**GUIDE TO COMMON AP STYLE ISSUES**

*Style is used loosely to refer to correctness in spelling, grammar, syntax, usage or even matters of fact.*

*This style guide includes the most common issues a school publication might encounter.*

**A-B**

**ABBREVIATIONS: When in doubt, spell it out.**

Avoid abbreviations. Don’t assume the reader knows what you are writing about. On first reference, spell out anything that might be confusing.

When you plan to use an abbreviation later in the story, do not follow the name of group with the abbreviation in parentheses. Often, the later abbreviation is unnecessary with clear writing.

* **Days of week:** Do not abbreviate.
* **Months** with six or more letters are abbreviated if they are used with a specific date. Spell out those with five or fewer letters. Always spell out the month when it is used without a specific date.
  + *Aug. 13, June 6. It starts in August.*
* **States**: Spell out the names of all states when used alone or with a city, town, village or military base. If used as part of a political affiliation, see AP Stylebook for correct abbreviations.
* **Street names:** Neverabbreviate road. Abbreviate avenue (Ave.), boulevard (Blvd.) and street (St.) when a complete address is given. Otherwise, spell out. The correct forms are: 320 N. Main St., North Main Street, Third Street and 42nd Street.
* **Course titles:** do not abbreviate

**accept, except**

*Accept* means to receive: *She accepts his invitation to prom. Except* means to exclude: *Except she doesn’t want to go with his friends.*

**ACT**

Acceptable abbreviation in all uses. If necessary, it’s an exam, not a test. *She took the ACT exam last week.*

**addresses**

See the ABBREVIATIONS.

**administration**

Lowercase.

**administrator**

Never abbreviate.

**Advanced Placement**

Capitalize and spell out on first reference when standing alone. Use *AP* without periods on second reference or when used with a course title.

**adviser**

Note the e.

**affect**

Affect with an a is usually a [verb](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/v.html#verbs); effect with an e is usually a [noun](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/n.html#noun). To affect is the have an effect on. Remember that *affect* is the verb and *effect* is the noun and you’ll almost always be correct.

Two exceptions: *Effect* can be a verb that means “to bring about,” as in *to effect change*. And *affect* can be a noun that means “emotional state or the outward expression thereof,” as in the psychological observation that someone displays *a flat affect*.

**ages**

Always use figures. Compound modifiers require hyphens: *A 8-year-old girl, a 8-year-old, she is 8 years old.*

**a lot**

It’s two words. Not *alot*. (However, this expression is vague and is best avoided.)

**all right**

Not alright.

**a.m., p.m.**

Lowercase, with periods.

**And then I said …**

*And* and *but* are just as eligible as any other words to start a sentence. And they often work well to provide continuity or a transition. “But I was taught never to do this,” you might say. Well, you were taught wrong.

**and/or**

Just use *or* whenever possible.

**app**

Acceptable abbreviation for application.

**Assistant Principal**

Not vice. Capitalize when used as a title before a name. Never abbreviate.

**baby-sit, baby-sitting, baby-sat, baby sitter**

**black**

Lowercase. If the adjective is necessary, ask the person whether they prefer African American.

**book titles**

See COMPOSITION TITLES.

**boys and girls**

Use boys and girls to designate teams. Do not use an apostrophe: the team does not belong to the boys or to the girls, but to the school. In most cases, boys or girls is used as part of a noun phrase: *The girls varsity soccer team beat South High School. The boys cross country team placed fifth in state competition.*

**boyfriend**

One word.

**C**

**calendar items**

In announcing events, identify the event and then the details in this order: place, day, date, time, and cost: *Student Council members are sponsoring a dance in the gym on Friday, Oct. 13, 7 p.m., $7 tickets.*

In a list:

* **Friday, Oct. 13** – Student Council dance in the gym, 7 p.m., $7 tickets

**cannot**

**CAPITALIZATION: Avoid unnecessary capital letters**

Generally, only capitalize formal titles used before an individual’s name.

* *Principal Roger Smith*

Set titles off with commas and lowercase after a name: *Roger Smith, principal*

* It is best to place a long title after a name.

A formal title is one that shows a position of authority or accomplishment. Other informal titles serve as occupational descriptions.

* *Social studies teacher Michelle Curran; coach Brad Anderson*

It is often best to place a title more than two words after a name.

* *Michelle Curran, social studies department chair, said …*

Capitalize the name of specific governing bodies such as Student Council and Board of Education. Do not capitalize general names like school board or committee.

Do not capitalize a.m. or p.m. Include the periods.

Capitalize specific courses, not but subject areas. Generally, use the informal name for courses. *Honors Freshmen English, but science class. Do not capitalize departments.*

Capitalize the word room when used with a number: *Room 302*.

**captain**

Lowercase and spell out in such uses as *team captain Ginny Anderson*.

**cellphone**

One word.

**chair**

Lowercase for the head of departments.

**chapters**

Capitalize when used with a number in reference to a section of a book. Always use numerals. *Chapter 1.*

**cheerleading**

One word*.*

**classes**

Capitalize official class names, but lowercase when used to identify individuals. j*unior, Junior Class, senior John Edison, Class of 2014.*

**coach**

Do not capitalize.

**colon**

In body text, the first word after a colon is capitalized only if it begins a complete sentence. In headlines, the first word after a colon is always capitalized.

**commas**

* Use a comma to separate a direct quotation from the sentence.
  + *"This class is awesome," senior Kristen Martinson said.*
  + *Lawrence Wilson, sophomore, said, "I love lady bugs."*
* The optional comma is not used in journalism.
  + *I have red, green and blue crayons.*

**COMPOSITION TITLES: Use quotation marks.**

Titles are in quotation marks; names are not. Newspapers and magazines have names, while movies, books and TV shows have titles.

* Capitalize the first word of any title. Capitalize all words that are four letters are longer. Do not capitalize the articles “a,” “an” and “the.” Do not capitalize conjunctions or prepositions, unless they are four letters or longer.
* “Gone With the Wind”(“with” is a preposition, but it is capitalized because of the four-letter rule).
* **Newspapers and magazines:** Do not italicize or use quotation marks around the names of newspapers or magazines: The New York Times, Newsweek, Wired, Vanity Fair, The Oregonian, Willamette Week.
* **Subtitles:** Article headlines and song titles are in quotation marks.

**compound modifiers**

When two or more adjectives express a single concept, use a hyphen to link the words. *The 12-member team, the 36-year-old teacher.*

**courtesy titles**

Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. should not be used, unless it is in a direct quote: *Quiz Bowl captain Will Bronson won first at nationals. Bronson said, “We couldn’t have done it without Mr. Wright.”*

**course titles.**

Capitalize official course titles but not subjects. *She is taking an algebra class. He has test in Classics of Literature.*

**D-H**

**dash**

Use dashes to denote an abrupt change in thought in a sentence or an emphatic pause: Obama offered a plan – it was unprecedented – to raise taxes. Note the space before and after the dash.

**dates**

Keep the date of the publication in mind when writing for newspaper readers. *Today* is the date of the publication. Be careful not to write in future tense when the readers will be seeing your story after the event.

* Always specify both the day and the date, as in *Tuesday, March 15.*
* Do not use *on* before a date.
* Do no not use *st, nd, rd, th* in a date.

**days of the week**

Always spell out in body text. *Monday, not Mon.*

**departments**

Use lowercase except for words that are proper nouns or adjectives: *the social studies department, the English department.*

**different**

The word different is often redundant, as in several different options or many different participants. Since you can't have several of the same option or many of the same participant, several options and many participants will do nicely.

**directions and regions**

Lowercase when indicating compass direction (north, south, northeast, northern, etc.). Capitalize when the word designates a region.

*She traveled north. The storm is moving northeast.*

*A storm is developing in the Midwest and will move in a northeasterly direction.*

*It will impact the Northeast tomorrow morning and the entire East Coast over the next 48 hours.*

*Despite being a native Northerner, she speaks with a Southern accent.*

*The peace talks with the Middle East nations continue.*

When used with names of nations, lowercase unless part of a proper name or to designate a politically divided nation (Northern Ireland, South Korea): *eastern Spain, northern Canada, southern United States.*

When used with states and cities, lowercase for directionals or area descriptions *(eastern Tennessee, northern Springfield)*. Capitalize when part of a proper name *(West Virginia, North Dakota)* or when used to refer to widely known sections of an area *(Southern California, West Texas, the South Side of Chicago, the Lower East Side of New York).* When in doubt, use lowercase.

When combining with a common noun to form a name, capitalize *(the Far East, the West Coast, the Western Hemisphere).*

**districts**

Lowercase in sports stories.

**dollar, dollars**

Beware of the use of a dollar sign and the word *dollars* with the same amount, as in *$100 dollars*.

**editor**

Capitalize as an official title but not as a job description. *North Pointe Editor Allison Michaels, editor Eric Quinlan said.*

**editor-in-chief**

Use hyphens. If plural, the correct term is editors-in-chief.

**effect**

See AFFECT.

**ellipse**

Three periods with a space before and after shows that words have been omitted from a quotation. Seldom needed at the beginning or end of a sentence.

**email**

One word. There’s a difference however between *email* and an *email address*. So, when someone asks, “Can I have your email,” tell them “no, but you can have my e-mail address.”

**false titles**

Never capitalize false titles which describe a person’s occupation or skill without reflecting on their authority: *politician, teacher, soprano soloist, pitcher, guard.*

* Do not use false titles before a person’s name as in *goaltender Sarah Scott.* Instead, set the name off from the description with commas: *Sarah Scott, goaltender.*

**freshman, freshmen**

Do not pluralize freshman as an adjective. It’s freshman girls, not freshmen girls, just as it’s sophomore boys, not sophomores boys. Use *freshmen* as a plural noun: *The freshmen elected a new president.*

**fundraiser**

One word.

**girlfriend**

One word.

**girls**

Use boys and girls to designate teams. Do not use an apostrophe: the team does not belong to the boys or to the girls, but to the school. In most cases, boys or girls is used as part of a noun phrase: *The girls varsity soccer team beat South High School. The boys cross country team placed fifth in state competition.*

**GPA**

Acceptable in all references for grade-point average.

**grades**

Use A-minus, C-plus, etc. (not A-, C+) when mentioning letter grades in text. In headlines it’s ok to abbreviate. Use an apostrophe with plurals of single letters, otherwise A’s will look like the word As.

**headlines**

Write in present tense.

**his/her**

Rewrite sentences into the plural form

* Weak: *A student can register for his or her classes online.*
* Better: *Students can register for their classes online.*

**Homecoming**

Capitalize as a proper noun. *Are you going to Homecoming?* Lowercase as an adjective. *I have to find the perfect homecoming dress.*

**I-N**

**IDENTIFICATION: Fully identify all sources**

On first reference, identify a person by title, class or position: *Principal Roger Smith, history teacher Michelle Curran, sophomore Sarah Scott.*

* Avoid use of double identification in a story, especially in sports: *guard Sarah Scott (not “sophomore guard Sarah Scott”).*
* When it is necessary to mention people with the same last names in the same story, distinguish between the two by using full names throughout, unless the type of story calls for first-name treatment, such as a feature story about twins.

**internet**

Do not capitalize (AP Style change June 1, 2016)

**junior varsity**

Capitalize and do not use periods when abbreviated as a modifier. *She’s a member of the junior varsity, or, she’s a member of the JV team.*

**limousine**

Not *limo*.

**magazine names**

See COMPOSITION TITLES.

**Mom and Dad**

Capitalize such terms when they’re used as substituted names: *Mom and Dad wouldn’t let me stay up late.* Lowercase other usages: *Jenna’s mom and Jeremy’s dad took us all to the movies.*

**months**

See ABBREVIATIONS.

**money**

Use figures for money. *$7.* Avoid unnecessary zeros. *$7.00.* Watch for the redundant *$7 dollars.* Spell out cents, as in *50 cents.*

**movie titles**

See COMPOSITION TITLES.

**MP3**

**NUMBERS: Spell out single-digit numbers**

Spell out single-digit numbers, including fractions. The exceptions to this rule are:

* **Addresses:** 7 Maple St.
* **Ages:** Always use figures. The 2-year-old cried.
* **Cents:** 5 cents.
* **Dollars:** $5, $2.6 million
* **Dates:** April 2. Do not use d, rd, st, nd.
* **Dimensions:** She is 6 feet tall.
* **Grades:** Single letters get an s and an apostrophe. She gets all A’s.
* **Millions, billions:** 3 billion people
* **Ordinal numbers:** Spell out first through ninth. Use figures for 10th and above. Do not use superscript.
* **Pages:** Use figures and capitalize. Page 2.
* **Percentages:** 5 percent
* **Plural forms:** Numbers like 3s get the s but no apostrophe. (The same rule applies to decades: The 1960s.) Single letters like B’s get the s and an apostrophe. Multiple letters like ABCs get the s but no apostrophe.
* **Sentences:** Spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence.
  + Exception to the exception – years. 1968 was one of the worst years in American history.
* **Sports scores:** Always use figures. Place a hyphen and no spaces between scores.
* **Temperatures:** 3 degrees
* **Time:** 8 a.m. (not 8:00 a.m.)
* **Zeros:** Do not use unnecessary zeros. Examples: Write seven cents rather than $.07. Write 10 a.m. instead of 10:00 a.m.

**O-R**

**online**

One word, lowercased.

**OK**

Not okay.

**page numbers**

Use figures and capitalize the word *page* when it’s used with a number: *Page 5*.

**percent**

Spell out percent in all uses.

**periods**

* **Abbreviations:** Use a period after most abbreviations (also see ABBREVIATIONS): B.A., M.A., Ph.D., Jr., the Rev., Feb. 2, 3001 N.E. 31st Ave., c.o.d., f.o.b., a.m., p.m.
* **Acronyms and organizations:** Do not use a period after initials of commonly accepted or widely known organizations, buildings, activities, etc.: FBI, PTO.
  + Use periods after U.S. and U.N. (Remember that U.S. and U.N. are only abbreviated when used as adjectives.)
  + Use periods for a.m. and p.m.
* **Ellipsis:** Three periods are used to form an ellipsis, which indicates omission of words. Treat it as a three-letter word, with spaces on both sides and no space between the periods within the ellipsis: Webster defines ellipsis as the “omission of one or more words … necessary to make the expression grammatically complete.”
  + When words are deleted from the end of a complete sentence, the original period is kept in addition to the ellipsis: *Webster defines ellipsis….*
* **Parentheses:** Put a period inside parentheses when a complete sentence is enclosed in brackets or parentheses: (The day was too hot for baseball.)
  + When the parenthetical expression forms only part of the sentence, put the period outside the bracket or parenthesis: The day was too cold for football (or skiing).
* **Quotes:** A period *always* goes inside quotation marks. Other punctuation marks go inside when they are part of the quoted material: “I saw the play,” he said. He said, “I saw the play.” “Did you see the play?” he asked. Should I see “King Lear”?

**physical education**

Do not abbreviate.

**p.m.**

Lowercase with periods between letters.

**PowerPoint**

This is a brand name and is spelled as listed.

**Prom**

Capitalize as a proper noun. *Are you going to Prom?* Lowercase as an adjective. *I have to find the perfect prom dress.*

**PUNCTUATION: Choose what sounds best out loud**

Punctuation helps a reader understand the story, and consists mainly of stop, pause and go signals. The standard rules of punctuation learned in English classes are also generally applicable in newspaper writing. There is usually more than one proper way to punctuate a sentence; therefore, choose what will work best for readers, and follow the style guide.

**QUOTATIONS: Get it exactly right, or don’t quote it.**

Capitalize the first letter of the first word in a quotation that stands as a sentence.

Never change a quotation to correct someone's grammar. For example, if you're interviewing someone who says, “I ain’t got no problem with them there neighbors,” you may write:

* “I ain't got no problem with them there neighbors,” he said.

And you may write:

* He said he has “no problem” with his neighbors.

And, while it looks odd, you could write:

* “I … got not problem with ... (the) neighbors,” he said.

But you may not write:

* “I have no problem with the neighbors,” he said.

That would be lying. He did not say that.

**QUOTATIONS: Punctuation style.**

Use one of the following styles.

* *Physical education teacher Clark Kent said that all students would be allowed to play basketball.*

Identify people by their full name and title on the first reference in a story. On the second reference, use only their last name.

* *Peter Haggerty, senior, said journalism is his favorite class.  
  “Journalism is the best,” Haggerty said.*

Place end-of-sentence punctuation marks within the quotation marks when they apply only to the quoted matter. Place them outside when they do not.

* *Steve asked, “What is for lunch?”  
  What is the meaning of the term “circumference”?*

Identify the source at the end of the first sentence, in the middle of the paragraph. For example:

* “The University of Nebraska is amazing,” counselor Brigitte Reynolds said. “I mean who couldn’t love such a great school?”

When the speaker or subject matter changes, start a new paragraph.

Don’t bury the attribution in a multi-sentence quote.

**Where does the period go?**

In American English, the period always goes inside the quotation mark. Why? It just does.

* Correct: We saw “Spider Man II.”

**QUOTATION MARKS**

Double quote marks are used to enclose direct quotations.

* Irony and slang: Double quote marks are used to set off slang expressions or words that are used with a meaning other than the usual one.
* Nicknames: Double quote marks are used to set off nicknames.

Single quotation marks are often used in error. They are needed when:

* Quote within a quote: Single quote marks are used for a quotation within a quotation.
* In headlines: Single quote marks are used in headlines to save space.

Running quotations: When one quotation is broken into paragraphs, each new paragraph starts with quotation marks. Only the final paragraph (or quoted statement) ends with quotation marks:

* Jones said, “I doubt any of this will come out in the hearings.
* “Usually these things are covered up by the senators. It’s a shame, but it’s true,” he said.

Paragraphs: Quotations should begin a new paragraph. Otherwise, the quotation may become buried in a long paragraph. It is almost always better to begin with a quotation instead of the credit line.

* *Math teacher Lisa Kingsley said, “Students should always do their homework.”*
* *“It is important to be on time for class,” she said.*

**More quote tips**

* Quote goes before attribution, unless different person has just been quoted.
* When asked: Do not write “when asked.” Simply say what the speaker said.
* Put the word *said* after the subject’s name.
* *Smith said*. Not *said Smith.* (Unless it’s on purpose to improve the flow of the sentence.)

**reviews**

The review should be in present tense if it's an album or movie, for example, because those still exist even after the review is published: “*Guitarist Bill Smith is at his best ...”* The review should be in past tense if it’s a concert or something that no longer exists once the review is printed: *“R.E.M. did not sound up to par at this show.”*

**said**

Don’t use any word for said without a strong reason.

**school names:**

Spell out. *South High School*, not *South, University of Michigan*, not *U of M*.

**Note:** It’s not necessary to write the name of your school in a story. It’s implied that all stories in your publication are about your school unless the story says otherwise.

**seasons**

Lowercase: winter, spring, summer and fall.

**single quotes**

In American English, single quotation marks have only two roles: One, they’re used when a quotation occurs within another quotation; two, they’re used in newspapers, as a matter of typographical style, in headlines and other headings. Some writers seem to think “minor” quoted matter, such as nicknames, is not worthy of a full quote and thus gets single quotes, but they are mistaken.

**sports scores**

Always use figures. Place a hyphen and no spaces between scores.

**sports terms**

See the AP STYLEBOOK for sports term style.

**states**

Lowercase in sports stories.

**state names**

See ABBREVIATIONS.

**subjects**

Lowercase, except languages. *science teacher, English department.*

**T-Z**

**teachers, faculty, staff**

*Teachers* are part of the *faculty*, which includes administrators and counselors. *Staff* includes everyone who is paid to work at North.

**team names**

Do not capitalize team designations: *The varsity team, basketball team, soccer team.*

**T-shirt**

Capital t.

**time**

Useperiods with a.m. and p.m. Avoid unnecessary zeros, such as *3:00 p.m.*

* AP style is 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
* a.m., p.m. – Lowercase with periods between letters.
* When a time falls on the hour, omit the zeros. Follow it with a.m. or p.m. Time precedes day.
  + Wrong: *The game begins Friday evening at 8:00 p.m.*
  + Right: *The game begins at 8 p.m. Friday.*
  + Right: *The game begins at 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 15.*

**TITLES (of people): Tell us who these people are**

Titles before a name: Formal titles of three words of less usually go before names and are capitalized. There is no comma between the title and the name.

On first reference of students, use the class and the full name. Next reference, just last name.

* *“I love ice cream,” junior Leah Pinkney said.*

**Titles after a name:** Formal titles are lowercased if you choose to place them after the name.

* *Rick Snyder, Michigan governor, said, “I will fight for the people.”*

**Occupational titles:** Occupational titles are descriptive of what a person does, but are not formal. *custodian, secretary, student, pitcher.* See also FALSE TITLES.

It is often best to place a title more than two words after a name.

* Michelle Curran, social studies department chair, said …

Do not use courtesy titles (Mr. Mrs.).

commas in titles

* Correct: Senior Class President Danny Schrage will speak. (President is used as a title.)
* Also correct: *The Senior Class president, Danny Schrage, will speak.* (President is used as a description, and the president’s name is n apposition – that is, set off with a comma.
* Incorrect: The Senior Class President, Danny Schrage, will speak. (Lowercase the p.)
* Incorrect: *Senior Class President, Danny Schrage, will speak.* (Dropping the “the” sets up the correctly capitalized title. But then the sentence goes and does the apposition thing. For apposition to work correctly, the sentence must make sense without the material between the commas. *Student Council President will speak* does not make sense, unless it’s a headline.)
* Incorrect: Senior Class President, Danny Schrage will speak. (The apposition requires two commas.)

**tuxedo**

Not *tux*.

**United States**

The abbreviation U.S. is acceptable in all uses. In headlines, use US (omit periods).

**Valhalla**

Since references are generally made to the book rather than the organization, use italics: *Valhalla.*

**video game**

**voice mail**

Two words.

**website**

One word; web is not capitalized when referring to World Wide Web or in webcam, webcast, webfeed, webmaster, webpage, web address, web browser. (AP Style change June 1, 2016)