

# ASSOCIATED PRESS STYLE CHEAT SHEET

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

- As a general rule, use only 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 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.
- Don’t put unfamiliar abbreviations in parentheses after the first reference (for example, “The American Copy Editors Society (ACES) ...”). Instead, either repeat the full name on subsequent references or use a generic reference, such as the society.
- AP style uses punctuation in academic degree abbreviations. Examples:
  - B.A., B.S., Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science
  - M.A., M.S., Master of Arts, Master of Science
  - Ph.D. Doctor of Education, Doctor of Philosophy
- Do not add the word "degree" after an abbreviation of the degree or after the full name of the degree.
  - Wrong: She'll receive her Ph.D. degree this fall
  - Right: She'll receive her Ph.D. this fall
- Abbreviate junior or senior directly after a name, with no comma to set it off: Justin Wilson Jr.
- Spell out the names of all states when used alone and in body text. This is a recent change to AP Style.
- 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: Sept. 28. Always spell out those with five or fewer letters: May 15.
- Spell out titles used alone: “She was the first female senator from her state.”
- 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, **don’t abbreviate**:
  - The days of the week
  - Percent as %
  - Cents as ¢
  - And as & (unless it is an official part of a name)
  - Christmas as Xmas

## Capitalization

The AP Stylebook uses what’s known as downstyle; that is, words are lowercased unless a rule says to capitalize them.

- For **AP title case**, capitalize any prepositions/articles of more than three letters. In addition, capitalize “To” when it is part of an infinitive verb (but not when it’s a preposition). For example:
  - o The Way To Learn With Emeritus
  - o The Way to the Beach
  - o Use the [Title Case Converter](#) to confirm the AP approach to capitalization.
- Capitalize common nouns such as party, river and street when they are part of a proper name for place, person or thing: 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.

- Capitalize Bible, without quotation marks, when referring to the Scriptures in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Capitalize also related terms such as the Gospels (referring to the first four books of the New Testament), Gospel of St. Mark, the Scriptures, the Holy Scriptures.
  - Lowercase biblical in all uses.
  - Lowercase bible as a nonreligious term: My dictionary is my bible.
  - Do not abbreviate individual books of the Bible.
- Lowercase the names of the seasons unless they are used in a proper name: the Summer Olympics.
- Lowercase the word room except when used with the number of the room or when part of the name of a specially designated room: Room 315, the Lincoln Room.
- Lowercase directional indicators except when they refer to specific geographic regions or popularized names for those regions: the Northeast; the Midwest.
- Academic titles preceding a personal name are uppercased. The title is lowercased when it stands alone or follows a personal name. This includes professor, assistant professor, and associate professor. Examples:
  - Right: President Niels-Erik Andreasen; Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University; the president
  - Right: Meredith Jones Gray, chair of the Department of English

## Numbers

The AP Stylebook entry for numerals is deceptively short. A close look reveals that there are plenty of rules hiding among the many cross-references. The most common are:

- In general, spell out numbers one through nine and use figures for numbers 10 on up. There are many exceptions that always take figures, however. 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 (except for years and addresses): 12,650.
  - Use decimals (up to two places) for amounts in the millions and billions that do not require a precise figure: \$3.74 billion.

- o 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

### Punctuation and Miscellaneous

For the most part, AP style follows the same rules of punctuation as you were taught in grade school.

There are some important exceptions, however:

- In general, **no serial comma usage**. In this regard, do not use a comma before a conjunction in a simple series: “The dinner choices were chicken, cod or beef.” However, use a serial comma if necessary for clarity: “The menu offered a choice of bacon and eggs, pancakes, or waffles.”
- Use a semicolon to clarify a series that includes a number of commas. Include a semicolon before the conjunction: Parts for the carrier are made in Tampa, Florida; Austin, Texas; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- Use a parenthetical **spaced em dash**
- **No use** of the en dash. Instead, use a hyphen for number ranges (e.g. This program has 3-5 videos).

### Other Common Style Rules

- Time should be expressed as a figure followed by a.m. or p.m.: 8:33 p.m. You do not have to add other words (night, morning, and so on) to distinguish between day and night. Use noon or midnight rather than 12 p.m. or 12 a.m.
- Use hyphens to link all the words in a compound adjective: “The five-volume report called for cleaning up the area over a 10-year period.” Do not use a hyphen if the construction includes very or an adverb ending in -ly: a very big project, barely legal procedures.
- To form a plural of a single letter, use s and an apostrophe: “All the B’s lined up to the right.” To form a plural of multiple letters, add s with no apostrophe: “She mastered her ABCs in little time.”
- To form the plural of words made out of a group of letters, add the letter s: CDs, ABCs, TVs.
- Titles of books, movies, recordings, television shows and similar works are set off in quotation marks, with all principal words capitalized: “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” “Letters from Iwo Jima,” “Memory Almost Full,” “Grey’s Anatomy.”

### Technological Terms

Here are the correct spelling and capitalization rules for some common technological terms:

- BlackBerry, BlackBerrys
- download
- eBay Inc (use EBay Inc. when the word begins a sentence)
- e-book
- e-book reader
- e-reader
- email
- cellphone
- Facebook
- Google, Googling, Googled
- hashtag
- IM (IMed, IMing; for first reference, use instant messenger)
- Internet (after first reference, the Net)
- iPad, iPhone, iPod (use iPad, iPhone, or iPod when the word begins a

sentence)

- LinkedIn
- social media
- smartphone
- the Net
- Twitter, tweet, tweeted, retweet
- World Wide Web, website, Web page
- webmaster
- YouTube