

Journalism 101
AP STYLE
Top 10 List

1. Use a person's full name and title the first time you mention him or her in an article. For example, write *Don Swanson, professor of communication*, not *Prof. Swanson*. Once people have been fully identified, refer to them by last name only. There are exceptions, so always check the AP stylebook.

WHY LEARN AP STYLE?

You must know Associated Press style if you intend to get a job in the media or public relations.

Strictly following a particular usage style provides consistency, accuracy and clarity in grammar, punctuation and other language issues.

While some publications, such as The New York Times, have their own unique style, the vast majority of newspapers, magazines and press releases follow the rules of the AP Stylebook. AP style aims to be totally accurate, clear to anyone with a high school education and inoffensive (curse words are generally avoided, for example) -- all while being as succinct as possible. Note that AP style differs significantly from style guides typically used in English classes, such as the APA and Oxford style guides.

Read some of your AP

2. Spell out abbreviations or acronyms on first reference. For example, use *Passaic County Community College* the first time you refer to the college in a story. You may use *PCCC* on any references made after that. Another example would be to use *DAR* only after you have spelled out *Daughters of the American Revolution* on first reference.

3. Abbreviate months when used with days, and use numerals (1, 2, 3, etc.) not ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, etc.). Exceptions are March, April, May, June and July -- write them out, don't abbreviate. For example, write *Sept. 2, 2008*, not *September 2nd, 2008*. But, when using only the month and year, spell out the month.

4. Generally, spell out the numbers zero through nine and use numerals for 10 and higher. Note, however, that numbers used at the beginning of a sentence are spelled out. Example: *Five hundred twenty-four students attended.* It is better, however, to rewrite the sentence so that it doesn't begin with a number. Example: *Attending the event were 524 students from local colleges.* Years are one of the exceptions. For example: *2008 was a bad year for investors.*

5. But use numerals even for ages younger than 10. This is another exception to the aforementioned number rule. When used like an adjective, say *X-year-old*, including the hyphens. Otherwise, don't use the hyphens. For example: *the 5-year-old girl kicked her brother, who is 8 years old.*

6. Spell out the word "percent" but use numerals for the actual number. Examples: *Participation increased 5 percent. Nearly 28 percent of all students don't like algebra.* Exception: use may use the % sign in headlines.

7. To indicate time, use figures and lowercase letters (9 a.m., 6 p.m.). Put a space between the figure and the letters. Exceptions are *noon* and *midnight*. Do not say *12 noon* or *12 midnight* -- it's redundant.

Stylebook every day. Keep it handy and refer to it often. You probably won't be able to memorize everything inside the book, but you should at least remember common style issues (such as the aforementioned rules) and be familiar enough with the book that you can look up other issues quickly when you're writing on deadline.

-Professor Grabowski

8. Capitalize formal titles used before a name. For example, write *Secretary of State Hillary Clinton*. Very long titles may be shortened or summarized unless they are essential to the story, but the shortened form should not be capitalized (for example, you may use *spokesperson* instead of *Vice President for Public Affairs and Communications*). Use lowercase when formal titles follow a name (e.g., *Hillary Clinton, secretary of state*). General titles, such as *astronaut* Neil Armstrong and *actor* Matt Damon, are lowercase.

9. Capitalize formal titles and names of people, places or things to set them apart from a general group. These include proper nouns such as *Mike*, *Canada*, *Hudson River*, and *St. John's Church*. But use lowercase for common nouns (i.e. nouns not coupled with a proper name), such as *the river* or *the church*. Also, put a word in lowercase when you have more than one proper noun sharing the word. Example: *Ocean and Monmouth counties*. Capitalize the first word in a sentence. Refer to the dictionary or AP Stylebook, if needed. When in doubt, use lowercase.

10. Do not use courtesy titles such as *Mr.*, *Miss*, *Mrs.*, or *Ms.*, except in direct quotes or where needed to distinguish between people of the same name. Using courtesy titles may be polite. And the New York Times uses them in its articles. But it is not AP style.