

Associated Press: Style Guide

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Associated Press style, or AP style, is a grammar usage and style guide developed specifically for journalists and journalistic writing. Its focus is on neat, concise writing that takes advantage of the smaller spaces journalists are typically writing for, and offers consistency across publications.

This handout contains an overview of some of the most common AP rules. The complete APA style guide can be accessed online by students for free at: http://www.apstylebook.com/fgcu_edu/

Grammar and Punctuation

The Serial Comma/Oxford Commas

- The serial comma (also known as the Oxford comma) is a comma that appears before “and” in a list. Omit the serial comma unless the sentence would be unclear without it

Numbers

- As a rule of thumb, spell out whole numbers below 10 and use numerals thereafter
- Spell out numbers at the beginning of sentences, except for calendar dates
- Spell out numbers in casual expressions (e.g. “A thousand times no.”)

Dimensions

- Use numerals for all numbers that indicate dimensions, such as height, length, and speed, even for numbers less than 10

Ages

- Always use figures, even for numbers less than 10
- Hyphenate when age substitutes or modifies a noun (“The 5-year-old boy,” “The 90-year-old.”)

Ordinals

- For ordinal numbers, or numbers that indicate order, spell out “first” through “ninth.” Use figures starting with 10th

Percent

- Write out the word “percent”
- Use numerals for percentages, replaces fractions with decimals when needed

Titles

- In general, only capitalize titles when used before a person’s name.
- Always spell out titles the following titles when they appear before a name: Doctor, Governor, Lieutenant, Representative, Senator.
- Always use the abbreviations for the following titles when they appear before a name: Dr., Gov., Lt., Rep., Sen.

Titles of Works

- Put quotation marks around the titles of books, movies, plays, etc. instead of italics.

Academic Degrees

- The phrases bachelor’s degree and master’s degree, when not referencing a specific degree, are written as they are here. No capitalization and with apostrophes.
- When stating a specific degree, use caps and omit apostrophes: Master of Education.
- There is no apostrophe in “associate degree.”

Academic Departments

- Only use capitalization for proper nouns and adjectives, and when “department” is part of the official or formal name: Florida Gulf Coast University Department of Language and Literature
- When referring to a type of department in general, or making an informal reference to the department, do not capitalize: the department of language and literature, the history department

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Locations

State Names

- Spell out state names when used in a headline, or when in mentioned in text without also listing a city
 - The following states are never abbreviated within the text: Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah
- Abbreviate state names when used with a city or town, in lists, in editor's notes, and in credit lines
- Distinguish New York state from New York City, and Washington state from the District of Columbia

Addresses

- Use abbreviations with numbered addresses only: 12st St., Second Ave.; otherwise, spell it out: Main Street, FGCU Boulevard
 - Spell out "first" through "ninth," then use figures starting with 10th
 - The following are never abbreviated within the text: alley, drive, road, and terrace.
- Use figures for address numbers: 10501 FGCU Boulevard, 123 1st St.

Directions and Regions

- When writing cardinal directions (north, southeast, ect.), you capitalize when you are:
 - Referring to the proper name of a nation, or a region of a nation that is politically separate: Northern Ireland, South Korea
 - Referring to a region: "She was from the Midwest," "She is a Northerner"
 - Forming a proper name by combining the direction with a common word: the West Coast, the North Pole
 - Referring to a section of a state or city that is widely known by the directional name: Southern California, West Texas
 - When in doubt about this rule, use lowercase
- When writing cardinal directions, you use lowercase when you are:
 - Referring specifically to the compass direction: He walked south, the tornado is blowing in from the northeast
 - Designating a section of a nation, state, or city that is not politically separated, or when the direction is not part of the proper name: northern Canada, southern United States

Time

- Always use numerals when referencing specific times
- Spell out "noon" and "midnight" for 12p.m. and 12a.m.
- Separate hours and minutes using a colon; when the minutes are :00, they should be left off and only the hour written
- a.m. and p.m. are preferred designations for hours: 12:43p.m., 3a.m.

Dates

- Always use numerals
- Omit "st," "nd," "rd," and "th"

Directions and Regions

- Always capitalize the names of months
- Only abbreviate the names of months when used with a specific date: Jan 29, 1991, Sept 1, 2010
- Spell out the names of months when used with only a year: January 1991, September 2010

Directions and Regions

- Use lowercase when referring to the seasons in general terms: "During the spring season..."
- Use capitalization when the season is part of the proper name of something: the Winter Olympics