

**Pennsylvania Department of Health
Office of Communications
AP Stylebook Go-To Guide**

Act -- Only capitalize *act* when it is part of the name for pending/implemented legislation.

In an act of protection against infection, all Department of Health employees are required to wash their hands regularly, according to Act 0123, or the Clean Hands Act.

Administration -- Unless part of a title (*The Office of Administration*), this word should be in lowercase. This rule applies even if following a name (*The Sterling administration*).

Ages -- Always use figures. Use hyphens for ages expressed as adjectives before a noun or as substitutes for a noun.

The man, who was 46 years old and had dentures, acted like a 5-year-old when he discovered that his favorite candy shop had closed down. He is actually in his 40s.

Asterisks -- Should not be used. If it is necessary to direct a reader's attention to a source or supplement, work it into the sentence or cite the reference with a number matching an explanation at the bottom of the page (i.e., in footnote format).

Because/since – Use *because* to denote a specific cause/effect relationship: *I went because I was told.* *Since* is acceptable in causal senses when the first event in a sequence leads logically to the second, but wasn't its direct cause: *They went to the show, since they had been given tickets.* A good tip is to use *since* for time elements.

Since the product's 2010 launch, it has sold more than 1 million copies.

Bullet points -- If each bullet consists of a full sentence, capitalize the first word of each one and end each one with a period. If part of a series, as well as a continuation of a sentence, end each bullet with a semicolon except the last one (which should end with a period). If bullets are part of a series but not part of a sentence, no punctuation is necessary. Use parallel construction (i.e., if the first bullet point is a sentence, the rest should be sentences; if the first bullet is a noun, the rest should be nouns).

His day went as follows:

- *He went to the store to buy some items.*
- *He asked the clerk for suggestions, saying that he wanted to spice up his unexciting office.*

- *The clerk directed him to the balloons, hats and piñatas.*

He went to the store and bought:

- *balloons;*
- *hats; and*
- *piñatas.*

Shopping list:

- *balloons*
- *hats*
- *piñatas*

Capitol/capital – Capitalize *U.S. Capitol* and *the Capitol* when referring to the building in Washington (e.g., *The meeting was held on Capitol Hill in the west wing of the Capitol.*). Follow the same practice when referring to state capitols. The word *capital* is not capitalized.

City -- Capitalize *city* only if part of a proper name, an integral part of an official name, or a regularly-used nickname (e.g., *Tower City, Pa., New York City* and *the city of York*).

Commas -- Do not place a comma before the conjunction (such as *and*) in a simple series (e.g., *The flag is red, white and blue.*). Put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series, however, if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction (e.g., *I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast.*). In a complex series of phrases, place a comma before the conjunction (see second example below).

Tom stepped back, tripped and fell. (a simple series)

The talking cat needed to determine whether the revelation of his ability would cause panic, whether it was possible he might be kidnapped and put in the circus, and whether it would be advantageous for his aspiration to be in the CIA.

Commonwealth -- Use *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* or the *commonwealth* when it stands alone. Using our state's *commonwealth* distinction is necessary only in formal cases.

Composition titles – Magazine and newspaper titles aren't italicized, just capitalized. For composition titles such as books, video games, films, TV shows, works of art, speeches, etc., use quotation marks.

*She read *The New York Times* before she watched "Inception" and "Mad Men."*

My favorite book is "The Kite Runner."

Dash -- These are used: 1) to indicate an abrupt change, 2) to set off a series within a phrase, or 3) to attribute an author's or composer's name at the end of a quotation. Note the space before and after. See **Hyphen**.

We will fly to Paris in June – if I get a raise.

He listed the qualities – intelligence, humor, conservatism, independence – that he likes in an executive.

"Who steals my purse steals trash." – Shakespeare.

Dates -- Always use Arabic figures (1, 2, 3, etc.), without *st*, *nd*, *rd* or *th*. See **Months**.

On Sept. 21, the Department of Health received an intern so indescribably valuable that everyone knew the department would just not be the same when his time was up.

Department -- Capitalize only when it is part of a formal name (e.g., *Department of State*, *Department of Defense*, etc.). Never abbreviate as "Dept." There is an exception, however: *Department*, on its own, may be capitalized if that is the intended abbreviation for the formal name in repeated usage. That is, if you write out the full formal name, you may indicate (upon first usage) in parentheses that further references will simply be abbreviated as *Department*.

The Department of Health was frantically working on a communications plan to address the problem; the department knew it had to finalize the plan by the end of the week.

OR

The Department of Health (Department) was frantically working on a communications plan to address the problem; the Department knew it had to finalize the plan by the end of the week.

Directions and regions -- In general, lowercase *north*, *south*, *northeast*, *southwest*, *northcentral*, *northern*, etc., when they indicate compass direction; capitalize when they designate regions.

The preferred form is to lowercase directional or area descriptions when referring to a section of a state or city (*western Montana*, *southern Atlanta*) except when denoting widely

known sections: *Southern California, West Texas, the South Side of Chicago*. If in doubt, use lowercase.

The Northwest District Office is located in Erie, in northwest Pennsylvania.

A storm system is developing in the Midwest and spreading eastward.

The North was victorious, but the South will rise again.

She has a Southern accent despite being a Northern liberal.

Disabled/handicapped -- Do not refer to an individual as *handicapped*. Use *person with a disability/people with disabilities* or specify the type of disability, as in *developmentally disabled, blind, visually impaired, deaf, partially deaf, mute*, etc. whenever possible. *Disabled* by itself may be used if there is no other way to express the thought.

e.g., i.e., -- Both must always be followed with a comma. Use *e.g.*, to give an example and use *i.e.*, to clarify an idea.

The upper house of Congress (i.e., the Senate) was set to debate a number of controversial bills (e.g., the Prohibit Breeding of Ugly Animals Act).

Elderly and senior citizen -- Use sparingly. Do not refer to a person as elderly unless it is clearly relevant to the story. It is appropriate to use in generic phrases that do not refer to specific individuals (*e.g., concern for the elderly*). **Note: The phrase "older Pennsylvanians" is the preferred wording for Pennsylvania Department of Health.**

Email -- No hyphen and lowercase, unless it begins a sentence.

Ensure, insure, assure -- Ensure should be used to mean guarantee. Insure should be used in reference to insurance. Assure is used to give confidence.

Angelina, newly insured and not quite able to make sense of the health care section of the policy, wanted to ensure that a certain procedure would be covered. The insurance agent assured her that it would be covered by her plan.

Farther, further – *Farther* refers to physical distance; *further* refers to an extension of time or degree.

John walked farther into the woods than Jane.

She will look further into the mystery.

Federal -- Lowercase unless part of a formal title, as in *Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

Fewer, less – In general, use *fewer* for individual items, *less* for bulk or quantity.

Fewer than 10 applicants called.

I had less than \$50 in my pocket.

Foodborne -- One word.

Government -- Should always be lowercase and unabbreviated.

Mars' newly established government put the silent and enigmatic "Rover" on trial for espionage.

Health care -- Two words in all applications is the current fashion.

Hyphen -- Use hyphens to avoid ambiguity (see first example below) or to form a single idea from two or more words or with a compound modifier before a noun. When dealing with the latter, do not hyphenate the adverb *very* or any adverbs ending in *-ly*. As a general rule, the fewer hyphens, the better. By the way, hyphens and dashes are not identical -- a dash is longer than a hyphen and is almost always preceded and followed by a space. See **Dash**.

He was a one-term senator not because of unpopularity but because he decided to become a professor and step out of politics.

The tall Italian-American was a master of the serio-comic put-down.

The quarterback made a first-quarter touchdown despite being distracted by the beautiful woman in a bluish-green dress.

Months – When using a month with a specific date, abbreviate only Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec., and spell out when using alone or with just a year. **Hint: the months never abbreviated fall chronologically and are five letters or fewer—March, April, May, June, July.** Separate the year with commas (before and after the year) when using a complete date: month, day and year.

The amount of snowfall on Dec. 13, 2012, was great enough for meteorologists to declare that December 2012 would be a record-setting period.

The party is on Dec. 13.

January 1972 was a cold month.

More than/over – *More than* is preferred with numbers, whereas *over* generally refers to spatial elements.

The company has more than 25 employees.

The cow jumped over the moon.

No. -- Use as the abbreviation for *number* in conjunction with a figure to indicate position or rank.

He was the department's No. 1 intern.

Numbers -- Unless identifying a year, spell out a numeral when used at the beginning of a sentence. Write out numbers one through nine; use figures for 10 and higher. When indicating a sequence in time or location, spell out *first* through *ninth* and use figures for *10th* and above. Do not place a figure in parentheses to clarify a number that has been spelled out; *e.g., three (3)*.

Remember: For ages, always use figures even if under 10.

Fifty people showed up to the movie, but by the end, there were only 17 people left in the theatre.

1976 was a very good year.

Ten percent of the witnesses had seen the 5-year-old girl fall down the flight of seven stairs.

None of the 11 candidates had ever received a raise of more than 12-15 percent during one year's time.

They had 10 dogs, six cats and 97 hamsters.

Online -- One word; lowercase.

PA versus Pa. – Spell out Pennsylvania when it stands alone in text. If abbreviating, use *Pa.* in text and *PA* only for an address.

Parenthesis -- Use as few parentheses as possible. The period goes outside a closing parenthesis if the material inside is not a sentence (*such as this fragment*). If a phrase in parentheses is dependent on the surrounding material (*this one is an example*), even if it could qualify as a sentence, do not capitalize nor end with a period. (*An independent parenthetical sentence such as this one takes a period before the closing parenthesis.*)

Percent -- One word. Use numerals with *percent*, not *%*. The symbol may be used only in a chart, graph or table, not in text. **Reminder: spell out numerals at the start of a sentence, even if followed by *percent*.**

Compulsive gamblers think about themselves 98 percent of the time, but no one knows what they think during the other 2 percent.

Between 12 and 17 percent of the victims were children; the previous year, the range had been 12 to 15.5 percent.

The cost of living rose 0.6 percent. (Use a zero before the decimal point for amounts less than 1 percent.)

Seventy percent of you need assistance. (The number is spelled because it begins the sentence.)

Percent takes a singular verb when standing alone or when a singular word follows a construction with the word *of*. It takes a plural verb when a plural word follows an *of* construction.

The teacher said 60 percent was a failing grade.

He said 50 percent of the membership was there.

He said 50 percent of the members were there.

Phone numbers -- Use figures and hyphens. No parentheses. Separate extensions with a comma and abbreviate (*e.g., 987-654-3210, ext. 9*). Commonwealth of Pa. press policy permits the use of 1- to precede the 10-digit phone number, as in *1-877-724-3258*, although it is not required.

He really wanted to take advantage of the "EXTREMELY limited-time offer" of \$300 worth of silverware for only \$19.95, so he hastily dialed 1-800-123-4567.

Program -- Lowercase unless part of a formal title.

Quotations -- Periods and commas always go within the quotation marks. Other punctuation marks, such as the dash, the semicolon, the question mark and the exclamation point, go outside the quotation marks unless part of the quote. Capitalize the first letter in a quote if it is the beginning of a statement. For quotes within quotes: alternate between double quotation marks ("or") and single marks ('or').

The pedestrian avoided injury and responded, "Mind your own business."

The shouter shrugged and said that he was "merely trying to help."

She said, "He told me, 'I love you.'"

Race -- *Black* and *white* should be lowercase, because neither is considered an official "race." *African-American* (note the hyphen) and *Caucasian* should be capitalized.

Alison, a 62-year-old black woman from New York, was awarded a prestigious "African-Americans in Education" award for her dedication to improving the education system.

The suspect, a Caucasian male, is accused of impersonating various historical figures. When arrested, he was dressed as Benjamin Franklin and insisted that he was "supposed to be in Philly for some convention."

References -- Put quotation marks around book titles, computer game titles, movie titles, opera or play titles, song titles, radio and television titles, and titles for lectures, speeches and works of art. Do not put quotation marks around works such as the Bible and books that are primarily catalogs of reference material.

He wanted his rough day to come to an end so he could lie on the couch and watch "The Walking Dead."

According to the AP Stylebook, no rules are permanent.

I just received a new copy of Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second Edition.

Seasons -- Do not capitalize *spring*, *summer*, *fall*, *winter* and derivatives such as *springtime*, unless part of a formal name, as in *Winter Olympics*.

The disease spreads primarily in the fall, but can also be rampant in the winter.

Semicolons -- Use to link independent clauses together when a coordinating conjunction (such as *and*, *but* or *for*) is not present.

The package was due last week; it arrived today.

State -- Lowercase the word *state* as in *the state of Maine*, *state funds*, *the state Transportation Department*, *the state health centers*, etc.

States – Capitalize and spell out the names of states when they stand alone in textual material.

Abbreviate state names when used with the name of a city, town or military base in journalistic datelines. However, omit state abbreviations in datelines for well-known U.S. cities such as *Atlanta*, *Boston*, *Chicago*, *Dallas*, *Detroit*, *Los Angeles*, *Miami*, *New York*, *San Francisco*, etc. AP doesn't follow ZIP code abbreviations. Each state has its own abbreviation (Mass. for Massachusetts; N.Y. for New York; Calif. for California; Fla. for Florida and so on—a list of these is available in the AP Stylebook or online). In any case, *Alaska*, *Hawaii*, *Idaho*, *Iowa*, *Maine*, *Ohio*, *Texas* and *Utah* are never abbreviated.

Use the two-letter Postal Service abbreviations only with full addresses, including the ZIP code.

Statewide -- One word, lower case.

Street addresses – Use the abbreviations *St.*, *Ave.* and *Blvd.* only when part of a numbered address: *1600 Pennsylvania Ave.* Road and other related causeways such as *court*, *drive*, *lane*, *terrace*, etc. aren't abbreviated. Spell out and capitalize when part of a formal street name without a number: *Pennsylvania Avenue*.

123 Public Relations Blvd.

12 Brady St.

1 Championship Road

7 Fifth Ave. **[Spell out and capitalize first through ninth when used as street names.]**

222 E. 42nd St. **[Starting with 10th Street use figures.]**

Punctuate by placing one comma between the city and the state name, and another comma after the state name, unless ending a sentence.

He was traveling from Nashville, Tennessee, to Austin, Texas, en route to his home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

That, which – Use *that* and *which* in referring to inanimate objects or animals without names. Use *that* for essential clauses, important to the meaning of the sentence, and without commas. Use *which* for nonessential clauses, where the pronoun is less necessary, and use commas. **Tip: If you can drop the clause and not lose the meaning of the sentence, use *which*; otherwise, use *that*.**

I remember the day that we met.

The team, which won the championship last year, begins its new season next month.

Times – Use figures except for *noon* and *midnight*. Use a colon to separate hours and minutes: *11 a.m., 1 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 9-11 a.m., 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

Titles (Prefixes/Suffixes) – Capitalize formal titles for individuals only when they precede the person's name. If it falls after the name, make it lowercase.

Mayor John Appleseed signed the proclamation; John Appleseed, mayor of Leominster, Mass., attended the banquet.

The deputy secretary refused to comment on the allegations, but Secretary Gentle assured reporters that an investigation was ongoing.

Pope Benedict XVI, the current pope, does not plan to retire.

Toward – Toward never ends in an *s*, same as forward, backward, upward, downward, etc.

Underinsured -- One word; no hyphen.

Website -- While *website* is always lowercased (and one word), *Web* is capitalized when alone or with a separate word (e.g., *Web page*).

Updated 11/20/15