

Style Reminders for Public Relations Writers - I

Based on *Associated Press Stylebook*

Public relations writers must pay particular attention to Associated Press style related to the use of numbers for dates and times and abbreviations for dates as well as the general rules for punctuation. Use these guidelines for news releases; organizations might adopt special style guidelines for their own publications.

1. Numbers for Dates and Currency

General Rule: Spell out whole numbers less than 10, use figures for numbers of 10 or more. Example: During the first four years, 11 freshmen were honored.

Dates: Use figures for dates: April 2, 1995. Not April 2nd, April second.

Use numerals for all addresses: 2 N. Main St., 33 N. Oak Blvd.

Write: from April 10 to April 20, not from April 10-20.

Write: A.D., B.C., 21st century. Hyphenate an inclusive period of years: 2003-04. (Note only last two digits are used in second year, except: 1999-2000.)

Times: Write: from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., not from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Use a.m. or p.m. (lower case with periods). Not: 1:00 p.m. Hyphenate times spans where appropriate: 10-11 a.m., 11 a.m.-1 p.m., noon-2 p.m. Avoid redundant use of 12 with noon or midnight, and unnecessary words: 2 a.m. *in the morning*. Avoid *last Tuesday* or *next Wednesday*--readers should be able to infer meaning from the use of verbs (past or future tense).

Money: For monetary amounts of a million dollars or more, use the dollar sign and Arabic number, then spell out million, billion or trillion: \$7.6 billion. But write out: \$245,000 (not \$245 thousand, except in broadcast copy).

Avoid unneeded decimals for cents: \$2 (not \$2.00). Include cents when important: \$2.22.

Dimensions: Use Arabic figures to describe all dimensions. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns. He is 5 feet 6 inches tall. The 6-foot-6-inch man, 2 inches, 9 feet by 12 feet, the 9-by-12 rug, 5 inches of snow. Always spell out inches, feet, yards, etc.

2. Abbreviations for Times and Locales

General Rule: Avoid abbreviations in text. Some exceptions:

Months: Abbreviate certain months of the year when used with a specific date: Sept. 19, 2004. But spell out: September 2004.

Abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. But always spell out: March, April, May, June and July.

Streets: Abbreviate avenue, boulevard and street when used with an address: 123 S. Main St., 214 Third Ave. S. Spell out: 100 block of South Main

Boulevard . Do not abbreviate alley, drive, road, or terrace. Use single letters for directions: N., E., W., S.

States: Abbreviate states when used with towns or cities: Cheyenne, Wyo. **But:** She lives in Wyoming. State abbreviations are: 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., Va., Vt., Wash., W.Va., Wis., Wyo. **Spell out:** Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, Utah.

Regional media in the northern United States also abbreviate Canadian provinces. See *Stylebook*,

Use two-digit postal codes only when providing a complete mailing address that includes a zip code: Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523-1785.

Datelines: About 30 U.S. cities appear without states in datelines. See “datelines” in *Stylebook*.

3. Pesky Punctuation Pointers

Periods. Always place the period inside the ending quotation mark whenever a quotation is at the end of a sentence: She said, "Of course."

Question/Exclamation Marks. Place question marks and exclamation marks inside or outside of the quotation mark, depending upon whether the mark refers to the quoted material (inside) or the larger sentence in which the quoted material appears (outside). Examples: Did she say, "Of course"? I responded, "Yes!"

Commas. Avoid a final comma in a series of three words or phrases, unless the meaning would be unclear. Example: 1, 2 and 3. Use commas sparingly, but insert one wherever necessary to help the reader understand the sentence: “and a one, and a two, and a three!”

Semi-Colons. Use these to parse up ideas or items that already require the use of commas. The winners were: John Jones, Colorado Springs; Helen Tremont, Denver; Evelyn Swartz, Pueblo. Also, use a semi-colon in complex sentences where two independent sentences are connected with a conjunction: He died; however, she didn't cry. (In most cases, two independent sentences are preferable.)

Apostrophes. Use these to show possession, use one or two depending on the number of owners and items possessed. Let's meet at John's house. Let's meet at John and Annie's house. Let's meet at John's and Annie's houses.

Also use apostrophes to show contractions. Generally, avoid contractions, except in direct quotes or where conversational style is clearly desired. Note: it's is the contraction for it is, never a possessive (which is always its).

Avoid an apostrophe when forming the plurals of numbers or letters used as words: Example: the 1950s, the ABCs. Exception: Use an apostrophe if the s alone might be confusing: three Ph.D.'s, dot the i's and cross the t's.