

AP STYLE TIP SHEET: The Basics

Your stylebook is your friend. Start learning appropriate style immediately. You'll need this knowledge throughout your career. Here are basic usages in many common stories and even your cover letter for jobs:

PUNCTUATION:

- Commas and periods ALWAYS go INSIDE quotation marks. **Example:** “That’s right,” Jones said. “I did it right.”
- For titles of movies, books, magazines, TV shows and newspapers, do NOT use italics.
- Titles of movies, books and TV shows go in quotation marks. **Examples:** Did you see “Aliens”? Truman Capote wrote “In Cold Blood.” He is often on “Meet the Press” and the “Today” show.
- Names of magazines and newspapers get no special punctuation. **Examples:** He reads The Washington Post and Fast Company magazine. (Note: if “the” is part of the proper name, it MUST be capitalized: like The Post-Standard and The Washington Post and The New York Times. If magazine is NOT part of the proper name, do not capitalize. This means you must CHECK to find out the proper name!)

STATES:

- Abbreviate state names when listed after a city. **Example:** Hampton, Va.
See the stylebook for specific abbreviations. These aren't always the same abbreviations the mail carrier uses. Memorize the AP abbreviations.

- Don't abbreviate if there isn't a city name before the state.

Example: No city name: He moved from Virginia to Maryland. With a city name: He moved from Hampton, Va., to College Park, Md. (Note that the state abbreviation is set off by commas before and after it.)

- States with five or fewer letters aren't abbreviated: Ohio, Texas, Maine, Iowa + Hawaii

TITLES:

- In general, formal titles are capitalized only when used directly before an individual's name. **Examples:** President Smith / the president.
- Capitalize titles before names: General Manager for Customer Services Jane Doe writes well.
- Do NOT capitalize titles after names: Jane Doe, general manager for customer services, writes well. (Note that the title is set off by commas before and after it.)
- When using a title before a name in a quotation, spell out these titles: Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen., Gen., the Rev. **Example:** “Governor Jones vowed to cut the budget,” Jones said.
- But don’t spell out *doctor* in a quotation when it’s used in front of a name. Keep the abbreviation, even in a quotation: **Example:** “Dr. Smith should be fired,” Latimer said.

ADDRESSES:

- Use the abbreviations Ave., Blvd. and St. only with a numbered address. **Examples:** with a specific numbered address: 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. Without a specific number: Pennsylvania Avenue.
- When using more than one street name, lowercase and spell out the words avenue and street: **Example:** He works at the corner of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues.
- Always use figures for an address number: 215 University Place.
- For street names that are numbers, spell out and capitalize First through Ninth. **Example:** He lives on Third Avenue.
- With street names, use figures with two letters for 10 and above. **Example:** 10th and 22nd Street.
- With numbered street addresses, abbreviate compass points used to indicate directional ends of a street: **Example:** His address is 222 E. 42nd St.
- If there's no numbered address, then spell out the compass point. **Example:** That's on West 43rd Street.
- On first reference, spell out Interstate – such as Interstate 81. On second reference, 1-81 is acceptable.

NUMERALS:

- In general, spell out the numbers zero through nine, and use numerals for 10 or larger. **Example:** one, two, three, 10, 11, 12.
- Always use figures for ages. **Examples:** The 5-year-old boy. She is 2 years old. The woman is in her 30s.
- If you must begin a sentence with a number, spell it out. The exception to this is for calendar years, such as 2011. **Examples:** Forty thousand people cheered. 2010 was a year to celebrate.
- Spell out fractions less than one, such as two-thirds.
- For percents, use numbers and do not use the % symbol. **Example:** 49 percent.

TIMES:

- Use figures except for noon and midnight. Do not use the zeroes. **Examples:** 10 a.m. / noon/ but NOT 10:00 a.m.
- Use a colon to separate hours from minutes. 2:30 p.m.
- Avoid redundancies, such as 9 a.m. this morning (the a.m. means morning).

DATES:

- For days of the week, use Monday, Tuesday, etc., instead of yesterday or tomorrow.

- For online stories that are evergreen, use the date as well. **Example:** The primary was Tuesday, Sept. 14.
- For months and a specific date, abbreviate the month. **Example:** Jan. 25.
- If you include the year with a specific date, set off the year with commas: Example: Jan. 25, 1949, is her birthday.
- Without a specific date, spell out the month. **Example:** He lost his job in January. He went to Greece in December 2010.

PARTY AFFILIATION:

- Names of political parties are ALWAYS capitalized: Republican / Democrat/ Green Party – Little “d” democrat is different from Big “D” Democrat.
- Pay special attention to “independent” – it can mean not affiliated with any political party and would not be capitalized.
- Or it can mean a member of the Independence Party.
- For clarity, be sure to ask voters what they mean by “independent” – and describe them as “not affiliated with a political party” or “member of the Independence Party.”
- Standard way of expressing party affiliation: Sen. Charles Jones, D-N.Y., said
- Also acceptable: Republican Sen. John Smith of Arizona said ...

This list, of course, is not complete. When you come across something not on the list, LOOK IT UP!