvd.*) and street (*St.*) when a complete address is given. Never abbreviate Road, Drive, Terrace or others.

▶ Without a complete address, spell it out. The correct forms are *320 N. Guadalupe St., North Guadalupe Street, Third Street, 42nd Street.*

▶ Highways: Refer to highways identified by number in the following ways: *Interstate 35* (second reference: *I-35*); *U.S. Highway 290* (second reference: *U.S. 290*).

▶ 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.*

### **Topic 6: Time Elements**

▶ Don't be redundant with time elements: *10 a.m. this morning* should be *10 a.m.*

▶ Use *noon* rather than *12 p.m.* *12 noon* is redundant. Avoid *midnight* if it would create confusion about what day you mean. (*Midnight Saturday* refers to the end of Saturday)

▶ 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: Use the words *today, this morning, tonight* only in direct quotes or in phrases not referring to a specific day:

*College students today 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.*

▶ Generally follow this order: time, date, place. *The show opens 8 p.m. Jan. 12 in Bass Concert Hall.*

## Topic 7: Titles of published 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.

▶ Magazines: Lowercase the word magazine if it is not part of the formal title.

Capitalize titles but don't put in quotes or italicize.

*Did you read Time magazine this week?*

▶ For the titles of movies, books, operas, plays, poems, songs, television programs, podcasts, works of art (except sculptures), lectures and speeches:

- Capitalize all words in a title except articles (*a, an, the*); prepositions of three or fewer letters (*for, of, on, up, etc.*); and conjunctions of three or fewer letters (*and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet, etc.*) unless any of those start or end the title.
- Put quotation marks around the title.
- Do not underline or italicize titles.
- YES: 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.

▶ Capitalize Bible when referring to the religious work. Lowercase bible if you mean a reference in a nonreligious sense: *Vogue magazine is her bible.*

▶ Render titles as is – that is, don't try to conform to traditional grammar style unless your publication requires you to do so. *He produced "Modern Family" before directing episodes of "black-ish."*

▶ Software and technology, games: Render name as company does, without quote marks or italics: Windows, iOS, iPhone, Listserv, Facebook, Slack, Wordle, World of Warcraft.

## Topic 8: Punctuation

▶ Don't use a comma before a conjunction in a series.

*The national flag is red, white and blue.*

▶ However, if a conjunction is integral to a part of the series, you should use the final comma.

*We ate toast, juice, and peanut butter and jelly for breakfast.*

▶ Set off a person's age with commas when used after the name.

*Gabe McCarthy, 15, and Latonya Smith, 10, won the prize.*

▶ Set off a person's title with commas when used after the name.

*Liam Quigley, a high school senior, is ready to graduate.*

▶ Use commas to set off nonessential phrases and clauses.

*We watched the 2019 movie "Parasite."* (If you used a comma after "movie," you'd be saying it was the ONLY movie made in 2019. The name is essential to your understanding of this sentence, so no comma.)

*We watched the top-grossing movie of 2019, "Avengers: Endgame."* (It is the only movie that made the most money that year, so you use a comma because the name is additional information, not essential information)

► Use commas to separate a series of adjectives equal in rank. If the commas could be replaced by the word and without changing the sense, the adjectives are equal: *a thoughtful, precise manner; a dark, dangerous street.*

► Use a comma to join two independent clauses (could stand on their own as complete subject-verb sentences) with the conjunctions and, but, for, so, or, nor, yet to form a compound sentence:

*We went to the store, and we bought ice cream.*

**But:** *We went to the store and bought ice cream.* (Why no comma here? There's only one subject – we – and a compound verb – went and bought. You can't separate the verbs with that comma in this case. Don't be fooled just because you see that conjunction!)

► Do **not** use a comma when you're joining an independent clause with a dependent clause (one that could not stand on its own as a complete sentence.

*We went home because it was late.* (No comma before "because" – "because it was late" can't stand on its own. It is a dependent clause acting as an adverb in this case.)

► 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.

*Diana Dawson said, "You must learn Associated Press style to make it in public relations." She said otherwise you would be "doomed to fail."*

► Use a semicolon to avoid confusion when you have a series full of commas. In this case, use the semicolon before the conjunction.

*I have lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma.; Daytona Beach, Florida.; Gainesville, Florida.; Houston, Texas; and Austin, Texas.*

► Use of the hyphen is far from standardized. It is optional in most cases. The fewer hyphens the better; use them only when not using them causes confusion. For example, when a compound modifier — two or more words that express a single concept — precedes a noun, use a hyphen if the meaning could be unclear or ambiguous: *better-qualified candidate, little-known song, loose-knit group.* Don't use it for common, easily understood phrases such as *third grade teacher, climate change report, chocolate chip cookie.*

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

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

► Hyphenate *well-* combinations before a noun, but not after: *a well-known judge,* but *the judge is well known.*

► Generally, also use a hyphen in modifiers of three or more words: *a know-it-all attitude, black-and-white photography, a sink-or-swim moment, a win-at-all-costs approach.*

► Single letters get the s and an apostrophe to become plural: She made all A's.

► Multiple letters like *ABCs* get the s but no apostrophe.

## Topic 9: Specific Words/Spellings

forward (not forwards).  
backward (not backwards).  
afterward (not afterwards) backward, toward, forward  
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)  
judgment (not judgement)  
vice president (no hyphen)  
email, voicemail (no hyphens)  
theater (unless part of the proper name is *Theatre*).  
adviser (not advisor)  
internet (lowercase)

## Topic 10: ANTECEDENTS AND AGREEMENTS

Emma Graves said she did not mind learning to dance. In the above sentence, “Emma Graves” is the antecedent/noun, and “she” is the pronoun. In AP style, the antecedent and its pronoun generally must agree in gender and number.

NO: *The president of the company delivered their speech via Skype.*

YES: *The president of the company delivered his speech via Skype.*

NO: *A student taking 18 hours needs to plan their time carefully*

YES: *A student taking 18 hours needs to plan his or her time carefully.*

BETTER: *Students taking 18 hours needs to plan their time carefully.*

Here’s what AP says about using “their” as a singular pronoun:

“In most cases, a plural pronoun should agree in number with the antecedent: *The children love the books their uncle gave them.* **They/them/their** is acceptable in limited cases as a singular and/or gender-neutral pronoun, when alternative wording is overly awkward or clumsy. However, rewording usually is possible and always is preferable.

► A company with thousands of employees – like Apple – is treated as a single noun.

NO: *Apple is planning to tell their employees to prepare for layoffs.*

YES: *Apple is planning to tell its employees to prepare for layoffs.*

► A composition title is treated as singular: “*The Grapes of Wrath*” is her favorite book.

▶ A jury or a committee is singular no matter how many members it has:  
*The jury decided it needed a break. The jury members decided they needed a break.*

▶ Use singular verb and pronoun "it" when referring to a team as a collective unit.

NO: *The team won their third title.*

YES: *The team won its third title.*

Team names and musical group names that are plural take plural verbs. *The Yankees are in first place. The Jonas Brothers are popular.*

Team or group names with no plural forms also take plural verbs: *The Miami Heat are battling for third place.* Other examples: *Orlando Magic, Oklahoma City Thunder, Utah Jazz, Alabama Crimson Tide.*

Most singular names take singular verbs, including places and university names in sports: *Coldplay is on tour. Boston is favored in the playoffs. Stanford is in the NCAA Tournament.*

### **Topic 11: Some local style notes**

▶ Lowercase "the" in "the University of Texas" (you don't need "at Austin" unless distinguishing from other branches in the UT System). "UT" on second reference.

▶ Austin City Council: You can drop "Austin" after first reference and say "City Council" (still capitalized). Lowercase for simply saying "the council." Use this style for titles: *Council Member Emily Quigley.*

▶ Moody College of Communication — that's us!

Moody Center — venue on UT campus ACL Live at

Moody Theater — venue on Second Street

Moody Amphitheater —venue that is part of Waterloo Greenway downtown

So, Austin has many Moodys. Make sure you're clear which one you're writing about and that your reader also understands.

▶ the Drag: nickname for the portion of Guadalupe Street that runs along campus.  
Lowercase "the."

▶ Some more capitalized names: West Campus, the Forty Acres, Hill Country, Central Texas, North Austin, South Austin, East Austin, West Austin

▶ Austin Independent School District: AISD on second reference

▶ Texas Legislature: made up of Texas House and Texas Senate. Meets every two years. You can drop the Texas and just say "the Legislature" when referring to this body in a Texas publication.

Use this style for titles:

*Rep. Gene Wu, D-Houston*

*Sen. Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston*

(Same style as U.S. representatives, only with city names rather than states)

Only precede the title with “State” or “U.S.” if there might be confusion (a story with both kinds of representatives, for example)

- ▶ Texas Capitol (don’t need “State”) — the building
- ▶ Texas capital (don’t need “State”) — the city
  
- ▶ Majors: lowercase all unless it is a proper noun (so, a math major, a Spanish major, a journalism major, an English major, a Plan II Honors major)
  
- ▶ Do not capitalize years in school (*freshman, sophomore, etc.*)
  
- ▶ Lowercase generic names of academic departments except for words that are proper nouns: *the Spanish department; the journalism school*. Capitalize full proper names: the School of Journalism and Media at the University of Texas at Austin; Moody College of Communication. (note: no S at the end of Moody’s name!)
  
- ▶ It’s *professor*, lowercase, and never *abbreviated*: *We listened to professor Ann Garza*. But capitalize when replacing the first name: *Professor Dawson, how can I grow up to be just like you?*

This guide to commonly used rules from The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual is based on versions by several University of Texas journalism professors. If you become very familiar with these entries, you will have a good command of the most frequent AP style issues.

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