

# AP STYLE HIGHLIGHTS

## Topic 1: Abbreviations

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

- *Names such as Robert (never **Robt.**) or Charles (never **Chas.**)*

- *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 OR GO TO YOUR STYLEBOOK.**

## 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*.

- ▶ Lowercase generic names of academic departments except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: *the English department, the history department*.

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

*Arab, Caucasian, Eskimo, Hispanic, African American (note NO hyphen).*

*Lowercase: black, white.*

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

- ▶ Do NOT capitalize seasons of the year or years in school (*freshman, sophomore, etc.*)

## Topic 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 exceptions to this rule are:
  - *Addresses: 6 Maple St.*
  - *Ages for people, pets, and inanimate objects: 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 %*
  - *Proportions: 2 parts water.*
  - *Speed: 7 mph.*
  - *Temperatures: 8 degrees. Use numerals for all except zero. Use the word to write minus 5 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**.  
*Yes: Aug. 2, Sept 3, Oct. 4.*  
*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.  
*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 (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. **Two exceptions – years and letter/number combinations.** *1492 was the year the Europeans discovered the Americas. 3D movies are increasingly popular.* 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.

#### Topic 4: Titles

- ▶ It's *professor*, lowercase, and never *abbreviated*: *We listened to professor Ann Garza*.
- ▶ 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*.
- ▶ 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. *Ladies* and *gentlemen* generally are terms designating behavior. 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.

#### Topic 5: Addresses/ Directions

- ▶ Abbreviate avenue (*Ave.*), boulevard (*Bldv.*) 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*.

- ▶ 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* 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.*

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

## Topic 7: 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 (**italics are used here only to conform with other examples**).

- ▶ 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?*

- ▶ Compositions: Capitalize the principal words and put quote marks around the titles of movies, books, operas, plays, poems, songs, television programs, podcasts, video and computer games, 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.

- ▶ The Bible is the religious one. 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: Render name as company does, without quote marks or italics: Windows, iOS, iPhone, Listserv, Facebook, Slack.

## Topic 8: Punctuation

- ▶ Don't use a comma before a conjunction in a series. Check the comma section in the "A Guide to Punctuation" in The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.

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

- ▶ Set off a person's age with commas.

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

- ▶ 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 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.*

- ▶ 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*.

## 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 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.*

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 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.*

► 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: Government and politics

► **Adopt, approve, enact, pass:** Amendments, ordinances, resolutions and rules are adopted or approved. Bills are passed. Laws are enacted.

*The City Council adopted an amendment to its charter.*

*The Senate passed the jobs bill.*

► **Constitution:** Capitalize references to the *U.S. Constitution* with or without the “U.S.” modifier. For constitutions of nations or other states, capitalize only with the full proper name. For organizations, it should always be lowercase.

*The French Constitution; the Texas Constitution; the state’s constitution; the club’s constitution.*

► **Congressional and legislative districts:** Use figures and capitalize district. Lowercase district when it stands alone.

*He is the representative from District 5. She lives in the 17th Congressional District. He returned to his district during the recess.*

► **Legislative titles:** With full names, use Rep., Reps., Sen., Sens. Spell out in other uses. For other titles, such as assemblyman, capitalize with a name but never abbreviate. Add “U.S.” or “state” before a title if needed to avoid confusion.

*Texas Sen. Kirk Watson, Sens. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn; the senators are meeting today; House Speaker Nancy Pelosi; the House speaker.*

Include the party affiliation and area they represent, either directly after their name or elsewhere in a more narrative format if that helps the flow of the story.

*Rep. Vikki Goodwin, D-Austin, was elected to the Legislature this year.*

*He said he was excited to meet Sen. Kirk Watson, a Democrat who represents Austin in the Texas Legislature, ...*

► Capitalize: **U.S. Capitol** and the **Capitol** when referring to the buildings in Washington or to state capitols. **U.S. Congress** and **Congress** when referring to the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Also: **Bill of Rights, First Amendment.**

► Capitalize **city, county, state, federal, city hall, courthouse, legislature, assembly, etc.**, when part of a formal name: *Austin City Hall, Texas Legislature, the federal government.*

► Do NOT capitalize: *first lady, administration, presidential, first family, constitutional.*

► **Political parties and philosophies:** Capitalize the name of the party and the word “party” if it’s part of the organization’s proper name; lowercase “party” on its own. Capitalize words like Communist, Democrat, Socialist when referring to a specific party or its members; lowercase when referring to a political philosophy.

*The Communist said that socialism is not the answer. The Republican accused the president of being a fascist.*

The tea party is a populist movement that opposes the Washington political establishment. Adherents are tea partyers. Formally named groups in the movement are capitalized: Tea Party Express.

► **Vote totals:**

If it's less than 10, spell it out:

*She won by eight votes. She received 11 more votes than her opponent.*

If the numbers are three digits or fewer, use a hyphen in between, and be sure to have the larger number first (and no commas are needed before the numbers):

*She defeated her opponent 637-443. Her opponent lost 637-443.*

If the numbers are more than three digits, use "to" rather than a hyphen, for ease of reading:

*He won the race 3,922,768 to 3,748,124.*

**But remember: Only use such large, specific numbers when necessary.**

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.

This version was updated April 2019.