

April 2021

ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

Refresher guide to AP style

When writing a press release for your district Web page, you are likely more concerned about content than whether you have all your commas in the right place. However, following the Associated Press Stylebook is a good idea for everyone who writes for the public.

AP Style, as it is known, is the go-to guide for journalism and news writing. It helps writers stay consistent and present material to the public in a universal style. And since public relations professionals work so closely with journalists and the media, it makes sense to use the same writing format.

One benefit of following AP style is efficiency. The editors who receive your press releases don't have to spend a lot of time editing for proper grammar and punctuation. News outlets are more likely to use press releases that are print-ready.

Another benefit is that it boosts the professionalism of documents your district produces. People expect communications from their district to have a consistent look and level of competence. Improper grammar and errors in syntax and punctuation can make you look amateurish.

Although the AP Stylebook was published as a guide for journalists, it is commonly used in classrooms and corporate offices as well. The printed version is updated every two years. The online version (www.apstylebook.com) is updated throughout the year. Both sell for under \$30.

Because writing styles evolve with the times, the AP Stylebook does too. The latest edition (55th Edition for 2020-22) contains more than 200 new or revised entries. They include:

- A new entry on **gender-neutral language**: The AP Stylebook advises reconsidering any word or term that has the effect of emphasizing one gender over another — for example, *search* instead of *manhunt*, and use terms such as *chair* or *chairperson* unless the -man or -woman terms are specified by an organization.
- **Climate change** is considered more accurate than global warming: The two terms are often used interchangeably, but the AP Stylebook says climate change is the more accurate scientific term. Global warming is just one aspect of climate change.
- **Homeless** is acceptable as an adjective: While it is acceptable to use homeless to describe people without a fixed residence, the AP Stylebook advises avoiding the collective noun *the homeless*. Instead, use phrases like homeless people, people without housing or people without homes.
- **Pled** is now acceptable. The AP Stylebook now says it no longer has strong feelings about the use of the word pled as past tense of the verb plead. “*Our preference is pleaded. Webster’s New World College Dictionary recognizes both ‘pleaded’ and ‘pled.’*”

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(Over)

The AP Stylebook includes more than 600 pages and includes guides for everything from abbreviations to punctuation to use of numbers and capitalization. Some of the more commonly used (and misused) guides include:

- **Punctuation**

Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in most simple series: *The flag is red, white and blue. He would nominate Tom, Dick, Harry or Jeannette.*

Put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction: *I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast.*

Use a comma before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: *The main points to consider are whether the athletes are skillful enough to compete, whether they have the stamina to endure the training, and whether they have the proper mental attitude.*

- **Abbreviations**

Use only the most commonly recognized abbreviations: The most common, such as NASA, FBI and CIA, can be used on all references. Less well-known, but still common ones, such as OSHA and NATO, can be used after you spell out the full name on the first mention. In most cases, however, the stylebook suggests using a generic reference, such as “the agency” or “the alliance,” for all references after the first.

Use an apostrophe and spell out academic degrees: *She holds a bachelor’s degree.* Use abbreviations for degrees only when you need to include a list of credentials after a name and set them off with commas: *Peter White, LL.D., Ph.D., was the keynote speaker.*

Spell out the names of all states when used alone: *He lives in Montana.* Abbreviate state names of seven or more letters when used with a city name, with commas before and after the abbreviation: *Pittsburgh, Pa., is a great weekend getaway spot for people who live in Youngstown, Ohio.*

Spell out the name of a month when it is used without a specific date: *August is too hot for a visit to Florida.* Abbreviate months with six or more letters if they are used with a specific date such as *Sept. 28.* Always spell out those with five or fewer letters: *May 15.*

Spell out all generic parts of street names (avenue, north, road) when no specific address is given: *The festival will be held on South Charles Street.* When a number is used, abbreviate avenue (Ave.), boulevard (Blvd.), street (St.), and directional parts of street names: *The suspect was identified as Michael Shawn of 1512 N. Mission St.*

In writing news stories, never abbreviate:

- o The days of the week
- o Percent as %
- o Cents as ¢
- o The word “and” unless the symbol & is an official part of a name
- o Christmas as Xmas

- **Capitalization**

Capitalize common nouns such as party, river, and street when they are part of a proper name for a place, person or thing: For example, the *Libertarian Party*, the *Ohio River*. But lowercase these common nouns when they stand alone or in subsequent references: *The party*

did not have a candidate for president. She nearly drowned in the river. Lowercase all plural uses of common nouns: *the Libertarian and Green parties, the Monongahela and Ohio rivers.*
Lowercase directional indicators: The exception is when they refer to specific geographic regions or popularized names for those regions — for example, *the Northeast or the Midwest.*

- **Numbers**

In general, spell out numbers one through nine: Use figures for numbers 10 on up. However, there are many exceptions that always take figures. Most, but not all, involve units of measurement. Common exceptions include:

- **Addresses:** *7 Park Place*
- **Ages, but not for inanimate objects:** *The 4-year-old cat, the four-year-old car*
- **Cents:** *8 cents*
- **Dollars:** *\$3.* Notice that AP style does not include a period and two zeroes when referring to an even dollar figure
- **Dates:** *March 4.* Notice that dates take cardinal numbers, not ordinal numbers (don't use 4th)
- **Dimensions:** *5 foot 2, 5-by-9 cell*
- **Highways:** *Route 7*
- **Millions, billions:** *6 billion people*
- **Percentages:** *1 percent.* Notice that percent is one word.
- **Speed:** *8 mph*
- **Temperatures:** *2 degrees*
- **Times:** *4 p.m.* Notice that AP style does not include a colon and two zeroes when referring to an even hour.
- **Spell out numbers used at the beginning of a sentence:** *Ten thousand people marched on the capital.* Exception: Never spell out years: *1999 was a terrible year for technology companies.*
- **Use commas to set off each group of three digits in numerals higher than 999.** Exception is for years and addresses: *12,650.*
- **Use decimals (up to two places) for amounts in the millions and billions:** Do this if no precise figure is required: *\$3.74 billion.*
- **Add an “s” but no apostrophe to a number to make it plural:** *She kept rolling 7s.* The same rule applies to decades: *the 1980s.* Use an apostrophe on a decade only if cutting off the initial figures: *the '80s.*