**The AP Style basics**

**Numbers or words?**

**When to use words:**

* Spell out numbers less than 10: He had five cats, eight birds and 10 goldfish.
* At the start of a sentence (except for years, just because years are lengthy): Ten cats sat on the hat. That’s because a number there might look like a decimal: There was a mat. 10 cats sat on the hat.
* Small fractions: one-half inch; but it was 1 ½ inches (Note the true fraction symbol)
* Streets below 10th: Positively Fourth Street.

*Except:*

* ages: a 9-year-old boy
* millions/billions: There are about 7 billion people on Earth.
* percent (and don’t use %: The cost of living went up 8 percent last year.)
* dimensions. This generally means depth, height, distances, length and width. Also weights. Things that you can measure. The creek was 2 miles long. He swam for 2 miles. She had a 9-pound, 6-ounce boy.
* house numbers: 6 Elm St.
* money—both dollars and cents: That costs $4, but you might need an extra 6 cents for the tax.
* speeds: A cyclist typically travels at 8 mph. (Note—no periods.)
* temperatures: That is equal to 5 degrees Celsius (Not Centigrade — that has to do with geometry
* rankings: This was my No. 2 choice (an odd AP one—note the abbreviated, capitalized “No.”)
* Other ones that you already know, e.g. dates (Sept. 5, 2099, will be a great day), sports scores (The Phillies beat the Braves 3–1), courts or districts ( the 5th circuit), decisions or votes (the motion passed 5–4). Note that these should use an en dash meaning “to” (Command + - on number pad = –; Em dash is Command + Option + number pad = —)

**Abbreviations**

Do abbreviate

* well-known ones (FBI, CIA, ABC, NBC, NASA). U.S. or U.N. now OK as nouns w/periods, and also as adjectives: the U.S. economy.
* Avenue, Street and Boulevard when used with a full address: She lives at 6 Elm Blvd. He lives on Elm Boulevard. (Note—these have six or more letters, but made-up ones such as Terrace are not abbreviated.) Also abbreviate compass points in an address: I live at 1846 W. Hamilton St.
* Dr. Gov. Lt. Gov. Rep. Sen. and most military ranks such as Gen. when used before a name on first reference: Gov. Tom Wolf, D–Pa. Then it’s just “Wolf said … ”
* States of fewer than six letters (except Alaska and Hawaii) when following the name of a member of Congress (see above), or in a dateline: ALLENTOWN, Pa.
* Months of fewer than six letters when used with a date: Today is Sept. 13, 2099. Today is Sept. 22. That happened last September.

Don’t abbreviate

* essentially everything else, e.g. Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Texas, Utah, March, April, May, June, July, Road, Drive, organizations that reader is not likely to know: e.g. the Allentown Creative Cycling Society (usually OK to then use CCS later in the story)

**Capitalization**

Do capitalize (see the Don’t list below in each case)

* Full titles before a name: Pope Francis I is the current pope. Dr. Zhivago. Capt. Kirk. When in doubt, set the title off in commas after the name: John Jones, professor of acupuncture, won the award.
* Academic subjects that are proper nouns: the English department, the German department
* Regions: the East Coast, the Pacific Northwest
* Political parties and affiliations: the Republican Party, Democrats
* Trademarks of companies, products (brand names) and services (service marks): General Foods manufactures Jell-O. DuPont produces Lycra. She was a Realtor for Re-Max.
* Abbreviations for academic degrees: She has an M.A. and a Ph. D. (Note the lowercase “h”—“Ph. D.” means doctor of philosophy in Latin.)

Do not capitalize

* informal titles: the home of movie star John Wayne.
* Academic subjects that are not proper nouns: the psychology department
* directions: He was traveling northwest.
* informal political terms: She was interested in the democratic process, especially as it is compared with communism.
* product names that have fallen into common usage: escalator, elevator, nylon.
* the full academic degree name: He has a bachelor of arts in music. He has a bachelor’s degree.

**Time/time element**

Use this form: That happened at 8 a.m. NOT That happened at 8 a.m. this morning (redundant). Note the periods and lowercase.

Avoid 12 a.m. and 12 p.m. [do you know which is which? I think it’s not a logical convention]. Say noon, midnight .

Generally avoid “yesterday” and “tomorrow.” The meeting will be held Thursday. (not “next Thursday”). The concert was given Tuesday. When it’s more than a week before or after, use the date: The meeting will be held Sept. 29.

Don’t use ordinals for dates: June 21, 2099 NOT June 21st , 2099. (Note that readers fill those in automatically.)