

# Missouri News Network

# 5-MINUTE STYLEBOOK

(How 10% of the rules cover 90% of style questions)

## MEMORIZE THESE RULES.

Below are style guidelines that you should know without having to refer to a stylebook. They're taken from the Missouri News Network and AP stylebooks and from dictionary listings. If you learn them, your life will be easier and your editors and producers happier.

## PEOPLE

- Capitalize formal titles when they appear before names, and lowercase titles when they follow a name or stand alone (*President Donald Trump*; former *President Joe Biden*, *Barack Obama*, former *president*).

- Lowercase occupational or descriptive titles before or after a name. Mere job descriptions (such as *astronaut*, *announcer* or *teacher*) are not capitalized before or after a name (*reporter Casey Law*; *Casey Law*, a *reporter*). If you are not sure whether a title is a formal, official title or merely a job description, put the title after the name and lowercase it.

- Refer to adults in news reports by first name and family name the first time they appear in a story (*Jane Smith*) and by family name only on later references (*Smith*).

- Children 15 or younger are usually referred to by both names (first and family) on first reference and first name only on later references. Children in adult situations — common examples are in international sports and serious crimes in which they are charged as adults — are referred to by last name only on later references. **See boy, girl entry in AP.**

- To avoid confusing two people with the same family name, such as husband and wife or mother and son, use both names (first and family) on later references. A story mentioning Barack Obama and Michelle Obama should usually refer to them as *Barack Obama* and *Michelle Obama* even after they are introduced if there's any chance of confusion. Sometimes a title can be repeated to make the distinction (former *President Obama* or the former *president* on later references), or the relationship qualifier can be used, such as *his mother*, *her brother*. Only rarely, in some feature stories, will you want to refer to adults by their first names on later references.

- Do not use courtesy titles (*Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Miss*, *Ms.*, *Dr.*) in news stories. Most newspapers have eliminated courtesy titles except in obituaries (for the deceased only) and in editorials. Other than in *Missourian* Life Stories, don't use *Dr.* before a name. It's much better to explain what kind of doctor he or she is in context (*Casey Law*, an *orthopedic surgeon*).

- Abbreviate military and police titles before names in accordance with the AP Stylebook. Don't abbreviate titles when they stand alone or follow a name (*Gen. Douglas MacArthur*; the *general*).

## NUMBERS

- In general, zero through nine are written out, and 10 and above are written as numerals.

- Always use numerals, even if less than 10, with:

- **addresses** (3 *Hospital Drive*)
- **ages** (7 *years old*)
- **dates** (*March 4*)
- **distances** (4 *miles*)
- **heights** (5 *feet 11 inches*)
- **million, billion and trillion** (9 *million people*)
- **money** (\$5)
- **percentages with figures take the symbol** (8%)
- **time** (2 *p.m.*)
- **weights** (6 *pounds*)

- Spell out any number, except a year, that begins a sentence. (*Twelve students attended. 2020 was a dismal year.*)

- For most numbers of a million or more, use this form, rounded off to no more than two decimal places: *1.45 million*; the *\$18.1 billion budget*. If the exact number is important, write it out: *She received 1,253,667 votes, and her opponent received 988,401.*

- Million and billion should not be abbreviated in text. It is OK to abbreviate in tight spaces and headlines (*a \$3.2M tax hike*).

- Spell out numbers used as figures of speech. (*Thanks a million.*)

- Spell out fractions less than 1 when they stand alone (*Use one-half cup of flour and two-thirds cup of sugar.*). Otherwise, write them as mixed fractions (*1 1/2 cups of flour*) or decimals (*1.5 liters of water*). Generally, use a 0 to precede a decimal smaller than zero (*0.75 kilograms*).

- Convert metric measurements to English ones. If you see metric measurements in wire copy, delete or put in notes mode.

- Do not use *1-* before any telephone number; 800-888-8888 will suffice. Don't use parentheses around the area code, but do include the 573 area code when necessary.

## DATELINES, PLACES, ADDRESSES

- Datelines appear at the top of stories and tell what city the story was filed from. The city name is written in capital letters, with the state names or country in upper and lowercase (*GRAND RAPIDS, Mich.*).

- Not all datelines include a state name. Don't include a state name, whether in a dateline or in text, for:

- the cities listed in the AP Stylebook's datelines entry
- Missouri cities and towns

■ Once a state dateline is used, cities in the story from the same state do not need to be followed by a state name. For example, if a dateline says *Topeka, Kansas*, and the story mentions Wichita or Olathe, you can simply write *the city name* without the state. But always include the state name for cities that could be confused with other places, such as Mexico, Missouri, and Paris, Missouri.

■ Notice that Washington and New York always refer to the cities by those names, not the states, unless otherwise indicated. In other words, you would not normally write *Washington, D.C.*, or *New York City* but simply *Washington* and *New York*.

■ Do not abbreviate such designations as *street* when they stand alone without a numbered address. Only three of these are abbreviated — *street*, *avenue* and *boulevard* — and they are abbreviated only when they appear with a numbered address. (This is usually referred to as the STAB rule.) If the street name has a direction in it, abbreviate the direction only with a numbered address (*West Hickory Avenue*; *103 W. Hickory Ave.*; *Southeast Avalon Drive*; *2608 S.E. Avalon Drive*).

■ When mentioning someone's hometown, do not use commas around the town. (Right: *Casey Smith of Columbia ran home*. Wrong: *Casey Smith, of Columbia, ran home*.) But if an age is included, do use commas. (*Casey Smith, 36, of Columbia, ran home*.)

■ There is no such actual place as the Daniel Boone Regional Library. It is a system. The Columbia location is called the Columbia Public Library.

## TIMES, DATES

■ Use only the day of the week for events within a week of publication. (*The summit ended Monday*.)

■ Never abbreviate days of the week. Do not include both a day and a date.

■ Do not use *today*, *yesterday* or *tomorrow* except in direct quotes. Use only days of the week.

■ Use month and day to refer to events happening a week or more before or after publication. Use cardinal numbers, not ordinal numbers, for dates. (*The summit began July 11*. *The seminar will be held March 3*.)

■ Don't use the year unless the event is more than a year before or after publication. (*He died March 17, 2019*. *The currency will be introduced Nov. 1, 2023*.)

■ Do not abbreviate a month unless it has a date (*January*; *January 2022*; *Jan. 1, 2022*). Five months are never abbreviated: March, April, May, June and July. Memorize these.

■ Names of months and days of the week are capitalized, but seasons are not capitalized (*Wednesday*, *January*, *spring*).

■ Designated months and weeks are capitalized, per AP. (*Black History Month*, *International Women's Day*).

■ Use the lowercase for time designators: *8 a.m.* and *7 p.m.*

■ Always use figures for time in this form: *6 a.m.*, *10:30 p.m.*, *1:45 a.m.* Do not leave in the zeroes, as in *8:00 a.m.*

■ For time spans, use this format: *1 to 4 p.m.* (not *1-4 p.m.*).

■ Follow time-date-place order. (*Martial law was declared at noon Friday in Jesse Hall*. *Trials of collaborators will begin at 2 p.m. Oct. 14 in Mexico, Missouri*.)

■ There is no such time as *12 p.m.* Use *noon*. Avoid the use of *midnight*, per AP's rule. Be specific.

## THINGS

■ Common nouns are lowercase (*dog*, *apple*).

■ Proper nouns are uppercase (*Fido*, *Schnucks*).

■ For names of varieties of plants and animals or of particular foods, capitalize only the proper noun (*German shepherd*, *McIntosh apple*, *red delicious apple*, *Boston cream pie*).

■ Capitalize trademarks (*I drank a Pepsi*), or use a common noun as a substitute (*I drank a soft drink*).

■ Many product names that people think are generic terms (common nouns) are actually proper nouns and should be capitalized (*Band-Aid*, *Frisbee*, *Jell-O*, *Kitty Litter*, *Kleenex*, *Scotch tape*, *Styrofoam*, *Vaseline*, *Velcro*, *Xerox*). **Search trademark in AP for clarity if you're unsure.**

■ Use abbreviations on first reference only if they are widely known. (*CIA agents*.) Do not put the acronym in parentheses. Spell out the names of agencies on first reference. If an abbreviation would be confusing, use a common-noun substitute (*the council*, *the junta*). As much as possible, avoid using acronyms.

■ In general, don't abbreviate units of measurement (*pounds*, *miles*, *hours*, etc.).

## A FEW MORE TIPS

■ On first reference for the Columbia campus, use *University of Missouri*. In sports stories, *Missouri* is the preferred first reference. *Mizzou* is acceptable on second reference in all cases. In some sports stories and in tight headlines or display type for print, MU would be acceptable. Never use *University of Missouri-Columbia* or *UMC*. If there would be confusion with another college, then write around it using something to the effect of *the Columbia campus*.

■ When referring to the president of the UM System, use *UM System President Mun Choi*. **Do not refer to him as the MU chancellor; this position was eliminated.**

■ Avoid exclamation points. Few things are spoken with the emphasis that should be reserved for an exclamation point.

■ Do not use brackets. Use parentheses. [This is a bracket. Do not use.] (This is a parenthesis. Do use, but sparingly.)

■ Do not include U.S. before Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force when referring to service members from the United States.

■ Do not use *http://* with any Web addresses. It's not needed. Also, check every Web address by typing it into a browser without the *www*.

■ In general, profanities or offensive language shouldn't be used. Exceptions can be made but must be approved by the executive editor, managing editor or news editor.

■ A citizen is a person who has acquired the full civil rights of a nation. To avoid confusion, use *resident*, not *citizen*, in referring to inhabitants of states and cities.

■ Always use the 13th Circuit Court on first reference because it encompasses Boone and Callaway counties.

Source: Fred Vultee; amended 2012 by Maggie Walter and Audrey Moon; amended 2013 and 2014 by Maggie Walter; amended 2015 by Mike Cirelli; amended 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2024 by Laura Johnston and Amelia Hurley; 2025 by Laura Johnston.