

American Hospital Association Editorial Style Guide

Updated July 25, 2014

AHA Electronic and Print Publications

The American Hospital Association follows the recommendation in the most recent edition of “The Associated Press Stylebook” for most decisions relating to style in its electronic and print publications. This document highlights some of those recommendations and gives some exceptions.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Generally, spell out the name of an organization in first reference. Follow with an abbreviation or acronym *only* if you will refer to the organization again using the abbreviated form. (Use your judgment. In short news briefs for AHA News Now, or when the audience is more familiar with the abbreviation than the spelled-out term, exclusive use of abbreviations may be preferable; in long documents that contain numerous organization names, readers may appreciate use of full names throughout.) *See also* Special Words and Terms:

The American Hospital Association (AHA) has offices in both Washington, D.C., and Chicago. The AHA headquarters is in Chicago.

Form the possessive of an abbreviation or acronym is by adding ‘s, regardless of its last letter:

CMS’s, DOJ’s, HHS’s

Form the plural of an abbreviation or acronym by adding s alone; do not use an apostrophe:

VIPs, critical access hospitals (CAHs)

The following list gives the correct form of several other commonly used abbreviations:

a.m., p.m.

ET, CT, MT, PT (for time zones)

Lt. Gov., Sen. (before a name)

M.D., R.N., Ph.D. (after a name when appropriate)

U.S.; P.L. 123; USC

See also Cities and states

Ages

Use figures only, according to AP.

She is age 9.

A 9-year-old girl is here.

Ampersand (&)

Avoid the use of the ampersand except when it is part of the title of an organization. (If in doubt, check the organization's website):

Health Research & Educational Trust

Department of Health & Human Services

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

but Department of Housing and Urban Development

Capitalization

The following list gives examples of correct capitalization:

Senior Vice President Mary Smith, Acme Corp. (title before name)

but Mary Smith, senior vice president of Acme Corp. (title after name)

Congress; Committee on Grammar; Democratic Party; American Hospital Association; Board of Trustees (proper names)

but congressional; the committee; the administration, the party; the association; the board; the trustees; federal; state (in subsequent references)

Seasons (winter, spring, summer, fall) are not capitalized unless they are part of a formal title.

In titles and headlines, capitalize the first and last words and all other words except prepositions and conjunctions of three or fewer letters. Capitalize a short article such as *the*, *a* and *and* only if it is the first or last word in a title:

An Argument for the Plaintiff

A Request Concerning Civility

See also The.

Citations

Use the following styles for citations only, based on the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, sixth edition. Pay particular attention to spacing, commas and periods. Do not spell out the first name of the author. See also Titles.

Technical and Research Reports

General format—use this form for issue briefs, working papers and other corporate documents):

Author, A. A. (2001). *Title of work* (Report No. xxx). Retrieved from:
<http://www.completewebaddress.com> Location: Publisher

a. Corporate author, government report

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. (2003). *Managing asthma: A guide for schools* (HIH Publication No. 02-2650). Retrieved from
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/lunch/asthma/asth_sch.pdf

b. Corporate author, task force report filed online

American Psychological Association, Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. (2007). *Report of the APA task force on the sexualization of girls*. Retrieved from
<http://www.apa.org/wpo/sexualization.html>

c. Authored report, from nongovernmental organization

Kessy, S. S. A. and Urio, F. M. (2006). *The contribution of microfinance institutions to poverty reduction in Tanzania* (Research Report No. 06.3). Retrieved from Research on Poverty Alleviation website:
http://www.repoa.or.tx/documents_storage/06.3_Kessy_and_Urio.pdf

d. Issue brief

Employee Benefit Research Institute. (1992, February). *Sources of health insurance and characteristics of the uninsured* (Issue Brief No. 123). Washington, D.C.: Author.

Periodicals

General format—use this form for items published on a regular basis, such as journals, magazines or newsletters:

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., and Author, C. C. (year, month date). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*, volume# (issue#), page numbers. Retrieved from <http://www.completewebaddress.com>

a. Online magazine article

Clay, R. (2008, June). Science vs. ideology: Psychologists fight back about the misuse of research. *Monitor on Psychology*, 39(6). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor>

b. Newsletter article

Six sites meet for comprehensive anti-gang initiative conference. (2006, November/December). *OJJDP News @ a Glance*. Retrieved from http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/news_at_glance/216684/topstory.html

Cities and states

Spell out the name of a city or a state when it stands alone in running text:

The Boston subway system; the California legislature

The names of large cities with distinctive names can stand alone, with no state name, in running text. No state with the following cities, from Associated Press Stylebook.

Atlanta	Houston	Phoenix
Baltimore	Indianapolis	Pittsburgh
Boston	Las Vegas	St. Louis
Chicago	Los Angeles	Salt Lake City
Cincinnati	Milwaukee	San Antonio
Cleveland	Minneapolis	San Diego
Dallas	New Orleans	San Francisco
Denver	New York	Seattle
Detroit	Oklahoma City	Washington
Honolulu	Philadelphia	

Spell out the name of a city and use the long-form abbreviation for the state when they appear together in running text. Use *Postal Service abbreviations only with a complete address*:

She lives in Stoneham, Mass., [not MA] not far from Boston.

but 123 Country Lane
Stoneham, MA 12345

Long-form abbreviations. (Names of eight states are not abbreviated.)

Ala.	Hawaii	Mich.	N.C.	Utah
Alaska	Idaho	Minn.	N.D.	Vt.
Ariz.	Ill.	Miss.	Ohio	Va.
Ark.	Ind.	Mo.	Okla.	Wash.
Calif.	Iowa	Mont.	Ore.	W.Va.
Colo.	Kan.	Neb.	Pa.	Wis.
Conn.	Ky.	Nev.	R.I.	Wyo.
Del.	La.	N.H.	S.C.	
D.C.	Maine	N.J.	S.D.	
Fla.	Md.	N.M.	Tenn.	
Ga.	Mass.	N.Y.	Texas	

Congress

Use the following style with names of federal legislators; precede with *U.S.* if the context would not make it clear:

U.S. Rep. Joe Smith, R-N.J., is one of six officials on the trip.

Sen. Joan Smith, D-Ala., is a sponsor of the legislation.

Use of ZIP code abbreviations for states may be preferable in tabular matter or when space is at a premium; at any rate, be consistent.

In general, avoid Member of Congress, member or congressman. Use legislator, representative or senator instead.

Dates

Use figures only, without ordinals (*st, th, etc.*). When full dates appear in text, abbreviate the month and use a comma both before and after the year. Use common sense to determine whether including the year is necessary:

On Jan. 1, 2016, this provision will expire.

not On Jan. 1st, 2016, this provision will expire.

Next January, this provision will expire.

However, when writing only the month and year, spell out the month and do not use commas:

The provision expires in January 2013.

Hospital names

When in doubt about a hospital's correct name, check the *AHA Guide* or the hospital's website

Use these guidelines when context dictates that you should identify a hospital's location:

Hospital name includes name of city or town. Put abbreviated state name (see *i*) in parentheses, immediately after city or town:

Winchester (Va.) Medical Center

Hospital name includes name of state. Put name of city or town, preceded by *in*, after full hospital name:

Vibra Hospital of Southeastern Michigan in Lincoln Park

All other cases. Put the city/town and abbreviated state after hospital name, preceded by *in*:

Beaufort County Hospital in Washington, N.C.

Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore *or* Baltimore-based Johns Hopkins Hospital

Lists (bulleted)

Use a consistent list style. Full sentences are preferred and will aid reader retention, but phrases are acceptable as long as they are used consistently. The following style is commonly used in AHA documents.

We object to this rule because:

- It will cost hospitals more money.
- It will do nothing to improve patient safety.
- It will discourage further performance improvement.

Money

The following examples illustrate AP style:

Casual reference: Please give me a dollar.

Amounts less than \$1 million: We charge \$5 for the book; our profits were \$1,025 this year.

Amounts more than \$1 million: \$55 million; \$2.56 billion (use up to two decimal places); exactly \$4,321,987.

Numbers

Spell out whole numbers below 10; use figures for 10 and above.

Use commas with four or more digits (4,000; 650,234).

Avoid beginning a sentence with a figure. *Exception:* Use figures for the year; better yet, recast the sentence:

Ten years later, we have discontinued this practice.

2010 was a pivotal year in health care.

Better: The year 2010 was pivotal in health care.

Do not use Arabic ordinals (1st, 2nd, etc.) unless they appear in a formal name (e.g., 2nd District Court).

Use *more than* (not *over*) and *less than* (not *under*) with numbers unless you are describing space or distance:

We have more than 60 employees.

The hole in the road is over nine inches deep.

Percentages

Spell out *percent* in sentences; do not use the symbol % except in tabular matter, where space is limited or in documents that are heavily statistical. Use figures for percentages (2 percent; 0.23 percent)

Phone numbers

AP recommends using a hyphen after the area code. If giving an extension, style as follows:

202-638-1100, ext. 2

Possessives

AP recommends use of the apostrophe only to form the possessive of proper names ending in s:

Dickens' novels

AP also recommends forming the plural of any abbreviation or acronym, even those ending in s, with 's:

CMS's, HHS's

Punctuation

Some special considerations:

Comma: Do not use a comma before the last item in a series unless the comma is essential for clarity.

Dashes: The AHA uses one space before and after a dash – as illustrated here.

Parentheses: If a full sentence is in parentheses, the period goes inside; otherwise, the period goes outside.

Period: Use a single space after a period at the end of a sentence.

The

Use the definite article *the* before American Hospital Association and AHA unless they are being used as a unit modifier; capitalize *the* only at the beginning of the sentence:

The American Hospital Association is often referred to as the AHA.

On May 1, the American Hospital Association held a meeting.

but American Hospital Association rules prohibit employees from accepting gifts.

Avoid capitalizing *the* preceding names of works unless it is the preference of the publication. The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times and The Washington Post all prefer the capitalized *the*; the Chicago Sun-Times and Los Angeles Times do not.

Titles of Bills and Laws

Capitalize principal words; do not use quotation marks or italics. If the bill or public law number is provided, style as follows:

The Grammar Improvement Act (H.R. 1234)

Titles of Projects and Initiatives

Capitalize principal words and enclose in quotation marks the titles of projects and initiatives:

“We Care. We Vote”

“Hospitals in Pursuit of Excellence” (HPOE)

Titles of Publications

Books, reports, chartbooks, white papers, newspaper or magazine articles and similar publications:

Capitalize principal words and enclose title in quotation marks:

“Hospitals and Care Systems of the Future”

Exceptions: In names of periodicals, directories and other reference guides, capitalize principal words but do not use quotation marks:

AHA News

The Washington Post

AHA Hospital Statistics: 2013 Edition

See also Capitalization

Special Words and Terms

The words and terms below are styled correctly. Some terms are followed by correct abbreviations in parentheses that are acceptable in subsequent references. Take special note of capitalization and hyphenation.

A

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

accountable care organization (ACO)

afterward (not afterwards)

American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE)

AHA Solutions

American Society for Healthcare Engineering (ASHE)

American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA)

American Society for Healthcare Risk Management (ASHRM)

Association for Community Health Improvement (ACHI)

Association for Healthcare Resource & Materials Management (AHRMM)
Association for Healthcare Volunteer Resource Professionals (AHVRP)
Association for the Healthcare Environment (AHE)

B

based on (not based off)

C

catheter-associated urinary tract infections (CAUTI)
Center for Healthcare Governance
central line-associated bloodstream infections (CLABSI)
co-author
Clostridium difficile (C. diff)
Congress but congressional
copayment
Comprehensive Unit-based Safety Program (CUSP)
critical access hospital (CAH)

D

database (one word)
data mining (n.); data-mining (adj.)
decision making (n.); decision-making (adj.)
disk (not disc)

E

e.g., i.e. (avoid; follow with comma)
email (no hyphen)

F

follow up (v.); follow-up (n.)
front line (n.); front-line (adj.)

G

green health care
Generation X, Gen X, Gen Xers
Generation Y, Gen Y, Gen Yers (Prefer millennials; do not mix the two terms in same document)

H

hospital-acquired conditions (HACs)
health care-associated infections (HAIs)
handoff(s)
health care
Health for Life
Hospitals in Pursuit of Excellence (HPOE)

I

in-depth
insurance exchanges

insurance marketplace
Internet
Institute for Diversity in Health Management (IFD)

J
Johns Hopkins Hospital

L
long-term (adj.)

M
makeup (n. or adj.)
make up (v.)
master's degree, master's
midsize
multi-industry
multisite
must-do (adj.)

N
nationwide
nonprofit
not-for-profit

O
offboarding
off-site
onboarding
on call
ongoing
online
on-site

P
pay-for-performance
payer (not payor)
Physician Leadership Forum (PLF)
policy makers
preconference

R
readmission
recovery audit contractors (RACs)
road map

S
safety-net hospital
sizable

short-term (adj.)
Society for Healthcare Strategy & Market Development (SHSMD)
state-level (adj.)
statewide
Symposium for Leaders in Healthcare Quality (SLHQ)
systemwide

T

throughput
time frame
traditionalist
Triple Aim
toolkit
top-performing
toward (not towards)
TRUST Award

U

update
United States (n.)
U.S. (adj.)

V

ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP)

W

the Web
webinar
website
well-being
West Nile virus
World Wide Web
workday
workforce
workplace
work hours

Y

year-end
yearlong

Z

ZIP code (ZIP in all caps)

Send suggestions for additions to this list to Maura Kennedy (mkennedy@aha.org) with subject Special Words and Terms.

