

AP Style Guide – Quick Reference

The difference between academic writing and AP style

Most, if not all, of the documents created by the department are shared with the public, the education community and the media. In order to uphold the integrity and image of the department, it is essential to use a consistent writing style.

With this in mind, writing to communicate, which is guided by the Associated Press (AP) Stylebook, differs from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) styles. Therefore, academic writing is different than writing for communications.

The following will provide some guidelines to writing using AP style:

Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth and the United States

- ❖ **Pennsylvania** – Always capitalize. If Pennsylvania stands alone in a sentence it should be spelled out (for example – The program serves many students in Pennsylvania.) Use the abbreviation Pa. in conjunction with the name of a city, county, town, village or military base in text. There are two exceptions to this rule, when referencing Philadelphia or Pittsburgh there is no need to include Pa. because they are so widely known as Pennsylvania cities. Place one comma between the city and the state name, and another comma after the state name, unless ending a sentence (for example – The grant will be awarded to three schools in Erie, Pa., six schools in Pittsburgh and two schools in York, Pa.).
- ❖ **Commonwealth** – Lowercase when using instead of Pennsylvania (for example – There are 500 school districts in the commonwealth.) Capitalize when used in conjunction with a state name (for example – The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.).
- ❖ **United States** – Always capitalize. United States should be spelled out when being used as a noun (for example – The program is offered to every student in the United States.) When used as an adjective, United States should be abbreviated as U.S. (for example – The U.S. Department of Education announced the guidelines for the grant application.).

Abbreviating States

- ❖ When referencing a state, always spell out the name when it stands alone in a sentence.
- ❖ State names should be abbreviated when used in conjunction with the name of a city, town or military base (with the exception of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, mentioned previously, and other large cities that are widely known). However, there are eight states that should only be abbreviated in a ZIP code: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas and Utah. The following are the abbreviations for the other 42 states when used in

conjunction with a city, town or military base, followed by their ZIP code abbreviations (which should only be used in full addresses) in parenthesis:

Ala. (AL)	Fla. (FL)	Md. (MD)	Neb. (NE)	N.D. (ND)	Tenn. (TN)
Ariz. (AZ)	Ga. (GA)	Mass. (MA)	Nev. (NV)	Okla. (OK)	Vt. (VT)
Ark. (AR)	Ill. (IL)	Mich. (MI)	N.H. (NH)	Ore. (OR)	Va. (VA)
Calif. (CA)	Ind. (IN)	Minn. (MN)	N.J. (NJ)	Pa. (PA)	Wash. (WA)
Colo. (CO)	Kan. (KS)	Miss. (MS)	N.M. (NM)	R.I. (RI)	W.Va. (WV)
Conn. (CT)	Ky. (KY)	Mo. (MO)	N.Y. (NY)	S.C. (SC)	Wis. (WI)
Del. (DE)	La. (LA)	Mont. (MT)	N.C. (NC)	S.D. (SD)	Wyo. (WY)
Alaska (AK)	Hawaii (HI)	Idaho (ID)	Iowa (IA)	Maine (ME)	Ohio (OH)
Texas (TX)	Utah (UT)				

Personal/Professional Titles

- ❖ Lowercase and spell out titles when not attached to a name (for example – For more information, contact your regional coordinator.).
- ❖ Capitalize formal titles when they are directly before a name (for example – Today, Governor Tom Corbett announced a new grant opportunity.).

Acronyms

Within the department acronyms are commonly used among staff to more efficiently communicate with one another however to an outsider we might as well be speaking another language. We have to remember that though our communication, written or oral, may be directed to a specific audience with a background in education it must be presented in a way that anyone can easily access and understand the information we are presenting. For this reason, the department has been instructed to limit our use of acronyms when communicating to the public as their over-use can lead to confusion.

Only very common acronyms and acronyms of department programs/initiatives should be used when we communicate with the public. Upon first reference, always spell out an acronym, even if it is well known, followed by the acronym in parenthesis (for example – The grant application should be returned to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).) If appropriate, include the word “the” before spelling out an acronym but omit “the” when using an acronym (for example – Five school districts administered the reading portion of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams yesterday. The schools will continue to administer the math portion of PSSA exams today.).

The following is a list of some of the commonly used acronyms which can be used in documents:

PDE	ELL	ESL	SPP	PA-MEP	TIMS
PSSA	SAS	CTE	CTC	PIMS	PVAAS
PASSHE	NCLB	IEP	SAT	ACT	GED

Months, Years and Dates

- ❖ **Months** - Capitalize the name of months in all uses. Always spell out the full month name.
- ❖ **Years** – Always include the year along with a date and use figures, without commas if a year stands alone (for example – The grant begins in 2012.).
- ❖ **Dates** – Always use figures, without *st*, *nd*, *rd* or *th* (for example – June 2, 2011).

Time

Always use figures. The format should be “00:00 A/PM” (for example – 4:00 PM). Use a colon to separate hours from minutes and always include “:00” when the time is at the top of the hour for clarity. Include AM and PM which are always capitalized.

Numbers

- ❖ Numbers 0 through 9 are spelled out, except when part of a date, address, a law or bill, a proper name or time (for example – There are five schools in the district.) Numbers 10 and above can be written as figures (for example – The grant will be awarded to 16 schools.).
- ❖ Spell out first through ninth and use figures starting with 10th (for example – Pennsylvania finished 15th in the competition for the second year in a row.).
- ❖ Spell out a numeral at the beginning of a sentence or reword the sentence (for example – Twenty of the schools have high achievement.).
- ❖ Dollar amounts should be written as figures (for example – The book cost \$3.).

Monetary Amounts

- ❖ Use figures and \$ sign in all cases, except in casual references or when the exact amount is unknown (for example – Each student will pay \$3.50 for lunch which will save the school districts thousands of dollars.).
- ❖ For amounts more than \$1 million, use the \$ sign and numerals up to two decimal places followed by million, billion, etc. (for example – The Governor signed the \$27.15 billion budget on June 30, 2011.).

Percentages

Use numerals for all percentages followed by the word “percent”- we do not use the % sign (for example – The scores show that 60 percent of the students are reading at a proficient level.).

Academic Subjects and Departments

- ❖ Lowercase the names of academic subjects and departments (for example – The history department works closely with the mathematics and science teachers.) Only capitalize words that are proper nouns or adjectives and when *department* is part of the official and formal name (for example – The University of Pittsburgh Department of Hispanic Languages and Literature offers courses in Spanish literature.).
- ❖ Capitalize the name of academic courses (for example – Students in ninth grade must take Algebra I, World History II and Biology 101.).

Names of Official Documents

- ❖ The names of official documents should be capitalized and italicized (for example – Applicants should complete the *School Improvement Grant Application* available online.).
- ❖ The names of publications should also be capitalized and italicized (for example – Pennsylvania made the list, compiled by the *New York Times*, of states with the highest graduation rates.).
- ❖ If you are referring to an article, section or data field within a larger body of work, the larger work should be italicized and the smaller body of work should be put in quotations.

Referencing a Piece of Legislation or a Law

- ❖ A piece of legislation, or a bill, is a proposed law that is awaiting passage by the General Assembly.
- ❖ A law or an act has been signed by the Governor.
- ❖ When referring to pieces of legislation, upon first reference spell out House Bill or Senate Bill followed by the bill number. House Bill and Senate Bill should be abbreviated upon future references as HB and SB followed by the bill number.
- ❖ Capitalized legislative acts (for example – The No Child Left Behind Act).
- ❖ When referencing a specific law always note in which larger set of statutes the law can be found (i.e. The Pennsylvania Code or the Pennsylvania School Code) and always include the full citation at the end of the sentence in which you are referring to the law (for example – Pennsylvania students are required to attend school from ages eight to 17 per the Pennsylvania School Code (24 PS § 1326)).

Legislature and General Assembly

Capitalize when preceded by the name of a state (for example – The Pennsylvania Legislature or the Pennsylvania General Assembly). Retain capitalization when the state name is dropped but the reference is specifically to that state's legislature (for example – The 2013 state budget was passed by the General Assembly and signed by Governor Tom Corbett.).

Federal and State

- ❖ **Federal** – Capitalize when referring to a governmental body that uses the word as part of their formal name (for example – the Federal Trade Commission). Lowercase when used as an adjective to distinguish something from state, county, city, town or private entities (for example – federal guidelines or the federal government).
- ❖ **State** – Lowercase when used as an adjective to specify a level of jurisdiction (for example – state Rep. John Smith, the state Transportation Department or state budget)
*Note – statewide should not be hyphenated.

The Use of – “Non”

- ❖ In general do not use a hyphen when forming a compound with “non” that does not have a special meaning and can be understood if **not** is used before the base word (for example – The student is a nonresident of the school district.).
- ❖ Use a hyphen before proper nouns or in an awkward combination (for example – She is a non-American therefore her identification code is non-numerical.).

Plurals and Possessives

- ❖ **Plurals** – In most cases, plurals can be formed by adding *s* (for example – teachers, programs, grants). Words ending in *ch*, *s*, *sh*, *ss*, *x* and *z* must be made plural by adding *es* (for example – buses, lunches, successes). When a word ends in *y*, and the *y* is preceded by a consonant or *qu*, change the *y* to an *i* and add *es* (for example – delinquency → delinquencies, city → cities). When forming a plural with an acronym use a lowercase *s* and do not add an apostrophe (’) (for example – The students took the PSSAs at their local IUs.).
- ❖ **Possessives** – In most cases, possessives can be formed by adding an *'s* (for example – The student’s test was completed using his classmate’s pencil.) When a word ends in *s* a possessive can be made by adding an apostrophe after the word (for example – The girls’ grades were higher than the boys’ grades.).

Punctuation

- ❖ **Colon (:)** – Use a colon at the end of a sentence to introduce lists or in legal citations. Only capitalize the first word after a colon if it is a proper noun or the start of a complete sentence (for example – The new teacher evaluations will consist of four components: classroom observations, school performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams, teacher performance and other criteria determined at the local level.).
- ❖ **Comma Use (,)** – Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series (for example – The meeting will include superintendents, principals and teachers.) Put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series however, if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction (for example – The program was a collaborative effort between the Office of Administration, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Policy

Office.).

- ❖ **Dash (–)** – Use a dash when denoting an abrupt change in thought within a sentence (for example – Students may begin enrolling in the charter school in June – if the school is approved.).
- ❖ **Hyphen (-)** – Use a hyphen to join two or more words to form a single idea (for example – PDE is committed to providing every student with a world-class education.).
- ❖ **Quotations (“ ”)** – Use quotations marks to denote the exact words of a speaker or writer (for example – The superintendent was “very pleased” by PSSA scores this year.).
- ❖ **Semicolon (;)** – Use a semicolon to indicate a greater separation of thought and information than a comma could convey but less than the separation that a period implies. Use a semicolon when items in a series are long or when individual segments contain commas (for example - Based upon the scores adopted by the board, of the students tested in Algebra I, 39 percent scored proficient or advanced; in Biology, 36 percent scored proficient or advanced; and in Literature, 50 percent scored proficient or advanced.).

*Note that a semicolon is used before the final *and* in such a series.

Bullet Points

Capitalize the first word of a bullet point. Complete sentences are not required when using bullet points and periods are not required at the end of a bullet point, however always stay consistent with the use of punctuation (for example – Documents must be reviewed by:

- The bureau director
- The deputy secretary
- The Office of Press and Communications).

Formatting, Spacing and Bolding within a Document

- ❖ Formatting within a document should always be consistent, this includes page numbers, spacing and margins. Every document should include page numbers on the bottom right of the page Documents should be single spaced with one inch margins.
- ❖ Every document should include a date of when it was last updated, on every page as footer, so that the editor and the audience receiving the information will know it is current information (for example – Last updated 8/5/2011). This can be included by: clicking on the Insert tab → clicking Footer → scrolling down and inserting the footer called Newsprint → deleting the line by clicking it and hitting delete → changing the left field to say “Reviewed or Revised (followed by date)” → the right side should automatically reflect the page number of the document → the footer should be formatted to match the text of the document and should be size 11 font.
- ❖ All documents should include a title which represents the purpose of the document.

Titles should be a larger size font and bolded.

- ❖ Font, font size and bolding should be consistent. Font should be Times New Roman or Verdana and size 12. Bolding should only be used in headings and subheadings. Italics should only be used to denote a title of a publication.
- ❖ When using bullet points or numbering be consistent with the style of bullets or numbers (figures or roman numerals) and the spacing before, after and between bullets.

Editing Marks

^ – Insert a word

/ – Lowercase

≡ – Capitalize

] – Flush right

[– Flush left

] [– Boldface and center

X or ——— – Delete

¶ – New paragraph