

AP Style

Associated Press (AP) Style is used in journalism and news writing. These guidelines make publications more uniform in writing style. Sometimes specific media publications will have their own versions or additions to the style guide, but AP Style is the standard set of guidelines.

The Associated Press Stylebook is the reference manual for AP Style. A basic working knowledge of AP Style is essential, but the book serves as a useful companion for journalists, writers, editors, and students while they compose their writing. The *Stylebook* is organized like a dictionary, and it contains entries that provide correct spellings, capitalization, and usage with examples. After these entries, there are sections on specific topics in news writing that provide topical entries and guidelines as well as best practices for journalists.

This handout focuses on the punctuation section and commonly used A-Z entries. See the *Stylebook* for more examples, entries, information, and special sections. Associated Press updates the *Stylebook* every couple years and releases new print additions and more frequently updated online versions. Make sure that you are working with a current edition. This handout follows the 56th edition of *The Associated Press Stylebook* for 2022-2024.

Punctuation

This section provides some highlights and special AP rules from the punctuation section. AP Style advises to use common sense with punctuation. If punctuation is not required and does not clarify what is being said, then it should not be there.

Commas

- In a simple series, use commas to separate elements, but do not put a comma before the conjunction/last item in the list. (ex: The muffin recipe required flour, eggs and milk.)
- Include the final comma only if omitting it would make the meaning unclear.
- Include the final comma before the concluding conjunction if another element of the sentence requires a conjunction. (ex: Some classic sandwiches include BLT, tuna salad, grilled chicken, and peanut butter and jelly.)

Punctuation for Quotations

- Use a comma to introduce one sentence direct quotations that remain within a paragraph.
- Use a colon to introduce long quotations within a paragraph and to end all paragraphs that introduce a paragraph of quoted material. Colons go outside of the quotation marks unless they are part of the quotation itself.

Em Dash, En Dash, Hyphen

- AP Style uses em dashes, the long dashes, and refers to them simply as dashes.
- AP Style does not use en dashes, the short dashes.
- Use hyphens whenever ambiguity would result without one.
- Use hyphens for ranges (in place of en dashes in other style guides). There should be no space surrounding a hyphen (ex: Jan. 1-4).

Parentheses

- In general, use parentheses around logos like in datelines; otherwise, sparingly use them.
- If using parentheses, place a period outside the closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a full sentence. If it is a full sentence, include the period inside of the closing parenthesis.

Commonly Used A-Z Entries

This section pulls commonly used entries from *The Associated Press Stylebook*. See the book for all entries and more detailed information and examples.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Use abbreviations and acronyms that readers will easily recognize, and generally avoid using them in headlines (with a few exceptions, such as using *AI* for *artificial intelligence*). Here are some general rules for abbreviations and acronyms:

- Do not follow an organization’s name with an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses or set off by dashes if it would not be recognizable on its own.
- Abbreviate titles when used before a full name (ex: Dr. or Gov.).
- Abbreviate *junior* or *senior* after an individual’s name and abbreviate *company*, *corporation*, *incorporated*, and *limited* when used after a company’s name.
- Abbreviations may be warranted for certain types of writing, such as technical writing.

Datelines

Datelines indicate the location of the news, and they appear at the beginning of stories. The place name should be in all capital letters, followed by the abbreviated state name (see “State Names”) (ex: SAN JOSÉ, Calif.). Datelines are followed by dashes to transition to the story.

Exceptions to this rule are the following domestic cities which stand alone in datelines.

● ATLANTA	● NEW ORLEANS	● LAS VEGAS
● BALTIMORE	● DETROIT	● LOS ANGELES
● BOSTON	● HONOLULU	● MIAMI
● CHICAGO	● HOUSTON	● ST. LOUIS
● CINCINNATI	● INDIANAPOLIS	● SALT LAKE CITY
● CLEVELAND	● NEW YORK	● SAN ANTONIO
● DALLAS	● OKLAHOMA CITY	● SAN DIEGO
● DENVER	● PHILADELPHIA	● SAN FRANCISCO

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MILWAUKEE ● MINNEAPOLIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PHOENIX ● PITTSBURGH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SEATTLE ● WASHINGTON
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There are further rules for datelines, including a list of international locations that stand alone in datelines—such as Amsterdam, London, Paris, and Vienna—which are in the *Stylebook*.

Names

- Use only last names to refer to people on second reference. If two people have the same last name, use both the first and last name on subsequent reference.
- Use the name a person prefers, like a nickname (ex: *Tom* instead of *Thomas*).
- Generally, use the first name of children 15 and younger on subsequent reference, but use their last name for serious or negative stories.

Numerals

- Generally, spell out numbers below 10 and use figures for 10 and higher.
- Use figures for academic course numbers, addresses, ages, planes/ships/spacecrafts, centuries, court decisions and districts, dates/years/decades, decimals/percentages/fractions (with numbers larger than 1), dimensions, distances, highways, mathematical usage, millions/billions/trillions, odds/proportions/ratios, ranks, school grades, sequences, political districts, recipes, speeds, sports scores and standings, temperatures, and times.
- Do not use apostrophes with figures (ex: *the 1980s* not *the 1980's*).
- Spell out numbers for the start of sentences, casual usage, figures of speech, roman numerals, ordinals, and cardinal numbers.

State Names

The names of the 50 states should be spelled out when used in the body of stories but should be abbreviated when used in datelines. There are eight exceptions that are never abbreviated: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah. See the following state abbreviations (and the postal code abbreviations for clarification—but not to be used).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ala. (AL) ● Ariz. (AZ) ● Ark. (AR) ● Calif. (CA) ● Colo. (CO) ● Conn. (CT) ● Del. (DE) ● Fla. (FL) ● Ga. (GA) ● Ill. (IL) ● Ind. (IN) ● Kan. (KS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Md. (MD) ● Mass. (MA) ● Mich. (MI) ● Minn. (MN) ● Miss. (MS) ● Mo. (MO) ● Mont. (MT) ● Neb. (NE) ● Nev. (NV) ● N.H. (NH) ● N.J. (NJ) ● N.M. (NM) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N.D. (ND) ● Okla. (OK) ● Ore. (OR) ● Pa. (PA) ● R.I. (RI) ● S.C. (SC) ● S.D. (SD) ● Tenn. (TN) ● Vt. (VT) ● Va. (VA) ● Wash. (WA) ● W.Va. (WV)
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ky. (KY) ● La. (LA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● N.Y. (NY) ● N.C. (NC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wis. (WI) ● Wyo. (WY)
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Time

- Time element
 - Use the days of the week, not *today* or *tonight*, in news stories.
 - Use *Monday*, *Tuesday*, etc. for days of the week within seven days before or after the current date.
 - Avoid redundancies like *last Tuesday* or *next Tuesday*. The past, present, or future tense used for the verb provides adequate indication of which Tuesday is meant.
- Time of day
 - The exact time of day for events is usually unnecessary in news stories.
 - Include it if it will give a better picture of the scene (ex: earthquake time) or if time is critical in the story (ex: rocket launch time).

Technological Terms

This section provides the correct spelling, capitalization, and hyphenation for common technological terms. Alternatives are provided in parentheses and can be used on second reference. See the full guide for definitions and more information.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● app, platform, service, site ● artificial intelligence (AI in headlines and on second reference in text) ● Bluetooth ● Chromebook ● cryptocurrency (crypto), bitcoin, non-fungible token; NFT ● daylight saving time (Pacific Daylight Time) ● deepfake, deepfake video ● direct message (DM), to direct-message ● disk, disc ● domain name ● earbuds, earphones, headphones, headsets ● e-book ● end user (n.), end-user (adj.) ● face recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HDMI ● HTML, HTTP ● internet ● iPad, iPhone ● machine learning ● Nasdaq composite ● New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) ● PC ● PDF ● phishing ● search engine optimization (SEO) ● smartphones, smartwatches ● social media ● STEM ● touch screen (n.) touch-screen (adj.) ● virtual reality, augmented reality ● Wi-Fi ● wireless ● YouTube
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Activity: AP Style Quiz

Test your knowledge of AP Style concepts from this handout in the following quiz. Correct any errors so that all sentences adhere to AP Style. Sentences may contain multiple errors.

1. Her smoothie contained strawberries, bananas, raspberries, and mangos.
2. The American Red Cross (ARC) has training and certification programs.
3. SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — Today the de Young Museum is unveiling a new exhibit.
4. MANHATTAN, NY — A new sushi restaurant will open next Friday at 10 a.m.
5. They tasted the chef's world famous dishes.
6. On Thursday it was eighty degrees outside.
7. 5 croissants were in the bakery display case.
8. He listens to Youtube videos on his chromebook using his wire-less headphones.

Answer Key for Activity

1. Her smoothie contained strawberries, bananas, raspberries and mangos.
2. The American Red Cross has training and certification programs.
3. SAN FRANCISCO — The de Young Museum unveils a new exhibit on Wednesday.
4. MANHATTAN, N.Y. — A new sushi restaurant will open on Friday.
5. They tasted the chef's world-famous dishes.
6. On Thursday it was 80 degrees outside.
7. Five croissants were in the bakery display case.
8. He listens to YouTube videos on his Chromebook using his wireless headphones.

References

The Associated Press. *The Associated Press Stylebook*. 56th Edition. Basic Books, 2022.

Purdue OWL. *Purdue Online Writing Lab*. 2024,

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/journalism_and_journalistic_writing/ap_style.html