



AP

WORLD'S #1 ACADEMIC OUTLINE

The Associated Press Style Guide

INTRODUCTION

- This is a guide to **The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook**. It is available for purchase in both online and hard-copy formats from www.apstylebook.com. It is also sold as an app.
- The guidelines in this guide are from the online edition.
- **Webster's New World College Dictionary** (10th edition) is the stylebook's preferred dictionary. The dictionary's online edition can be purchased on the stylebook's website, which also sells **AP Stylebook Checklist Tools** (updates that check for AP style as you write and edit in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Outlook, WordPress, Twitter and other web-based tools) and **AP Style Quizzes** (to test your knowledge).
- The stylebook offers clear and unambiguous guidance, but recognizes that individuals and organizations may choose to make other choices, even while following the majority of AP style.

What Is AP Style?

- The stylebook offers information on principles and ethics of professional journalism; updates to language usage; appropriate use of social media; and guidelines on grammar, spelling, punctuation, word usage and style.
- The online version has ongoing updates in a **What's New** section with new and updated entries; the **special-bound hard copy** is updated and published once a year each May. Suggested updates come from stylebook users, AP staff, news organizations, and journalism students and professors.
- It is a reference source for delivering accurate, careful, fair, unbiased and concise information, whether in print, online or on air; and in words, photos, videos or graphics.
- AP style is used by newspaper and magazine writers and editors (news, business, sports, lifestyle, etc.); photographers and videographers; journalism professors and students; corporate advertisers; PR and marketing departments; web and social media content writers; and others who need to write succinctly and clearly.
- The stylebook provides information on professional behavior, ethics and integrity.
 - A major point of writing style is clarity — choose words carefully, omit needless punctuation and do not overwrite.
- The online version is searchable by alphabetical lists, specialty chapters, new entries, recent changes and categories.
- The online version offers individual sections and chapters:
 - **Ask the Editor:** Search past answers on specific topics or send a question.
 - **Bibliography:** Learn the references used by the stylebook. It includes additional resources, such as for internet issues, company names, government questions, etc.
 - **Briefing on Media Law:** Find information on how court rulings have affected reporting. It includes the key legal issues in newsgathering activities (i.e., access to government and court information, confidential sources and newsgathering conduct) and news content (i.e., defamation, privacy and copyright infringement).
 - **Editing Markers:** See traditional editing marks and what they mean; use for editing on hard copy.
 - **My Custom Stylebook:** Create a custom stylebook, adding your own notes and examples.
 - **Polls and Surveys:** Learn what constitutes a quality poll (see **Data Journalism**, at right) and **Data & Graphics** under **AP Principles**, p. 3).
 - **Pronunciation Guide:** See phonetic spellings and hear audio files for proper pronunciation.
 - **Punctuation Guide:** Read a definition for each type of punctuation.
 - **Religion Guidelines:** View an A to Z listing of words related to religion and their definitions.
 - **Social Media Guidelines:** Find advice on fluency in social media while retaining journalistic integrity.
 - Social media can enhance reporting by locating and directly connecting with sources more easily; gathering user-generated content; finding potential stories; producing content designed for a particular platform and so on.
 - To retain credibility, the same professional standards apply to social media as to other newsgathering.
 - **Sports Guidelines:** Find an A to Z listing of words related to sports and their definitions; includes a section on sport identification codes (e.g., **BBM** = **Bowling-Ball-Minor League**).
 - **Style Blogs:** Search blogs for quickly changing terminology, how to phrase events, other changing information and more.
 - **Typical Codes:** Browse compilations of essential terms on topical events (e.g., **2012 Midterm Elections**, **2014 World Cup**).

Special AP Stylebook Sections

Broadcast Guidelines

These guidelines are for those who work in broadcast news.

- Speak in a conversational tone that is intelligent but easily understood.
- Use active verbs.
- When including an attribute, place the source at the beginning of the sentence (e.g., *At the House official says...*).
- When identifying the source, put the person's position first, then include the full name.
- Use clear, simple words; omit unnecessary words. Use round numbers.
- Use sentences of different lengths but keep most short.
- Direct quotes may not be as clear or short as paraphrasing.
- The first parts of a broadcast report include:
 1. **Lead:** The first sentence in a report, it includes the latest essential facts, gives the subject of the story and may present or hint at some verbs. Sources should be succinct.
 2. **Backlog:** The second sentence offers support and answers the implied question(s) from the lead.
 3. **Details:** The following sentences offer additional information, including the story's sources.
 4. **Background:** The end of the story offers perspective.

Business Guidelines

These guidelines are for stories that include business information.

- Use an engaging writing style, as the audience may not have a deep knowledge of the subject, and the readership could be global.
- Use numbers carefully and clearly to tell stories about how readers may be affected, not just as related to companies and profits.
- Know where to find information on Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filings, company histories and so on. Get to know experts in the field.
- Include details about both the decisions made and the people who made them (e.g., *board members*) to remind readers that companies are made up of people.
- Currency conversion is needed for foreign currency, but it should be limited to the first time the conversion is mentioned.
- Use figures and the \$ symbol for U.S. dollar amounts; do not use the euro symbol (e.g., *\$2 billion*, *2 billion euros*).
- World currency symbols are listed in the stylebook. Place the abbreviation before the amount starting with the second reference (e.g., *2 billion Australian dollars*, *A\$32 billion*).

Data Journalism

These guidelines offer advice on the challenges of acquiring and analyzing quantitative data and presenting it clearly (see **Data & Graphics** under **AP Principles**, p. 3).

- The AP specialty chapter **Briefing on Media Law** includes information on the Freedom of Information Act for requesting information from the federal government.
- Critically evaluate information, whether from a public source or a government agency; verify reliability, scope, methodology and purpose of data collection; check for bias; and analyze for anything that could skew an analysis, such as missing values.
- Ask for background information (e.g., *sample data entry form*, *definitions of coded fields*, *currency of the data*).
- Request data and statistics in formats that can be used with standard spreadsheet or database software for easier analysis. However, only paper records may be available.
- If similar data from another source are available, compare the data.
- When comparing two variables, distinguish correlation from causation.
 - **Correlation:** Two variables appear to be connected; a change in one variable appears in the other.
 - **Causation:** A change in one variable appears to cause the change in the other.
- Share the results (not the complete story) with the data producers before publication to get answers to any remaining questions.
- Some software offer searchable data and statistics, but they may not be downloadable.
 - Software can extract data, which some website policies may limit or prohibit. Terms of service must be followed.

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