

AP STYLE PRIMER *for student journalists*

In my 10 years as a journalism educator, publication adviser and judge, I have noticed that the same few AP style mistakes are made again and again. The following list is a compilation of the most common mistakes student journalists make.

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A **abbreviations and acronyms**

BEFORE A NAME: Abbreviate titles when used before a full name: *Dr., Gov., Lt. Gov., Mr., Mrs., Rep., the Rev., Sen.* and certain military designations.

AFTER A NAME: Abbreviate *junior* and *senior* after an individual's name. Abbreviate *company, corporation, incorporated* and *limited* when used after the name of a corporate entity.

WITH DATES AND NUMERALS: Use the abbreviations *A.D., B.C., a.m., p.m., No.* and abbreviate certain months when used with the day of the month.

IN NUMBERED ADDRESSES: Abbreviate *avenue, boulevard* and *street* in numbered addresses.

STATES: The names of certain states and the *United States* are abbreviated in some circumstances.

abortion

Use *anti-abortion* instead of *pro-life* and *abortion rights* instead of *pro-abortion* or *pro-choice*.

addresses

Use the abbreviations *Ave., Blvd.* and *St.* only with numbered addresses.

adviser

Not *advisor*.

al-Quaida

International terrorist organization headed by Osama bin Laden.

a.m., p.m.

Lowercase with periods.

B **because, since**

Use *because* to denote a specific cause-effect relationship. *Since* is acceptable in a casual sense when the first event in a sequence led logically to the second but was not its direct cause.

Bible

Capitalize, without quotation marks. Use the lowercase *biblical* in all uses.

black

Preferred usage for those of the Negroid or black race.

brand names

When they are used, capitalize them. Use brand names only if they are essential to a story.

C **cannot**

One word.

capitalization

Avoid unnecessary capitals.

company names

Consult the company or Standard & Poor's Register of Corporations if in doubt about a formal name. Do not, however, use a comma before Inc. or Ltd.

composition titles

Apply the guidelines listed here to book titles, movie titles, computer game titles, opera titles, play titles, poem titles, song titles, television program titles, and the titles of lectures, speeches and works of art.

GUIDELINES:

Capitalize the principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters.

Capitalize an article—*the, a, an*—or words of fewer than four letters if it is the first or last word in a title.

Put quotation marks around the names of all such works except the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material. In addition to catalogs, this category includes almanacs, dictionaries, encyclopedias, gazetteers, handbooks and similar publications.

Do not use quotation marks around such software titles as WordPerfect or Windows.

Translate a foreign title into English unless a work is known to the American public by its foreign name.

county

Capitalize when an integral part of a proper name: *Dade County, Nassau County, Suffolk County*.

courtesy titles

Refer to both men and women by first and last name. Use the courtesy titles Mr., Miss, Ms. or Mrs. only in direct quotations or other special situations:

When it is necessary to between people who use the same last name.

When a woman specifically requests it.

D **datelines**

Student publications generally do not run datelines. The dateline entry in the AP style manual is, however, important because it lists the U.S. cities that run without the state name. The cities in the United States that do

not require state names following them are:

Atlanta
Baltimore
Boston
Chicago
Cincinnati
Cleveland
Dallas
Denver
Detroit
Honolulu
Houston
Indianapolis
Las Vegas
Los Angeles
Miami
Milwaukee
Minneapolis
New Orleans
New York
Oklahoma City
Philadelphia
Phoenix
Pittsburgh
St. Louis
Salt Lake City
San Antonio
San Diego
San Francisco
Seattle
Washington

days of the week

Capitalize them. Do not abbreviate, except when used in a tabular format.

dollars

Always lowercase. Use figures and the \$ sign in all except casual references or amounts without figures. For amounts of more than \$1 million, use the \$ and numerals up to two decimal places: *\$4.35 million*.

Dr Pepper

No period after *Dr*.

E

e-mail

Use the hyphen.

G

gay

Acceptable as popular synonym for both gay males and females. Avoid references to gay, homosexual or alternative "lifestyle."

H

half-mast, half-staff

On ships and at naval stations ashore, flags are flown at *half-mast*. Elsewhere ashore, flags are flown at *half-staff*.

hang, hanged, hung

One *hangs* a picture, a criminal or oneself. For past tense or the passive,

used *hanged* when referring to executions or suicides, *hung* for other actions.

Hanukkah

Use this spelling.

I

Indians

American Indian is the preferred term for those in the United States.

initials

Use periods and no space when an individual uses initials instead of a first name.

Internet

Capitalize.

J

Jew

Use for men and women. Do not use *Jewess*.

K

Kmart

No hyphen, no space, lowercase *m*.

L

last

Avoid the use of *last* as a synonym for *latest*.

M

magazine names

Capitalize the name but do not put in quotation marks.

months

Capitalize the names of months in all uses. Spell out when using alone or with a year alone. When a month is used with a specific date, abbreviate only:

Jan.
Feb.
Aug.
Sept.
Oct.
Nov.
Dec.

N

names

In general, use last names only on second reference.

national anthem

Lowercase.

numerals

Spell out whole numbers below 10. Use figures for 10 and above.

O

online

One word.

P

president

Capitalize only as a formal title before one or more names.

S

state names

Spell out the names of all U.S. states when they stand alone. Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah are never abbreviated. When used with a specific city, all other states should be abbreviated as follows:

Ala.
Ariz.
Ark.
Calif.
Colo.
Conn.
Del.
Fla.
Ga.
Ill.
Ind.
Kan.
Ky.
La.
Md.
Mass.
Mich.
Minn.
Miss.
Mo.
Mont.
Neb.
Nev.
N.H.
N.J.
N.M.
N.Y.
N.C.
N.D.
Okla.
Ore.
Pa.
R.I.
S.C.
S.D.
Tenn.
Vt.
Va.
Wash.
W.Va.
Wis.
Wyo.

T

telephone numbers

Use figures: *(212) 621-1500*.

T-shirt

Note the capital *T*.

U

United States

Spell out when used as a noun. Use *U.S.* only as an adjective.

PUNCTUATION MARKS

commas

Do not put the comma in front of the conjunction in a simple list.

quotation marks

If a period or a comma comes at the end of quotation marks, it ALWAYS goes inside the quotation marks.