

## Guide to AP Style

### What is AP Style?

Commonly accepted journalistic standards for usage, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Keep writing style easy to read, concise and free of bias.  
Standard style guide for most U.S. newspapers, magazines and public relations firms.

### Why AP Style?

1. Accurate
2. Clear
3. Tight
4. Neutral (non-offensive)

### Numbers

- Spell out:
  - Whole numbers below 10
  - Numerals that start a sentence.
  - Example: *Twenty-seven detainees were released yesterday.*
  - For large numbers use hyphen to connect word ending in y to another word:
    - Example: *twenty-one or seventy-six thousand*
- Use figures:
  - For 10 and above.
  - For all ages and percentages (even less than 10).

## **PLACES: Addresses**

- Abbreviate words street, avenue and boulevard only after numbered address.
- Never abbreviate drive, highway, place, etc.
- Abbreviate compass directions in numbered address.

Example: *50 S. Court St.,  
South Court Street*

## **PLACES: States**

- Spell out names of states unless preceded by a city, county or military base name.
- Spell out Alaska & Hawaii and states with five or fewer letters.
- For second references, abbreviate all state names.

Examples: *I lived in Oklahoma.*  
*I lived in Tulsa, Okla.*  
*I lived in Iowa.*  
*I lived in Council Bluffs, Iowa.*

## **TIME: Days vs. dates?**

- Always use numerals without *st*, *nd*, *rd* or *th* in dates.
- Avoid using yesterday, today and tomorrow
- story publication could be delayed
- When writing about events use months and dates
- Example: "*April 30*" and "*June 5*."
- When referring to a month, day and year, set off year with commas.

Example: *Aug. 20, 1964, was the day they had all been waiting for.*

## **TIME: Months**

- Never abbreviate months not immediately precede a date
- Abbreviate only if month's name is six letters or longer

Example: *We got married in September last year.*  
*They were married Aug. 6 last year and divorced March 5.*

## **TIME: Years**

- Add an "s" to first year in the decade.
- Years are never spelled out.

Even at beginning of sentence use figure.

Example: *In the 1960s, I did a lot of things I don't remember.*  
*1968 was a good year, I'm told.*

## **TIME: a.m. vs. p.m.**

- Recognize "8 p.m. tonight" is redundant. Write *8 p.m. Monday.*
- Use figures except for noon and midnight
- Write time of day like this: *2:30 a.m.* or *8:45 p.m.*

## **TITLES: Compositions**

- Capitalize first and last word of title.
- Capitalize all words four letters or longer.
- Do not capitalize articles "a," "an" and "the" OR conjunctions or prepositions, unless four letters or longer.
- Capitalize *the* in title if that is the way publication prefers to be known.

Examples: *The Elements of Style*  
*Gone With the Wind*  
*The Angler*

## **TITLES: People**

- Capitalize formal titles before a name
- do not separate title from name by a comma.
- Titles after a name or standing alone are **ALMOST NEVER** capitalized (*exceptions for nobility—see AP Stylebook*)

Examples: *I saw President Obama.*

*He met Prince Charles.*

*Dr. Mojock, LSCC president, attended the meeting.*

## **TITLES: Places**

- General compass directions should be lowercase
- Example: *The warm front is moving east.*
- Capitalize names of U.S. regions
- Example: *The Northeast depends on the Midwest for its food supply.*

### **NOTE:**

- Best reference for correct spelling/punctuation of place names: "U.S. Postal Service Directory of Post Offices."
- Best reference for foreign geographic names: "Webster's New World College Dictionary."

## **TITLES: Ethnic Groups**

- Preferred usage for African Americans is "black." It is not capitalized.
- Preferred usage for Caucasians is "white," also not capitalized.
- Preferred usage for Asian people is "Asian," capitalized.
- "American Indian," capitalized with no hyphen, is preferred over "Native American."

## A Guide to Punctuation

### Comma (,)

- Do not put a comma before conjunction in a simple series.
- Example: *John, Paul, George and Ringo; red, white and blue.*
- Use a comma to set off a person's hometown and age.
- Example: *Jane Doe, Framingham, was absent.*
- *Joe Blow, 34, was arrested yesterday.*
- Place a comma before and after the following:
- A year, if it follows a month and date.
- Example: *I was born on Nov. 6, 1958, in Madison, Wis.*
- A state, if it follows a city or county name.
- Example: *I was born in Madison, Wis., on Nov. 6, 1958.*
- An appositive (a word or phrase that says same thing as a word or phrase next to it)

Example: *I saw my boss, John Smith, in the hall.* (My boss and John Smith are identical.)

### Colon (:)

- Capitalize first word after colon only if it is a proper noun or start of a complete sentence:
- Example: *He promised this: The company will make good all the losses.*
- *But: There were three considerations: expense, time and feasibility.*
- Colons go outside quotation marks unless part of quoted material.
- Hyphen (-)
- Use a hyphen for compound adjectives before the noun:
- Example: *well-known actor, full-time job, 20-year sentence*
- Do not use when compound modifier occurs after verb:

Example: *The actor was well known. Her job became full time. He was sentenced to 20 years.*

## Period (.)

- Use a single space after period at end of sentence.
- Do not put space between initials:

*C.S. Lewis; G.K. Chesterton*

## “Quotations” in the news

- Quote marks indicate exact wording.
- They tell reader, "This is exactly what was said."
- Quote marks always appear outside punctuation.
- When a full-sentence quotation is introduced or followed by attribution, place a comma between them.
- Quotations that are questions only need a question mark.

Example: *"Did he really say that?" he asked.*

- In dialogue, each person's words are placed in a separate paragraph with quotation marks.
- Begin a new paragraph with each speaker
- Use single marks for quotes within quotes:

Example: *She said, "He told me, 'I love you.'"*

If a quote is more than 2 sentences use a colon after attribution.

Examples:

*I said: "Isn't this great. . . It's the state fair."*

*"What's going on?" he asked.*

*He said he felt "sicker than a dead frog " after he drank too much tequila.*

## **Spellings to NOTE**

- accommodate (two c's, two m's)
- adviser (AP likes an "e" in it)
- afterward (no "s" at the end)
- amid (has no "st" at the end)
- among (has no "st" at the end)
- calendar
- canceled, cancellation
- embarrass (two "r's" and two "s's")
- harass (only one "r.")
- homicide (not homocide)
- judgment (there is no "judge" in judgment)
- knowledge
- livable
- privilege (no "d")
- sheriff

## **Activity: AP Style Check**

- a vs. an
- affect vs. effect
- burglary vs. larceny
- robbery vs. theft
- counsel vs. council
- principal vs. principle
- lay vs. lie
- Scots vs. scotch
- Marshall vs. marshal

