MEMORIZE THESE RULES.

Below are style guidelines that you should know without having to refer to a stylebook. They’re taken from the Missourian and AP stylebooks and from dictionary listings. If you learn them, your life will be easier and your editors happier.

PEOPLE

- Capitalize formal titles when they appear before names, and lowercase titles when they follow a name or stand alone (former President Vicente Fox; President Donald Trump; Bill Clinton, former president).
- Lowercase occupational or descriptive titles before or after a name. Mere job descriptions (such as astronaut, announcer or teacher) are not capitalized before or after a name (reporter Casey Law; Casey Law, a reporter). If you are not sure whether a title is a formal, official title or merely a job description, put the title after the name and lowercase it.
- Refer to adults in news reports by first name and family name the first time they appear in a story (Jane Smith) and by family name only on later references (Smith).
- Children 15 or younger are usually referred to by both names (first and family) on first reference and first name only on later references. Children in adult situations — common examples are in international sports and serious crimes in which they are charged as adults — are referred to by last name only on later references.
- To avoid confusing two people with the same family name, such as husband and wife or mother and son, use both names (first and family) on later references. A story mentioning Joe Biden and Jill Biden should usually refer to them as Joe Biden and Jill Biden even after they are introduced if there's any chance of confusion. Sometimes a title can be repeated to make the distinction (former Vice President Biden or the former vice president on later references), or the relationship qualifier can be used, such as his mother, her brother. Only rarely, in some feature stories, will you want to refer to adults by their first names on later references.
- Do not use courtesy titles (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., Dr.) in news stories. Most newspapers have eliminated courtesy titles except in obituaries (for the deceased only) and in editorials. Other than in Missourian obituaries and Life Stories, don’t use Dr. before a name. It’s much better to explain what kind of doctor he or she is in context (Casey Law, an orthopedic surgeon).
- Abbreviate military and police titles before names in accordance with the AP Stylebook. Don’t abbreviate titles when they stand alone or follow a name (Gen. Douglas MacArthur; the general).

NUMBERS

- In general, zero through nine are written out, and 10 and above are written as numerals.
- Always use numerals, even if less than 10, with:
  - addresses (3 Hospital Drive)
  - ages (7 years old)
  - dates (March 4)
  - distances (4 miles)
  - heights (5 feet 11 inches)
  - million, billion and trillion (9 million people)
  - money ($5)
  - percentages (8 percent)
  - time (2 p.m.)
  - weights (6 pounds)
- Spell out any number, except a year, that begins a sentence. (Twelve students attended. 1999 was an important year.)
- For most numbers of a million or more, use this form, rounded off to no more than two decimal places: 1.45 million; the $18.1 billion budget. If the exact number is important, write it out: She received 1,253,667 votes, and her opponent received 988,401.
- Many newspapers abbreviate million and billion in headlines (a $3.2M tax hike). We don’t.
- Spell out numbers used as figures of speech. (Thanks a million.)
- Spell out fractions less than 1 when they stand alone (Use one-half cup of flour and two-thirds cup of sugar). Otherwise, write them as mixed fractions (1 1/2 cups of flour) or decimals (1.5 liters of water). Generally, use a 0 to precede a decimal smaller than zero (0.75 kilograms).
- Convert metric measurements to English ones.
- Do not use 1- before any telephone number; 800-888-8888 will suffice. Don’t use parentheses around the area code.

DATELINES, PLACES, ADDRESSES

- Datelines appear at the top of stories and tell what city the story was filed from. The city name is written in capital letters, with the state name or country in upper and lowercase (GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.).
- Not all datelines include a state name. Don’t include a state name, whether in a dateline or in text, for:
  - the cities listed in the AP Stylebook’s datelines entry
  - Missouri cities and towns
- Once a state dateline is used, cities in the story from the same state do not need to be followed by a state name. For example, if a dateline says Topeka, Kansas, and the story

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This is a change from previous AP style rules.

Do not abbreviate such designations as street when they stand alone without a numbered address. Only three of these are abbreviated — street, avenue and boulevard — and they are abbreviated only when they appear with a numbered address. (This is usually referred to as the STAB rule — street, avenue and boulevard.) If the street name has a direction in it, abbreviate the direction only with a numbered address (West Hickory Avenue; 103 W. Hickory Ave.; Southeast Avalon Drive; 2608 S.E. Avalon Drive).

When an address follows a person’s name, either separate them with the word of and no commas or use commas around the address without the word of. (Hank Jones of 678 S. Elm St. was arrested; Hank Jones, 678 S. Elm St., was arrested.)

When mentioning someone’s hometown, do not use commas around the town. (Right: Casey Smith of Columbia ran home. Wrong: Casey Smith, of Columbia, ran home.) But if an age is included, do use commas. (Casey Smith, 36, of Columbia, ran home.)

TIMES, DATES

Use only the day of the week for events within a week of publication. (The summit ended Monday. The negotiators will meet Thursday.)

Use next only if needed for clarity. (The summit ended Monday, and the negotiators will meet again next Monday.) Use cautiously.

Never abbreviate days of the week. Do not include both a day and a date. The exception is Missourian obituary and Life Story style, when we use day, date and year in the sentence that tells when the person died. (She died Tuesday, Aug. 13, 2014.) Don’t continue using this format for other dates in the story.

Do not use yesterday or tomorrow except in direct quotes. Use only days of the week (not today, yesterday or tomorrow) This is a change from previous AP style rules.

Use month and day to refer to events happening a week or more before or after publication. Use cardinal numbers, not ordinal numbers, for dates. (The summit began July 11. The seminar will be held March 3.)

Don’t use the year unless the event is more than a year before or after publication. (He died March 17, 1999. The currency will be introduced Nov. 1, 2023.) The only exception is in the date of death in Life Stories or obituaries. (John Doe died Tuesday, Aug. 13, 2018.)

Do not abbreviate a month unless it has a date (January; January 2012; Jan. 1, 2012). Five months are never abbreviated: March, April, May, June and July.

Names of months and days of the week are capitalized, but seasons are not capitalized (Wednesday, January, spring).

Use the lowercase a.m. and p.m.

Always use figures for time in this form: 8 a.m., 10:30 p.m., 1:45 a.m. Do not leave in the zeroes, as in 8:00 a.m.

For time spans, use this format: 1 to 4 p.m. (not 1-4 p.m.).

Follow time-date-place order. (Martial law was declared at noon Friday in Jesse Hall. Trials of collaborators will begin at 2 p.m. Oct. 14 in Mexico, Missouri.)

There is no such time as 12 p.m. or 12 a.m. It’s noon or midnight.

A FEW MORE TIPS

Use MU, not University of Missouri or Mizzou, in all references to the Columbia campus with the exception of sports stories. Missouri is preferred for sports references to the teams on the Columbia campus, though Mizzou can be used in some instances. Never use University of Missouri-Columbia or UMC. If there would be confusion with another college in the system, then write around it using something to the effect of the Columbia campus.

Avoid exclamation points. Few things are spoken with the emphasis that should be reserved for an exclamation point.

Do not use brackets. Use parentheses. [This is a bracket. Do not use.] (This is a parenthesis. Do use, but sparingly.)

Do not include U.S. before Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force when referring to service members from the United States. It’s not needed because, after all, it’s illegal for a U.S. citizen to serve for another country.

Do not use http:// with any Web addresses. It’s not needed. Also, check every Web address by typing it into a browser without the www. If the site loads, then do not use the www. in the address in print or online.