

Style Reminders for Public Relations Writers - II

Based on *Associated Press Stylebook*

Public relations writers must pay particular attention to Associated Press style related to references to organizations and people. Use these guidelines for news releases; organizations might adopt special style guidelines for their own publications.

4. Organizations

Use **lower case** for all generic references: the company, the university, etc.

First References. On first use, spell out any name or title that is to be used repeatedly in shortened form. Then use the short form consistently. Example: the Metropolitan Transit Authority, then the Metro or the MTA. Do not confuse readers by mixing the second references. Instead, for variety, use a neutral descriptor, such as the transit agency.

Abbreviate: Co., Cos., Inc., LLP, etc., in first references unless a critical part of an organization's name: The Blackwell Companies. Do not separate from name with a comma. Use main name only in later references. See "Business Guidelines" in *Stylebook*.

Capitalize names units within an organization only when these appear in their full official form: Department of History, Division of Revenue, otherwise the history department, the revenue division.

Acronyms. Avoid unfamiliar acronyms by finding an alternative. Example: Write the department, not the DNR, when referring to a state's Department of Natural Resources. Exceptions might include well-known acronyms: FBI, etc. Always spell out Colorado State (not CSU).

Typographic Headaches: Trademarks, copyright and registration marks do not belong in news copy Avoid: ™ © ®

Pronoun Agreement: Organizations are inanimate objects that always take "it" or "its" as a pronoun in subsequent references. Wrong: The company announced their results.

5. People

Courtesy Titles. Avoid Mr., Mrs. and Ms. Use only the individual's last name in second references, including women. If differentiation is required for clarity, use the first and last name of the persons. Avoid: Mr. Smith is chairman; Mrs. Smith is president. Preferred in second reference: John Smith is chairman; Jane Smith is president. Avoid gender bias: see "women" entry in *Stylebook*.

Titles: Abbreviations. Use these abbreviated titles before proper names in first references only: Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., the Rev., Sen. Use Dr. only when referring to medical doctors, dentists, or veterinarians. Write John Jones, Ph.D. Use last names only in all second references.

Titles: Capitalization. Capitalize an official title if it precedes a name; use lower case when the title follows the name: President Larry Penley; Larry Penley, president of Colorado State University. Avoid including long titles before a name whenever possible--give the person's name first. Don't capitalize unofficial or merely descriptive titles used before a name. Example: computer analyst John Doe. Do not capitalize second or merely descriptive references to titles. Write: the president, the chairman, etc.

Corporate titles: The most common titles for managers in businesses are (in order of seniority): chairman of the board, chief executive officer, president, chief operating officer, executive vice president, vice president, associate vice president, assistant vice president, director, manager, (division, department, section) head, supervisor. Note: AP spells all titles containing "vice" as two words consistently: vice chairman, vice president, vice principal, vice secretary (no hyphen).

Ages: Most editors want to know the age of newsmakers. Include age in all personnel announcements for senior executives of organizations. Age can be omitted for lower-ranking promotions or appointment announcements if a person strongly objects. Write: John Jones, 60, ... Avoid: 56-year-old John Jones or John Jones, 56 years old, ... (Note: The latter style is used by some publications.)

Bios/Professional Experience: When writing a story about a person's promotion or appointment to a new position, specify the title clearly. To whom does the individual report? When recounting prior experience, begin the *most recent* job held. Be sure to include when the person joined the organization and subsequent titles held. Very early career experience can be omitted unless relevant.

Academic Degrees: Avoid needless detail and references to degrees whenever possible. Write: bachelor's degree, master's degree, doctorate in psychology. If necessary for specificity, write: Bachelor of Arts or Master of Science (no hyphens). Reserve the term *doctor* for medical, dental and veterinary professionals. Other doctorate holders should be referred by placing Ph.D. (or other title) after their names: John Smith, Ph.D. Use other abbreviations (with periods) only in lists or other situations where degrees or professional designations are required. Only use abbreviated degrees following full name of an individual: The speakers included: John Jones, M.S.W., ...

Quotes: Use quotes to accentuate a point, introduce opinion, or provide vital information about a person. Don't state the obvious. For example, people hired for a new position is assumed to be qualified and happy about the opportunity.

Generally, begin any quote as a new paragraph. When quoting a person, use the last name only, if the person has been identified previously. State the last name first: "It's a first!," Smith said. (Other words might be substituted for *said* to provide variety. But make sure the verb is appropriate.)

When using a quote from a person not yet identified in the story, it is acceptable to write: "It's a first!," said John Smith, associate professor at Colorado State University. Use such constructions sparingly. Consider breaking up the identifying formation into a separate sentence or include it in a subsequent quote..