

SP 2017: Best of AP Style and Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling (GPS)

1. PUNCTUATION

Use a comma ...

To separate a year used with a date:

- The bill was signed on May 5, 2013, two days before the session ended.

To separate a state when used with a city:

- The package was sent to Smithson, Virginia, by mistake.

Between two independent clauses (each with a subject and a verb):

- She grew up playing tennis, and her sister concentrated on softball.
- BUT: She grew up playing tennis but switched to softball.

To separate a nonrestrictive phrase or clause:

- The banker, who plans to retire in May, couldn't help smiling.
- The committee gave the award to a senior, John Smith.
- The committee gave the award to John Smith, a senior.
- BUT: The committee gave the award to senior John Smith.

To separate an age used as a nonrestrictive phrase or clause:

- Gabe McCarthy, 15, and LaShonda Smith, 10, won the competition.
- The suspect, 82, was taken to a hospital.
- BUT: The 16-year-old student is expected to be tried as an adult.

After an introductory clause or long phrase:

- In order to reach its goal, the organization bought ads.

To separate "according to (object of preposition)" from rest of the sentence:

- According to the study, most children learn to walk at home
- The school will close in two years, according to the report.

Between coordinate adjectives (adjectives can be reversed and used with "and"):

- The paramedics had to travel over several narrow, winding roads.

When the attribution (who said what) appears directly after a statement. Put commas and periods inside the quotation mark:

- "My opponent is out to get me," the mayor said.
- "This isn't how I planned it," said the teacher, who had been expecting a raise.
- The best method is to kill all the mosquitoes, the researcher said.
- BUT: The researcher said the best method is to kill all the mosquitoes.
- BUT no comma with a partial quote: The mayor said his opponent "was out to get" him.

To separate a direct address:

- "John, you don't understand," Mary said.
- Students, don't you want to graduate in three years?

In using the "not" construction to make a comparison:

- She was elected to be mayor, not county commissioner.

Don't use a comma ...

Before a conjunction in a series UNLESS it's needed for clarity.

- The most common colors in national flags are red, white and blue.
- She said she likes to play tennis, run in the park and swim in the lake.
- BUT: The staffer served had coffee, cheese and crackers, and grapes.

If the clause is necessary for our understanding of the sentence:

- The student who threw the pie at the teacher was arrested.

SEMICOLONS

Usually journalists avoid using them. It's easier for the reader to digest two sentences than one long sentence using a semicolon:

- WEAK: The problem with the software took two years to fix; therefore, coders used a workaround to avoid having issues.
- BETTER: The problem with the software took two years to fix. Coders used a workaround to avoid having issues.

You can use a semicolon to set off a series within a series, like a list of states. In this case, use the semicolon before the conjunction.

- Voting irregularities were discovered in Stillwater, Oklahoma; Port Washington, New York; and Mayberry, North Carolina.

USE A HYPHEN ...

To avoid duplicated vowels, triple consonants:

- "anti-intellectual," "pre-empt," "shell-like." (from gatehousenewsroom.com)

When two or more adjectives or nouns express a single concept:

- Four-year study. 12-member council. 28-year-old woman.
- BUT: The woman is 28 years old.
- She is a part-time professor. BUT: She teaches part time.

BUT don't use a hyphen when "very" or an adverb ending in -ly is part of the phrase (actually avoid using "very" unless in quotes)

- She said she didn't have a very good time.
- It's not an easily remembered rule.

USE AN APOSTROPHE WHEN ...

"It is" contracted to it's --

- The mayor said it's unlikely he will appear.
- BUT: The company didn't maintain its website. ("its" meaning possessive)

For possessives, meaning "belonging to" or "a part of":

- The mayor's assistant will talk to the media.
- The Longhorns' leading scorer is a kicker.

A single letter made plural:

- Few students get C's in J310F.

BUT multiple letters like ABCs get the "s" but no apostrophe:

- He discussed the ABCs of making money in real estate.

2: NUMBERS

- ▶ Use Arabic numerals for numbers with two or more digits.
 - The sheriff found two dogs and one rabbit in the house. He found 21 cats in the yard.
- When most of the numbers in a series have double digits, it makes sense to use all numerals:
 - The sheriff found 21 cats, 14 rabbits, 10 pigs and 2 dogs.
- ▶ Generally, spell out numbers less than 10. Exceptions to this rule:
 - Addresses: 6 Maple St.
 - Ages: The 2-year-old girl.
 - Cents: 5 cents.
 - Dollars: \$5. Don't use extra zeros with sums of money: \$5 not \$5.00.
 - Dimensions: 6 feet tall, 9-by-12 rug.
 - Highways: U.S. Route 1.
 - Millions, billions: 3 million people.
 - Percentages: 4 percent.
 - Proportions: 2 parts water.
 - Speed: 7 mph.
 - Temperatures: 8 degrees. BUT: zero degrees
 - Times: 9 a.m.
- ▶ Fractions. Unless you're writing about baseball innings, spell out amounts less than 1, using hyphens between the words: Two-thirds, three-quarters.
- ▶ Measurements: Use numerals but spell "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**.
 - Yes: Aug. 2, Sept. 3, Oct. 4, May 9.
 - No: Aug. 2nd, Sept. 3rd, Oct. 4th.
- ▶ 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.
 - The book was written in the 21st century, not the second century.
- ▶ Use a comma when numbers exceed 999: He said 1,354 voters signed the petition.
- ▶ For sums in the million and billion range, consider using decimals (you may not do this for some annual and quarterly report uses). *1.2 million, not 1,200,000.*
- ▶ Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. **One exception -- years:** 1942 was the year the Europeans discovered the Americas. 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.
- ▶ **AGES:** The 5-year-old girl. The girl is 5 years old. The girl is 5. Gabe McCarthy, 15, and LaShonda Smith, 10, won the competition. The building is 5 years old, but it's already been scheduled to be demolished.

3: TIME AND DATES

- ▶ 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, but 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 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.*
- ▶ Don't use ON unless necessary for clarity.
 - The meeting will be held Monday.*
 - John met Harold on Monday.*
- ▶ For days of the month, use only numerals, not **nd**, **rd** or **th**.
 - Yes: *Aug. 2, Sept 3, Oct. 4.*
 - No: *Aug. 2nd, Sept. 3rd, Oct. 4th.*
- ▶ Generally follow this order: time, date, place (remember T-D-P):
 - The show opens 8 p.m. Jan. 12 in Bass Concert Hall.*

4: ABBREVIATIONS

- ▶ Abbreviate junior or senior after a name, but don't use a comma: ***John Jones Jr.***
- ▶ 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.*
- ▶ It's the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Texas and the university. In quoted copy, UT doesn't need periods.
- ▶ 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.

► **ABBREVIATED TITLES:** The following formal titles are capitalized and abbreviated as shown when used before a name both inside and outside quotations: *Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen.*

► Abbreviate and capitalize *company, corporation, incorporated, limited* and *brothers* when used after the name of a corporate entity. 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 first reference for miles per gallon.

► Don't abbreviate academic degrees. Use **bachelor's and master's** for B.S., B.A., M.A., M.S. or Ph.D.: He holds a master's in philosophy.

► Do not abbreviate in text:

- Such Names as Robert (**never Robt.**) or Charles (**never Chas.**)
- Percent as % except in tabular form.
- Cents as ¢.
- & (ampersand) UNLESS it's an official part of the name (Procter & Gamble).
- Professor. Never Prof.

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

Check out [Moody Writing Support Program](#) videos for more tips. You can also read this [Towson University site](#) for clear explanations of antecedents.

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

- 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 cultural 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.

► But what about avoiding gender signifiers, especially in covering transgender issues?

From the AP Stylebook:

AP news stories adhere to traditional grammar in formulating sentences: e.g., plural pronouns agree in number and gender with plural antecedents. While a news story might note an individual's pronoun preferences if relevant, we avoid constructions of the type you cite.

When possible, using a plural subject can be easier for your sources and readers.

► **What about sports team nicknames? According to AP:**

Use singular verb and pronoun "it" when referring to the team as a collective unit. However, the team name takes a plural verb: *The Orlando Magic are close to setting a franchise record.*

NO: The team won their third title.

YES: The team won its third title.

5: 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.*

▶ Lowercase academic departments She teaches in the *history department.*

EXCEPT when the words are proper nouns or adjectives: *the English department* or when "department" is part of the official and formal name:

He resigned from the 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. Capitalize *U.S. Congress* and *Congress* when referring to the federal legislative chambers: U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Also: U.S. Constitution (with or without U.S.), Bill of Rights, First Amendment.

▶ The Texas Legislature. Retain capitalization when reference is clear: "The Legislature voted to censure the representative."

▶ Capitalize *city, county, state, federal, city hall, courthouse, legislature, assembly, etc.*, when part of a formal name. *Austin City Hall, but city hall when used alone.*

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

BUT only refer to race and ethnicity when pertinent to the story.

Arab, Caucasian, Eskimo, Hispanic

Lowercase: black, white, mulatto.

▶ 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.

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

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

▶ Usually spell out titles with names used in direct quotes with the exception of Dr., Gov., Rep., Sen., Lt. Gov., Mr., Mrs., Miss and Ms.

▶ It's *Professor*, never Prof.

▶ 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.**

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo or *Art Acevedo, Houston's police chief.* *But: Sen. Patrick Leahy, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee.* *Not: Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy.*

▶ 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 title if it's important to the story. On second reference, use only the last name with no title.

Dr. Maria Vasquez testified before the board. ... The doctor agreed. Vasquez agreed. She agreed.

- Use the title and first and family names on first reference: President Donald J. Trump, not just President Trump

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

6: CITIES, STATES, DIRECTIONS, ADDRESSES

▶ **AP style says** all states are spelled out in the body of the text, but some publications have their own style on state abbreviations.

▶ Never –**NEVER** -- use U.S. Postal Service abbreviations: OH, AL, etc.

▶ Big and well-known cities usually don't take the state with their name. Check your AP stylebook.

- The convention is going to be in Boston.
- The mayor of Seattle was voted to run the committee.
- *BUT:* The mayor of Portland, Maine, will run the committee.
- Portland, Oregon, is considered a hipster city.

▶ Think about your readership when referring to locations. Because we're in Texas, we usually don't use the state name when talking about smaller towns and cities. It's better to give readers a geographical clue.

- The robbery took place in Frisco, a Dallas suburb.

But if your readers are in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, you wouldn't need any description.

- ▶ Use a semicolon to set off a series within a series, like a list of states. In this case, use the semicolon before the conjunction.
 - He had lived in Stillwater, Oklahoma; Port Washington, New York; and Mayberry, North Carolina.
- ▶ Abbreviate avenue (*Ave.*), boulevard (*Bld.*) and street (*St.*) when a complete address is given. Memory device: those starting with BAS may be abbreviated. BUT: Never abbreviate Road, Drive, Terrace or others.
 - The fire destroyed the house at 320 N. Guadalupe St.
 - The meeting took place at 6 Mockingbird Lane.
- ▶ Without a complete address, spell it out.
 - The fire destroyed a house on North Guadalupe Street.
- ▶ Highways: refer to highways identified by number in the following ways: *Interstate Highway 35*, *Interstate 35*. On second reference only for Interstate: *I-35*. *U.S. Highway 290*, *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.*

7. CULTURAL WORKS AND TITLES

As a rule of thumb, nothing in AP style is italicized.

- ▶ Publications: Do not underline or use quotation marks or italicize. Capitalize the publication's proper name, including the word “the” if that's part of it:
 - He sued The Daily Texan and The Huffington Post.
 - She was quoted in the Austin American-Statesman.
- ▶ Magazines: Lowercase the word magazine if it is not part of the formal title. Don't italicize or use quotation marks: She was quoted in Vogue magazine.
- ▶ 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: She still reads Poor Richard's Almanac.
- ▶ The Bible is the religious one. Lowercase bible if you mean a reference in a nonreligious sense: Vogue magazine is her bible.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ 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: Render name as company does, without quote marks or italics: Windows, iOS, iPhone, Listserv.

8: SPECIFIC WORDS/SPELLINGS/ PHRASES

▶ People are boys and girls until age 18. “Ladies” and “gentlemen” generally are terms designating behavior and are avoided in non-quoted text. Use “women” and “men.”

▶ In news obituaries, people die. They don't “pass away,” “depart this earth,” etc.

▶ Phrases to avoid:

- Off of ... WEAK: It bounced off of the wall. BETTER: It bounced off the wall.
- Freeze up
- Thaw out
- Was able to – unless you need emphasis, use past tense of the verb.

CHECK THE SPELLING:

adviser (contrary to the university spelling, it's not advisor)

all right (not alright)

ax (not axe)

afterward (not afterwards)

forward (not forwards)

backward (not backwards)

toward (not towards)

likable (not likeable)

email (no hyphen)

goodbye (no hyphen)

vice president (no hyphen)

internet (lowercase)

web (lowercase)

teen, teenager (n), teenage (adj). No hyphen. Don't use teen-aged.

gray (not grey)

doughnut (not donut)

T-shirt

theater (unless part of the proper name is *Theatre*).

underway (in all uses)

voicemail (one word)