

style USA TODAY NETWORK **guide**

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	5
WHERE TO TURN IF YOU DON'T FIND WHAT YOU'RE AFTER	6
WHAT'S NEW IN THIS UPDATE	7
GENERAL GUIDE ENTRIES.....	8
A	8
B	22
C.....	27
D.....	42
E	56
F	62
G.....	68
H.....	74
I	79
J.....	84
K	86
L	88
M	91
N.....	99
O.....	108
P	113
Q.....	120
R.....	121
S	124
T	134
U	138
V	140
W	141
X-Y-Z	145
CRIMINAL JUSTICE	147
SPORTS	153
DISABILITY ISSUES	167
GENDER AND SEXUALITY ISSUES.....	170
NETWORK ETHICS & ACCURACY GUIDELINES	172

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

NETWORK STANDARDS FOR CRIME REPORTING.....	179
PUNCTUATION.....	180
RELIGION.....	188
RECOMMENDED REFERENCE GUIDES	195
NOTE	196
CREDITS	197





FOREWORD

This style guide is a testament to the collective commitment of the USA TODAY Network to journalistic excellence. This is a dynamic and invaluable resource that will serve as a guiding compass to provide clarity, consistency, and accuracy in reporting. This is not a static dictionary or a rulebook; it's a sensible tool, reflecting the ever-evolving landscape of language and the diverse needs of audiences.

The entries address contemporary issues and nuanced terminology, demonstrating a keen understanding of the challenges journalists face. The architects have provided the guidelines needed to navigate complex subjects with precision and sensitivity. Moreover, they have wisely imbued this guide with the agility to adapt to the unique demands of each story, recognizing that journalistic integrity requires both consistency and flexibility.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a service for journalists, teachers, professionals, writers, students, etc., to enable accuracy and accessibility relevant to the communities where we live, work, and serve. It is an evolving document that empowers us to communicate with clarity, accuracy and respect to foster trust and understanding.

If you have comments or feedback, please submit your thoughts using this link [here](#).

We sincerely hope the style guide will be used and referenced in the spirit it was intended: to establish a uniting tool that provides simple guidance regarding language to enable consistency and clarity as we deliver on our mission of serving and empowering our communities.

Michael McCarter
VP Opinion Group + Standards & Ethics
USA TODAY Co. | USA TODAY Network



WHERE TO TURN IF YOU DON'T FIND WHAT YOU'RE AFTER

Refer to the online Merriam-Webster Dictionary at [merriam-webster.com](https://www.merriam-webster.com) (m-w.com for short) for spellings, usage and definitions not addressed in the USA TODAY Network Style Guide. In recognition that the dictionary may provide more than one spelling for a word or phrase, here are the rules for determining which to use:

- Use the principal spelling of the word or phrase; do not use spellings marked as “variant,” “less common” or British versions (often noted in blue).
- When there are two spellings for the same word (often joined by the word “or”), use the first spelling.
- Be sure to use the spelling for the correct definition of the word or phrase you are using.
- Be sure to use the spelling for the correct part of speech (adjective, adverb, noun, etc.) you are using.



WHAT'S NEW IN THIS UPDATE

V3.0, Sept. 21, 2026

This update to the USA TODAY Network Style Guide (NSG) is a significant one. There are a number of clarifications that have grown out of questions put before the Style Committee. Among those updated:

- **secretary-general**
- **use of parentheses**
- **Old City of Jerusalem**
- **obscenities, profanities, vulgarities**
- **magazine, newspaper names**
- **China**
- **Web addresses, URLs**
- **Indigenous people, peoples**
- **military titles**
- **composition titles**
- **references to tennis' U.S. Open**

There are key new entries. Along with plural usages that differ from M-W, are these:

- **acronyms/initialisms**
- **occupied territories**
- **captain**
- **governor**
- **World Wide Web, the web**
- **Native American, American Indian, Indian**
- **file formats (PDF, GIF, PNG, JPEG, MP3)**
- **Election Day, election night**
- **emerging industry terms**
- **REAL ID**
- **beg the question**
- **manufacturer's suggested retail price, MSRP**

We removed the chapter on the 2026 Winter Olympics. Look for a new chapter for Los Angeles 2028!



GENERAL GUIDE ENTRIES

A

AAA

OK in all references for American Automobile Association.

AARP

OK in all references, as AARP is the official name. The special interest group for people 50 and older was formerly called the American Association of Retired Persons.

ableism

Take care when using idioms and colloquial phrases to avoid ableist language, or language that is discriminatory in favor of able-bodied people. Example: The governor of Texas uses a wheelchair, so it would be inappropriate to say *Abbott stands up for working class* or similar.

ABM, ABMs

OK in all references for anti-ballistic missile and anti-ballistic missiles. Don't use the redundant *ABM missiles*.

abortion

As always, aim for accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener rather than relying on phrases whose definitions are in dispute.

When referencing someone's stance on abortion and abortion rights, describe their position. Examples can include *anti-abortion*, *pro-abortion*, *opposed to abortion rights* or *abortion-rights supporter*. Opinion writers (including opinion staff, letters to the editor and outside contributors) may use *pro-life* or *pro-choice* to describe their own position and that of activists and organizations that advocate on the issue. These descriptions also may be used **in new stories** within direct quotes and proper names.

Precision is better than catch phrases, for example: *The nonprofit supports a ban on abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy. The lawmaker proposed a ban on abortions that starts at six weeks into a pregnancy.*

abortionist: Do not use. Where relevant, refer to medical professionals who perform abortions.

late-term abortion: As always, aim for accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener rather than relying on phrases whose definitions are in

dispute. The better practice is to describe the number of weeks of gestation at which an abortion is performed, and if not known, refer to “an abortion later in pregnancy” or “an abortion performed in the X trimester.” Phrase may be used in a direct quote.

partial-birth abortion: As always, aim for accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener rather than relying on phrases whose definitions are in dispute. The better practice is to describe the procedure, called intact dilation and evacuation, when relevant to the story. Phrase may be used if referencing the title of legislation and within direct quotes.

abortion pill: Mifepristone (Mifeprex; RU-486), and misoprostol are abortion pills, sometimes called Plan C pills. This series of pills terminates an established pregnancy. Lowercase mifepristone, the generic name of the drug, and uppercase Mifeprex, the brand name. RU-486 was the code name of the drug during early research and remains a common nickname. The brand name of misoprostol is Cytotec.

morning-after pill: Levonorgestrel, also known as the Plan B pill, is an over-the-counter form of emergency contraception that interferes with ovulation. It is a form of birth control, not a method of abortion. Lowercase levonorgestrel; uppercase brand names, such as Plan B. A newer pill, ulipristal acetate (brand name Ella), does the same thing but requires a prescription.

viability: As always, aim for accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener rather than relying on phrases whose definitions are in dispute. The point at which a fetus is capable of living outside the uterus, generally considered to be at about 23 to 24 weeks of pregnancy.

Abu Sayyaf Group

ASG acceptable on second reference. The Abu Sayyaf Group is the most violent of the Islamic separatist groups operating in the southern Philippines. The U.S. State Department designated the group a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997.

academic degrees

When it’s necessary to mention someone’s academic degree, use the full description of the degree or degrees instead of abbreviations. Example: *Janet Smith, who has a master’s degree in journalism*. Bachelor’s and master’s take an apostrophe in such usage, but not when referring to a Bachelor of Science degree or Master of Arts degree. There is no possessive in associate degree.

Use *Dr.* on first reference with a full name only for individuals with professional doctorates in fields such as dental surgery, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatric medicine and veterinary medicine. Do not use *Dr.* for those with other academic degrees. When providing credentials for a large group of people, use abbreviations (without periods) after full names and offset by commas. *Laura Perez, PhD; Simone Pierce, BA; Jon Zimmer, MS; and Sam Sheppard, LLD, spoke at the news conference.*

academic titles

Formal titles should be capitalized and spelled out only before a name. *Harvard President Alan Garber; the president of Harvard, Alan Garber.* (Note that *Dr.* is only used for someone with a doctoral degree in a medical field.) Do not capitalize the job description *professor* before a name.

accent marks and other diacritical marks

Use accent or other diacritical marks in a person's name if they have said they use them or are known to use them, such as Beyoncé. Additionally, place accent marks on any words that use them in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Use them to distinguish between words that are spelled the same but have different definitions, such as resume and résumé. Accent marks should also be used when they assist pronunciation, such as with El Niño and La Niña. Use accent marks where appropriate in quotes that are in a foreign language, but do not use them in the names of places or people that are more familiar to readers without the marks, such as Bogota or Ho Chi Minh City.

accident vs. crash

Use crash when referring to a vehicle wreck, as accident can denote intention/liability, or lack thereof. A collision involves two objects in motion, so a car hitting a stop sign, for example, is not a collision.

Achilles tendon

No apostrophe for this body part named after the mythological figure. But *Achilles' heel* does have an apostrophe.

acronyms/initialisms

Use acronyms (pronounced as words) and initialisms (pronounced as letters) when they improve clarity, readability or efficiency for the intended audience. Avoid unfamiliar shorthand that forces readers to stop and decode a term. Unless otherwise noted in this Style Guide, spell out the full term on first reference and use the shortened form only if it appears often enough to improve readability. If a shortened form will be used later and may not be widely recognized, introduce it immediately after the first reference: *consumer price index, or CPI; designated market areas, or DMAs.* For names translated from other languages, give the English name followed by the abbreviation: *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC; Doctors Without Borders, also known by its French initials MSF.* Introduce an abbreviation only if it will be used later in the story.

acting

Lowercase when used in front of a title and name.

A.D. vs. B.C. / B.C.E. vs. C.E.

A.D. stands for anno Domini ("year of the Lord") and refers to years following what is thought to be the birth year of Christ. When used, A.D. goes before the year: *A.D. 2024.*

B.C. stands for “before Christ” and goes after the year: 600 B.C. More modern terminology used mostly in academic and scientific contexts is B.C.E, which stands for “before the common era” and is numerically equivalent to B.C., and C.E., which stands for “common era” and is numerically equivalent to A.D. but goes after the year.

addiction

Be sensitive when writing about substance use or misuse. Do not use *abuse* unless in a quote. A person *uses* drugs; they do not *abuse* drugs. Don’t assume all substance users are addicts.

Write a person has alcoholism as opposed to a person is an alcoholic, or a person has a drug addiction (and be specific when possible) as opposed to a person is a drug addict. Simple, straightforward words without judgment are best. If the person says “I struggled with OxyContin addiction for two years” include that, or paraphrase. Do not write “Joe struggled with a pill addiction for two years” without attribution.

As with most things, ask what the person being written about prefers.

Consider an editor’s note alerting readers to a drug- or alcohol-use hotline at the top of the story.

addresses

For specific, numbered addresses, abbreviate St., Ave., Blvd. Otherwise, spell out. *Paws for Pints, at 123 Barks Ave., will open next month.* But *Paws for Pints is looking to lease a space on Barks Avenue.*

Other words – drive, road, circle, lane, etc. – are always spelled out. *Paws for Pints is moving to 123 Valley View Drive in December.*

Use numerals for address numbers.

Use numerals for street names above ninth. *In New York, 42nd Street is famous, but in Austin, it’s Sixth Street.*

Compass points are abbreviated if the address has a house number; if not, spell them out. *I live at 777 E. Fourth St., but I used to live on West Ninth Street. My office is at 333 NW Easy St., but I often work at the coffee shop on Southeast Slacker Lane.* (Note: No periods with NE, NW, SE and SW.)

administration

When referring to a political administration, lowercase. *Obama administration, DeSantis administration, etc.* When needed to differentiate between administrations, use a president’s full name (*the George H.W. Bush administration*) or an ordinal number (*the first Trump administration*).

administrative law judge

An official who adjudicates disputes within government agencies over administrative law. It is a formal title that should be capitalized before a name.

adoption

Don't mention unless relevant. The people who placed the child for adoption (not "gave them up for adoption") are *birth parents*, not *real parents*. *Adoptive parents* can be used when necessary, such as in a story that includes both sets of parents, or in a legal case involving validity/custody.

Adrenalin

Uppercase the trademarked, manufactured or extracted version of the chemical produced by adrenal glands, which is adrenaline (note lowercase and added "e").

adult

A person is legally an adult at age 18 and may then be referred to as a "man" or "woman" in a story. Leeway depending on context is allowed.

adverse vs. averse

Adverse applies to things that are harmful or unfavorable. *She experienced adverse effects from the medicine.* Averse applies to people who have a dislike for something. *He is averse to swimming.*

advocate, activist

Use *advocate* unless the subject opts for *activist*. An *activist* is a person typically seeking political and/or social change. Some also seeking change may describe themselves as *advocates*, which is seen as a more neutral term.

affect vs. effect

Generally, affect is the verb and effect is the noun. Mnemonic: *The arrow affected the aardvark to eye-popping effect.* As a verb, effect means to bring about, as in *to effect change*. Affect as a noun is not in common usage and refers to one's mental/emotional state.

affirmative action

A program, practice or process aiming to compensate for long-standing consequences of discrimination by allowing race and gender as possible factors in hiring or job advancement for women and minorities. In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down race-based affirmative action in higher education citing it violates the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

Affordable Care Act

Formal name is Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, signed into law by former President Barack Obama in 2010. Affordable Care Act is acceptable on first reference. ACA or "Obamacare" may be used on second reference (note quote marks).

Afghan

The people of Afghanistan are referred to as Afghans. Afghani is the currency in Afghanistan. The languages are Pashto and Dari.

Afghan also refers to a breed of dog (retain uppercase) and a knitted or crocheted blanket (lowercase).

AFL-CIO

OK to use in all references for American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations. It comprises national and international labor unions.

afterward

No “s” at the end.

agent

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

aid vs. aide

An aide is a person who provides aid, which is help.

AIDS, HIV

Acquired immune deficiency syndrome. AIDS and HIV are not the same thing. HIV is human immunodeficiency virus. Not everyone who has the virus develops AIDS, but everyone who has AIDS has the virus. In writing about a death, you can say “died of complications caused by AIDS” or “died of an AIDS-related illness.”

AIPAC

The acronym is OK to use on first reference and in headlines, but spell out the full name of this pro-Israel lobbying group early in the story: American Israel Public Affairs Committee. It is important to note that the “PAC” in AIPAC stands for Public Affairs Committee, not political action committee. Do not refer to it as such. AIPAC itself is not a political action committee, but AIPAC has established a separate group that is, AIPAC PAC, which is the largest pro-Israel PAC in the United States.

Air Force One

The Air Force applies this name to any aircraft in use by the president of the United States. Most commonly it is one of two customized Boeing 747-200B series aircraft with tail codes 28000 and 29000. The Air Force designation for the aircraft is VC-25A. Air Force Two is the designation of an airplane in use by the vice president. When both the president and vice president are on the same plane, it’s *Air Force One*. Likewise, *Marine One* is the call sign

for the Marine transport helicopter used by the president; the vice president's is *Marine Two*.

air strike

Two words, as per Merriam-Webster.

aircraft names

For a specific aircraft, use a hyphen when transitioning from letters to numbers in military designations (B-17, B-29), and no hyphen when letters follow a number (F/A-18E Super Hornet). For commercial aircraft, do not use a hyphen (Boeing 737, Airbus A320). Aircraft christened with a formal name (like *Air Force One*) do not have quotation marks.

aired vs. broadcast vs. televised vs. streamed vs. live streamed

Use *televised* with something shown on television. *Aired* and *broadcast* are for traditional, large-audience media. *Streamed* happens through the internet, and *live streamed* is shown as it happens.

airlines

Be aware of which companies use Airlines, Air Lines, Airways or none of these in their proper names. On second reference for any of them, *the airline* is acceptable. When referring to multiple airlines, regardless of their proper names, *airlines* should be used.

airport

If used in a proper name or a specific airport, capitalize. Names of airports may be shortened to how they are commonly referenced and retain capitalization if part of the official name is included. *John F. Kennedy International Airport* may be referred to as *Kennedy Airport*. But if *Logan International Airport* is referred to as *the Boston airport*, airport is lowercase.

alcoholic

Used in adjective form, it describes a type of drink.

Do not use the word in reference to a person who has alcoholism or is recovering from alcoholism. Someone can be (temporarily) drunk, but do not call them a drunk.

Alcoholics Anonymous

AA on second reference.

Allegheny Mountains

Also called the Alleghenies.

allies, allied

Capitalize when relating to either world war. *The Allied powers invaded*.

all-terrain vehicle

ATV acceptable on second reference.

allude vs. elude

To *allude* is to make an indirect reference. To *elude* is to escape capture.

allusion vs. illusion

An *allusion* is an implied or indirect reference, such as the idiom “cross to bear” being a biblical allusion. An *illusion* is something misleading, such as a magic trick or friendly behavior from someone who turns out to be awful.

al-Qaida

Not *al Qaeda*. If a group is called *al-Qaida in Iraq* or other locations, don’t trim out the location. The group may be affiliated, but it’s not the same.

al-Shabab

Militant group based in Somalia.

amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS, Lou Gehrig’s disease

Spell out *amyotrophic lateral sclerosis* on first reference. Also known as *ALS* or *Lou Gehrig’s disease*, it is a fatal degenerative disorder in which the nerves break down, making it difficult or impossible to use muscles. *ALS* may be used on second reference. Lou Gehrig was a famous baseball player diagnosed with the disorder; it’s OK to say *also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease*.

alumnus vs. alumni vs. alumna vs. alumnae

The masculinized versions are *alumnus* (singular) and *alumni* (plural). The feminized versions are *alumna*, *alumnae*. If a group is composed of men and women, use *alumni*.

Alzheimer’s disease

Capitalize and retain the apostrophe when shortening: *He was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s*.

ambassador

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

American Civil Liberties Union

ACLU is acceptable on second reference.

American Legion

An organization of former members of the U.S. Armed Forces who saw active duty. Founded in 1919, the group helps provide veterans with access to medical services and secondary education. Can use *Legion* after first reference.

American Sign Language

A means of communication used in the United States and most English-speaking parts of Canada. Use *ASL* or *sign language* on second reference.

Americans with Disabilities Act

ADA is acceptable on second reference.

among vs. between

Between for two, *among* for more than two. *I parked between the lines. The senators discussed it among themselves.*

amount vs. number

If you can count it, it's a number; if you can't, it's an amount. *The number of books on his shelf is staggering. The amount of water in the balloon was enough to soak through my shirt.*

a.m., p.m.

The letters stand for *ante meridiem* and *post meridiem*. Use *noon* and *midnight*, not *12 p.m.* or *12 a.m.* And don't write *12 noon*, *12 midnight* or *1 p.m. this afternoon* – all of which are redundant.

animals

Use pronoun *it* unless the animal has a name or is identified as a stallion, ewe, bull, etc.

animal welfare activist

Preferred over "animal rights activist."

anniversary

Use only for years. You don't have a two-week anniversary. (*Anni-* means year.)

annual

Something happening yearly. Unless officially part of an event name, don't use *first annual*; call it *inaugural* instead, or simply *first*.

anthems

Generic phrase *national anthem* not capitalized; specific song titles get quotation marks.

antifa

Shorthand for anti-fascists, or a group or person actively opposing fascism. Capitalize only when referring to a specific group name.

antisemitism (n.), antisemitic (adj.)

Antisemitism is prejudice or discrimination against Jewish people. Judaism is both an ethnicity and a religion. Jewish views of who should be considered Jewish vary by denomination. Do not describe a person as an antisemite other than in a direct quotation. Describing the person's words or actions is always preferable.

Antisemitism is often connected to anti-Zionism and efforts to delegitimize Israel or its existence. Sources' critiques and criticism of Israeli government action are acceptable but be careful to avoid amplifying critiques that morph into antisemitism by vilifying or negating Zionism. (see Zionism entry)

Do not equate the Jewish people with the Israeli government. Criticism of that government is not inherently antisemitic; just as not all Americans agree on their government's actions, neither do all Israelis, nor all Jewish people.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance offers some contemporary examples of antisemitism. Among them:

- Calling for, aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jewish people in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making dehumanizing, demonizing or stereotypical allegations about Jewish people as such or the power of Jews as a collective.
- Denying the existence or scope of the Holocaust during World War II.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jewish people worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism to characterize Israel or Israelis.

In photos/videos: Do not publish visual images of hate symbols when they are used to provide a platform for antisemitic people or groups. They should rarely appear in our stories, and then only after discussion between the content creator and a senior editor. Among those images is the swastika, an ancient religious and culture symbol that was appropriated by the Nazis. Consider the context of the story – there is no harm in publishing images of swastikas in stories about their historic background, for example.

anti-vaxxer

This term has been used to categorize people who are opposed to vaccines. It became more common during the COVID-19 pandemic. Don't use this term unless it's in a quote. Instead, be specific and descriptive of a person's or group's viewpoint.

anybody/anyone vs. any body/any one

The words "anybody" and "anyone" refer to indefinite people: *Anyone is welcome to come to the event.* Use *any one* if the emphasis is on the one: *Any one player should turn in the*

score sheet (don't send the whole team). Use *any body* only in health or crime references to actual bodies.

Appalachia

The region roughly overlapping the Appalachian Mountains and surrounding areas. It stretches through parts of 13 states: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland, West Virginia (the only state falling entirely within the region), Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi. The region's culture has been the subject of many books, films, songs and other cultural touchstones – and often in an unflattering way. Beware of stereotypes when describing the region and its people.

Arabic names

For famous people, use the name by which they are popularly known. Otherwise, defer to the individual's preference. (In royal names and place-names, keep and capitalize the prefix Al: Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Al Jazeera, Al-Aqsa Mosque.)

arbitrate vs. mediate

Arbitrators listen and make a decision by which both sides agree in advance to abide; *mediators* listen and try to talk both sides into coming to an agreement.

arctic

Lowercase when referring to the cold; uppercase when referring to the geographic location or for things that derive their name from the specific region, as in *Arctic fox*.

armed forces

The branches of the U.S. Armed Forces are the *Army*, *Navy*, *Air Force*, *Marine Corps* (which may be shortened to *Marines* in all uses), *Coast Guard* and *Space Force*. Capitalize these names and the term *Armed Forces* when referring to the proper name of the U.S. military collectively. For other countries, use the possessive or adjective form of the country with a lowercase reference to the military branch. References to the official name of another country's armed forces should be limited to quotations but should be capitalized according to that country's custom when used. Examples: the *Luftwaffe*, but *Germany's air force*; the *British Royal Navy*, but the *British navy*. The National Guard in the United States has two components: the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. Each operates under dual control of state and federal government, which means they can be called upon for local emergencies by state governors or for federal operations by the U.S. president.

Asian American, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI); Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI); Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA)

These terms refer to people of these identities living in the United States. Do not use the terms to refer to individuals or groups made up of only one of these identities. When possible, be specific about an individual's or group's identity, deferring to sources' self-identification.

Asian Regions: Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia

Be specific about the country or countries you are referring to and confirm to which region they belong.

assassin vs. killer vs. murderer

A person who kills a politically important person, a person who deliberately kills anybody, and a person who has been convicted of the legal charge of murder, respectively. Be careful not to label anyone as an *accused assassin*, *accused killer* or *accused murderer*, which conveys a connotation of guilt. Better to say someone is *accused in the killing of so-and-so* or *has been charged in the killing of so-and-so*. Even after a conviction, it's better to say someone was *convicted of murder*, for example, than calling them a *convicted murderer* – because convictions are sometimes overturned.

Assembly

If a government's lawmaking body is called that, and you're referring to it specifically, capitalize it. If you're referring to multiple assemblies, use lower case. Also, use caps for a specific *General Assembly* but not when you refer to it as *the assembly*.

assistant

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

associate

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

assure vs. ensure vs. insure

Assure means to encourage or reassure someone, *ensure* means to guarantee something or make it certain, and *insure* means to get insurance coverage for something. (*Insure* can also mean *to take precautions or steps to make something certain*, but you're likely safest with *ensure*.)

asylum-seeker

Asylum-seekers are people who left their country because they were unable to count on the protection of their government. Not everyone who migrates involuntarily is considered a refugee. Asylum-seekers are looking to gain a protected legal status by showing they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, ethnicity, political beliefs or membership to a particular social group. Use only when the source expresses that they will be or have already begun the asylum process. When not specified, use migrant. (See: *Migrant*).

athletic conferences (college)

Several collegiate athletic conferences are best known by their initials, including SEC, ACC, AAC and MEAC. It is fine to refer to them by the initials in all references as long as the context makes it clear it is a collegiate athletic conference. It is never wrong, albeit sometimes unnecessary, to spell out the full name of a conference on at least one instance in the story. When in doubt for conference abbreviations not listed here, it is best to spell out names on first reference.

ATM

OK in all references for automated teller machine. Don't say ATM machine.

Atomic Age

Period of history launched by the first use of the atomic bomb in 1945.

attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder

ADHD on second reference. Only mention if relevant and from a reliable source. ADHD is split into inattentive, impulsive, hyperactive types. The term ADD for a non-hyperactivity version is no longer used. A person has ADHD, not is ADHD.

attorney general, attorneys general

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. In headlines, the abbreviations AG and AGs are acceptable.

auger vs. augur

An *auger* is a kind of drill. To *augur* (something) is to see it in the future.

average vs. mean vs. median vs. mode

Use *average* in most cases for the single value that represents the general significance of a group of unequal values. Mean, median and mode are all different types of averages, but "average" is commonly understood as the sum of values divided by the number of values, or the *mean*. If any of the other terms for average are necessary in a story for technical accuracy, just be sure to explain their meanings.

awhile vs. a while

Awhile is an adverb, *a while* is a noun. *I'll stay awhile. I haven't seen you in a while.*

AWOL

OK to use in all references for *absent without leave*.

ax, axed, axing

Not axe.

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B

baby boom, baby boomer

The term referring to the generation born from about 1946 to 1964 is lowercased. The baby boom is attributed to the end of World War II.

Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science

The degrees are abbreviated BA and BS. When referring to a person's academic status, *bachelor's* or *bachelor's degree* is OK. See entry on "academic degrees."

bad (adj.) vs. badly (adv.)

Use *bad* as an adjective: *He did a bad job.* Use *badly* as an adverb: *He badly wanted the job.*

Bakery Workers union

OK in all references for Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union.

baloney vs. bologna

Nonsense is *baloney*. The meat on a sandwich is *bologna*.

bald-faced

The term *bald-faced*, such as with *bald-faced lie*, is used to describe something that is obvious and unobscured (like a shaved face).

Band-Aid

Use *bandage* unless specifically referring to trademarked brand. Capitalize when used.

Band names

Plural names take a plural verb, singular names take a singular verb. *The Beatles are*, but *Nirvana is*.

bear market vs. bull market

When the stock market sees a 20% decline in valuation, it is called a *bear market*. When it sees a 20% increase in valuation, it is called a *bull market*.

because vs. since

Use *because* to indicate an explicit cause-and-effect relationship: *I went to bed because I was tired. The dog barked because it saw the cat.* *Since* can be used in much the same way, as a causal conjunction joining a result and a reason, but it expresses a lesser degree of causality and introduces an element of the passage of time: *Since the rain stopped,*

James decided to put the top down on his convertible and go for a drive. (There might have been other factors in his decision as well, indicating a milder causality, but there is also the temporal element. First the rain stopped, and then James made his decision.) Keep in mind that *since* can also be used in a purely temporal sense: *He has been speaking Russian since he was 4.* Not because he was 4.

bed and breakfast

No hyphens. B&B acceptable for second reference.

beg the question

Don't use this idiom unless you are referring to the circular argument logical fallacy of assuming the conclusion within the premises. For example, you beg the question when you say a Vodka Collins is better than a Tom Collins because it has more vodka. The conclusion that a Vodka Collins is better than a Tom Collins is only true if you already accept the premise that more vodka equals better. When meaning that something raises the question, use *raises*, *invokes*, *invites*, or one of a number of other synonyms, but not "begs."

Benelux

Use when referring to the economic/political union of **B**elgium, **N**etherlands, **L**uxembourg, not the cultural linking of the three. Explain it in the text.

Ben Gurion International Airport

The place in Lod, Israel, is spelled with no hyphen, despite being named for David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister.

beside vs. besides

To be *beside* something is to be close to or next to it. *Besides* means as well as, in addition to, apart from: *I want sprinkles and peanuts on my sundae, besides the fudge and cherries.* (Also: *That's beside the point* means something is irrelevant.)

biannual vs. semiannual vs. biennial

Biannual and *semiannual* both mean twice a year. Ideally, use *every two years* or *every other year* instead of *biennial*.

bias, discrimination

Bias is a state of mind, predisposition or prejudice toward people, objects or views. Discrimination is the unfair treatment against a person, age, group and beliefs. Both terms could be for or against an object, topic, person or perspective.

Bible

Capitalize only in reference to the book used by a religion.

bimonthly vs. semimonthly

Bimonthly means every two months. *Semimonthly* means twice a month. Better to use *twice a month* – or *biweekly*, if that's more accurate.

bin Laden, Osama

Use *bin Laden* on second reference. Capitalize *bin* at the start of a sentence.

BIPOC

Do not use BIPOC. There is uncertainty over if this stands for "Black Indigenous People of Color" or "Black Indigenous and People of Color." If a person uses it in a quote, either explain it directly after the quote or rewrite so the phrase isn't used.

biracial

A term to describe people who are two races. Use judgment on its value to a story. If used, follow it with a person's race. *John Smith is biracial – he is Black and White.*

bird flu

Not avian influenza. If a quote uses the acronym HPAI, explain or spell out: highly pathogenic avian influenza.

birth defect

OK as a general reference, but for a specific person, be specific: *She was born missing one hand and most of her toes.* Some prefer *congenital disorder* or *congenital abnormality*; use what they use.

Bitcoin/bitcoin

Uppercase *Bitcoin* as a digital currency. Lowercase *bitcoin* as a unit of this currency. Example: *Tom favors Bitcoin, even though the value of one bitcoin has exceeded \$95,000.*

bloc vs. block

The term used for a political alliance is *bloc*.

blood alcohol content

Spell out instead of abbreviating. It's often unnecessary to repeat it. *The driver had a blood alcohol content of 0.15%, nearly twice the legal threshold (not "legal limit") of 0.08%. Most states have 0.08% blood alcohol content as the legal threshold for drivers – meaning the ratio of grams of alcohol, 0.08, to 100 milliliters of blood, expressed as a percentage, is 0.08%.* If the blood alcohol content is known to the third decimal place, do not round the number because the difference could be legally significant.

boats, ships

All ships are boats, but not all boats are ships. *Ship* is generally reserved for a large sea-worthy vessel. Some exceptions: ferryboat; PT boat; and large, oceangoing yachts. If a ship is named, use Arabic numerals: *Queen Elizabeth 2* or *QE2*. In any reference, a boat or ship is an *it*, not a *she*.

body camera

Use instead of *body-worn camera*. Bodycam is acceptable in headlines.

body mass index

BMI is OK on second reference.

Boko Haram

Use this rather than the name they call themselves, Group of the Sunni People for the Calling and Jihad. A Nigeria-based group that seeks to overthrow the current Nigerian government and replace it with a regime based on Islamic law. The U.S. State Department designated it a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 2013.

Boogie

Uppercase the trademark for a type of water sports bodyboard. If you are referencing a type of blues music, it's *boogie-woogie*. To dance to rock music or to move quickly is to *boogie*. The scary creature is the *boogeyman*.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

The population in general and the language are *Bosnian*, but the three main ethnicities are *Bosnian Serbs*, *Bosnian Croats* and *Bosniaks* (formerly *Bosnian Muslims*, but they aren't all Muslim). Singular *Bosnian Serb*, *Bosnian Croat*, *Bosniak*. Don't just say *Serbs* or *Croats*, because those refer to people in different countries.

boy, girl

Refers to those under the age of 18, but other terms, such as *teens* or *youths* may be more appropriate. Be aware that *boy* has been used as a racially derisive term to attempt to belittle Black men and boys, more prevalently but not exclusively in the South while the use of *girl* may be used to minimize women. Quotations using these words should be avoided.

boycott vs. embargo

A *boycott* is when people decide to not use products or services of a specific company or group in an attempt to financially pressure them to change their ways. An *embargo* is a legal restriction, usually involving something entering or leaving the country. Plural is *embargoes*, verb is *embargoed*.

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions

On first reference, capitalize and spell out the Palestinian-led movement that promotes boycotts, divestments and economic sanctions against Israel. Lowercase “movement” when used in conjunction with it. *The movement, BDS, or the BDS movement* are OK on second reference. Do not use BDS to refer to boycotting, divesting and implementing sanctions in a general sense, even when pertaining to Palestinian causes.

BP

OK for all references for what used to be British Petroleum.

brand names

Names like *eBay* and *iPod* get capitalized at the start of sentences.

Brexit

The United Kingdom’s 2016 vote to leave – and 2020 departure from – the European Union. Only needs brief explanation: *After Brexit, when the United Kingdom left the European Union ...*

Britain

OK to use for Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), but not for the United Kingdom, which includes Northern Ireland as well. Someone from Britain is a Briton (n.) or is British (adj.).

Btu

Stands for British thermal unit, a measure of heat energy. Note the lowercase t and u. Plural and singular are the same. *He refuses to pay for a single Btu over 10,000. The air conditioner has a cooling capacity of 12,000 Btu (not Btus).*

Bubble Wrap, Bubble Paper

Both trademarks. Call it bubble packaging.

bug vs. tap

A *bug* is placed anywhere for covert listening. A *tap* is specifically on the phone line.

building

Capitalized if it’s part of the actual name: *Chrysler Building*.

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives

ATF is acceptable on second reference. Part of the Department of Justice.

bus, buses vs. buss, busses

Buses are mass transit vehicles. *Busses* are kisses.

C

Cabinet

When referring to a leader's group of advisers, the word is capitalized. Officials who serve on the U.S. president's Cabinet include the vice president, the secretaries of governmental departments (such as the State Department and Transportation Department), and several other officials, most of whom require confirmation by the U.S. Senate.

cactuses

The preferred plural of cactus is an exception to Merriam-Webster.

Cajun, Creole

Uppercase. Cajun refers to a Louisianan descended from French-speaking immigrants from Acadia, the former name of a region in Canada. Creole in the broadest sense is a person of mixed French or Spanish and Black descent, originating in Louisiana. Creole has historically been difficult to accurately define. The words also refer to the foods, music, language and culture of Cajuns and Creoles.

caliber

A gun barrel's inner diameter. Write as *.22-caliber rifle*, etc.

call letters, call sign

Station names are in all-caps. If it has separate channels, that will be WABC-TV, WABC-FM, etc., with a hyphen.

campaign manager

Lowercase, not a formal title.

Canal Zone

Former name of the Panama Canal. Don't call it this unless you're writing about when it was under U.S. control.

cannon vs. canon

A cannon is a weapon. Canon is a rule, law or principle. In a religion, canon is the books/stories accepted as genuine. Sometimes used as part of a pop culture reference. *Marvel Universe canon says Black Widow is from Russia.*

Canuck

Don't use this except for the sports team name.

canvas vs. canvass

Canvas is a type of cloth material. Canvass is to do a survey of opinion.

cape

Capitalized when part of name. Even if everyone in an area calls it simply “the Cape,” refer to the cape by its actual name (*Cape Cod*) on first reference.

capital vs. capitol

A country or state’s designated center of government is the capital, THESE LETTERS are capitals, and the money on hand to run a business with is capital. The possibly dome-topped building that serves as a physical center for government is a capitol, but if you’re talking about a specific one it’s capitalized, Capitol. Examples: *The capital of the United States is Washington, DC; you can find the U.S. Capitol there. You can find the Michigan Capitol in the capital city of Lansing.*

captain

Capitalize and abbreviate Capt. before a name when used as a military rank or as a comparable title in police and fire departments (e.g., police Capt. Jane Smith, fire Capt. John Jones). In other uses, spell out captain, capitalizing it only when used as a formal civilian title before a name and lowercasing it as a job description or generic reference. For example: the captain of a ship or aircraft, as in Captain Merrill Stubing; the captain of an athletic team, as in captain Lionel Messi.

carat vs. caret vs. karat

Carat is a term used to measure precious stones like diamonds. A caret is a proofreading mark like this ^. Karat (abbreviated as a lowercase k) is a measure of the purity of gold. Example: *A 14k gold ring is 14 parts gold and 10 parts other metals.*

cardholder, credit card holder

Note spacing.

Carnival

If you’re talking about a country’s or region’s Mardi Gras season celebrations, it’s uppercase. Example: *We are going to Rio to see the Carnival parades.* May be Carneval in some places.

casualties

The word has several meanings when it comes to a crash, disaster, war, etc. Number of dead, injured or wounded are all considered as casualties. List the number of each category.

Caterpillar

Uppercase for the company that manufactures various trucks and work vehicles. Headquarters are in Irving, Texas. Lowercase for the larvae of a moth or butterfly.

caucuses

Lowercased and plural in reference to the Iowa caucuses (as well as those of other states), because they are several meetings at once instead of one election like a primary. Use the singular “caucus” only when referring to a single meeting as in the sentence: “Each precinct in Iowa will hold its own caucus tonight.”

Caucus also means “a group of people united to promote an agreed-upon cause” per Merriam-Webster. Examples include the *Congressional Black Caucus* and the *Freedom Caucus*. Note the capitalization.

CBD

Stands for cannabidiol. It is found in cannabis plants. It is not the same substance as THC in marijuana.

Celsius

Capitalized. The freezing point is 0 degrees Celsius, and the boiling point is 100 degrees Celsius. Also acceptable if the context is clear: *100 C*.

cement

Cement is not concrete, but concrete contains cement. Example: *They built a concrete sidewalk using cement, water and sand.*

censer vs. censor vs. censure

A censer is a device for burning incense. A censor is a person tasked with redacting naughty or secret things from documents or broadcasts. To censure someone is to reprimand them.

census

Lowercase, unless it is part of the formal title of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The full name is used on first reference, but CDC is acceptable afterward and in headlines. Use U.S. or federal before the first reference only if needed to avoid confusion. Despite the first word being plural, Centers, the agency is treated as a singular entity when choosing a verb. Example: *The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends adults receive a COVID-19 vaccine.*

Central Asia

Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

central bank

The bank that controls a country's currency and monetary policy.

cents

Use numerals. For amounts under one dollar, don't use either a dollar sign or a decimal point. Examples: *10 cents*, *78 cents*, *\$1.50*, *\$21.06*

century

Not capitalized except for proper names. Example: *20th Century Fox. The computer is among the 20th century's most important inventions.*

CEO, CFO, COO

CEO is OK for all references to chief executive officer, but spell out chief financial officer, chief operating officer, and any other C-suite jobs on first reference. "C-suite" refers to the highest-ranking executives at a company, where the C stands for "chief."

chair vs. chairperson vs. chairman vs. chairwoman

Gender-neutral language, such as chair or chairperson, is preferred unless an organization refers to the position as chairman or chairwoman. Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

champing at the bit

The phrase meant to convey impatience or eagerness is *champing at the bit*. Do not use chomping.

chancellor

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

chapters

Capitalized when referring to a specific book section or bit of legal code: Chapter 2, Chapter 11.

ChatGPT

A specific large-language model of generative AI.

chauvinism, chauvinist

Chauvinism is unreasonable devotion to a person's race, sex, etc., and looking down on others. It is not limited to men looking down on women. A chauvinist is the person so devoted.

checkup (n.) check up (v.)

Chemical Mace

Trademark for brand of tear gas.

Chennai

Formerly Madras, in India.

Chevy

Use only in quotes, otherwise Chevrolet.

chief

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

chief justice

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

child-free vs. childless

Child-free if they like it that way. Childless if they want kids but haven't been able to have any yet. If you don't know which category someone falls into, you can just say they have no children. Don't mention unless relevant.

child pornography/child sexual abuse images

The preference is to use "child sexual abuse images" in a crime/courts story, as pornography implies consent. If the name of the charge is "child pornography," use that.

Chile vs. chili vs. chilly

Chile is the country; *chili* is the stew and peppers; *chilly* is cold.

China

As just "China," this is the country you're thinking of. Use People's Republic of, Communist, and mainland China only when necessary to separate from Taiwan. Call Taiwan Taiwan in most cases, but use Taiwan's formal name, Republic of China, if required for accuracy in legal or diplomatic contexts, which can be sensitive. For example, it is the Republic of China, rather than "Taiwan," that has entered into treaties with other countries. Some international sports organizations and events use the designation Chinese Taipei for teams and governing bodies from Taiwan. In most references, use Taiwan. Use Chinese Taipei when it is necessary to refer to the official name of a team, delegation, organization or event participant. Lowercase china in reference to porcelain tableware.

Chinese names

Surnames often come first, but ask. Spell it how sources want it spelled.

Christmastime

One word.

chronic traumatic encephalopathy

CTE can be used after spelling out the brain disease on first reference. *See more detailed entry in Sports.*

CIA

OK in all references for the Central Intelligence Agency.

city vs. town vs. village

Use what a municipality officially calls itself, but generally, of the three, cities are the largest, followed by towns, and then villages, which are typically found in rural areas. If a direction is in a formal name of a region, capitalize it. Example: *I used to live in West Berlin. He grew up in New York City's Upper West Side.*

citizen vs. resident vs. subject vs. national vs. native vs. Native

A citizen has full civil rights of a place, either by birth or becoming a citizen. A resident lives there. A subject is someone under the authority of a monarch and the laws of the country he or she leads. A national is a citizen of someplace else. Example: *A German national, Antje is experiencing her first Wisconsin winter.* Someone is native to the place where they were born. Capitalize Native American.

city council

Capitalize with city names and when it stands alone and refers to a specific city: *Phoenix City Council; They attended the City Council meeting.* Lowercase council by itself. *They attended the council meeting.* The same guidelines apply to *town council* and *village council*.

city hall

Capitalize as part of name or when referring to a specific city. Also applies to *town hall*.

civil cases vs. criminal cases

Civil cases generally seek damages or an order to stop doing something or start doing something. Criminal cases are the government accusing a person of a crime.

Civil Rights Movement, Civil Rights Act

Capitalize for the racial equality movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and subsequently the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which guaranteed basic civil rights for all Americans regardless of their racial background. These laws are commonly associated with the plight of Black Americans seeking to stop racial segregation from the 1940s through the 1970s. This includes seminal moments during the Civil Rights Movement such as nonviolent protests, sit-ins and the March on Washington in 1963.

Civil War

Capitalize when used in reference to the American Civil War from April 18, 1861, to April 9, 1865. Lowercase when referring to a figurative civil war or another country's civil war.

climate change

Use the term *climate change* instead of the older phrase *global warming*; although the global average is warmer, some places have gotten colder or experienced colder extremes. Instead of saying someone is a climate change denier, be specific. Do they think it's not happening at all? Do they think humans didn't cause it? Only use "climate crisis" with attribution. Scientists disagree about whether climate change is a "crisis."

coast

Lowercase when you're talking about the literal shoreline, "I walked along the coast of the Pacific/the Pacific coast." Capitals when you're referring to a big region: "I always wanted to move to the West Coast."

Coast Guardsman

But when used without Coast, it is lowercase *guardsman*.

cocktail

Use for drinks, not for drugs.

Cold War

Uppercase in reference to the period in American history after World War II when tensions rose with the former Soviet Union and communist nations.

collective nouns

Herd of sheep, pod of whales, etc., along with nonspecific collectives like group or crowd. These take singular verbs.

College Board

The organization in charge of the SAT and Advanced Placement courses.

Colonies

Britain and other powers maintained colonies around the world. Only capitalize the *Colonies* when referring to what became the United States, and capitalize *Colonial* in reference to them.

Columbus Day

A federal holiday, first declared on Oct. 12, 1892, now celebrated on the second Monday in October, meant to commemorate the anniversary of Christopher Columbus arriving in the Americas. Some state/local governments celebrate *Indigenous Peoples Day* instead of, or in addition to, *Columbus Day* on the same day. *Indigenous Peoples Day* is not a federal holiday under U.S. law.

commander in chief

No hyphens. Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

commissioner

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

committee

Capitalize as part of a formal name. Lowercase when using a shortened form for the committee name. In the Senate it's the *Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee*, but shortened, just the *agriculture committee*. In the House of Representatives, the full name of the committee is the *Agriculture Committee or the House Committee on Agriculture*

Commonwealth, the

Group of sovereign states that recognize the British sovereign as head of the Commonwealth, whether they see the British sovereign as head of their state/country or not.

In America, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia are states officially known as *commonwealths*.

Communications Workers of America

CWA on second reference.

Communist

Lowercase when describing a political philosophy. Uppercase when referring to the Communist Party.

community

Don't overgeneralize and use phrases like *The Black community feels ...* or *The evangelical community feels ...* It's appropriate only when talking about people who live in proximity to one another.

company, companies

Co. and Cos. when part of names but otherwise write them out.

company (military)

Capitalize when it's part of the name. Example: *1st Regiment, Company B*

company names

No commas before Inc. or Ltd., and no !”*, even if they're there in the company's formal name (hyphens and ampersands are allowed). You can find the formal name in stock filings or often at the bottom of the company website. An exception is *USA TODAY Co., Inc.*, its formal name. Call it by the formal name at least once in business stories. Only all-caps if it's said that way, like AT&T, otherwise spell it as you would most titles, like Lego.

compared to vs. compared with

Use *compared to* when you're saying these things are similar. *He compared his work to that of Van Gogh.* Use *compared with* when you're highlighting differences. *Compared with a penny, a 1 euro cent coin is smaller, lighter and rarer.*

complacent vs. complaisant vs. complicit

To be *complacent* is to be smug or satisfied, often undeservedly so. To be *complaisant* is to be eager to please. To be *complicit* is to be part of some sort of wrongdoing.

complementary vs. complimentary

Complementary means two or more things “complete” each other. Complimentary means free or expressing praise, as in giving a compliment. Examples: *After she joined the Rolling Stones onstage, Mick Jagger was complimentary of Lady Gaga's singing skills.* Or: *Mick Jagger and Keith Richards brought complementary skills to the Rolling Stones — Jagger as a lyricist, Richards as the composer of the band's trademark sound.*

compose vs. comprise vs. constitute

To compose is to create or to be made up of what follows. *We composed a style guide. The style guide is composed of many entries.* To comprise is to include or contain. Correct: *The style guide comprises many entries. The music festival comprises 15 bands.* Incorrect: *The style guide is comprised of many entries.* To constitute is to be what makes up the whole of a thing. *Four musicians constitute a quartet.* When writing of something that is only part of the whole, use include or includes. *The music festival's lineup included Pearl Jam and Nirvana.*

composition titles

Use quotation marks around formal composition titles such as books, poems, songs, albums, television and radio shows, movies, operas, lectures, speeches and most works of art (except for sculptures). Do not use quotation marks around the titles of holy texts such as the Bible and the Quran, or the titles of reference works such as directories, dictionaries and encyclopedias. Do not use quotation marks around the titles of software or games (video games like Minecraft or physical games like Cards Against Humanity). Capitalize all words except articles, such as a, an, the; prepositions and conjunctions that are three letters long or shorter, such as for, of, on, and, but, or. An exception is made if the article, preposition or conjunction is the first or last word of the title. (Note: Some modern artists have stylized the names of their compositions with unusual capitalization, for example Bad Bunny's "DeBÍ TirAR Más FOToS." In this case, and in most others where the reason for the unusual capitalization is not evident, if the artist has not provided a rationale for the stylization, use the capitalization that conforms to the style outlined in this section: "Debí Tirar Más Fotos.") A foreign title should be translated into English unless it is better known by its foreign name. For musical performances of foreign titles, the title should be in English if performed in English but kept in its original language if performed in that language. For classical music, use quotation marks around a piece's nickname, if it has one, such as Beethoven's "Grand Sonata," but not around a numbered name of a composition, such as Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 4.

concentration camps

Say a camp was in Nazi Germany-occupied Poland/Latvia/Netherlands etc., not that it was a Polish/Latvian/Dutch camp.

Conference Board, The

A business/research organization, which capitalizes *The* in its name.

confess, confessed

Outside of crime stories and other misbehavior, say "said." *He confessed to pouring sugar in her gas tank, but she said she didn't want to go.*

Congress

Capitalize in reference to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. Do not use outside a quotation to refer only to the House. If used within a quotation to refer to the House alone, make sure that meaning is clear. Otherwise, it is best to paraphrase the quote. Also, capitalize *Continental Congress* in historical contexts.

Capitalize Congress in the formal name of a foreign body that uses it or its equivalent in a foreign language (Mexico's Congreso de la Unión) and on subsequent references to that body. In other uses, capitalize within a formal name (Congress of Vienna), but lowercase as the *congress* in subsequent references to the same, and in all other uses.

congressional

Capitalize only as part of a proper name.

congressional districts

Use this form: *Ohio's 3rd Congressional District*, or *the 40th Congressional District of Florida*, but lowercase *her congressional district* or *the California district* without a number.

congressman, congresswoman

Representative is preferred for a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Congressman or congresswoman may be used but only for House members, not senators. When referring to both representatives and senators, the term *members of Congress* may be used. Use the abbreviation *Rep.* as a formal title before the name of a member of the House on first reference.

connote vs. denote

Connote is about the feelings or ideas raised beyond a word or phrase. *Denote* is about the literal meaning or definition of something. Words can have the same denotation but a different connotation: *slender* vs. *skinny*, *chubby* vs. *curvy*.

constitutional amendments, clauses

Capitalize numbered amendments to the U.S. Constitution: *the First Amendment right to peacefully assemble*. In text, explain the relevance of an amendment in specific terms: *The First Amendment says Congress may not place restrictions of time, place or manner on the right of people to peacefully assemble*. Colloquial references to the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination (*He pleaded the Fifth several times* or *Clark took the Fifth in the deposition*) are permissible but should be explained in the story. Avoid overuse.

References to clauses of the Constitution should be lowercased (*the commerce clause*, *the establishment clause*, *the due process clause*) but an explanation of what the clause does is preferred. Lowercase constitutional.

constable

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

Constitution

Capitalize when talking about the U.S. Constitution (document) with or without the U.S. in front of it. Uppercase when talking about another nation's or a state's document but only if that place's name accompanies the reference: Louisiana Constitution. Lowercase in all other references.

consulate

Capitalize when the country is included: *the British Consulate*. Not the same as an embassy.

consul, consul general, consuls general

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

CFPB on second reference.

consumer price index

Use *the index* or *CPI* on second reference.

Consumer Product Safety Commission

CPSC on second reference.

Continental Divide

The geographical feature of North America, like an invisible line through the Rocky Mountains, that separates which way rivers and streams flow. Water to the east of the Divide ends up in the Atlantic Ocean. Water to the west flows into the Pacific Ocean. It's OK to use *the Divide* on second reference.

continental shelf, continental slope

Lowercase these undersea geology terms.

continual vs. continuous

Continual means repeating. *The continual notes of the cello line in Pachelbel's Canon in D can be problematic for cellists*. Continuous means forever, no breaks. *The ocean was continuous to all horizons*.

contractions

Use in quotes and in phrases that always use them. Example: *He warned that his opponent couldn't care less about them*.

contrasted to vs. contrasted with

Use *contrasted x to y* in reference to things are entirely different. Use *contrasted x with y* in reference to things that have differences and similarities.

controversial

Usually if something is controversial, you don't need to tell people it is. They'll know. If they don't, it's not that controversial. Use it mostly when circumscribed to a group most

readers don't belong to: *Within the medical community, the FDA's approval of eteplirsen to treat Duchenne muscular dystrophy was controversial.*

copyright

A story that has copyright applied to it is a copyright story, not copyrighted. It can be a verb, though: *I copyrighted that story.*

co-respondent vs. correspondent

Hyphenate *co-respondent* in reference to a party in a divorce to better differentiate it from *correspondent*, someone who communicates with another.

Corn Belt

Area of the Midwest known for growing corn. Historically includes western Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, southern Minnesota, the eastern parts of South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and northern Missouri.

corporation

Corporations can own property/have debts, sue/be sued. In business names, Corporation can become Corp. if it's at the end of the name.

corps

Capitalize when it's part of the name. It is OK to refer to the Marine Corps and/or the Army Corps of Engineers as "the Corps" on second references.

Cotton Belt

A section of the United States where much of the country's cotton is produced. Includes states in the South and Southwest.

council vs. counsel

A council is a group of people making decisions, like a city council. Counsel means advice, or to give advice. Someone who gives advice is a counselor. Do not capitalize special counsel, the temporary legal official.

country names

In general, spell out the names of countries as nouns. Use the adjective form before nouns as appropriate. For example: the *French Embassy*, not the *France Embassy*. However, in compound adjectives used to express geopolitical pairings, use the noun forms of the countries. For example: the *U.S.-Mexico border*, not the *U.S.-Mexican border*; *Russia-Ukraine negotiations*, not *Russian-Ukrainian negotiations*.

county

Capitalize as part of the county's name, such as Jefferson County, and in proper names of government bodies, but lowercase the word when listing multiple counties, such as Jefferson and Madison counties. Do not abbreviate as Co., that is the abbreviation for company.

coup

Short for the French *coup d'état*, which is literally “blow to the state” and reflects a violent overthrow of the government. Use *coup* for all references.

couple

Treat couple as a unit, which takes a singular verb. Examples: *The couple was walking to their favorite restaurant. The couple was asked to leave.*

couple of

Of is needed. *He took a couple of minutes to complete the task.*

courtesy titles

Generally, do not use courtesy titles (Miss, Mr., etc.) outside of direct quotations. If Jane Doe and John Doe are both in a story, call them by first and last name, instead of Mrs. Doe and Mr. Doe.

courthouse

Capitalize the term if it's part of the name.

Court of St. James's

Include the 's on this royal court.

COVID-19

The disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Include the -19 in most uses. The -19 should be dropped only in quotes if the person did not say it, in headlines if space is a concern, and in proper names such as *COVID Task Force*. Those who experience symptoms long after most recover are said to have long COVID, which does not include a -19 at the end.

coworking (n., adj.) vs. co-worker

Coworking refers to people who share a workspace but do not work for the same company or are self-employed. A co-worker (note the hyphen) is a colleague who works for the same company.

CPR

Acceptable in all references for cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

C-section

OK on first reference to cesarean section, but spell it out in a later reference.

CT scan

Not CAT scan.

curriculums

The preferred plural of curriculum is an exception to Merriam-Webster, but *curricula vitae*.

cynic vs. skeptic

A cynic believes a person's conduct is motivated by self-interest. A skeptic is someone who advocates skepticism or doubt.

czar

Preferred over "tsar" in all uses. As a formal title for a historic Russian ruler, uppercase (*Czar Nicholas*) but lowercase in other references (*border czar*).

Czechia, the Czech Republic

The formal name of the country is the Czech Republic, but use the shorter name Czechia in most cases, because the country prefers it. (This is similar to the way we call the Federal Republic of Germany by the shorter name Germany.) The formal name Czech Republic may still be appropriate some situations, especially in legal and diplomatic contexts.

D

Dad vs. dad

Capitalize when the word stands in for a name; lowercase when referring to someone's father. Examples: *I asked Dad where I could find the wrench.* *I asked my dad where I could find the wrench.* The same rule applies to Mom vs. mom.

damage vs. damages

Damage is the actual loss or injury caused. Damages are what a court orders someone to pay to compensate for that damage.

Dardanelles, the

The strait in northwestern Turkey is *the Dardanelles*, NOT *the Dardanelles Strait*.

datelines

A dateline is used to tell the reader that the USA TODAY Network reported the story from a specific location. Datelines should be used *only* when a staff reporter, a correspondent or a stringer is *physically present* in the dateline location.

When a story has been put together from reports from widely separated areas, such as in an “across the USA” trend story, in general no dateline is used.

When a datelined story contains supplementary information obtained by a reporter, correspondent or stringer in another locale, use a contributing line containing the individual's name and location at the end of the story.

For stories with multiple bylines, at least one person cited in the byline must be on site for the dateline to be used. At the end of the story, the location and roles of all reporters should be stated. We do not use datelines without substantial contributions from a reporter at the scene.

U.S. datelines

City names in datelines are all uppercase. Use postal codes for U.S. states and standard capitalization on the name of a country or territory that follows a city name: *DULUTH, MN –*, *PERTH, Australia –*, *SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico –* are examples.

References in text to another city in the same state as the dateline city need not be followed by the state name if confusion would not result. A *DENVER* dateline story, for example, need only refer to *Boulder*, not *Boulder, Colorado*. Likewise, cities that stand alone in datelines may stand alone in text if there is no possibility of confusion. Thus, a reference in a story to *Chicago* does not need to say *Chicago, Illinois*.

Apart from specific exceptions in this entry, the following cities stand alone in datelines and most stories:

ATLANTA	BALTIMORE	CHICAGO	CLEVELAND
AUSTIN	BOSTON	CINCINNATI	DALLAS

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

DENVER	LOS ANGELES	NEW ORLEANS	ST. LOUIS
DES MOINES	LOUISVILLE	NEW YORK	SALT LAKE CITY
DETROIT	MEMPHIS	OKLAHOMA CITY	SAN ANTONIO
HONOLULU	MIAMI	ORLANDO	SAN DIEGO
HOUSTON	MILWAUKEE	PHILADELPHIA	SAN FRANCISCO
INDIANAPOLIS	MINNEAPOLIS	PHOENIX	SEATTLE
LAS VEGAS	NASHVILLE	PITTSBURGH	WASHINGTON

Some of the cities listed above shouldn't stand alone in text when the context makes it unclear which city you're talking about. For example, *Nashville* may take a *Tennessee* in text when it's not obvious you are talking about the *Nashville* in Tennessee, and *Phoenix* may take an *Arizona* when it's unclear whether you're talking about the one in Arizona or the one in Oregon. (The Phoenix in Oregon always takes an Oregon.) Also, cities that usually do not require a state with them might have them in "across the USA" stories when there's potential for confusion. For example, in an Arizona item, a reference to Miami may be given as *Miami, Florida*, so the reader understands you're not referring to *Miami, Arizona*. Similarly, a reference in an Arizona item to the town of Miami in Arizona should make clear that you are not referring to the city in Florida.

Exceptions:

U.S. and Canadian cities that have professional sports franchises may stand alone in datelines on stories about those franchises. Example: *EDMONTON, VANCOUVER*. In the lifestyles sections (and occasionally elsewhere), *HOLLYWOOD* may stand alone on stories about the entertainment industry.

Spellings:

The references for proper spellings of U.S. communities are the government website of the specific community, followed by the government website of the next largest jurisdiction. The [U.S. Postal Service ZIP Code Lookup tool](#) is a good backup source, although it does not list many unincorporated communities. When possible, unusual spellings should be verified through a public official in the community in question.

Territories:

In general, use the commonly accepted name of the territory after a city name in a dateline: *HAGATNA, Guam*. For island territories, use the name of the community followed by the territory name. Give the name of a specific island, if necessary, in the text. For example, a story datelined *CHRISTIANSTED, Virgin Islands*, may need a reference to the island of St. Croix within the text.

Islands:

For communities on islands within a state's boundaries, use the city name followed by the state's postal code: *EDGARTOWN, MA*, for example. Do not use *EDGARTOWN, Martha's Vineyard*.

(See the separate section on **Sea Islands** below.)

International datelines

Apart from specific exceptions in this entry, these international locations stand alone in datelines:

AMSTERDAM	GIBRALTAR	MADRID	SAN MARINO
BAGHDAD	GUATEMALA CITY	MEXICO CITY	SAO PAULO
BANGKOK	HAVANA	MILAN	SEOUL
BARCELONA	HELSINKI	MONACO	SHANGHAI
BEIJING	HONG KONG	MONTREAL	SINGAPORE
BEIRUT	ISLAMABAD	MOSCOW	STOCKHOLM
BERLIN	ISTANBUL	MUNICH	SYDNEY
BRUSSELS	JERUSALEM	NEW DELHI	TEL AVIV
CAIRO	JOHANNESBURG	PANAMA CITY*	TOKYO
COPENHAGEN	KYIV	PARIS	TORONTO
DJIBOUTI	KUWAIT CITY	PRAGUE	VATICAN CITY
DUBAI	LONDON	QUEBEC CITY	VIENNA
DUBLIN	LUXEMBOURG	RIO DE JANEIRO	ZURICH
GENEVA	MACAO	ROME	

* In most cases, the capital of Panama stands alone, while the city of the same name in Florida should be followed by the state postal code, *FL*. If there is a possibility of confusion, however, *PANAMA CITY, Panama* may be used as a dateline.

Spellings: Refer to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online for the proper spelling of foreign cities and nations that are not listed in the USA TODAY Network Style Guide.

Choice of names: Use the conventionally accepted short form of a country's official name in datelines: *Liberia*, for example, rather than *Republic of Liberia*. Follow the Merriam-Webster Dictionary online for usage unless otherwise noted here.

Territories: Territories, colonies and other nonindependent areas sometimes have widely recognized distinct identities because of their geographical characteristics or unique status as defined by treaties. For these, follow the city name in a dateline with the commonly accepted territory name. Examples:

Bermuda	Greenland	Martinique	Sikkim
Corsica	Grenada	Sardinia	Tibet
Faroe Islands	Guadeloupe	Sicily	

Islands: When reporting from nations or territories composed mainly of islands but commonly known under a single name, use the city name followed by the general name in the dateline. Specify an individual island within the text of the story when needed. Examples:

British Virgin Islands	French Polynesia	Netherlands Antilles
Fiji	Indonesia	Philippines

Solomon Islands

OTHER GUIDELINES

Air, land and sea: Sometimes the names of ships, aircraft, trains or other vehicles may be used as datelines. The form:

ABOARD THE USS ENTERPRISE –

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE –

ABOARD THE COAST STARLINER –

Note: In most of these cases, the text of the story should give either the vehicle's general location (ships) or point of departure and destination (aircraft and trains).

Bahamas: In datelines, follow the name of the city or town with *Bahamas*. In stories, *Bahamas*, *the Bahamas* or *the Bahama Islands* may be used. Identify a specific island in the text of the story if necessary.

British Virgin Islands: Use after a community name followed by British Virgin Islands on stories from this territory. Identify specific islands, as necessary, in the text of the story. The word *British* distinguishes these islands from those of the U.S. territory. Do not, however, use *U.S. Virgin Islands* in datelines.

Cambodia: Use this name rather than *Democratic Kampuchea* in datelines. When *Kampuchea* is used in the body of the story, it should be identified as the formal name of Cambodia.

Canada: Datelines from Canadian cities other than Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City and Toronto should have the name of the city in capital letters followed by the name of the province: *THUNDER BAY, Ontario*. Do not abbreviate any province or territory name. The provinces are: Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador (aka Newfoundland, see that entry below for use in datelines), Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Saskatchewan. The territories are: Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon.

Congo, Congo Republic: The country that used to be Zaire is *Congo* (NOT: the Congo). It's the larger country in central Africa, and its capital is Kinshasa. Its formal name is the Democratic Republic of Congo, but to avoid confusion it's best to avoid using that name. The country that used to be Congo is *Congo Republic*. It's the smaller country on the Atlantic coast; its capital is Brazzaville.

Crimea: The territorial sovereignty of Crimea is disputed. In datelines, use a city name, followed by *Crimea*. Example: *SEVASTOPOL, Crimea*.

England: London stands alone in datelines. Use *England* after the names of all other English communities in datelines. See **United Kingdom** below.

Florida Keys: Use the name of a city or specific island, followed by FL: *KEY WEST, FL*

Gibraltar, Strait of: Not Straits. The British colony on the peninsula that juts into the strait stands alone in datelines: *GIBRALTAR*.

Hagatna, Guam: The name of the capital of Guam was changed from Agana in 1998.

Hawaii: Honolulu stands alone. Otherwise, use the city name in capital letters, followed by *HI*. If necessary, identify a specific island in the text of the story.

Kansas City: Use *Kansas City, KS* and *Kansas City, MO* in datelines and text when a story is specific to one of the two cities. Kansas City stands alone in datelines and text when a story obviously concerns the whole metropolitan area. For example: Kansas City is one of the Midwest's fastest-growing metropolitan areas.

Kashmir: This is an area of disputed territory between India, Pakistan (each claim it in its entirety) and China. It is not well-defined geographically or politically but is divided into areas administered by India (Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh), Pakistan (Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan) and China (Aksai Chin, Trans-Karakoram Tract, which are largely uninhabitable) by the Line of Control (between areas administered by India and Pakistan) and the Line of Actual Control (between areas administered by India and China), but neither are internationally recognized borders. In datelines, use the city name followed by Kashmir, regardless of which country administers the area in which the city is located. For example: *SRINAGAR, Kashmir* (a city in Jammu and Kashmir, which is administered by India); *MUSAFFARABAD, Kashmir* (a city in Azad Kashmir, which is administered by Pakistan). For context, make clear in the story which country administers the area of the datelined city.

Korea: Use *North Korea* in datelines after the names of communities in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Use *South Korea* after the names of communities in the Republic of Korea.

Kuril Islands: Datelines from these islands take a community name followed by *Kuril Islands*. Name an individual island, if needed, in the text of the story. If pertinent, explain in the text that the islands are controlled by Russia, despite Japan's claim that Kuril Islands' four southernmost islands belong to Japan.

Maldives: In a dateline, follow a community name with the official name *Maldives*. The nation frequently is called *the Maldivian Islands* and can be referred to in text as *the Maldives*, with the definite article.

military bases: Use the name of the military base followed by the name of the state in which it is located: *CAMP PENDLETON, CA* or *FORT JOHNSON, LA*

Monaco: Use one of three datelines. *LA CONDAMINE, Monaco*; *MONTE CARLO, Monaco*; or simply *MONACO* if reporting from outside those two sections of the principality.

Mumbai, India: *Mumbai, India*, is preferred for datelines and general references. When possible, the story should mention that Mumbai was formerly known as Bombay. It changed its name in 1995.

Netherlands: Use the name of the community followed by *Netherlands* (no “the”): *ROTTERDAM, Netherlands*. In stories, use *the Netherlands* or *Netherlands* according to how the sentence is structured. Also, *THE HAGUE, Netherlands* in datelines; and *The Hague* in text.

Newfoundland: Officially Newfoundland and Labrador since 2001; use only Newfoundland after a community name in datelines. Specify in the story’s text whether reporting from mainland Labrador or island Newfoundland.

Northern Ireland: It’s part of the United Kingdom and not to be confused with the *Irish Republic* (or *Ireland*). Use *Northern Ireland* after the names of all communities in datelines.

occupied territories: Each of the territories broadly considered by the United Nations to be under the control of Israel but not formally absorbed as part of that state has a distinct identifier. Do not use “Occupied Territories” in a dateline and do not use Palestine or Israel for areas within the occupied territories.

- **Gaza Strip:** Use in datelines after the name of a city/community. GAZA STRIP may be used as a standalone dateline when a city/community is not needed. Examples: “GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip –” or “GAZA STRIP
- **West Bank:** Use in datelines after the name of a city/community. WEST BANK may be used as a standalone dateline when a city/community is not needed. Examples: “BETHLEHEM, West Bank –” or “WEST BANK –”
- **East Jerusalem:** East Jerusalem is part of Jerusalem. Do not use EAST JERUSALEM in a dateline. Instead, use “JERUSALEM –” and indicate in the text of the story that it is being reported from the occupied territory of East Jerusalem if relevant. See “Old City of Jerusalem” entry.
- **Golan Heights:** Use in datelines after the name of a city/community. GOLAN HEIGHTS may be used as a standalone dateline when a city/community is not needed. Examples: “MAJDAL SHAMS, Golan Heights –” or “GOLAN HEIGHTS –”. The Golan Heights is considered Syrian territory under military control of Israel. Do not include in references to “the occupied Palestinian territories” or “the Palestinian territories.”

Philippines: In datelines, use the name of a city or town followed by *Philippines*: *CEBU, Philippines*. Specify the name of an individual island, if needed, in the text.

San Marino: Use *SAN MARINO* as the dateline on stories from the Republic of San Marino, a small, independent country surrounded by Italy.

Sea Islands: This group of islands off the South Carolina, Georgia and Florida coasts includes several distinct islands within each state's borders. In South Carolina, these islands encompass Parris Island, Port Royal Island and St. Helena Island. Georgia's islands include Cumberland Island, St. Simons Island, St. Catherines Island and Sea Island. Amelia Island is in Florida.

Several communities derive their names from these islands. For example, Port Royal is situated on Port Royal Island, Sea Island hosts a resort of the same name, and St. Simons Island is home to the village St. Simons Island.

For datelines, use the community name with the state's postal code abbreviation: *PORT ROYAL, SC*. Identify the island in the text of the story, as necessary.

St. Barts: Use the familiar English name St. Barts (no apostrophe, to be consistent with U.S. Board on Geographic Names policy and to avoid implied possession) instead of the official name of the French overseas collectivity, St. Barthélemy.

Example: *Gustavia, ST. BARTS*.

St. Kitts and Nevis: In datelines for this dual-island nation, use a community name followed by its island, either St. Kitts (no apostrophe) or Nevis, but not both. Do not use St. Christopher, the official, but lesser known, name of St. Kitts.

Example: *Basseterre, ST. KITTS*.

St. Martin: In datelines, follow the name of the community with the English name of the Caribbean island, St. Martin, regardless of whether the community is in the French side or the Dutch side. Where appropriate in copy, Saint-Martin may be used for the French part of the island, or Sint Maarten for the Dutch part, along with an explanation that separate parts of the Island are administered by the French and the Dutch.

Taiwan: For datelines on stories from the island of Taiwan, use the name of a community and *Taiwan*. In the body of a story, use *Nationalist China* or *Taiwan* for references to the government based on the island. Use the formal name of the government, *the Republic of China*, when required for legal precision. Do not use *Formosa* in references to the government or to the island itself.

Trinidad and Tobago: In datelines for this dual-island nation, use a community name followed by its island, either *Trinidad* or *Tobago* – but not both. Examples: *PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad* or *SCARBOROUGH, Tobago*.

United Kingdom: Do not use in datelines. Instead, follow the name of a community with either *England*, *Northern Ireland*, *Scotland* or *Wales*.

United Nations: It stands alone on stories filed from U.N. headquarters. Do not follow it with the abbreviation NY.

Virgin Islands (U.S.): Use *Virgin Islands* with a community name in datelines on stories from the U.S. territory. Do not abbreviate. If relevant, specify an individual island in the text of the story.

day care

Two words. One word or hyphenated only as part of a proper noun.

daylight saving time

In the United States, daylight saving time kicks in at 2 a.m. on the second Sunday in March, when clocks “spring forward” one hour, until 2 a.m. on the first Sunday in November, when clocks “fall back” one hour, in areas that do not specifically exempt themselves. Note the spelling: lowercase, no hyphen, not “savings.” Time zone abbreviations are acceptable on first reference when linked with a clock reading: 7 *p.m. PT*. Note that the abbreviation is not set off with commas and that no distinction is made between standard time and daylight time.

Note: Daylight saving time is not observed in Arizona (except the Navajo Nation), Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and American Samoa.

daylong, dayslong

No hyphen.

Day 1

Use *Day 1* when doing timelines/summaries, but *day one* in quotes, etc. *He promised that from day one ...*

days of the week

Because of the permanence of stories in digital, we will discontinue the practice of using days of the week within seven days of publication, as well as using *today*, *yesterday* or *tomorrow* as time elements. We now will only use the month and date. Avoid phrases such as *this week* or *next month* when possible. This rule will go across digital and print so that stories do not have to be reedited.

deaf, deafness, hearing loss

A person who is *deaf* cannot hear. A person who is *hard of hearing* can hear with difficulty. The line between *deaf* and *hard of hearing* is fuzzy; a person who is *deaf* may still be able to hear very loud things like a fire alarm or gunshot. Avoid using *hearing impaired*. *Hearing loss* is the preferred medical term, per guidance from the World Health Organization and

the Center for Disability Rights. Check with sources to see what terms they prefer and, if possible, ask if the person or group uses identify-first language (deaf athlete) or person-first language (athlete who is deaf). When referring to the shared community and culture influenced by deafness the D in *Deaf* is capitalized. A person who is blind and deaf is deafblind, one word.

dean

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

dean's list

Lowercase.

death, die

Do not use euphemisms such as *passed away* or *went to a better place*.

decades

Use apostrophes to show that you have dropped numerals, '93, but not to make plurals, 1990s.

decimal units

4,531,000 = 4.53 million or 4.5 million. Not 4.531 million unless you need the precision for clarity. Below 1, start with a leading zero: 0.85. An exception is caliber in weaponry: a .22-caliber bullet.

Declaration of Independence

The U.S. founding document is capitalized, but lowercase when referred to as *the declaration*.

DeepSeek

An open source generative AI model from China with an AI Assistant app.

Deep South

The region of the Southeastern United States that includes Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina.

defense attorney

A job description, not a title. It is lowercase.

defund

To reduce the budget of. Be specific on what is meant when used. Some people understand “defund the police” as getting rid of it entirely, others as reducing the budget

and duties of police (for example, by moving that money to a team of social workers tasked with welfare checks).

delegate

Convention delegates don't get capitalized, but some states use Delegate Smith in the legislature and then title rules apply. Nonvoting members of the House of Representatives from the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories are also called delegates. Such delegates may participate in debates, introduce legislation and vote in committee, but not on legislation in the full House. Do not abbreviate before a name.

dementia

Not synonymous with Alzheimer's disease. A person can have dementia, which is a cognitive condition, and not have Alzheimer's disease.

democrat, Democrat, democratic, Democratic, Democratic Party

In reference to the political party, uppercase. In general use, lowercase.

Democratic National Committee

Use the full name on first reference. *DNC* or *the committee* are acceptable on second reference. DNC should never be used to abbreviate Democratic National Convention.

Democratic Socialists of America, DSA

Spell out on first reference, but DSA may be used in subsequent references and in headlines. Democratic Socialists of America is a political organization, not a political party. Do not treat DSA as a party label or abbreviation. Identify elected officials by their ballot party affiliation (e.g., D-Michigan) and note DSA membership or endorsement separately when relevant. Not all self-described democratic socialists belong to the DSA, in which case the descriptor should be lowercase. For example, Bernie Sanders is a democratic socialist, but not a Democratic Socialist.

Denali, Mount McKinley

North America's tallest peak, located in Alaska. A dispute over the mountain's name dates back decades. It has been called Denali for years by some Alaska Natives – the Koyukon Athabascans – and the state of Alaska favors that name. Mount McKinley, named after the assassinated U.S. president William McKinley, was the official name of the peak recognized by the U.S. government from 1917 until 2015. The Trump administration issued an executive order in 2025 to reinstate Mount McKinley as its name in the federal Geographic Names Information System. Use both when describing the mountain: Mount McKinley, formerly known as Denali, or Denali, renamed by the U.S. government as Mount McKinley. Denali National Park and Preserve is the name of the national park that surrounds the mountain.

department

Lowercase when it stands alone or in plural usage such as departments of Labor and Energy.

Department of Government Efficiency, DOGE

A task force created by the Trump administration following the 2024 presidential election with the goal of reducing the size and scope of government. Originally overseen by Elon Musk, it has worked across a wide variety of federal agencies and in close coordination with the White House in an attempt to eliminate parts of government, reduce its workforce and cut regulations. Do not put quotation marks around the name. *DOGE* is acceptable on second reference, but do not refer to it as the “department.” The precise nature of DOGE has evolved over time and might continue to evolve before its scheduled expiration on July 4, 2026.

Departments in the U.S. government

Department of Agriculture (USDA acceptable on second reference)

Department of Commerce

Department of Education

Department of Energy (DOE acceptable on second reference)

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS acceptable on second reference; the leader is the *Health and Human Services secretary* or *HHS secretary*, not *Health secretary*)

Department of Homeland Security (DHS acceptable on second reference)

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD acceptable on second reference)

Department of the Interior (DOI acceptable on second reference)

Department of Justice (DOJ acceptable on second reference)

Department of Labor

Department of State

Department of Transportation (DOT acceptable on second reference)

Department of the Treasury

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA acceptable on second reference)

Department of War, formally the Department of Defense (DOD acceptable on second reference only in contexts that require Department of Defense rather than Department of War, see note below)

Note: Executive Order 14347, signed by Donald Trump on Sept. 5, 2025, authorized the use of Department of War (and associated titles) in place of Department of Defense for official correspondence, public communications, ceremonial contexts, and non-statutory documents within the executive branch. The official name of the department remains the Department of Defense until Congress passes legislation changing the name. However, the USA TODAY Network has chosen, in line with the executive order, to use Department of War (and associated titles) in all but statutory contexts with an explanation to readers along the lines of “formally known as the Department of Defense.” (Note that it says “formally,” not “formerly.”) Other exceptions: Use Department of Defense in historical

contexts, as in “In 2020, the Department of Defense ordered ...,” and when used in direct quotations. If Congress rejects legislation to change the name to the Department of War, additional style guidance on the matter will be considered.

deputy

Capitalize the official title, or as part of an official title, before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

-designate

Use hyphen. Not capitalized.

detective

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

devil

Lowercase, even in references to the religion-related entity. Satan is uppercase because it is a name.

diabetes

Type 1 and Type 2, if relevant, not juvenile/adult.

dietitian

Not dietician. A registered dietitian has a degree, but a nutritionist is not usually regulated.

different

Use *different from*, not *different than*.

differ from vs. differ with

Differs from means “is different from.” *Differs with* means “disagrees with.”

dimensions

Use numerals when citing dimensions, and spell out the measurement, such as inches or feet, instead of abbreviating. When used as adjectives, hyphens should be added.

For example: *I tell people I am 6 feet tall, but I am actually only 5 feet, 11 inches tall. When I played high school basketball, the roster said I was a 6-foot-2-inch forward. Our tallest player was a 6-footer who was listed as being 6 feet, 6 inches tall. The living room is 15 feet by 25 feet. It is a 15-by-25 room. The room has 365 square feet of space, or it is a 365-square-foot room.*

disburse vs. disperse

To distribute money is to disburse it (think of reimbursement). Dispersing money would be to throw it about.

discreet vs. discrete

Discreet means careful, unobtrusive. Discrete means separate and distinct.

diseases

Not capitalized unless they are named after a person or place and then only the person or place is capitalized, not “disease.” Someone *has a disease*. Use care when writing that people are *battling it* or *suffering from it*.

disinterested vs. uninterested

Disinterested can mean unbiased, not partial. Uninterested means not interested.

disk vs. disc

In your back and computer, it’s a *disk*. In a car’s brakes, or devices that look like a CD, it’s a *disc*.

dissociate

This means to disconnect. It is not “disassociate.”

distances

Use numerals for distances: *3 feet, 40 miles*.

district

Capitalize when part of a formal name. *District of Columbia, district court*.

diversity; diversity, equity and inclusion; DEI

A ubiquitous term describing either a multiracial or multicultural environment. Diversity can also include people from different racial, social and gender backgrounds as well as sexual orientations. When using diversity, equity and inclusion, spell out the term on first reference. *DEI* may be used in subsequent references and in headlines. Journalists should take extra care to explain the term in the correct context of the story. Specificity and accuracy are most important, as diversity can also be different experiences.

doctor

Only use Dr. on first reference with a full name and do not use it for people who have academic degrees. It can be used for doctors of dental surgery, medicine, optometry, osteopathic medicine, podiatric medicine and veterinary medicine. When mentioning more than one doctor, Drs. can be used. *The board heard from Drs. Rachel Daniels and Rich Smith*.

Doctors Without Borders

Abbreviates as MSF only after explaining that the French name is *Médecins Sans Frontières*.

dog breeds

Capitalize the part of a breed's name that comes from a proper noun, even if that country/region name doesn't get used anymore: English setter, German shepherd, but also Pomeranian, Dalmatian.

dollars

Lowercase. Specific amounts get a singular verb: *\$20 is too much for a burger*.

drowned, was drowned

A person drowns. Saying a person *was drowned* implies a second person who acted.

Drug Enforcement Administration

Use *DEA* on second reference.

drugs

It is OK to use this word in reference to legal and/or medicinal prescriptions. Example: *I'm going to pick up my drugs at the pharmacy*.

drunk, drunken, drunkenness

A person is drunk or was drunk. That is the word to use when it follows some conjugation of the verb "to be." The word *drunken* should be used preceding a word it is modifying, such as *drunken driving* or *drunken driver*. The term *drunkenness* describes the state of being intoxicated.

duffel

This is the spelling in uses other than *duffle coat*.

DUI, DWI

Abbreviations acceptable in all uses for *driving under the influence* and *driving while intoxicated*. Do not use the terms interchangeably. Use the term law enforcement is using.

dwarf vs. dwarfism vs. little people

Dwarfism is a genetic or medical condition that results in people growing no taller than 4 feet 10 inches. Use of the word is acceptable when referring to the medical condition but is otherwise generally considered offensive. Only reference if relevant to a story. Ask people how they want to be described; some people might prefer *short stature* or *little people* rather than *dwarf* or *dwarfism*. Avoid *midget* or euphemisms such as *vertically challenged*.

E

each

Each takes a singular verb.

each other vs. one another

People talk to *each other* when it's two of them, to *one another* when it's three or more.

Earth, earth

Capitalize when referring to the planet we live on. Lowercase when talking about dirt.

earthquakes

The U.S. Geological Survey says the once well-known Richter Scale is outdated and no longer in use. Earthquakes are measured using several different scales to gauge different aspects of an earthquake and compare them for the purposes of research, but the one used to report earthquakes is the Moment Magnitude Scale. However, do not name the scale unless necessary, as in a case where it is needed to set it apart from some other scale that is mentioned. Refer to magnitudes without a hyphen, such as *an earthquake of magnitude 5.3*, or a *magnitude 5.3 earthquake*, not a 5.3 magnitude earthquake.

The number always follows the word magnitude and never precedes it.

The USGS says the magnitude of an earthquake is standard from location to location, not less when farther from its source nor greater nearer the source. It is a measure of the size of an earthquake, and every whole-number increase, such as from 5.3 to 6.3, represents an amplitude 10 times greater than the lower value (it defines amplitude as “The size of the wiggles on an earthquake recording” from a seismograph). Keep in mind, magnitudes are sometimes revised, even days later, so it is wise to refer to the first report as a *preliminary magnitude*; the earlier example could be presented as *an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.3*.

Intensity of an earthquake, however, can differ from location to location. The USGS says it uses the Modified Mercalli Scale to measure intensity, or the degree of shaking and amount of damage in a place. As the measurement can be subjective, the more scientific magnitude measurement is preferred.

A temblor is a synonym for an earthquake. Do not type tremblor.

The epicenter is the point on the surface, below which was the focus of the quake, or as the USGS says, the spot above the “point in the crust where a seismic rupture begins.”

Early warning systems cannot be used to predict earthquakes, but if their sensors are triggered, they can be used to issue an alert to areas farther from the earthquake's epicenter in hopes of giving people even a little more time to take some protective action.

Eastern Seaboard vs. Eastern Shore

The Eastern Seaboard is East Coast. The Eastern Shore is the region east of the Chesapeake Bay to the Atlantic Ocean and can refer to Maryland or Virginia. Some consider Delaware part of the Eastern Shore as well.

Ebola

Capitalized because it's named after a river. Can be Ebola or the Ebola virus.

E. coli

OK in all references.

editor

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

e.g.

This means “for example” and is always followed with a comma.

either ... or vs. neither ... nor

The verb agrees with whichever subject is closest. *Neither Mom nor the kids are ready*, but *Neither the kids nor their mom is ready*.

-elect

Always use a hyphen and lowercase the e that follows it in constructions such as *President-elect Donald Trump*, *Sen.-elect Bill Cassidy*, *Gov.-elect Gary Thornton*.

Election Day, election night

Capitalize Election Day as the proper noun referring to a specific, recognized Election Day, whether it be the general election in November, primaries within a state, local elections, or international elections. Lowercase election day when it is used generically or as a modifier. For example, “election day preparations” but “preparations for Election Day.” Other terms, such as election night or election week, are lowercase.

election denier

Avoid in narrative copy except in direct quotations. Some consider the term to be loaded language. Instead, use the most specific wording the facts support. For example, say a person or group disputes election results, says an election was stolen or rejects certified results. Be specific about which election. If the term appears in a quotation, provide context explaining what the person said or did so readers are not left with the label alone.

Electoral College

The electors of the Electoral College cast electoral votes.

electric vs. hybrid vs. plug-in hybrid vehicles

Electric cars have a battery and run fully on a battery-operated motor. Hybrid cars have a gas engine, and a battery-driven motor that is charged by braking/decelerating and used for accelerating. Plug-in hybrids also have both like a hybrid, but their battery can also be charged by plugging in. They can drive on just battery/motor, but not nearly as far as an electric car can. After “electric vehicle” has been used on first reference, the abbreviation “EV” is acceptable.

electrocardiogram

EKG on second reference.

electronic cigarette

Use *e-cigarette* on second reference, not *e-cig*.

eleventh hour, the

Spell out and lowercase the phrase that means at the last possible moment.

El Salvador

The people of this country are Salvadorans. The adjective referring to the country is Salvadoran without the “El.”

embassy

Capitalize with a country. Lowercase without the country or when referring to multiple embassies. The *American Embassy*, *the embassy*, *the U.S. and British embassies*.

embryo, fetus, unborn baby, unborn child

Use *embryo* from conception to 8 weeks, then *fetus* until birth. Use *unborn baby/child* when it would be insensitive to call it a fetus. *She eagerly decorated the nursery, singing to her unborn child.*

emergency room

ER on second reference.

emerging industry terms

Use caution with terms that are not yet widely used but have gained relevance because of new products, technologies, business models, regulations or practices. These industries are often in early stages of development or changing rapidly. Generally, rely on merriam-webster.com for established usage. If an emerging industry term does not appear in Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, spell out the full term on first reference (example: *education technology*). Subsequently, use abbreviations or shortened forms only if clear.

Use open compounds for shortened forms of multi-word terms (example: *ed tech*). For words with prefixes or suffixes, hyphenate them if they do not appear in Merriam-Webster (example: *micro-learning*).

emeritus

Use *emerita* for women if they prefer. The term means that the person used to hold this job but has retired from it. Capitalize the official title *before* a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. *Professor Emeritus John Doe*, or *Jane Doe, professor emerita of history*.

engine vs. motor

An engine makes its own power, like a gasoline engine. A motor gets power from elsewhere, like a battery-powered motor.

England

Not interchangeable with Britain or United Kingdom.

entitled, titled

Entitled means has a right. Example: *I am entitled to my opinion*. Works of art are *titled*.

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA on second reference.

envoy

Not capitalized because it is not generally an official title.

epidemic (n., adj.) vs. pandemic (n., adj.) vs. endemic (adj.)

An *epidemic* is when a disease spreads rapidly in a certain place or group. A *pandemic* is the spread of a disease over a much larger geographic area, usually affecting multiple countries on more than one continent (wait until the World Health Organization or another organization makes this call). The regular presence of a disease in a population means that it is *endemic*. *Colds are endemic to everywhere humans live*.

equal vs. equitable

Something can be more *equitable*, but not more *equal*. *Equitable* has to do with how fairly or justly people are treated.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

EEOC on second reference.

equally as

Don't use. Instead, say *as* or *equally*, not both. *The new policy is equally ineffective as the old one*, NOT *The new policy is equally as ineffective as the old one*.

Equal Rights Amendment

Do not abbreviate as *ERA*. Instead use *the amendment* on second reference.

ERA

OK on all references for *earned run average* in baseball.

e-reader

Generic for stand-alone devices such as a Kindle or Nook, meant for reading e-books. There are also e-reader apps for phones/tablets/computers.

Eskimo

Avoid using this term. Once a blanket term used to refer to Indigenous peoples from the Arctic Circle, especially Alaska, Canada and Greenland, it is now considered outdated and offensive. Some groups are Inuit instead, particularly in Canada/Greenland/north Alaska. Use more specific terms that reflect the diversity of these peoples and use the terms your source uses to define themselves.

Eswatini

Formerly Swaziland.

ETF

OK on second reference for exchange traded funds.

ethanol

E85 is 85% ethanol.

ethnic descriptors: Black, African American, Brown, White, etc.

Use only when ethnicity is relevant. The labeling of people or things with broad terms/definitions isn't helpful and only causes a greater divide. If it's necessary for the reader, ask the source which ethnic identifier they use.

Capitalized when used to describe a person or group, as in *Black people*, *Brown people*, *White people*. Do not use as a noun, as in *Blacks* or *Whites*. *Black*, *brown*, *white* should be lowercase when referring to skin color, as in *people with brown or black or white skin*.

African American: Some people prefer the identifier African American; ask rather than assume, as not all Black people are or consider themselves to be African American.

Use the descriptor a source uses.

euro

Lowercase. Plural is euros.

European Union

The *European Union* is a group of 27 mostly European member states tied politically and economically. *EU* may be used on second reference, no periods. The *European Commission* is its governing body.

Eve

Capitalized as part of holidays.

even-steven

An exception to Merriam-Webster.

every day (adv.) vs. everyday (adj.)

I run *every day*, so getting out of breath is an *everyday* occurrence.

every one vs. everyone

If you're saying something about every single item, *every one* (*As a fan of gourmet pizza, I've ordered every one on the menu*). If you're talking about a group of people, *everyone* (*Everyone likes pizza*).

executive director

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

Executive Mansion

If you're talking about the White House or the official residence of the governor of a state, capitalize.

extrasensory perception

ESP on second reference for a sixth sense, a psychic ability.

extremist groups

Don't just call them extreme; be specific about how they are extreme.

F

Fahrenheit

Capitalized. The temperature scale used in the United States. The freezing point of water at sea level is at 32 degrees Fahrenheit, and its boiling point is at 212 Fahrenheit. Use 32 *F* if the context is clear.

Fannie Mae vs. Fannie May

Fannie Mae is the Federal National Mortgage Association. *Fannie May* is a candy company.

FAQ

Acceptable in all references for *frequently asked questions*.

far-ranging

Note the hyphen, to avoid the double-r.

farther vs. further

Farther refers to an actual physical distance. Further refers to a degree or intensity, often in reference to time. *You and I will discuss this further after lunch.*

Far West

This geographic region of the United States is capitalized. It is composed of California, Oregon and Washington. The West, as defined by the federal government, is composed of Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

fashion week

Lowercase when used generally, uppercase when used as part of a reference to a specific one: New York Fashion Week, Paris Fashion Week, London Fashion Week, Milan Fashion Week.

Father's Day

It is observed in the United States on the third Sunday of June. Note that “father” is singular possessive.

faze vs. phase

Faze means to upset. Example: *Extra work doesn't faze me.* *Phase* is a period or stage in a series of events. Example: *The second phase of construction will begin this spring.*

FBI

Acceptable in all references for *Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

federal

Lowercase as an adjective, uppercase as part of the title of a building, department, agency or body. Examples: *We must abide by the rules of the Federal Communications Commission*, but *He is facing federal charges*.

Federal Aviation Administration

FAA on second reference.

Federal Communications Commission

FCC on second reference. The federal agency regulates interstate and international communications through cable, radio, television, satellite and wire.

federal court

Lowercase.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

FDIC on second reference.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEMA on second reference.

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

FERC on second reference.

Federal Highway Administration

Part of the federal Department of Transportation. Do not refer to it as *FHA*, which is the Federal Housing Administration.

Federal Housing Administration

FHA on second reference.

federal Indian boarding schools; Canadian Indian residential school system

The accurate names for the government-run or government-sponsored school systems in the United States and Canada that forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families in the name of assimilation. Do not refer to them as Native American boarding schools or Indigenous boarding schools; those terms can suggest that Indigenous peoples created or operated the schools. In the United States, the schools were established by the federal government during the Indian boarding school era. In Canada, the schools were a network of residential schools funded by the Canadian government and administered

largely by Christian churches, and they operated as part of a broader policy of forced assimilation. Indigenous children and families were the people affected by these systems, not the people who created or ran them.

Federal Reserve

This central banking system of the United States is best known for influencing market interest rates. Spell it out on first reference, but it may then be referred to as “the Fed.”

Federal Trade Commission

FTC on second reference.

female, male

With few exceptions, these should be used as adjectives, not as nouns. An exception would be a group of varying ages. Example: *The study included females ages 12 to 22.* Better would be: *The study included girls and women ages 12 to 22.*

fertility rate

In general, the number of live births per 1,000 girls and women of reproductive age per year. It is used to measure population growth. In the United States, it is calculated using a reproductive age of 15-44.

fewer vs. less

If you can count it, *fewer*. If you can't, it's *less*. *We offered fewer glasses because we had less wine.*

Fiberglas

A trademark name. One s.

file formats (PDF, GIF, PNG, JPEG, MP3)

All caps, no periods; OK on first reference; spell out only if needed for clarity. This is an exception to Merriam-Webster for PDF, but consistent for GIF, PNG, JPEG.

Filipino, Filipina

Filipinos (male) and *Filipinas* (female) are from the Philippines. Use *Filipino* as an adjective only when the emphasis is on ethnicity rather than nationality (Philippine). *Filipino* is also one of the Philippines' two official languages; the other is English.

Finland

Not part of Scandinavia, for cultural reasons.

fire department

Capitalize the official name of a fire department including the name of its municipality or jurisdiction on first reference. Lowercase fire department when used apart from the department's official name.

firm

A business partnership is correctly referred to as a firm. He joined a law firm. Do not use *firm* in reference to an incorporated business entity. Use *company* or *corporation* instead. In a pinch, *firm* may be used in a headline to mean a business entity for space reasons.

first lady, first gentleman, first family

For spouses of heads of state or governors, and their family. The term is not an official title and is always lowercase.

flack vs. flak

A *flack* is jargon for a public relations agent. Use *flak* for artillery fire and criticism.

flail vs. flay

To *flail* is to thrash around, wave one's arms, etc., or rarely, a medieval weapon. To *flay* is to peel the skin from, generally in an aggressive sense. *The movie villain flayed one of his victims, not I flayed a banana.*

flair vs. flare

Flair is a special something, decoration, or ability (*flair for dramatics*). A *flare* is a bright flash.

flaunt vs. flout

Flaunt is to show (something) off. *Flout* is to flagrantly disregard.

flounder vs. founder

Flounder is a fish, or to flop about like one. To *founder* is to sink.

flyer vs. flier

Use *flyer* for pamphlets and people on airplanes. A *flier* is a running jump, literally or figuratively.

focuses

The preferred plural of focus is an exception to Merriam-Webster.

Food and Agriculture Organization

FAO on second reference. Note that the name uses *Agriculture*, not *Agricultural*.

Food and Drug Administration

FDA on second reference.

foot-and-mouth disease

This affects animals, is infectious and sometimes fatal. Humans do not get this virus, but they can get *hand, foot and mouth disease*.

forbear, forebear

Forbear means to abstain or refrain from doing something and is a verb. A *forebear*, which is preferred over *forebearer*, is an ancestor and a noun.

forcible rape

This is a legal term and should only be used if that is the name of the charge.

forego, forgo

Forego means to go before. *Forgo* means to abstain from. Example: *It's a foregone conclusion that I will not forgo dessert.*

fort

Spell out when used as part of a city name (same with mount). There are exceptions but very few (Mt. Juliet, Tennessee).

forward

No "s." Also, *backward* and *toward*.

4x4

Use if it's part of the vehicle's name. Otherwise, four-wheel drive.

fracking

A common term for hydraulic fracturing, a process used in obtaining natural gas and oil. Fracking is acceptable on first reference if the story explains what it is, including that it is also known as hydraulic fracturing.

Freddie Mac

Acceptable on first reference for the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

French Canadian

Someone who lives in the French-speaking region of Canada.

French Foreign Legion

A military unit of active soldiers in the French army. You do not have to be French to join. Referred to as *the Legion* after first reference.

Frisbee

A trademark for the plastic disc thrown as a toy. Lowercase *flying disc* in generic use. The sport using a version of the toys that are thrown around a course is disc golf. The noncontact team sport using such a flying disc is called *ultimate disc golf*, rather than *Ultimate Frisbee*, which has been trademarked by the Ultimate Frisbee Association.

from ... to, from ... through, between ... and

These constructions referring to ranges of time or number have slightly different meanings. “From 1997 to 2007” is inclusive of the year 1997, but ambiguous about 2007, and should be avoided if greater specificity is possible. “From 1997 through 2007” is inclusive of both 1997 and 2007. It means “starting in 1997 and ending in 2007.” If the entirety of 2007 is meant to be included, say “through the end of 2007.” “Between 1997 and 2007” is exclusive of the endpoints, and it does not necessarily include everything in between but focuses on something happening within that range. It’s best to avoid unless the lack of specificity is intended. Do not use “between ... and” with consecutive numbers, as in “between two and three days” or “between 1997 and 1998.”

In such phrases as “from 1999 to 2007,” the word *from* must be accompanied by the word *to* or *through*. Do not substitute a hyphen for *to* or *through* if the word *from* is used, such as “Smith led the team from 2001-03.” “From 1997 until 2007” has essentially the same meaning as “from 1997 through 2007” but the latter construction is preferred for consistency.

Use care not to mix up these phrases in constructions such as “between 1997 to 2007,” which is nonstandard English and does not make sense.

fulsome

It can mean abundant and generous but also can refer to something offensively overdone. Take care when using this word.

G

G20, Group of 20

Despite its name, the Group of 20 comprises 19 countries and two regional bodies: the European Union and the African Union. Founded in 1999, the organization originally represented 19 industrialized and emerging-market nations (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States) along with the EU. The African Union was granted membership in 2023, bringing the total number of members to 21. The G20 retained its original name for institutional reasons and recognizability. G20 is acceptable in all references but describe it early in the story as a group of leading wealthy and developing nations. Avoid referring to it as the Group of 20, unless the story allows for an explanation of why it has 21 members.

G7, Group of Seven

Seven leading industrialized nations, in addition to the European Union, make up the G7: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Known as the Group of Eight, or G8, from 1997 to 2014, it reverted to its previous name when Russia was expelled in 2014. G7 is acceptable in all references, but describe it early in the story as a group of seven leading industrialized nations and the European Union.

GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles)

GAAP on second reference.

gambling revenue

Money made by casinos after paying off winners. Not to be confused with *handle*, which is the amount of money for all wagers.

gamut vs. gantlet vs. gauntlet

Gamut means an entire range, so *to run the gamut* means to experience, perform or include the entire range or series of what is being discussed. A *gantlet* is a lane between parallel lines of people waiting to hit someone running between them – thus, the term *run the gantlet*. A *gauntlet* is a long glove, sometimes metal, worn with armor to protect the hands. *To throw down the gauntlet* is to issue a challenge.

garnish (v. and n.) garnishee (v. and n.)

Garnish refers to a decorative addition to food or drink, or the act of adding such touches. *Garnishee* refers to the taking of something, often wages, by legal authority. The IRS *garnishees* one's wages, NOT *garnishes* one's wages. (The noun *garnishee* refers to the person who is served with the garnishment.)

GED

A trademark that stands for *General Educational Development* tests, through which someone who dropped out of school can earn a high school equivalency diploma. *Received a GED* is common, but *received a GED diploma/certificate* is better.

gender-neutral pronouns

They/them/their or any other gender-neutral pronoun is acceptable when that is what a person prefers. Reporters and editors can explain *they/them* pronouns in stories if doing so helps in clarifying who is speaking or otherwise informs the reader. A person's last name can be substituted. When covering, it's important to understand that the federal government (by [executive order](#)) recognizes two sexes: male - *he/him* and female - *she/her*.

General Assembly

The main policymaking body of the United Nations. All 193 nations that are members of the U.N. make up the General Assembly. Note the capitalization.

general court

A legislative assembly. Two states refer to their legislatures as general courts: Massachusetts General Court and New Hampshire General Court.

general manager

Lowercase in sports articles, even before a person's name. However, outside of sports, capitalize when used as part of a formal title before a name. GM can be an acceptable abbreviation on second reference, but be aware of the possibility of confusion in some contexts, for example, in a story that includes mention of the company General Motors, which is also abbreviated GM.

General Services Administration

GSA on second reference.

generations

The *Greatest Generation* comprises those generally born in the years 1901-1927, followed by the *Silent Generation* born 1928-1945. The *baby boomers* (note lower case) traditionally refers to the generation born 1946-1964, although those born 1955-1964 have since been identified as a distinct group dubbed *Generation Jones*. *Generation X*, or *Gen X*, is generally considered those born 1965-1980, followed by *Generation Y*, better known as *millennials* (note lower case), born 1981-1996. *Generation Z*, or *Gen Z*, generally considered those born between 1997 and the early 2010s, is sometimes referred to as *Zoomers*. The birth of *Generation Alpha*, currently the youngest generation, dates from the early 2010s. *Generation Beta* has been proposed as the name for those born between 2025 and 2039.

generative AI

This type of artificial intelligence uses machine learning to create new content, generally from a user's prompt. ChatGPT and DALL-E are examples of generative AI.

genocide

Genocide is a legal term that refers to crimes committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Genocide is an international crime, recognized by the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, an international treaty that obligates state parties to pursue the enforcement. These acts fall into five categories: "killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Although the term genocide – and modern understanding of what that means – grew out of the atrocities of the Holocaust during World War II, genocide was not recognized as an international crime until 1948. Three genocides in history have been recognized under the legal 1948 definition worldwide: the Cambodian genocide, the Rwandan genocide and the Srebrenica massacre.

Given that this is a legal term, use only when attributed to a qualified source such as a tribunal, court, international court, and its officials, attorneys, and state actors, similar to best practices with other legal terms such as murder. Do not paraphrase to express the opinions of nonlegal sources; instead, use quotes. Avoid the use in ledes, headlines, unless news is connected to a legal proceeding or an official declaration. When useful, clarify for the reader where the country being accused stands in the process. Although the term genocide is colloquially used by affected parties in conflict zones, its commission is extremely rare when compared to crimes that are not defined by an intent to destroy a targeted group such as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

genus vs. species

Genus is a wider category than *species*. Together they make a binomial name. For example, the genus *Equus* includes horses, zebras and donkeys; the species *Equus quagga* refers to zebras only. Species can and do sometimes interbreed. Genuses are capitalized, species aren't. Binomial names are sometimes abbreviated: *E. coli* for *Escherichia coli*.

German measles

Rubella is preferred. (It's the R in the MMR vaccine: measles, mumps, rubella.)

GI, GIs

Current or former member(s) of the U.S. Armed Forces. Can also be an adjective for items provided by or characteristic of the military, such as a GI haircut. Note: GI is also used as

an acronym for *glycemic index* and an abbreviation for gastrointestinal, as in *upper GI tract*. In martial arts, a karate uniform is a *gi*.

GMT

Greenwich Mean Time, the international standard of time, which is based on local time at the Royal Observatory in the London borough of Greenwich. Also known as Coordinated Universal Time.

gods and goddesses

Capitalize *God* in reference to the supreme being of a monotheistic religion: *As God is my witness, I'll never go hungry again*. Capitalize the names of gods and goddesses of polytheistic religions and mythology: Zeus, Isis, Odin, Vishnu. As a general term, use lower case: *She was a goddess in Hollywood, commanding respect and high salaries*.

good Samaritan

Capitalize when part of a name: *Good Samaritan Hospital*, or when referring to the parable of the *Good Samaritan*. Lowercase *good* in general reference: *The drowning boy was saved by a good Samaritan out walking his dog*.

good vs. well

Good is an adjective and *well* is an adverb. Example: *She did a good job. She did well*.

Government Accountability Office

GAO on second reference. Sometimes called the “congressional watchdog.”

governor

Capitalize and abbreviate as Gov. before the name of an official elected or appointed to govern a U.S. state or territory (e.g., Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis; Govs. Gretchen Whitmer and Brian Kemp, Puerto Rico Gov. Jenniffer González-Colón). In other formal titles, spell out Governor and capitalize it before a name, including for governors of jurisdictions in other countries (Governor Yuriko Koike of Tokyo). Governor, spelled out and capitalized, may be used before the name of a member of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors (e.g., Governor Christopher Waller), but for members of most other bodies called a Board of Governors, identify them as members of the board after their names rather than using Governor as a title.

GPA

OK in all references for grade point average.

grade, grader

No hyphens. Fifth grade. First grader.

Grammy Awards

Grammys is acceptable on second reference.

grand jury

A grand jury listens to evidence to determine if formal charges are warranted. Always use lower case.

gray vs. grey

In American English, it's *gray*; in British English, *grey*. The dog breed is *greyhound*.

great-

Family “greats” are hyphenated: *great-grandchild*, *great-great-grandmother*.

Great Recession

The *Great Recession* was a severe economic downturn in the United States from December 2007 to June 2009. Not the same as the *Great Depression*.

Great Smoky Mountains

Mountain range along the Tennessee-North Carolina border and a subrange of the Appalachian Mountains. Don't put an “e” in *Smoky*.

gringo

Don't use this disparaging term unless in a quote or a title.

grisly vs. grizzly

Use *grisly* in reference to something horrific or disgusting. *The location of the homicide was a grisly scene*. Use *grizzly* in reference to the bear, or to describe something sprinkled or streaked with gray (also *grizzled*).

gross domestic product

GDP on second reference.

Ground Zero, ground zero

Capitalized, *Ground Zero* refers to the site of the former World Trade Center, which was destroyed when terrorists flew two airliners into the north and south towers on Sept. 11, 2001.

Lowercased, *ground zero* refers to the land or water surface area directly below or above the point of detonation of a nuclear bomb. Be cautious about using *ground zero* as a metaphor; it has become a cliché.

Guam

Unincorporated U.S. territory. The southernmost of the Mariana Islands in the western Pacific Ocean region of Micronesia. People born on Guam are U.S. citizens.

Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of America

The Gulf of Mexico has been the most common name since the 1600s for the body of water surrounded by U.S. Gulf Coast states, Mexican states and Cuba. The Trump administration issued an executive order in 2025 to change the name of the Gulf of Mexico in the federal Geographic Names Information System to the Gulf of America. Use both names, adjusting as appropriate to the context: Gulf of America, formerly known as Gulf of Mexico, or Gulf of Mexico, renamed by the U.S. government as Gulf of America. Leave usage as is in direct quotes and add context as soon as possible. Capitalize Gulf by itself for this body of water and Gulf Coast when referring to the states/region bordering it.

H

half day (n.) half-day (adj.)

half-mast vs. half-staff

On a boat, a lowered flag is at *half-mast*; on land, it's at *half-staff*.

Hamas

Officially named Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, or Islamic Resistance Movement, this Palestinian militant group is commonly known by the abbreviation Hamas. It was founded in 1987 and has both a political wing, which has engaged in political activities and provided services to Palestinians, and a military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, which conducts military operation against Israel. Hamas is violently opposed to the existence of Israel on what it says is Palestinian land, and it seeks to replace Israel with a Palestinian state based on Islam.

Following an electoral victory in the Palestinian Territories in January 2006, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 in a brief civil war between Hamas and its rival party, Fatah, culminating in the dissolution of the Palestinian unity government and resulting in a de facto split into the West Bank, governed by the Palestinian National Authority (controlled by Fatah), and the Gaza Strip, governed by Hamas. (Israel had previously pulled all military personnel and Israeli settlers from Gaza in 2005.)

On Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attacked southern Israel, killing more than 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking more than 200 hostages. In response, Israel declared a war aimed at eradicating the group. *Refer to this war as the Israel-Hamas war (lowercase) rather than the war in Gaza (which implies it is contained within the Gaza Strip) or the Israel-Palestinian war (which implies the war extends to the whole Palestinian people).* Tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed in the war, including civilians, however the Hamas-controlled Gaza Health Ministry does not differentiate civilian and non-civilian deaths. When reporting death tolls from the war, be sure to attribute the numbers, which can vary by source. The Gaza Health Ministry has been known to report questionable tallies. Attribution to the Gaza Health Ministry should include wording making clear that it is controlled by Hamas. Many of the leaders of Hamas have been killed by Israel's military.

The U.S. State Department designated Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997. Hamas sometimes operates in coordination with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another Gaza-based group designated by the State Department in 1997 as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. Both groups receive backing from Iran and share common goals in armed resistance to Israel but have had a tense relationship because of disagreements on strategy for confronting Israel.

hands off, hands-off

Hyphenate when used as a modifier. *We prefer hands-off management. But: Keep your hands off the stove!*

hand to hand, hand-to-hand, hand to mouth, hand-to-mouth

Hyphenate when used as a modifier. *It's a hand-to-hand deal. They eke out a hand-to-mouth existence. But: They passed the knickknack from hand to hand.*

hangar vs. hanger

A *hangar* is a place to store a plane. A *hanger* is for hanging items such as clothes.

hanged vs. hung

A person is *hanged*. A photo is *hung*.

Haqqani Network

An Afghan Islamist group founded in 1970 by Jalaluddin Haqqani that often operates out of Pakistan. Designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the United States in 2012.

hate speech

Slurs against people, including but not limited to those based on their race, religion or ethnicity, should not be repeated in stories. Nor should their euphemisms. For example, do not use “N-word” or the word it stands in for. In stories where use of a slur in a quote is newsworthy, obtain approval from the company’s vice president for ethics and standards. In all other situations, use a description such as a racial epithet. The approval of the use and treatment of the slur with the name of the approving editor must be noted in Presto's Print Package Instructions.

Hawaii, Hawaiians

Those who live in Hawaii are called *Hawaii residents*. *Hawaiians* and *Hawaiian* are reserved for those belonging to the Native group and its culture.

heart attack, heart failure, cardiac arrest

A *heart attack* is a stoppage of blood to the muscle of the heart, also called a myocardial infarction. The term *heart failure* is for chronic weakening of the heart, until it can't effectively pump blood. *Cardiac arrest* is the heart itself stopping, suddenly not beating.

hemisphere

Capitalize when referring to a specific hemisphere: *Most of the Earth's land mass is in the Northern Hemisphere.*

Hezbollah

Hezbollah, meaning “Party of God,” is a Shiite Muslim political party and militant group based in Lebanon that wields considerable power in the Middle East, opposing Israel and Western influence in the region. Founded in the early 1980s by Lebanese clerics, Hezbollah had been led by Hassan Nasrallah since 1992 until his death in an Israeli air strike in September 2024. Its political wing is represented in Lebanon’s Parliament as the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc. Its militant wing, overseen by the Jihad Council, has conducted attacks worldwide. Although Hezbollah is a nonstate actor, it has state-like military capabilities with an array of defensive and offensive artillery and drones. Hezbollah’s biggest financial backer is Iran, and it operates throughout the region on Iran’s behalf. Hezbollah’s founding document pledges allegiance to the Iranian supreme leader. The group adheres to principles of armed opposition to Israel, ridding the Middle East of Western influence, and establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon. Since its founding, Hezbollah has had many clashes with Israel, including years of guerilla warfare, a 34-day war in 2006 and numerous skirmishes on the Lebanon-Israel border in 2019. Following the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, Hezbollah began bombing northern Israel with rockets in solidarity with its Iranian-backed ally in the Gaza Strip. In September 2024, Israel stepped up its attacks on Hezbollah’s military infrastructure and leadership. Days before Hezbollah’s leader Nasrallah was killed, Israel simultaneously remotely detonated explosives hidden inside thousands of pagers, and then walkie-talkies the next day, used by Hezbollah, causing dozens of deaths and thousands of injuries. In November 2024, a ceasefire was implemented, requiring Hezbollah militants and Israeli troops to withdraw from southern Lebanon. Hezbollah was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department in 1997. Government agencies and others sometimes use the spelling *Hizballah* but Hezbollah is the preferred spelling. *Hasbulla* is a Russian social media personality who has a form of dwarfism and has ties to the UFC, Ultimate Fighting Championship.

hillbilly

Avoid using this belittling term unless in a direct quote.

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, HIPAA

Spell out on first reference. HIPAA on second reference.

His Majesty / Her Majesty

Capitalize *His Majesty* or *Her Majesty* in quotes or as part of the formal title. Otherwise, use their name or *the king* and *the queen*.

historic vs. historical

Historic is an adjective describing something important in history or of lasting importance: *the historic battle of Gettysburg*. Historical is an adjective for something relating to history: *historical records, historical data*.

Hodgkin lymphoma

Not *Hodgkin's lymphoma*.

homeless, homelessness

Homeless is an acceptable adjective, but do not refer to a group of homeless people as *the homeless* or *the unhoused*. Use *unhoused* only in quotes or if a person says that is how they prefer to be described. Mention a person's homelessness only if it is relevant. Avoid any oversimplified and often erroneous general assumptions about homelessness. Do not use derogatory terms like *bum* or *derelict* or *vagrant*.

homophobia, homophobic

Acceptable for a broad generalization of hatred for some members of the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than pronounce a judgment on a thing or situation, be specific: *The council member used an anti-gay slur. The comedian was criticized for using language that belittled lesbians and bisexuals.*

homosexual

Use *gay* or *lesbian* instead, outside of clinical contexts or quotes.

honorary degrees

If a degree is honorary, always say so when referring to it.

Hotshot

Capitalize for a firefighter who belongs to a group that uses the word in its formal name.

House of Commons, House of Lords

Two houses of British Parliament. Can be called Commons and Lords on second reference.

Humane Society of the United States

Be sure to include the full name of the group on first reference, as many humane societies exist. *The society* is acceptable for subsequent references.

human papillomavirus

HPV on second reference.

human smuggling vs. human trafficking

The term *smuggling* usually refers to sneaking someone across a border they would not otherwise be allowed to cross. However, *trafficking* is employing threats, violence or other coercion to use a person for labor or prostitution. Be specific as to what sort of trafficking is happening or alleged. Don't hyphenate when used as a modifier.



I

ICBM, ICBMs

On first reference, spell out intercontinental ballistic missile or missiles. *ICBM missiles* is redundant.

ice age

Lowercase. Unlike the Stone Age or the Iron Age, there are multiple ice ages.

ID

This is acceptable to use for identification, as in *I need to see your ID*, but in stories, don't use it to mean identified. In headlines, *ID'd* is acceptable.

i.e.

Abbreviation for *id est*, which is Latin for “that is” and often used to mean “in other words.” The abbreviation i.e. is followed by a comma, i.e., punctuated like this.

illegal

In non-sports uses, only acceptable to mean something that violates a law. Note: A person is not an illegal.

illegal alien

Avoid this term. Instead, use *undocumented worker* or *undocumented immigrant*. Immigration status can be complicated. When relevant to the story, include whether an individual is in a lawful immigration process, has a legal work permit, etc. Under Biden, millions of people sought asylum legally, and may have an Employment Authorization Document, for example. Undocumented is a catch-all, but specificity is better when it doesn't endanger the subject.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement

The federal agency within the Department of Homeland Security states that its mission is to “protect America through criminal investigations and enforcing immigration laws to preserve national security and public safety.” *ICE* may be used on second reference. The two main law enforcement divisions within ICE are Homeland Security Investigations, which has “special agents,” and Enforcement and Removal Operations, which has “ERO officers” or “deportation officers.” Capitalize “Special Agent” as a title before a name. Capitalize “ERO Officer” or “Deportation Officer” as a title before a name, but in most cases “Officer” will suffice for those titles in both cases. Reporters should make an effort to determine if an ICE official is an officer or a special agent, but if it cannot be determined, “officer” is usually OK in law enforcement contexts. However, do not capitalize it as a title before a person's name if it is unknown whether that is the person's official title.

imply vs. infer

A writer or speaker hinting at or alluding to something implies it. A reader or listener picking up on what was hinted is inferring it.

improvised explosive device

Spell out on first reference. *IED* or *roadside bomb* on second reference.

Inauguration Day

Held on Jan. 20 following a U.S. presidential election (or Jan. 21 if Jan. 20 is a Sunday).

incarceration, internment

Internment is inaccurate to describe the detention of U.S. citizens, as only foreign nationals can be *interned*. When Japanese Americans and Japanese nationals were imprisoned under armed guard because of Executive Order 9066, the vast majority were U.S. citizens by birth, so it is more accurate to refer to the places the detainees were sent as *incarceration camps*, *detention centers* or *prison camps*.

incredible vs. incredulous

Incredible means so extraordinary and improbable, it can't be believed (often hyperbolic). *That double rainbow was incredible.* The term *incredulous* means skeptical or unwilling to believe what is true. *I am incredulous that you saw a double rainbow on your way to the office because it wasn't even raining.*

Independence Day

July Fourth or Fourth of July are also OK.

India

The populous country in south Asia. The people and cultures are Indian, but there is not a language called Indian.

Indigenous people, peoples

The original inhabitants of an area. Use *people* when referring to a single group of individuals, and *peoples* when referring to multiple Indigenous groups. See the entry on Native American, American Indian, Indian.

Indigenous Peoples Day

In recent years, some communities have renamed Columbus Day, the federal holiday celebrated the second Monday in October, *Indigenous Peoples Day*, acknowledging that the lands Columbus "discovered" were already inhabited and that his interactions with native populations were often brutal. In 2021, President Joe Biden issued the first presidential proclamation of *Indigenous Peoples Day*.

indiscreet vs. indiscrete

To be *indiscreet* is to be unwise or imprudent, or failing to be secretive. To be *indiscrete* is to be one piece, without distinctive separate parts.

individual retirement account

IRA on second reference.

initial public offering

IPO on second reference.

in spite of, in light of, in lieu of

In spite of can be replaced with *despite*. Example: *It was a good date, in spite of the car breaking down.*

In light of means “because of a certain event or information,” usually information that was previously concealed. Example: *I demanded a paternity test in light of my ex’s cheating.*

In lieu of means “instead of something that isn’t available.” Example: *Some Depression-era recipes feature substantial substitutions, like meatloaf that uses oatmeal and breadcrumbs in lieu of most of the meat.*

intensive care unit

ICU on second reference.

International Monetary Fund

IMF on second reference.

International Space Station

Use *space station* on second reference, not *ISS*.

internet

Lowercase in all uses.

Interpol

Acceptable for International Criminal Police Organization.

in vitro fertilization

IVF on second reference.

IQ

Acceptable for intelligence quotient.

Ireland

An independent nation, not part of the United Kingdom. It is sometimes called the Irish Republic if a distinction needs to be made between it and the separate nation of Northern Ireland.

Irish Republican Army

IRA on second reference.

irregardless

Use *regardless* instead.

IRS

OK in all references for the Internal Revenue Service.

Islamic State group

This group splintered off from the al-Qaida network and continued terrorist actions in Iraq, Syria and other areas. It has also been called the *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria* or *ISIS*. The preferred terminology is the *Islamic State group*.

IT

Spell out *information technology* on first reference. IT is fine for subsequent references.

italics

for emphasis in text: The use of italics to give emphasis to a word or phrase is preferred over the use of boldface type or all uppercase letters. Do not overuse this device. In most cases, the sentence structure can and should supply the emphasis. Do not use italics to emphasize the obvious in quoted material: “We shall never surrender.” Not: “We shall *never* surrender.” But italics is permissible to correctly reflect the spoken emphasis within quotations when it would not otherwise be understood by the reader.

in written quotations: Italics should be used to correctly reflect a quotation from a written source that includes italics in its original form.

to express a thought rather than spoken word: Italics may be used in certain types of writing to convey the idea that the italicized wording represents a thought, rather than a quotation spoken aloud.

for foreign words: When necessary to use full sentences in a language other than English, italicize the full sentence to set it apart. Many foreign words and phrases are listed in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Those that have been assimilated into everyday English usage are given as standard entries in the dictionary and should not be italicized (adios, hors d’oeuvre, oy vey, for example), unless quoting a non-English-speaking person. If a foreign word or phrase is not included in as a standard entry in the Merriam-Webster

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

Dictionary, it should be italicized. For example, *enchanté*. If the meaning of the word or phrase is not clear from the context, it should be explained. Foreign words that are proper nouns (the Louvre, for example) are not italicized.

IUD

Stands for *intrauterine device*. Spell out on second reference.

IV

OK in all references for *intravenous*.

USA TODAY NETWORK
styleguide
Version 3.0 — 9/21/2026

J

jail

Usually holds people awaiting trial or sentencing, or people detained on misdemeanors and civil charges. Different from prison.

Jaws of Life

A trademark.

JB Pritzker (no periods)

This is an exception based on the individual's preference.

JD Vance (no periods)

This is an exception based on the individual's preference.

jeep, Jeep

Lowercase the military vehicle. Capitalize the civilian vehicle. Do not use as a generic word for an SUV.

Jet Ski, jet ski, personal watercraft

Jet Ski is a trademark. Use this brand name (capitalized) when we know a personal watercraft is the Jet Ski brand. The same goes for other brands. Jet Ski, owned by Kawasaki, is arguably the most iconic and widely recognized personal watercraft (other brands include Wave Runner and Sea-Doo). Because "personal watercraft" is a category much broader than what is traditionally considered that of the Jet Ski, when it is not known whether the brand of the vehicle is Jet Ski, the term "Jet Ski-type watercraft" is acceptable. Use "jet ski" lowercase in quotes only when the brand of the watercraft is not known.

Joint Chiefs of Staff

Uppercase this military advisory group as well as *Joint Chiefs*.

judge advocate

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. Plural form is *judge advocates*.

junior, senior

Abbreviate as Jr. and Sr. after a person's name. Do not use a comma between the name and the Jr. or Sr. If only one of the two is in the article, second references should not use the Jr. or Sr. If they are both in the article or it is otherwise necessary to distinguish between the two people, there are a couple of acceptable ways. The Jr. and Sr. can follow the second-reference use of the last name, such as Hopkins Jr. and Hopkins Sr., or they can be referred to as the younger Hopkins and the elder Hopkins. For possessive presentation,

simply add 's, such as Hopkins Jr.'s. If a person uses II or 2nd instead of Jr., keep in mind these are not the same as Jr., and are not interchangeable.

justice

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

justice of the peace

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. Plural is *justices of the peace*.



K

K

You may use the letter in references to kilometers, as in a *5K race*, and to multiples of \$1,000 in headlines, as in *Grants totaling \$150K were awarded*.

K-9

K-9s are dogs specially trained for police or military work, including drug and explosives detection, search and rescue, tracking and combat support. The term “police dog” is fine to use in informal law enforcement contexts. K-9s that are part of a Military Working Dog program may also be referred to as Military Working Dogs (capitalized).

Kennedy Center

Use “the Kennedy Center” in most references. Do not use “The Trump Kennedy Center” except in historical references to the December 2025-June 2026 period or in quoted material. The institution’s name was set by Congress in 1964 as the “John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts,” originally the “National Cultural Center.” In 2025, the center’s board of trustees voted to designate the center as “The Donald J. Trump and the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts,” shortened to “The Trump Kennedy Center” (initial caps, no hyphen) in branding by the center. In May 2026, a federal judge ruled that only Congress can change the center's name and ordered Trump references removed from the building and related materials, and the center complied. In August 2026, the center’s board approved a new proposal that, rather than renaming the center, would add façade wording reading: “The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Restored and Renovated by President Donald J. Trump” and would name the center's grounds “President Donald J. Trump Plaza.” A new legal challenge to these changes has been filed and federal courts have not issued a final ruling regarding it. In historical references to the December 2025-June 2026 period, it may be appropriate to use “The Trump Kennedy Center.” The legal name remains the “John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts” unless Congress changes it. Use the full legal name in legal, statutory and other contexts where precision is required.

KGB

The main security agency for the Soviet Union from 1954 to 1991. It has never been an agency of Russia. Do not refer to it as such. However, the main successor to the *KGB* is the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation, also known as the FSB. *KGB* is acceptable in all references but define it in the story as the Soviet Union’s main security agency. FSB is acceptable in all references but define it in the story as Russia’s main security agency.

kindergarten, kindergartners

Grade of school before first grade, usually for students who are 5 or 6 years old. Note the word describing students in kindergarten does not have an e after the t.

Kolkata

Our preferred style for the city in India that some references still call Calcutta.

Korea

N. Korea and S. Korea are OK for headlines, as is N. Koreans and S. Koreans. But spell out North and South elsewhere.

Korean names

In both North Korea and South Korea, a person's family name comes first. When possible, check with the source.

Ku Klux Klan

KKK or the Klan on second reference.

Kuomintang

A political party in China that means "National People's Party."

Kyiv

The accepted spelling of the capital of Ukraine. The spelling of the food dish is still chicken Kiev.

L

Lake Ontario, Lake America

The Trump administration issued an executive order in 2026 to change the name of Lake Ontario in the federal Geographic Names Information System to Lake America. Use both names, adjusting as appropriate to the context: Lake America, formerly known as Lake Ontario, or Lake Ontario, renamed by the U.S. government as Lake America. Leave usage as is in direct quotes and add context as soon as possible.

last

Avoid using last if it might imply a final something. Instead of saying *at the last meeting of the council* be specific on time: *The vote was taken at the Jan. 16 council meeting.*

Latino/Latina, Hispanic

Latino (masculinized usage) and *Latina* (feminized usage) are people of Latin American heritage. To make plural, add an s. If a group is made up of men and women, *Latinos*. Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish natively or have a background in a Spanish-speaking country. Use the descriptor the source prefers. Do not use *Latinx* unless that is what the source prefers.

lawyer vs. attorney vs. solicitor

Any member of the bar is a lawyer. An attorney is someone, usually a lawyer but not necessarily, who is legally appointed to represent another person. In the United States, a solicitor is a government-employed lawyer.

lay vs. lie

The verb *lay* requires an object. Chickens lay eggs. *Lie* is an intransitive verb and does not require an object. If you are tired, you *lie* down. Tenses for each are lie, lay, lain and lay, laid, laid.

leatherneck

A nickname for a member of the U.S. Marine Corps. It's slang, but it is not considered offensive or insulting.

Lectern vs. podium, pulpit, rostrum

The structure behind which a speaker stands, which is sometimes used to hold a book from which they are reading, is called a *lectern*, not a *podium*. *Podiums*, *pulpits* and *rostrums* are raised platforms on which a *lectern* and a speaker might stand.

Legionnaires' disease

Note the position of the apostrophe.

legislature

Capitalize if the word is part of a governmental body of lawmaking. Lowercase in general use. Examples: *The Louisiana Legislature is the lawmaking body in that state. The Iowa General Assembly serves as its legislature.*

LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ (adj.) is the preferred acronym to use as an umbrella term referring to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning and/or queer community. The acronym is useful in headlines and short leads, but it should be explained in the first or early reference.

While LGBTQ+ should be our standard in display type and staff-written stories, LGBTQ is also acceptable in non-staff-written stories. In quotations and in the formal names of organizations and events, LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQIA and other variations are also acceptable with any additional letters explained. The “I” generally stands for intersex, and “A” can stand for asexual (a person who doesn’t experience sexual attraction), ally (some activists decry this use of the abbreviation for a person who is not LGBTQ+ but who actively supports LGBTQ+ communities) or both.

Do not use LGBTQ+ as a noun. Do not use LGBTQ+ when intended as a slur. If one part of the acronym — such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender — is a better descriptor, use the term that best describes the person or group instead of the acronym.

lieutenant governor

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Abbreviate as *Lt. Gov.* before a name.

like vs. as

Use *like* as a preposition to mean similar to. Example: *I wish I could bake like my grandmother.* Use *as* to introduce a clause. Example: *Do as I say, not as I do.*

linage vs. lineage

The number of lines in printed material is *linage*. A person’s ancestry is their *lineage*.

lion’s share

Lions don’t share. Don’t use this to mean the majority. It means all of something, or all but the small, insignificant parts. It comes from Aesop’s fable “The Lion’s Share,” in which the lion takes almost all the spoil of a kill, leaving only scraps for the other animals. If meaning merely the biggest portion of something, the use of *the biggest portion* or *majority* is a better choice. Do not use lion’s share for something that isn’t necessarily desirable, as it distorts the phrase’s meaning. Example: Don’t say *Because John’s friends were out partying, he ended up doing the lion’s share of the work.*

liquefied natural gas

LNG on second reference.

live blog (n.), live-blog (v.)

loath (adj.), loathe (v.)

local

Leave this word out and aim for specificity when possible. Example: *The students at a local school becomes The students at Johnson Elementary. The victims were taken to a local hospital becomes The victims were taken to St. Mary's Hospital.*

Los Angeles, LA

The city of Los Angeles may be abbreviated *LA* (no periods) in many contexts, but in news stories use *Los Angeles* on first reference. It does not need to be followed by “California” unless there is the potential for confusion with some other city or entity, such as a sports team. Natives or residents of LA are *Angelenos*.

Lunar New Year

Use *Lunar New Year* when referring to celebrations around the world that mark the start of the Chinese lunar calendar. Note that some communities have their own practices and traditions, such as Chinese New Year in China, Seollal in South Korea and Tet in Vietnam.

-ly

No hyphen with adverbs ending in -ly.

M

Mach number

Use numerals for this measurement of speed: Mach 1, Mach 2.

magazine, newspaper names

Capitalize the name of the publication; use quotes for titles of articles. *The story “Beyoncé Finally Won” ran in People.* You would only capitalize “magazine” if it’s part of the formal publication name. Capitalize the “The” at the beginning of the names of news outlets that stand alone as nouns in text only if it is part of the formal name. Do not capitalize “the” when using it with the name of an outlet that does not include it in its formal name. Some examples: The Associated Press, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Arizona Republic, but the Detroit Free Press, the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Times. Lowercase the “the” when the name is used as a modifier before another noun (*the New York Times reporter, the Associated Press article*). Do not create a double article (*the The New York Times reporter*). Where the city or state is not part the formal name, add that information in parentheses or after the paper name for context: The (Nashville) Tennessean, The Greenville (South Carolina) News, The Arizona Republic in Phoenix. For bylines and credits for USA TODAY Network outlets, use the names listed in the Network’s Unified Design Guide.

magistrate

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

majority leader

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

manager

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

mantel vs. mantle

Mantel is a shelf or the stone finish around a fireplace. *Mantle* refers to both a literal and figurative cloak (*the mantle of leadership*).

manufacturer's suggested retail price, MSRP

Spell out, lowercase, on first reference. Use MSRP in subsequent references.

marshal vs. Marshall

Use *marshal* for the verb and the noun. Examples: *He will marshal his arguments. Bernard Montgomery was a famous field marshal.* The spelling used in proper names is often Marshall. Example: *the Marshall Islands, Marshall University.*

Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Business Administration

The degrees are abbreviated MA, MS and MBA. When referring to a person's academic status, *master's* or *master's degree* is OK. See entry on "academic degrees."

Medal of Honor

The highest military honor a service member can receive, it is given by Congress to someone who risked their life in combat beyond what is required of them. A person is a Medal of Honor recipient, not "winner." It is not and has never been called the Congressional Medal of Honor.

merchant marine

Refers to the commercial ships of a nation. Only capitalize as part of the official name of an organization. A person is a merchant mariner.

metric system

A system of weights and measures based on 10 and multiples of 10 as a base. For the most part, the United States does not use the metric system; it uses the imperial system. In stories, unless the metric measurement is relevant (as in writing about a 5K race), use the imperial system.

mic

This is the slang term for microphone. Not *mike*.

Middle Atlantic states, Mid-Atlantic region

In references to the Middle Atlantic region of the United States, capitalize both the M and the A. In weather stories, six states make up the Mid-Atlantic region, per the National Weather Service: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. In stories referring to the U.S. Census Bureau-defined region, the Mid-Atlantic states are New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania.

Middle East

The countries included in this region are Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, the eastern part of Turkey called Asia Minor, and Egypt and Sudan, which are two countries in northeastern Africa. Libya is often considered part of this region. *Mideast* was a common term, but today *Middle East* is preferred.

middle names

Use to differentiate individual people; use if the person prefers it or they are known for it.

midnight

Use this, not 12 a.m., and take care using it to describe when something happens. Write 12:01 a.m. Wednesday rather than midnight Tuesday.

Midwest

As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, the states are Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. *Midwest* and *Midwestern* are uppercase in reference to this region.

MiG

A line of Russian fighter jet. The “i” is lowercase.

migrant

Migrants are people who leave their country in search of economic opportunity or refuge in another country, and who have not yet reached their destination. The term can also be used as an umbrella term for people whose reason for leaving their country is unclear or who might identify as an asylum-seeker or refugee. The term “immigrant” should not be used as a synonym - an immigrant is someone from another country who has settled in a new country. Choose migrant over undocumented immigrant when the person or group is attempting to enter the country, has crossed the border or is seeking some sort of legal relief or recognition of their legal status. Do not use illegal alien.

miles per gallon, mpg

The abbreviation *mpg* can be used with numerals, such as 52 *mpg*, but spell it out otherwise.

miles per hour, mph

The abbreviation *mph* is always acceptable. Do not hyphenate with a numeral.

military titles

Note that some of the branches have the same rank. If that’s the case, specify the branch of service. Only capitalize and abbreviate before a name (and note that not all ranks are abbreviated). If someone in the military says they are an “E-3” or similar, that is a military pay grade, not a rank. Use their rank in stories. If someone in the military says they are an “E-3” or similar, that is a military pay grade, not a rank. Use their rank in stories. Use troops as a general term; do not refer to Marines as soldiers. Use “former Marine,” not “ex-Marine,” for those who have been dishonorably discharged and “retired Marine” or “Marine veteran” for others. As in other situations, it is often best to describe the person’s status with the Marines (Jones retired in 2002 after a 24-year career in the Marine Corps).

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

Generally, we should not call a person a Marine just because they were once in the Marine Corps. Reserve the unqualified term for those who are actively serving as a Marine or a Marine reservist. The Space Force refers to its personnel, whether civilian or military, as guardians. Use the abbreviations below when a similar title is used before the name of a police officer or firefighter. Add police or fire before the title: police Capt. Wilma Jones, fire Lt. Al Knight.

Use the abbreviations below when a similar title is used before the name of a police officer or firefighter. Add police or fire before the title: *police Capt. Wilma Jones, fire Lt. Al Knight.*

The following ranks are the same for **Air Force**, **Army**, **Marines** and **Space Force** and would get the same abbreviations:

general:	Gen.
lieutenant general:	Lt. Gen.
major general:	Maj. Gen.
brigadier general:	Brig. Gen.
colonel:	Col.
lieutenant colonel:	Lt. Col.
major:	Maj.
captain:	Capt.
first lieutenant:	1st Lt.
second lieutenant:	2nd Lt.

The following ranks are the same for **Army** and **Marines** and would get the same abbreviations:

Warrant officers

chief warrant officer 5:	Chief Warrant Officer 5
chief warrant officer 4:	Chief Warrant Officer 4
chief warrant officer 3:	Chief Warrant Officer 3
chief warrant officer 2:	Chief Warrant Officer 2
warrant officer:	Warrant Officer

Enlisted

staff sergeant:	Staff Sgt.
sergeant:	Sgt.
corporal:	Cpl.
private first class:	Pfc.
private:	Pvt.

The following ranks are specific to the branches listed:

ARMY

Enlisted

sergeant major of the Army:	Sgt. Maj. of the Army
command sergeant major:	Command Sgt. Maj.
first sergeant:	1st Sgt.
master sergeant:	Master Sgt.
sergeant first class:	Sgt. 1st Class

specialist: Spc.

NAVY/COAST GUARD

Officers

fleet admiral: Fleet Adm.

admiral: Adm.

vice admiral: Vice Adm.

rear admiral: Rear Adm.

captain: Capt.

commander: Cmdr.

lieutenant commander: Lt. Cmdr.

lieutenant: Lt.

lieutenant junior grade: Lt. j.g.

ensign:..... Ensign

Warrant officers

chief warrant officer: Chief Warrant Officer

Enlisted

master chief petty officer of the Navy: Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

command master chief petty officer: Command Master Chief Petty Officer

master chief petty officer: Master Chief Petty Officer

senior chief petty officer: Senior Chief Petty Officer

chief petty officer: Chief Petty Officer

petty officer first class: Petty Officer 1st Class

petty officer second class: Petty Officer 2nd Class

petty officer third class: Petty Officer 3rd Class

seaman: Seaman

seaman apprentice: Seaman Apprentice

seaman recruit: Seaman Recruit

MARINES

Enlisted

sergeant major of the Marine Corps: Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps

sergeant major: Sgt. Maj.

master gunnery sergeant: Master Gunnery Sgt.

first sergeant: 1st Sgt.

master sergeant: Master Sgt.

gunnery sergeant: Gunnery Sgt.

lance corporal:..... Lance Cpl.

AIR FORCE

Enlisted

chief master sergeant of the Air Force: Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force

command chief master sergeant: Command Chief Master Sgt.

chief master sergeant: Chief Master Sgt.

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

senior master sergeant:	Senior Master Sgt.
first sergeant:	1st Sgt.
master sergeant:	Master Sgt.
technical sergeant:	Tech. Sgt.
staff sergeant:	Staff Sgt.
senior airman:	Senior Airman
airman first class:	Airman 1st Class
airman:	Airman
airman basic:	Airman

SPACE FORCE

Enlisted

chief master sergeant of Space Force:	Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force
chief master sergeant:	Chief Master Sgt.
senior master sergeant:	Senior Master Sgt.
master sergeant:	Master Sgt.
technical sergeant:	Tech. Sgt.
sergeant:	Sgt.
specialist 4:	Spc4
specialist 3:	Spc3
specialist 2:	Spc2
specialist 1:	Spc1

militia, guard

Avoid the terms militia or guard to describe an armed group of people. They may be using the term to convey authority they do not have. Be specific and use phrases to describe who they are: armed men, armed men and women, etc. If the terms appear in the name of a group, they may be used in the name with a description of the group. If militia or guard appears in a quote, it may be used in the quote.

millennials

Born 1981 to mid-1990s, those of Generation Y are more commonly called millennials, which is lowercase.

minority leader

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

misinformation, disinformation, fact checks, fake news

Misinformation is false and/or unverified information spread through social media, usually without a negative intention or motive. *Disinformation* is the purposeful spreading of false information. *Fact checks* are conducted and published in an effort to combat both

misinformation and disinformation. The activity is called *fact-checking*. The term *fake news* should only be used if appearing in a direct quote.

Mom vs. mom

Capitalize when the word stands in for a name, lowercase when simply referring to someone's mother. *I asked Mom where I could find the wrench. I asked my mom where I could find the wrench.* The same rule applies to Dad vs. dad.

Montessori method

The name of a specific style of education. Note that Montessori is always capitalized (it's named after Italian physician Maria Montessori). *She attended a Montessori elementary school.*

months

Spell out January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November and December when used alone (without specifying a day) or when used with a year alone. Abbreviate Jan., Feb., Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. with a specific date. When using without a specific date, do not separate month and year with a comma (*January 2025*). With a specific date and year, set the year off with commas (*Jan. 31, 2017, was the day his father died.*)

Mother's Day

Uppercase and singular possessive.

Mountain States

Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. Capitalize both Mountain and States when referring to the region made up of these eight states.

mpox

The viral illness once called monkeypox was renamed mpox by the World Health Organization in late 2022. The name of the virus that causes mpox, which is determined by the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses, has retained the name monkeypox virus. Use mpox in all references to the illness and use *the virus that causes mpox* for references to the virus. Do not use the term "monkeypox virus" except within quotes, and when used, explain that it is the virus that causes mpox.

MRI

OK in all references for *magnetic resonance imaging*.

MRSA

OK in all references for *methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus*.

Myanmar

Refer to this country by its current name, Myanmar, but also note in stories that it was formerly known as Burma. Refer to its residents as “people of Myanmar.” Some may prefer to be called Burmese if they identify with the Burmese ethnic group. Use whatever individuals prefer.



N

NAACP

OK in all references for *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*.

naloxone

Naloxone is the generic name for an antidote for opioid overdose. *Narcan* is a brand name for the device used to give someone naloxone.

names

In general, people are entitled to be identified however they wish to be known, as long as their identities are clear.

When an individual elects to change the name by which that individual has been known, such as Cassius Clay's name change to Muhammad Ali, provide both names in stories until the new name is known by the public. After that, use only the new name unless there is a specific reason for including the earlier identification. An important exception to this is using the name a trans person no longer goes by. For specific guidance regarding this, see the entry on "deadname."

initials. In a name, initials are followed by periods (without spaces between two or more: *J.R.R. Tolkien*), unless a person expresses a preference not to use them.

Example: *Vice President JD Vance*. Don't give a first initial with a last name (*A. Smith*) unless that's the person's preference or if the whole first name is unknown and unavailable.

middle names/initials. In general, middle names or initials are not necessary in USA TODAY Network's informal style. Clarity and common sense should be the guiding principle. One notable exception: When available, middle initials should be used in casualty lists.

Middle initials and names should be retained, however, if that is how the person commonly is referred to: *John F. Kennedy*, *Billie Jean King*.

junior, senior. Let the individual's preference rule. But when possible to do so without causing confusion or misidentification, drop a *Jr.* or *Sr.* after a name. Likewise with the numerical notations *II*, *III*, etc.

Spell out *Junior* when it stands alone. Example: *Smith said, "I told Junior to hide in the basement."*

Do not separate a name and a designation with a comma: *Joseph Kennedy Jr., Edwin Meese III*.

If necessary to distinguish between father and son in second reference, use *the elder Smith* or *the younger Smith*, not *Smith Jr.* or *Smith Sr.*

last names. Use both parts of hyphenated surnames after the first reference: *Smith-Jones then adjourned the meeting*. Some individuals use two unhyphenated surnames — the most common case being married women who use their maiden name and married name: *Mary Smith Jones*, who uses *Smith Jones* as her surname. If an individual prefers to be identified that way, the preference should be honored. If an individual's preference cannot be determined or there otherwise is any doubt, use just the final surname, *Jones*.

nicknames. A nickname or shortened form of a name should be used in place of person's given name in news stories when it is the way the individual prefers to be known: *Bear Bryant, Johnny Carson, Catfish Hunter*. When a nickname is inserted into an individual's given name, use quotation marks: *Sen. Henry "Scoop" Jackson*. Also: *Jackson is known as "Scoop" to his friends* (because it is not how he is known to the population at large). Do not use quotation marks when the nickname stands alone and is the person's common name: *El Chapo, Magic Johnson*. But: *Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Earvin "Magic" Johnson*.

second reference. Use the last name (family name) without titles or courtesy titles on second reference for individuals 16 or older.

Exception: For a clergy member who does not use a surname, repeat the title on second reference: *Mother Teresa*. Exception to exception: Use only the surname on second reference to the pope.

For people younger than 16, use the first name (given name) on second reference, unless the context makes doing so inappropriate. For example, use the last name on second reference for a teenager accused of a violent crime.

For Chinese names and other nationalities or ethnicities in which the family name comes first, the family name should be used on second reference for those 16 or older, and the given name should be used for people younger than 16 on second reference.

In a news story, if two or more people in a story share a last name, repeat both first and last names on second reference, unless the context makes it clear who is being referred to.

Features may use only the first names. Take care to treat men and women equally. For example, do not use just *Smith* for all the second references to *John Smith* and *Mary* or *Mary Smith* for all the second references to *Mary Smith*.

NASA

OK in all references for *National Aeronautics and Space Administration*.

national anthem

This is not the name of the composition, and so it remains lowercase. However, the name of the U.S. national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," is treated like other composition titles. Also, the band Radiohead has a song titled "The National Anthem," which would be treated like a composition title.

National Organization for Women

NOW on second reference. The name uses the word "for" not "of."

National Park Service

Note that it is “Park” singular, not “Parks.”

National Security Adviser

Capitalize when used as a title before a name: *National Security Adviser Mike Waltz*.

National Weather Service

Use *the weather service*, lowercase, on second reference.

Native American, American Indian, Indian

Native American is generally the preferred term for Indigenous people of the contiguous United States. Use **Alaska Native** (a native Alaskan refers to anyone born in Alaska) and **Native Hawaiian** (avoid Hawaii native; instead, use *a Hawaii-born resident, a resident of Hawaii*, or simply *from Hawaii*). Consider the preference of the subjects of a story. When possible, identify people by their tribal affiliation: *Johnson's ancestry is Swedish and Shawnee*. Do not add *Indian* to a tribal name unless needed for clarity, especially with less familiar tribes: *He is a Tohono O'odham Indian*. *Indigenous people(s)* is also acceptable, particularly in international contexts. See the entry on **Indigenous people, peoples**.

NATO

NATO is OK in all references for North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It was formed in 1949 by a pact signed by 10 European nations, the United States and Canada, to provide security against aggression by the Soviet Union. There currently are 32 members of NATO.

New England

New England includes Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

New Year's, New Year's Day, New Year's Eve, Happy New Year

New York City

The boroughs are Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, The Bronx and Staten Island. Do not use borough names in datelines.

New York Stock Exchange

Use *NYSE* on second reference.

NGO

Use on second reference for nongovernmental organization.

9/11

This presentation is acceptable in all references for the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Avoid starting a sentence with 9/11.

911

No hyphens are necessary for this emergency phone number.

No.

Generally, this is used in place of the word *number*. Capitalize *No.* when paired with a numeral, usually to refer to position or rank. Do not use the pound sign in its place.

Nobel Prize, Nobel Prizes

Annually, five are awarded: Nobel Peace Prize, Nobel Prize in chemistry, Nobel Prize in literature, Nobel Prize in physics, Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine. Uppercase as listed here, but lowercase when the full phrase is not used: *Jimmy Carter won the peace prize*. The organization that awards the peace prize is based in Oslo, Norway. The organizations awarding the others are based in Stockholm, Sweden.

nobility

Capitalize royal titles before a name. Examples: *King Charles III, Princess Catherine, Prince William, Duchess Meghan*. On second reference, using just their names is sufficient: *Charles, Catherine, William, Meghan*. Princess Catherine may also be referred to as Kate Middleton. Royals who have been stripped of their royal titles should be referred to by their full names, including their surname, on first reference, with an explanation of their formal title, such as: *Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Andrew*. Refer to the individual by the name by which they are best known, usually the name that had followed their royal title: *Andrew*, in the above example. (See the entry on *prince, princess*)

nonlethal/less lethal munitions/bullets

Munitions fired by police with the intent of crowd control without killing the target should be called “projectiles that law enforcement describe as nonlethal.” Do not use simply “nonlethal,” which focuses on intent but obscures the fact that such munitions have actually killed. Likewise, do not use terms such as “less lethal” or “less than lethal” that may be technically accurate but do not take into account the intent of the munitions. In subsequent references, use the word “projectiles” as long as it is clear the reference is to the “projectiles that law enforcement describe as nonlethal.”

noon

Refer to the midday hour as noon, not 12 p.m.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission

NRC on second reference.

numbers

The basic rules for numbers are:

Ordinarily, spell out zero and one through nine; use figures for 10 or above. Spell out all numbers at the start of a sentence (except for years) but avoid by rewriting the sentence

when possible. Spell out indefinite numbers and amounts, such as *a few thousand people* or *a home worth millions of dollars*. Spell out expressions meant to de-emphasize the precise number: *There must be a hundred and one reasons to leave. A thousand times no! A picture is worth a thousand words.*

Exceptions

Addresses: Use figures for address numbers, but spell out ordinal numbers first through ninth in a street's name. *8 First Ave.*

Ages: Always figures, when relevant. *He is 15. The car is 15 years old. I have a 4-year-old son. That photo is 2 weeks old.* (However, *That photo was taken two weeks ago.*) *A woman in her 20s is a 20-something.*

Aircraft, ships, spacecraft: Use figures in the designations of such craft. *F-18 Hornet, B-52 Stratofortress, Queen Mary 2, Soyuz TMA-13, Gemini 7.*

Area: Use figures. *3 acres, 8 square miles, a 4-square-mile search.*

Course numbers: Use figures: *History 101, Algebra 2.*

Court decisions: Use figures: *They ruled 7-2 that it was a violation.* If you're quoting someone who includes "to," it's 7-to-2, with hyphens.

Court districts: Use figures and capitalize the names of courts. *6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, 5th Judicial District Court, 7th District Court, the 3rd Circuit.*

Dates, years, decades and centuries: For dates, use the month-day-year format: *Feb. 8, 2025*. When the day follows the month, use a cardinal numeral (1, 2, 3, etc.) regardless of whether in a quote or not. That is, use "Feb. 8" in a quote even if the person said "February 8th" because the most common way to read "Feb. 8" is "February 8th," and any other pronunciation would not change the meaning. But if the person said the "8th of February" use it that way and do not change it to "Feb. 8" or spell out "eighth." For years, use the common four-digit format, *2025*, even at the start of a sentence, but rewrite to avoid at the beginning of a sentence when possible. For decades, add only an "s," without an apostrophe: *1980s, 2000s*, etc. When it is clear what the century is, the first two digits can be omitted and replaced with an apostrophe: *'60s* for the *1960s*, or *'80s* for the *1980s*. However, do not omit the first two digits in the decades of the *2000s, 2010s* or *2020s*. For centuries, spell out the numbers first through ninth, otherwise use the ordinal abbreviations unless starting a sentence: *first century* (A.D. 1 to A.D. 100), *10th century* (901-1000), *21st century* (2001-2100), but *Twenty-first century* at the start of a sentence. *Y2K* was the beginning of the last year of the *20th century*, not the beginning of the *21st century*.

Decimals: Do not extend decimals beyond two places. Round thousandths to the hundredths place, except when such precision is crucial.

Dimensions of depth, height, length, width: Use figures with dimensions such as *30 fathoms, 6 feet, 8 yards, 9 centimeters, 15 picometers*.

Distances: Use figures with units of distance such as *8 miles, 2 kilometers, 400 feet, 5 light-years*.

Election returns: Use figures. *Thomas received 13,511 votes; he got 45% of the vote with 95% of precincts reporting; it was a 9-point margin*.

Film: Use figures for references to the size of film and the cameras that use them. For references that use the abbreviation “mm” for millimeters, do not put a space between the number and “mm.” (Ex.: 35mm film, 8mm camera)

Firearms, ammunition: Use figures for references to the size of ammunition and the firearms used to fire it. For references that use the abbreviation “mm” for millimeters, do not put a space between the number and “mm.” (Ex.: 9mm pistol, 4.6×30mm ammunition)

Fractions: Spell out fractions that do not accompany whole numbers, with a hyphen between the numerator and the denominator unless one or the other already contains a hyphen (*one-third, four-fifths, one thirty-second*) unless that is too long and awkward (*5/64-inch-wide strips* is better than *five-sixty-fourths-inch-wide strips*). An exception is in recipes. Use figures to express a mixed number (whole number with a fraction), for example, $3\frac{1}{2}$ (no space, when the fraction is a special character), but $3\frac{7}{8}$ (a space, not a hyphen, is needed when the fraction is not a ready-made special character, and you construct it yourself.) Avoid mixing special-character fractions with non-special-character fractions. Units of measurement with fractions less than one are singular (*one-third inch*); those with mixed numbers are plural (*1½ inches*).

Golf clubs: Use figures with a hyphen: *5-iron, 3-wood*.

Highway designations: Use figures (*Highway 1, U.S. Route 60, Interstate 495*). When a letter is added after a number, capitalize it but do not hyphenate (*Route 1B*). Highway naming conventions vary by state, so use the name used by the locals.

Mathematical expressions: For use in math, use figures: *divide by 2; 3 times 3 is 9*.

Military ranks, used as titles with names: See Military titles.

Millions, billions, trillions: For fast comprehension, use figure-word combinations for specific or estimated amounts: *3 million, 8.25 billion people* (not *8¼ billion*, use decimals, not fractions); *1 trillion*. When referring to specific or estimated amounts,

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

use a numeral with the word, such as 8 million people, nearly \$12 billion, a \$1 trillion deficit. Do not use a hyphen between the figure and the word when the phrase modifies a noun, such as a *\$4.5 million contract* or a *100 billion-year-old fossil*. When using a decimal after the whole number, do not go beyond two decimal places; \$4.53 million; use \$4.527 million only if the precision is needed for clarity. When referring to a range, the word million, billion or trillion must appear with the numerals on both ends of the range, such as the program will serve 5 million to 10 million people. If you leave off the first “million,” you are saying the range is from 5 to 10,000,000 instead of 5,000,000 to 10,000,000. In headlines, abbreviate the words as M, B or T with no space between the numeral and the abbreviation, such as School district passes \$400M budget. Do not use K as an abbreviation for thousand, except in references to kilometers (a 5K race), and to multiples of \$1,000 in headlines (grants totaling \$150K).

Monetary units: Use figures out to two decimal places and a dollar sign (\$) for specific amounts \$1 or greater. For amounts less than \$1, use figures and spell out the word cents, except in idiomatic expressions such as “my two cents’ worth.” Use a dollar sign with a zero followed by two decimal places for amounts less than \$1, when needed to conform to the format of amounts \$1.00 or greater, such as in a table or chart, for easier comparison. Likewise, add two decimal places to even dollar amounts when needed for easier comparison to amounts with both dollars and cents. Examples: \$8.99, 57 cents, \$100, a hundred dollars. Use similar guidance with other currencies around the world, but do not use symbols with a number for the monetary unit of a foreign country, such as “€” for the euro, or “¥” for the Japanese yen. Instead, use figures before the name of the unit spelled out, lowercase: 500 yen, 8 euro cents, 5 million rupees. When needed for clarity, add the adjectival form of a country after the numeral, but before the monetary unit: 4 Canadian dollars, 500 Samoan talas, 6.87 Zambian kwachas. Keep in mind that some monetary units have the same singular and plural forms: 30 yen, not 30 yens; 20 Chinese yuan, not 20 yuans; and 10 Turkish lira, not 10 liras.

Numbers as numbers: Use figures. *Pick a number from 1 to 100; four of his Powerball numbers matched: 2, 23, 36 and 44.*

Odds, general sense: Use figures and a hyphen. *He put his odds of being home for Christmas at 10-1.* See the betting odds entry in the Sports section for an explanation of sports betting odds.

Ordinals: Spell out first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth for numbers less than 10, unless an exception is listed in this Style Guide. When a numeral abbreviation is permitted or required, use 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th. Use the numeral abbreviations for ordinal numbers greater than nine.

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

Page numbers: Use figures for page numbers, with or without the word page. Lowercase page before a number unless it begins a sentence. *Page 5 began with a poem. The pages were numbered 1-55. He found it was on page 8.*

Percentages: Use figures with the percent symbol (%). Also use figures with percentage points, spelled out (3 percentage points). For the difference in the meanings, see the entry on percent, percentage, percentage points.

Political districts: Use figures. Ordinals at the beginning (*4th Precinct, 6th Congressional District*) and cardinals at the end (*Ward 9*).

Proportions: Use figures (*3 parts per million, 3 parts cement to 1 part water*).

Ratios: Use figures. May be written with a hyphen or with the word “to” or “in” (*the ratio of children to parents was 2-1, mixing ingredients in a 3-1 ratio, 3 girls to every 2 boys, 1 in 5 people approved*).

Recipes: Use figures with measurements: *4 tablespoons, 1½ cups of water*.

Roman numerals: Symbols used in the ancient Roman number system in which I, V, X, L, C, D and M stand for 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000 respectively. Limit the use of Roman numerals to wars (*World War II*), popes (*John Paul II*), monarchs (*Queen Elizabeth II*), certain legislative acts (*Title IX*), movie sequels (*Rocky IV*), and to distinguish people with the same name from different generations (*Harold Fitzpatrick III*, but defer to an individual who prefers to use *Jr.* or *Sr.* for that purpose.)

Room numbers: Uppercase Room and use figures (*Room 101*).

School grades: Use figures for 10th grade and above; spell out first through ninth grades. Capital *K-12* may be used to refer to the range of grades from kindergarten through 12th grade. In constructions such as *grade 2, grades 2-6* or *level 3*, use figures.

Sequential designations: Use figures and capitalize scenes (*Scene 3*), chapters (*Chapter 4*).

Sizes for things such as clothing: Use figures: Size 8 (capital S) but sizes 8 and 12.

Speeds: Use figures. *5 mph, 40 knots, Mach 2*.

Sports scores: Use figures for all scores, even those less than 10 (*a 4-1 victory, a 3-0 loss*).

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

Telephone numbers: Use hyphen in ordinary 10-digit telephone numbers omitting the U.S. country code (1) for the United States: 571-867-5309, not 1-571-867-5309 or (571) 867-5309. When adding an extension, use a comma and the abbreviation “ext.”: 571-867-5309, ext. 309. When a company chooses to use letters for part or all of its phone number, use the company’s style: 800-GoFedEx.

Temperatures: Use figures except for zero. *40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit is the same as minus 40 Celsius. The temperature rose 8 degrees in two hours. 100 Celsius. 32 F.*

Times: Use figures for time of day, except for noon and midnight: *2 p.m. March 25; 1:30 a.m. ET; 8 hours; 15 minutes passed.*

Votes: Use figures. The bill was passed by a vote of 10 to 3. The bill was passed by a 7-vote margin.

Weights: Use figures in all cases for weights. *5 ounces, 9 kilos, a 2-ton vehicle.*

O

obesity, obese, overweight

In a health care context, the word *obesity* is preferred. Take care, though, as the definition of obesity has varied over time and continues to change. In reference to a person, the terms *overweight* and *fat* should be avoided, unless the subject refers to themselves that way. The stigma around weight stretches far, and it includes ableism and fat-shaming. Any reference to the weight of a person should be relevant and handled with care.

OB-GYN

Obstetrics and gynecology. OB-GYN is acceptable for all references.

obscenities, profanities, vulgarities

Obscenities, profanities and vulgarities are to be avoided. Seldom do such terms add in any way to a story. However, the following words are permitted in all uses without discussion:

hell

damn

pissed (reflecting anger)

sucks (meaning lousy)

For other profanities, a conversation should occur between a reporter/columnist and editor about whether the word is needed in the story. Their use should be approved by the highest-ranking available newsroom leader (in smaller markets) or a managing editor or higher (in larger markets). Usage in wire stories should be approved by the national wire desk's manager or team leader. Do not use profanities in an anonymous quote.

In general, "everyday" profanity by private figures speaking publicly or captured in public records is unnecessary to repeat, though it may be appropriate to more broadly note their use of profanity or obscenities. Use of profanity by elected officials and community and business leaders is more notable and worth a discussion.

The approving editor will decide how the word should appear. In most cases, replacing the profanity with (expletive) works, although in some cases it will be better to use the first letter followed by hyphens. Do not use other forms to denote missing letters. Subsequent profanities in a story, if any, should be handled the same way. The approving editor also needs to decide how to handle quoting profanity that appears in documents.

When a story with an approved profanity is picked up by another site, that location is not obligated to use the offensive word. But the word should not appear in full if the approving editor has called for it to be hyphenated or redacted.

Profane words not included in the list of exceptions above should not be used in headlines, captions, pull quotes or subheads unless approved by the senior editors noted above and, where relevant, a Design Center director.

A story that contains profanity should include a warning at the beginning of the story in notes font and in the package instructions saying the word has been approved and identifying the approving editor.

Rule of thumb: If Merriam-Webster says a word or phrase is profane, vulgar, obscene or (usually) offensive, it's definitely in need of approval. (Racial slurs, which require approval of the VP of Standards, are usually listed as offensive, but not profane, vulgar or obscene.) But if it is listed as merely "impolite," we generally don't think of it as a word in need of a senior editor's approval (managing editor level or higher), though many times a discussion with a more senior editor (perhaps not as senior as an ME) about it might be a good idea. Words that are labeled as "sometimes offensive" are a gray area. A conversation with a senior editor is in order to determine whether such words in context need the approval of an ME or higher. The result of that conversation should be noted in the Presto Print Package Instructions.

obsessive-compulsive disorder

OCD on second reference. Don't describe a person as having OCD unless it is relevant and only if that person uses such a description or there has been a medical diagnosis indicating OCD. If others use the term to describe someone, first assess how they know the person has OCD before including it in a story. Don't say a person *is OCD* or *is obsessive-compulsive*. Instead say a person *has OCD* or *has obsessive-compulsive disorder*.

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

Use OSHA on second reference.

occupational titles

Lowercase them before a name: *author Stephen King, musician Harry Connick Jr., scientist Louis Pasteur, engineer Gordon Moore*.

office

Capitalize when using an official name (usually a governmental agency). Lowercase otherwise.

oil

When reporting amounts of oil in news stories, the preferred unit is gallons, not barrels or tons. Each barrel is 42 gallons, but the number of gallons per ton varies for different types of oil product. Take care in converting tonnage (short ton, metric ton, or long ton) to gallons that are specific to the correct type of oil product. When dealing with large amounts,

accuracy is more important than precision, so employ terms such as *approximately*, *more than*, *less than* and *roughly* when needed.

OK, OK'd, OK'ing, OKs

Only spell out *okay* when quoting written text. Otherwise, always use *OK* and these variations.

Old City of Jerusalem

The walled section of East Jerusalem is divided into four uneven quarters: the *Muslim Quarter*, the *Christian Quarter*, the *Jewish Quarter* and the *Armenian Quarter*. Because the status of East Jerusalem is politically sensitive, the “occupied” designation should be applied to East Jerusalem as a whole rather than to specific areas within it, such as the Old City or its individual quarters. Avoid describing the Old City itself or its quarters as occupied.

Old South

References the region as it was before the Civil War.

Old West

Refers to a period from the early 1800s to the early 1900s in the American frontier marked by exploration, settlement and development of the Western United States.

Old World

The Eastern Hemisphere, excluding Australia (Oceania), and as an allusion to European culture.

on

Use *on* at the beginning of a sentence before a date. Elsewhere, eliminate *on* before a date if the meaning is clear. Use *on* to separate a date from a proper name. Examples: *Collins' car collided with Taylor on March 3*, not *collided with Taylor March 3*. *On Sept. 2, the city will honor her legacy*.

onboard vs. on board

He tested the onboard computer, but he came on board without his luggage. On board is synonymous with *aboard*; *onboard* is not. You could say *he came aboard without his luggage*, but you would not say *he tested the aboard computer*.

one-

Hyphenated as a compound adjective: *one-track mind*, *one-way street*.

“One China” policy

A long-standing United States policy regarding China and Taiwan that says Taiwan is part of China. The U.S. government has a formal relationship with the People’s Republic of China and an informal one with Taiwan.

one person, one vote

Phrase used to convey equal representation in voting.

onetime vs. one-time vs. one time

Onetime means former; *one-time* (adj.) and *one time* (n.) both mean once.

One World Trade Center

Main building of the rebuilt World Trade Center complex in New York City and the tallest building in the United States.

only

Be careful of where you place the word “only,” as different placement can convey different meanings. Example: *I only love you* and *I love only you* can carry different meanings.

OPEC, OPEC+

OPEC is OK in all references to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. OPEC+ is the coalition that includes the country members of OPEC and additional countries.

opiate vs. opioid

Both refer to drugs, whether prescription or illegal. Opiates come from natural sources (example: morphine), while opioids are synthetic (example: oxycodone).

Organization of American States

Use OAS on second reference.

out of bounds, out-of-bounds

No hyphens as an adverbial phrase: *He threw the ball out of bounds*. Hyphens as an adjective before the word it modifies: *The coach told them to avoid out-of-bounds areas*.

out of court vs. out-of-court

No hyphens as an adverbial phrase: *They settled the case out of court*. Hyphens as an adjective before the word it modifies: *They reached an out-of-court settlement*.

Oval Office

Both words capitalized. Seat of the executive department of the U.S. government, also known as the president’s office. Located in the West Wing of the White House.

owner

Don't capitalize before a name; it's not a formal title.



P

PAC

PAC is OK on first reference for *political action committee*, but it should be spelled out in the story. It's a group that raises money and makes contributions to campaigns, with certain restrictions. Likewise with *super PAC* (note the lowercase s), which can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money to promote a campaign or candidate if it does not coordinate with a party or candidate. Super PACs are technically, and less commonly, known as *independent expenditure-only committees*.

palate, palette, pallet

The *palate* is the inside of your mouth, literally or figuratively. A *palette* is what artists have paint on, or a selection of colors. A *pallet* is the wood frame that forklifts can pick up, or a simple bed.

Palestine

It is important that the USA TODAY Network maintains objectivity and neutrality in reporting in sensitive geopolitical contexts. As a recognized nonmember observer state by the United Nations and as a member of several other international bodies, *Palestine* can be used in the context of its activities within those groups. However, because it might imply recognition of Palestinian statehood outside of specific international organizations, do not use *Palestine* or *the state of Palestine* in other contexts. *The Palestinian territories* are *the West Bank* and *Gaza*. Be specific in reference to either territory or use *the Palestinian territories* when referring to both.

Palestinian Authority

This semi-governmental body that represents Palestinians in parts of the Palestinian territories was established in 1994 by the Oslo Accords.

Palestinian Liberation Organization

PLO on second reference. Note the first word is Palestine, not Palestinian.

Paralympics

Those who participate in the Paralympic Games, a competition for athletes with disabilities, are called Paralympians.

Paraplegia/paraplegic, quadriplegia/quadruplegic

Do not capitalize. Paraplegia is partial or complete paralysis of both legs. Quadriplegia is partial or complete paralysis of both arms and both legs. Do not say a person is a paraplegic/quadruplegic, unless they call themselves that.

parish

Louisiana is the only state that refers to its counties as parishes.

parliament, Parliament

Before capitalizing Parliament, confirm that it is part of the formal name of that governing body. Otherwise, it is lowercase.

part time, part-time

Examples: *She works part time. She is a part-time worker.*

pedal vs. peddle

To *pedal* is to move with your feet, like a bicycle. To *peddle* is to sell.

Pennsylvania Dutch

People of German descent, not people whose ancestors are from The Netherlands. Dutch is a misspelling/mishearing of “Deutsch.”

percent, percentage, percentage points

Percent is one part of 100. A percentage is a measurement of part of a whole. In usage, pair *percent* with a number (but use the percent sign %) and *percentage* with a description.

Examples: *The chance of rain tomorrow is 15%. The percentage of students failing the exam was more than expected.* To express a range: 20% to 25% or 20%-25%.

When you are comparing percentages, as in poll numbers, use percentage points in your comparison. When the interest rate on a credit card goes from 19% to 21%, that is a 2 percentage point increase, not a 2% increase. On subsequent references to percentage points, the word percentage may be omitted if the meaning is clear in the context.

Example: *In a recent poll, 89% of Republicans and 77% of Democrats said they were likely to vote, a difference of 12 percentage points and the largest gap recorded this election season.* The president’s approval rating was 2 points lower than in the previous poll.

PFA

OK on second reference for the legal document *protection from abuse*. It’s a court order often issued to protect a party in a domestic violence dispute.

PFAS

OK in all references. *Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances*, abbreviated *PFAS*, are often referred to as forever chemicals. By definition, *PFAS* is plural, so the initialism never takes a small s at the end (don’t use *PFASs*). The EPA website refers to them as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, which also is acceptable, but preference is to use the abbreviation *PFAS* or to spell the term out completely. If it is necessary to refer just to one or the other of the two most well-known *PFAS* (*perfluorooctanoic acid* or *perfluorooctane sulfonate*), the abbreviations *PFOA* or *PFOS* can be used respectively.

physician assistant

Not physician's assistant. Do not abbreviate.

PIN

Acceptable in all references for *personal identification number* as long as the meaning is clear in the context. Do not use *PIN number*, which is redundant.

Pledge of Allegiance

Uppercase. A promise of loyalty to the United States, often recited.

p.m., a.m.

Use periods for these indicators of day and night. Lowercase.

police department

Uppercase when referring to a specific municipality's police department only when the city name comes before it. If the city uses another name for the agency, like Indianapolis Metro Police Department, follow that style, and lowercase the phrase when used elsewhere. Best practice would be to shorten it to *the department* or *the police*. Don't use "PD" unless in direct quotes.

political party conventions

Do not refer to the national major party conventions (Republican National Convention, Democratic National Convention) by the initialisms RNC or DNC, which should only be used in subsequent references to the Republican National Committee and the Democratic National Committee. Avoid quotations that use RNC or DNC to refer to the national party conventions, but if such a quote is needed, be sure to make clear the initialism is a reference to the convention rather than the national committee, with phrasing such as *Perez said, referring to the Democratic National Convention*.

political regional references

While not being specific enough for geographic identifiers, political regional references resonate when talking about general regions. Examples: *Rust Belt* (industrial North and Midwest states); *Bible Belt* (mid-South, Deep South and central states); *Sun Belt* (southern Atlantic and Gulf states, Southwest and California).

political spectrum

Avoid applying labels along the political spectrum of beliefs; i.e., *moderate*, *far right*, *center right*, *centrist*, *extremist*. Lean on how a subject chooses to self-identify, using language that makes it clear they are saying that of themselves, if such a characterization is necessary at all. *For example: Sen. Smith says she is fiscally conservative but a centrist on social issues.* Use of the terms conservative, liberal, progressive and moderate is

acceptable in opinion articles, but what's preferred is specificity around a person or group's policy positions.

pope

Capitalize in front of a name. Otherwise, lowercase.

possessives

Here are the guidelines for giving various words a possessive form.

Singular nouns: For singular common and proper nouns that don't end in s, add an apostrophe and s – 's – such as with *the city's streets*, *the fence's posts*, *the sax's keys*, *John's wallet*, *the quiz's answers*. For common and proper nouns ending in s, add an apostrophe at the end to show possession. *the actress' script*, *Paris' nightlife*, *for goodness' sake*.

Plural nouns: For plural nouns that do not end in s, add an apostrophe and s – 's – such as with *the people's champion* or *women's suffrage*. For plural nouns ending in s, add just an apostrophe, such as with *the voters' will* or *the cities' streets*. Some nouns take a plural form despite a singular meaning, such as economics or news or United States. For words like these, add just an apostrophe if they must be presented as possessive, such as *the United States' influence*. However, with inanimate objects that have a plural form but singular meaning like this, it is preferred to use an "of" construction, as with *the arrival of the news*.

When singular and plural look the same: When a noun is spelled the same whether singular or plural, like moose, the process of making it possessive will always treat the word as though it is plural. So, *the moose's foot* would be correct for a foot on a single moose. *The moose's herd* could describe either a single moose's herd or the herd of a group of moose.

Joint or individual possession: If John and Jane share possession of a lump of cash, it would be *John and Jane's dough*. If John and Jane separately possess their own lumps of cash, it would be *John's and Jane's dough*. So, if conveying joint possession, put the apostrophe and s – 's – after only the final name in the list. If conveying individual possession, both words get it.

Open compound words: When making open compound words possessive, add an apostrophe and s – 's – after the last of them, such as with *the peanut butter's texture*, *the high school's gymnasium*, *the secretary of state's office*. If making the open compound words possessive in this manner introduces the possibility of confusing the reader, such as with *the director of the ACLU's lawsuit*, the wording should be reorganized to avoid this: *the lawsuit brought by the director of the ACLU*.

Pronouns: Personal pronouns and relative pronouns who have their own forms for possessive presentation do not include an apostrophe, such as *hers, his, its, mine, ours, their, theirs, whose, your, yours*. Some indefinite pronouns (no one, others, somebody, one another, each other, etc.) have regular possessive forms. Use already stated rules for those when adding an apostrophe (*others' expectations; somebody's brother; one another's names; everybody's tickets*). Make sure if you put an apostrophe with a pronoun, you are aware you might be creating a contraction instead of a possessive and the contraction is what you intended, such as *it's or who's*.

Descriptive phrases: In descriptive phrases, no apostrophe is used with a word ending in s, such as with *farmers market, teachers union or New York Giants general manager*. This often shows up in sports articles, in which it is correct to write *the Atlanta Hawks point guard*. An apostrophe and s – 's – are added when the word does not end in s, such as with *children's books*.

Layered possessive phrases: Possessive phrases can be layered using the rules already mentioned. Examples include *my brother's roommate's dog, their cat's scratching post or their cats' names*.

Possessive-like phrases or quasi possessives: Phrases like *two weeks' pay* or *a week's pay* take a possessive construction, with the possessive essentially standing in for the word "of."

Double possessives: Sometimes, writers will double up on the possessive expression by using both an "of" construction and an apostrophe (or apostrophe and s when suitable), such as *a drawing of William's*. This is allowable when the word after the "of" is a person or animal, but when it is inanimate, there should be no possessive addition to the word after the "of." For example, *the mean streets of the big city* is correct, while *the mean streets of the big city's* is incorrect.

The double possessive can be handy in clearing up potential confusion, because *a drawing of William*, with just the "of" construction to show possession, will likely be read as a drawn rendering of William's likeness, while *a drawing of William's* will read as a drawing that belongs to William. Of course, one could simply write *William's drawing*. However, if the writer is trying to convey that this is one of several drawings possessed by William, *a drawing of William's* conveys a sense that it is part of a whole and not the whole, something not communicated by simply writing *William's drawing*.

Post-it

A trademarked name for the notes with the sticky edges made by 3M.

post-traumatic stress disorder

PTSD on second reference. For a related illness, *complex post-traumatic stress disorder*, use *CPTSD* on second reference.

pound-foot, pound-feet

A measurement unit of torque, the twisting force that produces rotation. Do not abbreviate. Do not confuse with foot-pounds, a distinct unit used to measure work, or force over a given distance, which is sometimes used in discussions of horsepower.

president

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

Presidential Medal of Freedom

Presidents Day

No apostrophe.

press release, press conference, news release, news conference

Use any of these terms for the appropriate context. Some press conferences or press releases are aptly named because the focus of them is not news in the sense that we often use the term to differentiate it from sports or entertainment.

press secretary

Capitalize when used as a title before a name: : *White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt.*

Pride, pride

Uppercase when referring to specific events for celebrating and honoring the LGBTQ+ community and its members: *Pride Day is today.* Lowercase for general events or LGBTQ+ pride. *They participated in a pride festival.*

prince, princess

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

prisoner(s) of war

POW on second reference.

professor

Not capitalized unless part of a formal title: *He talked to professor Jane Smith. He talked to Regents Professor Jane Smith.* (Regents Professor is a formal title bestowed upon a faculty member in recognition of their academic achievements, rather than a job title.)

Prohibition

Only capitalized when referring to the time in U.S. history (1920 to 1933) when making, selling and transporting alcoholic drinks was illegal.

Proper nouns used as verbs

Avoid using proper nouns as verbs outside of quotes. It's *searched using Google* rather than *googled*, and *sent by FedEx* rather than *FedExed*. Within quotes, capitalize as a verb unless it is in Merriam-Webster as a verb lowercased, as is *googled*, *xeroxed* and *photoshopped*. The same goes for adjectives formed from proper nouns, such as *googleable*.

provinces

Offset names of provinces from cities with commas. Don't capitalize the word *province*.

PTA

OK in all references for *Parent Teacher Association*.

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Q

Q&A format

The first question is introduced with the word “Question” followed by a colon. Both the word “Question” and the question that follows are bolded. Subsequent questions are bolded only, not introduced by the word “Question.” The first answer is introduced with the word “Answer” followed by a colon. Both the word “Answer” and the response that follows are not bolded. Subsequent responses are also not bolded. Answers may also be introduced with the name of the respondent followed by a colon, especially when there is more than one respondent.

QAnon

When referencing QAnon, provide context. The core of QAnon is the false belief that there is a secret child-sex trafficking ring run by Democratic politicians and celebrities, and Donald Trump was elected to root it out. The conspiracy theory has grown into a movement that is promoted by extremists. Its followers perpetuate other theories through the internet that they suggest are related to the main premise.

Quran vs. Koran

Quran, not *Koran*, is the preferred spelling of the Islam holy book.

R

R-word

Do not use “R-word” or the slur for an intellectual or developmental disability or a person with such a disability that the euphemism stands in for. In stories where use of a slur in a quote is newsworthy, obtain approval from the company’s vice president for ethics and standards. In all other situations, use a description such as “a slur that references people with developmental disabilities.” In quotes, do not use the euphemism (R-word) instead of one of the usual forms of treatment (spelling out the actual slur, using an initial letter followed by hyphens, or using “slur” within parentheses). The approval of the use and treatment of the slur with the name of the approving editor must be noted in Presto’s Print Package Instructions.

rack vs. wrack

Almost always *rack*: *rack his brain*, *nerve-racking*, *racked up debt*, *rack of lamb*, *clothes rack*. *Wrack*, which stems from shipwreck, means to utterly ruin and also refers to some marine vegetations.

Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, RICO

The Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act made “illicit activity that is run like a business, illegal and applied harsh penalties to those engaged in it.” Spell out on first reference. Use RICO on second reference. It is not necessary to include the word “Act” after the acronym because it is always implied.

radio station

Capitalize the call letters. If needed to specify, hyphenate with AM or FM after the call letters: *WKRQ*, *WLW-AM*.

REAL ID

Use the government’s styling of all caps, in line with merriam-webster.com.

Realtor

Realtor should only be used to describe someone who is a member of the National Association of Realtors. In general, *real estate agent* is preferred. When used, *Realtor* is capitalized.

reform

Be careful in the use of this word. It implies improvements that, despite intentions, may not be changes for the better – particularly if political motivation is involved. The same goes for the word *overhaul*, which implies comprehensive improvements. It is better to use

more neutral terms in news reporting such as *making substantive changes* or *extensively altering*.

representative, Rep.

Capitalize and abbreviate as a formal title before a name. When more than one: *Reps. Jamie Raskin and Elise Stefanik*.

Republican National Committee

Use the full name on first reference. Use *RNC* or *the committee* on second reference. RNC should never be used to abbreviate Republican National Convention.

Republican, Republican Party

GOP acceptable on second reference or in headlines.

Reverse 911

Trademarked term for the communications system that allows emergency services to send automated messages to people in a specific area. For example, Reverse 911 was used to notify parents about the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

revolution

Capitalize when used to describe a specific event: *the Russian Revolution*. Uppercase *Revolution* when it stands alone and refers specifically to the American Revolution. Lowercase in other uses.

revolutions per minute

Use *rpm* on second reference.

ride-sharing (n., adj.)

Ride-sharing, not *ride-hailing*, when referring to services like Uber and Lyft.

right-of-way, rights-of-way

right-to-work

A worker's right not to be required to join a labor union. Not every state has such laws.

Rio Grande

Just *Rio Grande*; does not need *River*.

river

Capitalize as part of a proper name. Lowercase in plural uses: *the Columbia and Snake rivers*.

rock 'n' roll

Make sure the apostrophes are facing the right direction when referring to the music genre. However, in proper names, adhere to the style of the organization being named, such as the *Rock & Roll Hall of Fame*.

Rocky Mountains

Rockies is acceptable on second reference.

Romani, Roma, Gypsy, gypsy

Romani are an ethnic group originating in the Indian subcontinent that migrated to Europe between the ninth and 14th centuries. *Roma* may be used interchangeably with *Romani*. Do not use the term *Gypsy*, which is increasingly considered offensive and has largely been replaced with *Romani* and *Roma*. Likewise, do not use the terms *gyp* or *gypped*, which perpetuate a stereotype of Romani as swindlers. Don't use *gypsy* to refer to anyone who wanders from place to place.

ROTC, Reserve Officers' Training Corps

ROTC can be used in all instances.

S

said vs. everything else

The word “said” should be the default word for attribution because it is neutral. Other types of attribution considered neutral include “according to,” “told the USA TODAY Network,” and “media reported.” Do not use other words for attribution if “said” will suffice. “Claimed” implies doubt and introduces a level of subjectivity that is usually inappropriate for news reporting. (Never say “falsely claimed.” If someone is making a false statement, say that and then be ready to back it up. Better yet, just say what they said and follow it up by reporting facts.) “Noted” implies the speaker is saying something in passing that is objectively true, when it is often the speaker’s own interpretation. “Exclaimed” and similar words require a degree of interpretation by the reporter and imply a certain level of emotion that may not be intended by the speaker. “Acknowledged” implies reluctance or a prior denial. “Warned” can imply urgency that might not be intended. Other attribution words to avoid include *asserted*, *admitted*, *declared*, *insisted* and *revealed*. Just use “said” instead. Use of “says” (historical present tense) should be limited, mostly to feature stories.

When quoting written material, indicate that: *the president said in a post on Truth Social*, *the mayor said in a statement released Friday*, *the Times reported on its website*.

Overextended attribution: Make sure not to attribute more than what you mean to. In the following sentence, attribution is overextended to something the Trump administration did not say, that Trump took the materials “unlawfully”: “The FBI handed back boxes of materials that President Donald Trump had unlawfully taken to his Mar-a-Lago Florida estate upon leaving the White House in 2021, the administration said Friday.” This is easily fixed by removing the word “unlawfully.” The allegation that the materials were taken unlawfully should be attributed to the appropriate source in a separate sentence.

Incomplete attribution: The opposite of overextended attribution is partial or incomplete attribution. The following sentence is intended to attribute what comes before and after the word “and”: “Trump said that he is seeking peace and the world is behind him.” However, “the world is behind him” could be read as a separate, unattributed statement. To avoid that, add the word “that” after the “and”: “Trump said that he is seeking peace and that the world is behind him.”

saint

Abbreviate as St. before the name of a saint or in the name of a place, such as *St. Peter*, *St. Louis*. There are exceptions for some places. The city in New Brunswick is Saint John, and cities in both Ontario and Michigan go by Sault Ste. Marie.

S&P 500

Standard and Poor’s 500. *S&P 500* is acceptable for all references.

SAT

SAT on all references. Do not use Scholastic Aptitude Test or Scholastic Assessment Test.

Scotch tape

Trademark name for transparent adhesive tape.

Scouting America

Formerly, the Boy Scouts of America. Its flagship program for boys ages 11-17 has been open to girls since 2019 and has been called Scouts BSA since 2018. Its members are scouts. Girl Scouts of America and its Girl Scout program open to girls only is not affiliated with Scouting America.

Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists

SAG-AFTRA on second reference.

Scud missile

Capitalized.

SEAL, SEAL(s)

Member(s) of the U.S. Navy's special operations forces. The acronym stands for Sea, Air and Land, which the Navy says reflects training to operate in every environment.

seasonal affective disorder

SAD on second reference.

seasons

Lowercase the names of the seasons unless part of a proper name. *The groundhog predicted an early spring. The students were eager for the start of the fall semester. The Winter Fest starts Dec. 1.*

secretary

Capitalize if it is an official title before a name, but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

secretary-general

Capitalize the official title before a name (Secretary-General António Guterres), but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. Requires a hyphen. Plural form is secretaries-general.

secretary of state

Capitalize the official title before a name, but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. Never *state secretary*.

secretary-treasurer

Capitalize the official title before a name, but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate. Requires a hyphen.

Securities and Exchange Commission

An independent U.S. government agency that regulates securities markets. SEC on second reference.

Security Council (U.N.)

Seeing Eye dog

But lowercase guide dog when not referring to a dog trained by the trademarked Seeing Eye School.

semitrailer

Large shipping vehicles can be referred to as semitrailers or tractor-trailers.

Senate

Capitalize in reference to a specific legislative body such as the *U.S. Senate* or the *Georgia Senate*. Lowercase in references to more than one: *the U.S. and Georgia senates debated similar bills*. For other countries that have legislative bodies serving a similar function as the U.S. Senate, use the name the country uses in English: Britain's *House of Lords*, Germany's *Bundesrat*, Russia's *Federation Council*. Use *Senate* if the governmental body of a non-English-speaking country would be directly translated as Senate: *the French Senate (Senat)*; *the Colombian Senate (Senado)*.

senatorial

Related to the Senate or senators. Lowercase.

senator, Sen.

Capitalize and abbreviate as a formal title before a name. When plural: *Sens. Cory Booker and Susan Collins*.

sensitive topic resources

Stories about mental health, addiction, gender-based violence and other sensitive or distressing topics should always include references to relevant resources at the end of the story. Local and state resources should be listed when possible; otherwise, use national ones instead. The National Crisis Lifeline covers the widest variety of issues, but it shouldn't be relied on as a catch-all when more specific organizations are available.

Example (in italics at the bottom of the story): *If you or someone you know needs mental health resources and support, please call, text or chat with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline*

or visit 988lifeline.org for 24/7 access to free and confidential services.

Here's a list of national crisis hotlines:

- National Drug Helpline, 1-844-289-0879.
- Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), 1-800-656-4673.
- National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233.
- National Eating Disorders Association, 1-888-375-7767.
- National Problem Gambling Helpline, 1-800-426-2537.
- LGBTQ+ mental health crisis: Trevor Project, 1-866-488-7386.
- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, 988.
- Veterans' mental health: Veterans Crisis Line, 988, then press 1.

sexploitation vs. sextortion

The terms are not interchangeable. *Sextortion* is extortion based on the threat of revealing sexually compromising information, texts, photographs, etc. It is a term used by law enforcement agencies and may be used to describe a crime. *Sexploitation* is the use of titillating sexual material, especially in a film, to increase commercial appeal. An example might be the use of revealing clothing on models used in ads to sell fast food.

sheikh

Favor *sheikh* over *sheik* in reference to the religious or tribal title, unless the individual expresses a preference for the latter. Capitalize before a name.

sheriff

Capitalize the official title before a name, but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

shoutout (n.)

shut-off (n.)

Sierra Nevada

The *Sierra Nevada* is a mountain range in California that juts into Nevada. Don't use the word *mountain* with the name since *Sierra* translates to mountain range.

slave, enslaved

Use of the phrase *enslaved person/people* is preferred over the term *slave/slaves*. Instead of using the term "slave owner," which some find dehumanizing, or "enslaver," which shifts the focus to the act of enslaving but is less commonly used or historically familiar, try using a phrase that focuses on the act of enslaving rather than the status of the

enslaved. For example, instead of describing someone as a *slave owner* (or enslaver), say *Jefferson enslaved more than 400 people at Monticello during his lifetime*.

Smithsonian Institution

Not *Institute*.

Smokey Bear

Not *Smokey the Bear*.

snafu

When using this term, it's unnecessary to mention its vulgar origin unless particularly relevant to the story.

sneaked

Preferred over *snuck*.

so-called (adj.)

Use *so-called* to indicate skepticism or irony, not simply to indicate a novel way of referring to something. *My so-called friend stood me up for lunch again today*. Do not use both quotation marks and *so-called* in the same phrase. Wrong: *the so-called "expert."* Also wrong: *Therapists say so-called "digital detox" is helping teens with their mental health*.

Social Security

Always capitalize in reference to the U.S. program.

Society of Professional Journalists

SPJ on second reference.

SOS

The call for help has no periods. The initials do not stand for any specific words.

Space Age (n.), space-age (adj.)

A period in human history characterized by rapid technological advancements, beginning Oct. 4, 1957, with the launch of Sputnik 1 by the Soviet Union. Use the adjective *space-age* (lowercase and hyphenated) to mean of or relating to the *Space Age*, such as *space-age technology*.

spacecraft designations

Capitalize names and use numerals: *Vostok 1*.

spacesuit, spacewalk

space shuttle

Lowercase, but capitalize the spacecraft names: space shuttles Columbia, Challenger, Discovery, Atlantis and Endeavor.

spam vs. Spam

Lowercase when referring to junk mail or unwanted email; capitalize when referring to the trademarked canned lunch meat.

speaker

Capitalize when part of a formal title before a name, usually someone who leads a legislative body, such as *Speaker of the House Mike Johnson*. However, when referring to the person without the name, lowercase the word, such as *the speaker called a vote*, or *He said he would discuss the matter with the speaker of the House*.

special forces

Lowercase unless referring to the Green Berets of the U.S. Army.

Special Olympics

An organization that conducts Olympic-style athletic competitions for people with intellectual disabilities. Athletes who compete in these events are called Special Olympians.

speeds

Always use figures.

SPF/sunscreen/sunblock

When referring to a preparation used on the skin for sun protection, the terms sunscreen and sunblock can be used interchangeably.

SPF stands for “sun protection factor,” and it is not interchangeable with sunscreen or sunblock. According to Merriam-Webster, SPF is a number assigned to a sunscreen that is the factor by which the time required for unprotected skin to become sunburned is increased when the sunscreen is used. In other words, skin with an SPF 30 applied should take 30 times longer for the same effects of the sun on bare skin.

Do not use the outdated term “suntan lotion” to refer to sun protection. Although some offer an SPF, others are used to speed up the effects of sun on skin, resulting in skin darkening (a “tan”).

spongy moth

This term has replaced the term *gypsy moth* because of the offensive connotations associated with the word Gypsy.

sportsbook

A place where betting wagers are made.

standing room only

SRO on second reference.

“The Star-Spangled Banner”

However, *national anthem* is lowercase and without quote marks, as it is not a composition title.

statehouse

Capitalize when referring to a specific statehouse: *Arizona Democrats hope to gain control of the Statehouse*. Lowercase in plural uses.

state names

In datelines, use the U.S. Postal Service’s two-letter abbreviations for states with cities that don’t stand alone.

In body copy and cutlines, spell out all state names, whether standing alone or used with a city.

The rules apply to short-form listings of party affiliations: *Rep. John Smith, D-Iowa; Sen. Robert Jones, R-Tennessee*.

Use *DC* or District of Columbia after Washington when necessary to distinguish the U.S. capital from other locations named Washington.

Four states are officially commonwealths and should be referred to as such individually or when grouped with one another. They are Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia. When grouped with other states that are not commonwealths, however, it is fine to refer to them collectively as states.

When writing headlines, be aware that some abbreviations can have multiple meanings.

VA can stand for Virginia or Veterans Affairs. LA can stand for Louisiana or Los Angeles.

The two-letter postal abbreviations may be used in headlines without periods. The abbreviations are:

Alabama	AL	Idaho	ID
Alaska	AK	Illinois	IL
Arizona	AZ	Indiana.....	IN
Arkansas.....	AR	Iowa.....	IA
California.....	CA	Kansas	KS
Colorado	CO	Kentucky	KY
Connecticut.....	CT	Louisiana	LA
Delaware	DE	Maine.....	ME
District of Columbia	DC	Maryland	MD
Florida	FL	Massachusetts.....	MA
Georgia.....	GA	Michigan	MI
Hawaii	HI	Minnesota	MN

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

Mississippi.....	MS	Pennsylvania	PA
Missouri.....	MO	Rhode Island	RI
Montana	MT	South Carolina	SC
Nebraska	NE	South Dakota	SD
Nevada	NV	Tennessee.....	TN
New Hampshire	NH	Texas	TX
New Jersey.....	NJ	Utah.....	UT
New Mexico	NM	Vermont	VT
New York	NY	Virginia.....	VA
North Carolina	NC	Washington	WA
North Dakota	ND	West Virginia	WV
Ohio	OH	Wisconsin	WI
Oklahoma.....	OK	Wyoming.....	WY
Oregon	OR		

State of the Union

When referring to the president’s speech before a joint session of Congress, it is capitalized, but the word *address* is not. When using the phrase otherwise, it is lowercase. *The president delivered the State of the Union address, beginning by saying, “The state of the union is strong.”*

The speech is often given in January or February and often used to lay out a president’s priorities for the year, presenting them to the joint session of Congress for the lawmakers’ consideration. The president’s address is followed by an opposition response delivered by someone who is not of the president’s political party.

Since Ronald Reagan set the precedent in 1981, presidents’ first speeches before a joint session of Congress shortly after the beginning of their first term (nonconsecutive) have not been called a State of the Union address, such as that of President Barack Obama in 2009 and of President Donald Trump in 2017, and again in 2025. Those speeches were simply called an address to a joint session of Congress.

state police

Capitalize when used with the state name: *Maryland State Police*. When writing stories, it is OK to refer to the officers as state police (lowercase) without naming the state as long as context makes clear which state it is. Example: *State police are working the crime scene.*

stationary vs. stationery

Stationary is not moving. *Stationery* is writing material.

STEM, STEAM

STEM stands for science, technology, engineering and math. *STEAM* stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and math. Both are OK on first reference, but use the full phrase at least once in the story.

Both are educational philosophies and neither use periods in their names.

steppingstone

St. John's, St. Johns, Saint John

St. John's is a Canadian city in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. *St. Johns* is a U.S. city in Arizona. *Saint John* is a Canadian city in New Brunswick.

straitlaced

Not *straightlaced* (and no hyphen) to describe someone who is strict in manners and morals, or someone constricted by a tightly laced bodice.

Strait of Gibraltar

A narrow passage of water that connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. It separates Europe and Africa.

Styrofoam

A trademark.

Super Bowl

The championship game for the National Football League uses Roman numerals to indicate which Super Bowl (always two words) is being referenced. Most readers do not know Roman numerals, so for their clarity, we will use Arabic numbers. For example, Super Bowl LIX is how the NFL listed the game played in February 2025; our style would be Super Bowl 59. When writing about Super Bowls past, it's preferred to use the number and the teams playing one another. For example: *Super Bowl 20 between the Bears and the Patriots*. Even better, reference the year the Super Bowl was played: *The Bears defeated the Patriots in the 1986 Super Bowl*. When writing about the upcoming Super Bowl or the one played this week, no number or year will be needed, and the reference can simply say *the Super Bowl*.

supersonic transport

SST on second reference.

super-spreader

Note the hyphen.

survivor vs. victim

When writing about sexual assault, use the terms *survivor* and *victim* with care. Generally, a subject's preference may be used if it is known. If not known, guidelines from RAINN (the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) say to use "victim" when someone has been recently affected by sexual violence; use "survivor" for someone who has gone through recovery or when discussing the effects of sexual violence. However, be careful not to

violate the due process rights of a suspect named in a story. Don't call someone making an accusation against another person a victim unless the accused has been convicted. In these cases, the subject can be referred to as an *accuser*. Do not use the term *alleged victim* in describing the person. The best practice is to rely on official documents as much as possible for attribution: *The woman told police*, or *according to the indictment*.

symposiums

The preferred plural of symposium is an exception to Merriam-Webster.



T

taps

The bugle call is lowercase.

team names

Plural names get plural verbs, abstract un-plural-able names get plural verbs, and singular names (usually cities or universities) get singular verbs. Examples: *The Green Bay Packers are*, *the Minnesota Wild are*, but *Dallas is*, even though you would say *the Cowboys are*.

team nicknames, offensive

The NFL's Washington football team dropped its long-criticized nickname in 2020, and the Cleveland baseball team followed suit after the 2021 season. Both nicknames (Redskins and Indians, respectively) are considered offensive or insensitive to Native Americans, regardless of whether applied to professional, collegiate or high school teams. As a result, we will not use either nickname in display type, including captions and jump lines, and should avoid using them in stories unless in a direct quote that can't be paraphrased. Try to keep offensive imagery out of photos. A photo of a uniform with the team name is OK; images of offensive signs, fans wearing Native American dress or doing the tomahawk chop are not. That guidance applies to all local newsrooms for any team with these names and is not dependent upon a local school's comfort level with their name. This policy only applies to the offensive nicknames of "Redskins" and "Indians."

tea party

The U.S. political movement is not capitalized. But capitalize *Tea Party Caucus*.

temperatures

Use numerals for temperatures, except for zero, which gets spelled out. When referring to temperatures below zero, do not use a minus sign. *The temperature dropped to 5 below zero by 10 p.m. The forecast was for a low of minus 12.* When indicating a range, do not use an apostrophe when saying, for example, temperatures will be in the 70s. When writing about temperatures in the United States, it is assumed the temperatures are Fahrenheit. When necessary, indicate Fahrenheit or Celsius as *55 degrees Fahrenheit* or *13 degrees Celsius*. If abbreviating, use a space between the numeral and the abbreviation, such as *55 F* or *13 C*. Do not use a degree symbol.

Ten Most Wanted Fugitives

The list is maintained by the FBI. Note "ten" is spelled out.

Tennessee Valley Authority

TVA on second reference.

than vs. then

The word *than* can be used in comparisons or to otherwise indicate difference: *He is taller than you*, or *this rather than that*. The word *then* is used to indicate a time, the next in a series or the result of something: *I tied my shoes, then I went for a walk*, or *If I don't tie my shoes, then I might trip over the loose laces*.

theater

Use alternative spelling *theatre* only in formal titles.

times

Use figures except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate minutes from hours: 2:30 p.m., 9:45 a.m. The construction 5 o'clock is acceptable, but time listings with a.m. or p.m. are preferred.

time zones

The four time zones in the 48 contiguous states are, from east to west: *Eastern*, *Central*, *Mountain* and *Pacific*. (Some parts of Alaska use Pacific time, as well.) Capitalize the full name of a time zone when spelled out: *Mountain Time Zone*. Time zone abbreviations are acceptable on first reference when linked with a clock reading: 7 p.m. *PT*. Note that the abbreviation is not set off with commas and that no distinction is made between standard time and daylight time.

Greenwich Mean Time may be abbreviated as GMT on second reference if used with a clock reading.

TNT

OK in all references for trinitrotoluene.

today, tonight, tomorrow

Avoid. Instead, always use the date: *Sept. 18*, *June 30*, etc.

top

Capitalize as a list: *Top 100 restaurants*.

Toys R Us

Not *Toys "R" Us* or *Toys 'R' Us*.

trademark

If a word or phrase is trademarked, capitalize it and don't use it in a general way. Kleenex is a trademark. Don't use it to mean facial tissue, unless the tissue was Kleenex and that fact is somehow relevant to the storytelling. Band-Aid is a trademark for a type of self-adhesive bandage. Don't write *He put a Band-Aid on his cut* if it wasn't that brand.

trauma

Avoid medical jargon terms like *trauma* when it's better to be specific. If writing about mental health, *trauma* is acceptable to describe the cause of post-traumatic stress disorder or a similar situation.

treasurer

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

Treasuries

Plural for government securities issued by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

troop, troops, troupe

A *troop* is a group of people, often in the military. Several groups in the military are called *troops*. When used with a number, it means individuals. An estimated 50,000 *troops* were stationed in Syria. A *troupe* is a group of actors or dancers.

Trump derangement syndrome

A pejorative term used by Trump supporters to describe what they see as extreme and irrational reactions to all things related to Donald Trump. It mostly should be limited to use within quotes, but when not directly quoting someone, the term should be used with quotation marks on first reference. Capitalize only the T in Trump. Use the abbreviation TDS sparingly, only where use of the term is repeated so much that spelling it out would be burdensome and stilted. If TDS is used in a direct quote, make sure to explain what it is in relation to the quote. For example, "*Whoopi Goldberg's shouting match with Jeanine Pirro is a candidate for the TDS hall of fame,*" Brown said, referencing "*Trump derangement syndrome,*" the perceived irrational and extremely emotional criticisms of the president.

TSA PreCheck

A registered trademark; note the capitalization.

tuberculosis

TB on second reference. The disease is lowercase.

24/7

Not 24-7.

21-gun salute

A *21-gun salute* is performed with artillery, not rifles. It is used ceremoniously in some circumstances for heads of state. At some funeral services, especially for members of the military, there are seven people with rifles who fire three times each. This is often

erroneously referred to as a 21-gun salute. Avoid this. A preferred reference to this practice would be *a rifle salute* or *three volleys* or *a three-volley salute*.

Twin Towers

Capitalize this reference for the two buildings destroyed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, but lowercase “north tower” and “south tower” in references to the buildings individually.

typhoon

Capitalize as part of an official name.

USA TODAY NETWORK
styleguide
Version 3.0 — 9/21/2026

U

U-boat

A German submarine, specifically those used in World War I or II.

UHF, ultrahigh frequency

UHF is OK in all references.

UNESCO

OK in all references for the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*.

UNICEF

OK in all references for the *United Nations Children's Fund*.

United Arab Emirates

Spell out as a noun on first reference (including datelines). *UAE* may be used on second reference as a noun. (This is an exception to the general guidance to spell out the names of countries as nouns.) The country's adjective form is *Emirati*. The people are called *Emiratis*. The UAE is a federation of seven emirates, each with its own monarch (emir): Abu Dhabi (the capital), Dubai (most populous emirate, stands alone in datelines), Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah. Chosen from among the emirs, the UAE president represents the UAE internationally as head of state.

United Kingdom, U.K.

Comprises Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain is England, Scotland and Wales. Ireland is altogether separate. In stories, spell out United Kingdom when used as a noun. Abbreviate U.K. as an adjective. In headlines, U.K. may be used as a noun. Use UK without periods in digital headlines. An exception is also made for proper names that use UK without the periods.

United Nations

U.N. on second reference and in headlines.

USO

OK in all references for *United Service Organizations*.

United States, U.S.

In stories, spell out United States when used as a noun. Abbreviate U.S. as an adjective. In headlines, U.S. may be used as a noun. Use US without periods in digital headlines. An

exception is also made for proper names that use US without the periods. When part of a compound adjective, abbreviate U.S., as in *U.S.-based* or *U.S.-born*.

up-to-date (adj.), up to date (adv.)

Hyphenated as an adjective and not as an adverb. *The up-to-date computer program is awesome. The computer program is up to date.*

USA TODAY, USA TODAY Network

When referring to the newspaper, *USA TODAY* is all caps. When referring in copy to the wider network for which the newspaper is the flagship, *USA TODAY Network* gives the word network a capital N. In bylines, however, it's all caps: *USA TODAY NETWORK*.

U.S. District Courts

Note that *federal judge* describes a jurist of a U.S. District Court. Before a name, *federal* is not capitalized, but *Judge* is: *federal Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly*. Use *the District Court*, *the District Courts*, *the court* on second references.

U.S. Marshals Service

Note the s in *Marshals*.

USMCA, United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement

USMCA on second reference. *USMCA* replaces the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA.

U.S. Postal Service

Use on first reference or *the Postal Service*. Uppercase *Postal Service* in all references. Lowercase *the service* and *post office*. *USPS* is acceptable on second reference.

V

vaccine (n.) vs. vaccination (n.)

Vaccine is the product. Vaccination is the act of receiving a vaccine. You would receive the flu *vaccine* during a *vaccination*.

valley

Capitalize as part of a name: *Coachella Valley*. Metro Phoenix is referred to as the *Valley of the Sun*, or the *Valley*. Lowercase *valley fever*, the infection.

V-E Day

OK on first reference for *Victory in Europe Day* (May 8, 1945) but try to spell out somewhere in the story. Considered the official end of World War II in Europe.

V-8 vs. V8

V-8 when referring to an engine, but the juice is V8.

Velcro

A trademark. Use *fabric fastener* in a generic sense.

Veterans of Foreign Wars

VFW on second reference.

vice president

Capitalize the official title before a name but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

VIP, VIPs

Viral, virality

Viral is an acceptable term to discuss videos that grow outsize attention on social media platforms. What constitutes something as “viral” is up to an editor’s discretion and this may vary by network market/niche community online. Avoid using the term *virality* outside of direct quotes. Acceptable synonyms include “popularity” or “outsize attention” where appropriate.

V-J Day

This represents *Victory over Japan Day*, the day Japan formally surrendered in World War II. It is marked as Sept. 2, 1945, in the United States.

Voice of America

VOA on second reference.

vs., versus , v.

The abbreviation vs. is OK in references for *versus*. Example: *In our house, it's butter vs. margarine*. For court cases, v. is used: *Marbury v. Madison*.

W

Wall Street

While it is an actual street in New York City, it's often used as a collective term for U.S. financial interests or as a synonym for U.S. stock markets.

war

Capitalize in the name of a specific conflict: Korean War, Vietnam War, World War I. Current conflicts, such as the Ukraine-Russia war, without the benefit of history, do not include “war” as part of the name, but it is often used as a descriptor, and should be lowercase. The conflict that began with the surprise attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, is the *Israel-Hamas war*; do not call it the *war in Gaza*, the *Gaza war*, or the *Israel-Palestinian war*.

-ward

Words like *toward*, *forward*, *backward* and *afterward* don't end with an “s.” The exception is *forwards* as a verb. Example: *He forwards his mail to a P.O. box*.

Washington's Birthday

The U.S. government's official name for Presidents Day is Washington's Birthday.

Washington, DC, the District of Columbia

When needed to differentiate the U.S. capital from the state of Washington, follow the city with the abbreviation DC, without periods and set off by commas. The city of Washington and the federal District of Columbia are geographically and administratively the same. Do not capitalize the “district” without “of Columbia” when referring to DC.

weatherman

Don't use unless in a direct quote. Use *meteorologist* or *weather forecaster*, depending on the degree they hold.

weather terms

Weather warnings and watches from the National Weather Service are lowercase. Capitalize storm names: *Typhoon Haiyan*, *Tropical Storm Debby*, *Hurricane Helene*.

Web addresses, URLs

The terms are interchangeable. All Web addresses are internet addresses, but not all internet addresses are Web addresses. Other types of internet addresses include email addresses and IP addresses. When writing a Web address, omit the <http://> or <https://> at the beginning of the address. Also, the www. can usually be omitted as well, but first check to make sure the address will work without it. Most will, but it is not always the case. Anything after the top-level domain (the .com, .edu, .org, etc. part) in a Web address can be case sensitive, so always make sure a specific address works before publishing it. Avoid breaking Web addresses over lines, but if you have to, break after a slash or dot.

weeklong, weekslong

No hyphen.

Western Hemisphere

Uppercase both words.

West Point

Technically, West Point is the site of the U.S. Military Academy in New York, but colloquially, many people use it as a synonym for the academy. *She attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. She graduated from West Point.*

wheelchair use

Don't mention a disability unless it is relevant, and it is better to be specific. Don't say *confined to a wheelchair* or *wheelchair-bound*. Instead, say a person *uses a wheelchair*.

whip

Capitalize the official congressional title before a name, but lowercase when it stands alone. Do not abbreviate.

wildfires, fire names

Uppercase *Fire* when part of a named fire (usually given by fire agencies) and always include the size of the fire and where it is burning. Use acres or square miles to describe the area of a fire but be consistent throughout coverage, and where practical, provide a comparison for reference. *Fire crews have yet to fully contain the Eaton Fire, which has burned 14,000 acres, an area roughly half the size of San Francisco. It has devastated much of Altadena and is now burning mostly in the San Gabriel Mountains in the Los Angeles area.*

Some wildfire vocabulary:

- *containment* refers to the control line that fire crews create around a fire to keep it from spreading. A fire with 100% containment could still be burning.
- *Hotshots* refers to specialized fire crews. Uppercase.

- “ready,” “set,” “go” refers to states of evacuation (lowercase and use quotation marks with no exclamation point). “Ready” means prepare your home, make a family evacuation plan and pack an emergency kit. “Set” means identify the closest shelter or safe space, consider relocating and stay informed. “Go” means evacuate immediately.
- *red flag warning* (all lowercase) is a warning issued by the National Weather Service indicating conditions are prime for wildfires, including strong winds, low humidity and high temperatures.

weapons of mass destruction, WMD

WMD on second reference. Note it is not WMDs.

web addresses, URLs

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winter storm names

In the United States, winter storms are not named in the way the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) names tropical storms/hurricanes. However, beginning in 2013, The Weather Channel said it would begin naming winter storms forecast to affect more than 10 million people or cover 390,000 square miles. The National Weather Service has rejected the practice of referring to winter storms by names, as have multiple major news outlets and private weather forecasters, including AccuWeather. The Weather Channel argues that in the age of social media, having a quick way to refer to a major winter storm system (together with a hashtag) is important for raising awareness and making information easier to share. The USA TODAY Network does not use winter storm names in its news coverage except when the use of the name becomes so ubiquitous in other media that avoiding its use becomes a hindrance to effective communication. Reporters and editors should take care to consider SEO when determining when that point is. If a winter storm name is used, be sure to indicate in the story who has named the storm. A hashtag containing the name given to the storm may be used in social media posts even if the name of the storm is not used in a story. Separately from naming current storms, past storms with historical significance have often acquired names without a formal naming scheme. Use of such names is permitted but should be accompanied by the year in which they occurred: the *April Fool’s Day Blizzard of 1997*; the *1993 Storm of the Century*; the *Great Coastal Gale of 2007*.

woman, women

Do not refer to women as *females*. Female is an adjective.

World Bank

Collective name for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Development Association. The World Bank provides loans and grants to governments of low- and middle-income countries for economic development.

World Health Organization

WHO on second reference for World Health Organization.

World Trade Center

Capitalize when referring to the group of former buildings in Lower Manhattan in New York City that were destroyed during the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The two tallest buildings are referred to together as the Twin Towers; separately, as the north tower and south tower.

World War I, World War II

Spell out *World War* and use Roman numerals. *WWI* or *WWII* is acceptable in headlines.

World Wide Web, the web

In reference to the World Wide Web, lowercase “the web.”

X-Y-Z

X

The social media platform formerly known as Twitter. If it's unclear in context, define it as a social media platform. It was formerly known as Twitter, but it is no longer necessary to explain that in every use.

Xmas

Do not use as a substitute or shorthand for Christmas.

year-round (adj. and adv.)

But no hyphen in the phrase *all year round*.

yesterday

Avoid. Instead, use the date: *Sept. 18, June 30, etc.*

YMCA, Young Men's Christian Association

YMCA is OK in all references. *The Y* is acceptable on second reference.

Young Women's Christian Association

YWCA is OK in all references. *The Y* is acceptable on second reference.

Zika

The *Zika virus* is also acceptable.

Zionism

Zionism is a big tent movement for statehood and self-determination for the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland of Israel. The desire to return to Zion, the biblical term for both the land of Israel and Jerusalem, has been central to Jewish life since the Roman Empire suppressed the Jewish rebellion in 70 CE, destroying the Second Temple in Jerusalem, sending Jews into exile 2,000 years ago. Zionism as a political movement had a rebirth in the late 1890s established by AustroHungarian journalist and activist Theodor Herzl, widely considered the leader of the movement. Zionism gained adherents among Jews as a consequence of anti-Jewish pogroms in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, rampant antisemitism and the Dreyfus Affair. As a result, Jews from around the world began relocating to their ancestral homeland as early as the turn of the 20th century, which was known at that time as the British Mandate of Palestine. Following the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people in World War II, international support grew for the creation of a Jewish state, which resulted in a vote for the formal creation of Israel in 1948. It is historically inaccurate to equate Zionism with colonization; it is the result of being exiled during Roman conquest

of the land of Israel. Furthermore, Zionism does not preclude support for Palestinian self-determination and statehood. (See: *Palestine*)

ZIP code





CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Take care when covering crime. Attribution is a must. We do not want to convict people before their trial. Be aware that definitions of crimes and charges can vary from state to state and from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

accident, collision

Exercise caution when using these words. An *accident* implies it was unintentional, and a *collision* involves two objects in motion. A car hitting a stop sign is not a collision, and it may not be an accident. *Crash, wreck* or *incident* is better.

accused, suspected

Do not use phrases such as *accused murderer John Smith* or *suspected murderer John Smith*. Instead, say *John Smith, accused of murder*, or *John Smith, charged in the murder*.

allege

If used, be clear who is doing the alleging. Actions are alleged, not people. Do not use phrases such as *alleged murderer*.

allegedly, reportedly

In general, use of these words should be avoided. Alone, they do not provide protection from libel. If used, be sure the story is clear that there are charges and/or who is making the allegations.

arrested

Don't use *for*. No one is *arrested for* a crime. A suspect is arrested on charges of or in relation to a crime. Use phrases such as *arrested on charges of, suspected of, accused of, faces charges of, arrested in*. In the U.S. criminal justice system, a person is innocent until proven guilty.

arrested, charged, indicted

An arrest does not equate to guilt. You can be arrested but not have committed a crime. Police have the authority to arrest anyone. Police don't charge a person; they recommend charges to the prosecutor's office. The prosecutor's office then files the charges with the court. Don't write *police charged a person with assault*. Example: *She was arrested and charged with assault*.

An indictment is an additional way to formally accuse a person of a crime. A grand jury returns an indictment. A grand jury is a group of regular people who hear evidence and

decide if there is enough evidence to warrant formal charges. Example: *He was indicted on animal cruelty charges.*

attribution

Attribute, attribute, attribute. Official sources include police, police reports, court documents, statements from law enforcement and prosecutors (including official news releases), statements from judges and statements at official proceedings.

Be aware: Just because the police said it, don't assume it's absolute fact. They are as fallible as the rest of us. Always be sure to attribute to police such phrasing as *admitted to the crime*.

burglary, larceny, robbery, theft

Burglary is entering a building without permission with the intent of committing a crime.

Larceny is the legal term for wrongfully taking property, i.e., stealing or theft. *Robbery* in the legal sense is larceny that involves violence or threat. Outside of legal circles, it means to plunder or rifle and can be used while a person is not present, such as *Their home was robbed*. *Theft* is larceny without threat, violence or plundering.

civil trial, criminal trial

One is a dispute between individuals or organizations, usually seeking monetary compensation, a ceasing of activity or other remedies. The other involves an alleged violation of criminal law and is brought by the government. The standard of proof is also different. In a criminal trial, the prosecution must prove the guilt of the defendant "beyond a reasonable doubt." In a civil trial, the plaintiff must show a "preponderance of the evidence," which means that whatever is being argued must be "more likely than not" to have occurred.

Example: O.J. Simpson was found not guilty of charges in a criminal trial. In a civil trial, he was found to be responsible for "wrongful death."

convict, ex-con, felon

Avoid these words to describe people convicted of crimes. Use people-first language, such as *a person with a felony conviction*, not *a convicted felon*.

guilty, not guilty, innocent

In a criminal trial, a jury or judge will find a defendant either guilty or not guilty. Don't use *innocent* because that is a judgment call we don't have the knowledge or authority to make. Also, note that a jury finds a defendant not guilty or guilty, so write it that way. Don't say the person IS one or the other. They can be guilty and still be found not guilty by a jury, and vice versa.

Exercise care with wording if a person pleads guilty to or is convicted of a lesser charge. Prosecutors often will charge someone with a lesser crime to ensure a conviction.

Convicted of attempted child molestation is different from *convicted of child molestation*:

Jones was accused of child molestation and pleaded guilty to two counts of attempted child molestation.

hate crime

Jurisdictions decide what qualifies as a hate crime. According to the FBI, “a hate crime is a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias. For the purposes of collecting statistics, the FBI has defined a hate crime as a ‘criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender’s bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity.’ Hate itself is not a crime – and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties.”

jurors

When reporting details about jurors or potential jurors in high-profile cases, weigh what we know vs. what we should report. Be mindful of what could happen if we are party to transforming a private citizen into a public figure. Revealing details of jurors can make it easier for internet sleuths to find, harass and threaten jurors. We are obligated as journalists to report stories thoroughly and fairly. But we are also obligated not to endanger people who, through no actions of their own except fulfilling a civic duty, have become part of a story. Reporters and editors, ask: What is the relevance of this information? Does it add value to the story? What is the potential harm that could be caused by this reporting? Does that harm outweigh our obligation to report as thoroughly as possible? What if jurors identify themselves? How does that change our reporting?

juvenile, juvenile delinquent

Juveniles and minors are considered under age 18. Generally, they are not identified in news stories about crime, either as the person who may have committed the crime or as a victim of a crime. If a person under a certain age is being charged as an adult, they may be identified. The term *juvenile* is often part of an official aspect of the criminal justice system, such as a juvenile court. And because juvenile has been used almost exclusively in crime reporting, it carries a heavy connotation. It may be better to avoid the word depending on the story’s context. And it shouldn’t be used outside of crime reporting. Use *kids*, *teens*, *young people*, *youths* or similar. In a specific reference, put the person’s age if it is known. Do not use *juvenile delinquent* outside of a direct quote.

libel, slander

Libel is a published statement that is false and damages someone’s reputation. *Slander* is a spoken statement that is false and damages someone’s reputation. Both are accusations unless a court finds in favor of the plaintiff. Example: The teacher accused the parent of libeling her in blog posts.

mug shots

Don't run booking mug shots unless the case involves a public official or involves a high-profile case.

police-involved shooting; officer-involved shooting

Better to be specific and say: Police shot and killed Joe Smith after they say he shot at them. In early versions of a story, it may not be clear who did the shooting, and vague language may be necessary. But as soon as information is available, delete the "police-involved" language and specify the law enforcement officer was the one firing the weapon.

pardon, parole, probation, commutation

A *pardon* means excusing an offense without exacting a penalty or the release of a person from the legal penalties of an offense. *Parole* means the release of a person from prison before the end of a sentence and is granted by a parole board. *Probation* means suspending a sentence for someone convicted but not sentenced. A judge grants probation. *Commutation* means exchanging a legal penalty for a lesser one.

pedophilia

This is not the name of a crime. A person is not a *convicted pedophile*. Instead, use the terminology of the charges. *He was convicted of sexually abusing children.*

prison, jail, prisoner, inmate, incarcerated person

A *prison* is where someone who has been convicted of a crime goes to serve a sentence if the sentence includes incarceration. A *jail* is where someone is held while they await trial if they either cannot pay bail or bail is denied. It is also where someone convicted of a lesser crime may be incarcerated. An *inmate* can be someone confined to either a prison or a jail. We prefer person-first language and use *incarcerated person* for someone confined to a prison instead of *prisoner* or *inmate*.

race

Unless race is relevant, it is not necessary to identify a person's race.

Some guidelines for when identifying people by race is relevant: when writing about significant or historic events; where suspects or missing people are being sought; when you are reporting on racial conflicts.

We should be consistent in how we treat all racial groups.

When the race is relevant, the reporting needs to be thorough. We have to be sure about someone's race before publishing that information. And don't write it in a way that assumes White is the default.

We don't want to say: *The police officer is accused of shooting Smith, who is Black.*

Instead: *The police officer, who is White, is accused of shooting Smith, who is Black.*

If you're not sure about a racial reference, reporters should talk to a senior editor or regional planning editor. On the production side, consult your manager or the Network Ethics & Standards team.

rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct

These are crimes in most jurisdictions, and each has its own definition that varies from place to place. Know the differences. If someone is facing allegations of, but is not charged in, a crime of a sexual nature, be careful. Each situation will need to be discussed and decided independently. If criminal charges have been filed, use the wording of the charges exactly. If the charges are not criminal (work-related or civil charges), use the wording of the complaint. Note that a reference to a sexual relationship implies consent. The same goes for pornography and sex work. Legally, consent is not possible if one party is a minor in that jurisdiction. Therefore, do not use *child pornography* in reference to a crime unless that is the legal charge. Use *images of child sexual abuse*.

returning citizen

If used, provide context for it by including a description such as *someone reentering society after being incarcerated*.

riot, unrest, protest, demonstration, uprising, revolt

A *riot* involves violence and chaos and may or may not be of a political nature. *Unrest* is vaguer and usually describes a milder form of *protest* than *riot*. *Protest* or *demonstration* is specific and purposeful. The terms can describe both a legal, organized event or a more spontaneous and/or illegal (without a permit) event. *Uprising* or *revolt* means something broader in scope and definition and almost always involves upheaval of a political nature.

said vs. claimed

In news reporting, *said* is the correct word. Properly identify authorities quoted in stories or whose records are being cited (avoid vague *authorities said*). Do not use *claimed*.

sexploitation, sextortion

The terms are not interchangeable. *Sextortion* is extortion based on the threat of revealing sexually compromising information, texts, photographs, etc. It is a term used by law enforcement agencies and may be used to describe a crime. *Sexploitation* is the use of titillating sexual material, especially in a film, to increase commercial appeal. An example might be the use of revealing clothing on models used to sell fast food.

so-called

Do not use *so-called* in crime stories, since that can indicate skepticism or irony.

survivor vs. victim

When writing on sexual assault, use the terms *survivor* and *victim* with care. Generally, a subject's preference may be used if it is known. If not known, guidelines from RAINN (the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) say to use *victim* when someone has been recently affected by sexual violence; use *survivor* for someone who has gone through recovery or when discussing the effects of sexual violence. However, we should be careful not to violate the due process rights of a suspect named in a story. In these cases, the subject can be referred to as an *accuser*. Do not use the term *alleged victim* in describing the person. The best practice is to rely on official documents as much as possible for attribution: *The woman told police, or according to the indictment.*

suspect

Police don't have a suspect unless they have a name or a person in custody. If the identity of the person who committed a crime is unknown, refer to that person by the type of crime. Examples:

Police were searching for the shooter.

The gunman shot two people before fleeing, police said.

The thief stole \$20,000 from the bank, officials said.

suspect descriptions

Don't run suspect descriptions unless they are specific enough to be useful.

unarmed Black man

We shouldn't use this phrase as it could foster the assumption that, otherwise, all Black men are armed.

victim

Use caution when calling someone a *victim* or an *alleged victim*. The former conveys the assumption that the person making accusations is telling the truth, which is not always the case. The latter might imply that we are casting doubt on whether the person is a victim (telling the truth). Instead, consider using language such as *the person who reported being assaulted* or *who accused Jones of assault*. When a shorter reference is needed, consider whether *accuser* is better than *victim*. When the accuser's name is used, their last name could be used in most places instead of *the victim* or *the alleged victim*. Generally, we do not identify victims in a sex-crime story. If a victim allows themselves to be identified, or wishes to be identified to tell their story, then yes. We also do not identify victims or those charged if they are under a certain age. If the accused are being charged as adults, then we do.



SPORTS

anterior cruciate ligament (ACL)

ACL is the acronym for the *anterior cruciate ligament* in the knee. Spell it out on first reference; use ACL on second reference and in headlines.

All-America, All-American

All-America college football and basketball teams are selected each year by various entities, including USA TODAY Sports.

All-America (adj.), usually refers to a team: *She was named to the USA TODAY All-America team.*

All-American (n.), usually refers to a person: *His play on the football field made him an All-American.*

all-star, All-Star, All-Star Game

Examples: *He looked like an all-star on the field. Kevin Durant has been an NBA All-Star since he turned pro. The NBA All-Star Game is scheduled in Indianapolis next month.*

Alpine skiing

It uses skis with fixed-heel bindings, unlike others used in cross-country, ski touring or ski jumping. Alpine is capitalized because it refers to the Alps mountain range in Europe.

Alpine ski races include the downhill, slalom and super G.

AstroTurf/FieldTurf

AstroTurf was a trademarked term for artificial grass that was a popular playing surface in the 1970s and '80s. The term was replaced in the 2000s by FieldTurf, which is also a trademarked term for artificial grass. FieldTurf is the term that should be used now.

athletic director

Lowercase when used in front of a name.

auto racing

Formula 1 is an open-wheel racing league, primarily based in Europe. Use *F1* on second reference.

IndyCar is a U.S.-based open-wheel racing league, most famously known for the annual Indianapolis 500 race.

NASCAR, less commonly known as the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, is a U.S.-based closed-wheel racing league. NASCAR can be used on first reference. The

group's top-tier league is the *NASCAR Cup Series*. NASCAR also runs the *NASCAR Xfinity Series*, which is the tier below the Cup Series, and the *NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series*, which is considered a tier below the Xfinity Series. Use the full name for each tier when discussing multiple classes in a story.

baseball

Key terms: baseline, bullpen, center field (n.), center-field (adj.), center fielder, designated hitter (DH on second reference); doubleheader, fastball, first baseman, foul line, ground-rule double, home plate, home run, knuckleball, left-hander, left field (n.), left-field (adj.), left fielder, line drive, lineup, major league(s) (n.), major league (adj.), major leaguer (n.), outfielder, pinch hit (v.), pinch-hit (n., adj.), pinch hitter (n.), pitchout, playoff (n., adj.), postseason, putout (n.), right field (n.), right-field (adj.), right fielder, rundown (n.), shoestring catch, shortstop, shut out (v.), shutout (n., adj.), squeeze play, strike zone, twi-night doubleheader.

Homer is an acceptable substitute for home run. *Dinger* is considered slang for home run and should be avoided.

RBI, run(s) batted in: Use RBI on first reference when a batter drives in a singular run. Use RBIs when multiple runs score. Example: *Joe Smith had an RBI on three doubles. Tim Jones added three singles and three RBIs.*

Numbers: For most stats and figures, spell out numbers below 10. For game scores and some pitching and hitting statistics, numerals should be used. Example: *They stood for the seventh-inning stretch. Pete Alonso hit his 11th home run of the season. The pitcher's record is 7-2 with a 3.20 ERA after last night's 3-0 win. Joey Votto hit .324 with a .424 on-base percentage when he won the NL MVP in 2010.*

basketball

List of key terms: alley-oop, backboard, backcourt, baseline, fast break, field goal, field-goal shooting, foul line, free throw, free-throw shooting, frontcourt, full-court press, goaltending, half-court press, halftime, hook shot, jump ball, jump shot, layup, man-to-man, midcourt, playoff (n., adj.), up-tempo.

Numbers: Spell out quarters and halves. Use numerals for figures greater than 10 and dimensions. Examples: *first-half lead, 3-pointer, three-point play, 6-foot-1 guard, 7-1 center.*

National Basketball Association (NBA is OK on first reference) is the major men's professional basketball league, comprised of teams from Canada and the United States, but team rosters cross global boundaries. NBA teams who qualify for postseason play advance to NBA playoffs. (See entry for *NBA Finals*)

Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA is OK on first reference) is the major women's professional basketball league, comprised of teams from Canada and the United States, but team rosters cross global boundaries. WNBA teams who qualify for postseason play advance to WNBA playoffs.

betting odds

Odds can be described as fractional odds or moneyline odds, which is the preferred method for sports betting in the United States. Fractional odds use numerals and a hyphen. The word “to” can be used but should be hyphenated. Moneyline odds use a “+” or “-” before numerals. Examples: *The odds were 3-1 against;* *The odds were +300 against them;* *The Eagles won despite having 3-to-1 odds against them.*

Most sports betting is fixed-odds betting, where the bettor knows at the time the wager is placed what the earnings will be should they win the bet as the odds are set. Types of bets include moneyline (where a bettor simply picks the winner of a contest), spread (where the bettor picks if a team or player will cover a given number of points) and over/under (where a bettor picks if the total score of a contest will be above or below a given number).

A team that is expected to win is called the favorite and will have low odds, not that the likelihood of the team winning is unlikely, but because the payout from such a bet will not be as lucrative. The team that is expected to lose is called the underdog and will have higher odds.

A cover is when a team covers the spread of points that is predetermined. A “-” in front of a number means a team is favored to win and must do so by more than the given amount to cover the spread. A “+” in front of a number means that team is the underdog and must lose by less than the given number to cover. Examples: *The Chiefs were moneyline favorites at -150 in the Super Bowl. The Nets failed to cover the +5.5-point spread when they lost 96-90. A last-second touchdown for the Packers hit the over at 48.5 in their 27-24 win.*

Example: *Chiefs -1.5 vs. Eagles; The Chiefs are 1.5-point favorites.* If they win by two or more points, they will have covered the spread. The Eagles are 1.5-point underdogs and must lose by one point, tie or win to cover the spread, depending on which side of the game a bettor picked.

Pari-mutuel betting, or pool betting, is mostly associated with horse racing. When a bettor places a bet, the odds can continue to shift after the wager is made and any payout won’t be known until after the contest is over.

bobsledding, luge

Ice sports primarily seen during the Winter Olympics. Classify events as two-man or two-woman bobsled, four-man bobsled, women’s monobob, men’s luge, women’s luge.

boxing

Sanctioning bodies include World Boxing Association, World Boxing Council, World Boxing Organization and the International Boxing Federation. Spell out the organization’s name on first reference.

Knock out (v.), knockout (n.) A knockout occurs when a fighter is knocked to the canvas and fails to get back on his feet within a 10-second count from the referee. If a fighter chooses not to continue with a fight, it is not considered a technical knockout, or TKO, by most states and regulatory bodies. It is considered a stoppage. Example: *Sugar Ray*

Leonard stopped Roberto Duran in 1980 when Duran walked away in the eighth round, saying “No más,” or “no more,” to the referee.

Outpointed: When a decision in a fight is determined by the judges’ scorecards, the fighter with the most points wins. Thus, *the winner outpointed their opponent*. Not outdecisioned.

championship game

Lower case both words. *Examples: The Kansas City Chiefs won their third straight AFC championship game to advance to Super Bowl 59. The Philadelphia Eagles won the NFC championship for the second time in three years.*

chronic traumatic encephalopathy

A neurodegenerative disease associated with repeated head trauma. Cases are most likely to be found in football players, especially offensive linemen, defensive linemen and linebackers. Lowercase on first reference. *CTE* on second reference. Living players can show symptoms. Confirmation of the disease requires post-mortem examination of the brain.

coach, head coach

Use coach to identify head coach. For assistants, use their hired titles ... *offensive coordinator, hitting coach, pitching coach, etc.* Assistant is fine on second reference. (See also: athletic director)

collective nouns

Nouns that are made up of multiple people or entities that form a singular unit. These nouns take a singular form. Example: *Iowa is hoping to end its losing streak. The team won its final game.*

Team nicknames not ending in “s” (Jazz, Magic, Thundering Herd, Cardinal) are plural. Example: *The Jazz hope to end their losing streak. Stanford hopes to win the ACC Tournament. The Cardinal hope to win the ACC Tournament.*

We do not adhere to the British use of plural nouns for collective teams. Use singular verbs instead. (Example: *Chelsea FC is a Premier League team* as opposed to the British *Chelsea FC are...*) Use the plural verb when using a plural nickname. (Example: *The Blues are...* when referring to Chelsea FC by its nickname.)

College Football Playoff

System devised to determine the national champion in NCAA Division I FBS college football. The first playoff was in 2014 as a four-team event. The playoff expanded to 12 teams in 2024.

Spell out on first reference. *CFP* is fine for subsequent references. Make sure it is “Playoff” and not “Playoffs.”

College World Series, Women's College World Series

The NCAA brands the men's baseball championship tournament in Omaha, Nebraska, as the Men's College World Series. Men's College World Series and College World Series are both acceptable. Spell out on first reference. MCWS and CWS are fine on second reference and in headlines.

The Women's College World Series is the NCAA softball championship tournament held in Oklahoma City. Spell out the name of the tournament on first reference. WCWS is fine on second reference and in headlines.

cross-country

Running sport that should be hyphenated in all uses. XC in headlines OK.

decathlon

In athletics, the 10 events are: 100 meters, 400 meters, 1,500 meters, 110-meter hurdles, long jump, high jump, pole vault, discus, shot put and javelin. The athlete with the highest total score after the 10 events is declared the winner. Athletes earn points based on their performance relative to predetermined benchmarks (times recorded or maximum distances achieved per event).

diving

Olympic water sport that involves acrobatics while leaping into the water from a springboard or platform base at set heights.

draft

Lowercase unless used as part of a specific league event. *2025 NFL Draft; WNBA draft. MLB draft.* Example: *Bryce Harper (College of Southern Nevada) was the first overall selection by the Washington Nationals in the 2010 MLB Draft.*

FBS

Football Bowl Subdivision. FBS is OK on first reference.

Member conferences and affiliated teams include: American Athletic (AAC), Atlantic Coast (ACC), Big 12, Big Ten, Conference USA (C-USA), Mid-American (MAC), Mountain West (MWC), Pac-12, Southeastern (SEC), Sun Belt (SBC), and independents (Notre Dame and Connecticut). (Note: Above members and conferences subject to change each season.)

Considered the top tier of NCAA Division I college football and formerly called Division I-A. FBS teams play in postseason bowl games. The CFP system determines the national champion in FBS.

FCS

Football Championship Subdivision. FCS acceptable on first reference.

Considered the lower tier of NCAA Division I college football, formerly known as Division I-AA. The champion is determined in a postseason tournament (single-elimination).

Member leagues include: Big Sky, Big South-OVC, CAA, Ivy League, MEAC, MVFC, NEC, Patriot, Pioneer Football League, Southern, Southland, SWAC, UAC. The Ivy League and SWAC don't participate in FCS postseason tournament.

FIFA

Federation Internationale de Football Association. The governing body of international soccer. Hosts World Cup for men and women every four years. FIFA is fine on first reference and in headlines.

first quarter, first-quarter

Hyphenate when used as a compound modifier.

Examples: *The Wildcats scored 14 points in the first quarter. Jerry Rice scored a second-quarter touchdown.*

football

Key terms: ball carrier, end line, end zone, fair catch, field goal, fourth-and-1, fullback, goal line, goal-line stand, goalpost, halfback, handoff, kick off (v.), kickoff (n., adj.), out of bounds (adv.), out-of-bounds (adj.), place kick, place-kicker, playoff (n., adj.), quarterback, runback, running back, tailback, 10-yard line, touchdown, wide receiver, minicamp, OTAs (organized team activities on first reference).

Examples: *He ran 85 yards for the winning touchdown, dodging an opponent at the 10-yard line. The Wildcats improved their record to 10-2 after the 21-14 win over the Panthers.*

gender references

Don't expect that an event's name defaults to meaning it's the men's event when both men and women participate. Specify the *men's NCAA Tournament* or *women's World Cup*. It should be the *men's college basketball poll* and *women's college basketball poll* rather than just college basketball poll.

golf

Key terms: birdie, bogey, double-bogey, eagle, hole-in-one, par, under par, two strokes under par, green fee (not greens fee).

Four professional men's majors include: Masters or Masters Tournament (the Masters on second reference), U.S. Open, PGA Championship and The British Open (a U.S. reference; the British call it The Open Championship.) The Players Championship (The Players on second reference) is considered men's pro golf's unofficial fifth major. Five professional women's majors are: Chevron Championship, PGA Championship, U.S. Open, Evian Championship and The Women's Open.

Number examples: *A 5 handicap; Joe Smith parred the 17th hole to win the match 2 and 1 (he was up 2 holes with only 1 left to play). He played the round in 2 under, not He played the round in 2-under-par.*

Pro golf associations: LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association), PGA (Professional Golfers' Association of America), PGA Tour Champions (formerly the Senior PGA Tour), LIV

Golf (competing tour funded by the Public Investment Fund, the sovereign wealth fund of Saudi Arabia, founded in 2021 and beginning play in 2022. “LIV” refers to the Roman numerals for 54, the number of holes played at LIV Golf events.).

Ryder Cup, biennial competition between 12 of the top men golfers from the United States vs. 12 of the top men golfers from Europe.

Solheim Cup, biennial competition between 12 of the top women golfers from the United States vs. 12 of the top women golfers from Europe.

In neither case use *Top 12 golfers* because they are the subjective selection of the captain.

Grey Cup

Championship game for the Canadian Football League.

Group of Five

College teams from American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West and Sun Belt. Primarily used for college football. Pac-12 members can be considered part of the group.

gymnastics

Men’s events: floor exercise, pommel horse, rings, vault, parallel bars, horizontal bars

Women’s events: vault, uneven bars, balance beam, floor exercise

handball

Olympic team sport where players advance and pass the ball only using their hands. Also, a game in the United States. where players use their hand to hit a ball against a wall.

Can also be a soccer term for a violation when a non-goaltender touches the ball with their arm or hand.

hockey

Key terms: blue line, faceoff (n., adj.), goalie, goaltender, goal line, goal post, hat trick (when one player scores three goals in a game), penalty box, playoff (n., adj.), power play, power-play goal, red line, shootout, short-handed, slap shot, two-on-one break.

National Hockey League (NHL is OK on first reference) is the major men’s professional hockey league comprised of teams from Canada and the United States, but team rosters cross global boundaries. NHL teams who qualify for postseason play advance to Stanley Cup playoffs. *(See entry for Stanley Cup Final).*

The Professional Women’s Hockey League (PWHL is OK on first reference) is the major women’s professional hockey league comprised of teams from Canada and the United States, but team rosters cross global boundaries.

horse races

Capitalize formal race names like Kentucky Derby (or the Derby on second reference), Preakness Stakes, Belmont Stakes. Winning those three races in one year completes the Triple Crown.

horse racing

Broodmare: A female horse used for breeding

Colt: A male thoroughbred horse 4 years old and under, or a standardbred 3 years of age

Filly: A female horse under the age of 5

Furlong: One-eighth of a mile. Race distances up to 7 furlongs are measured in furlongs.

Races that are one mile or longer are listed in miles.

Half-mile pole: The pole on the racetrack that marks one-half mile from the finish. All distances are measured from the finish line.

Horse: A male horse over 4 years old

Long shot (two words): A horse with extremely high odds and is unlikely to win. *Mine That Bird won the 2009 Kentucky Derby as a long shot at 50-1 odds.*

Mare: A female horse 5 years and older

Stallion: A male horse used for breeding

Capitalize the names of horses.

Injury designations

Professional team sport athletes, when out with an indefinite injury, now go on the IL (injury list), as opposed to the former name for it, the DL (disabled list). When referring to injury status, it is *injury list* on first reference and can refer to the status *day to day* on second reference. Example: *Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts is on the injury list, where his status for the wild-card game Sunday is day to day.*

lacrosse

Contact team sport played with sticks. Spell out in all references. Do not use “Lax” in headlines or body copy.

marathon

A running race that measures 26.2 miles.

March Madness

The name given to the annual NCAA men’s and women’s basketball tournaments.

MCL

MCL is the acronym for the *medial collateral ligament* in the knee. Spell out in first reference. Use *MCL* in subsequent references and in headlines.

measured results

With timed events, write out the time on first reference; shorten on subsequent references.

Example: *Sebastian Coe finished in 3 minutes, 38.41 seconds to win the gold medal.*

Teammate Steve Ovett won the bronze in 3:39.12.

For distance events, write out the length on first reference; shorten on subsequent references. Example: *Tara Davis won the gold medal with a long jump of 23 feet 3 inches. Teammate Jasmine Moore won the bronze with a jump of 22-9*

mixed martial arts

A full-contact fighting sport based on striking and grappling, incorporating techniques from various combat sports from around the world. MMA is acceptable on second reference. Sometimes is used interchangeably with UFC (the Ultimate Fighting Championship). UFC is the most famous MMA league but is not the entire sport of mixed martial arts.

name, image and likeness (NIL)

Mechanism for college athletes to get compensated for any commercial use of their name, image or likeness. California adopted the first such legislation to pay college athletes in 2019. More states passed similar bills after the Supreme Court decision in *NCAA v. Alston* (2021) that rejected the NCAA's long-held claims that college sports are for amateurs and thus athletes could not receive compensation. NIL is fine on second reference and in headlines.

NBA Finals; WNBA Finals

The series to determine the National Basketball Association and Women's National Basketball Association champions, played by the teams advancing from the conference finals. The formal name is plural, unlike the NHL's Stanley Cup Final.

NCAA

National Collegiate Athletics Association, headquartered in Indianapolis. NCAA is fine on first reference and in headlines.

New Year's Six

Rose Bowl, Orange Bowl, Peach Bowl, Cotton Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, Sugar Bowl. These are the most prestigious bowl games in college football and make up the CFP quarterfinals and semifinals. Sponsors' names should not be used.

Olympics

Capitalize references to the quadrennial athletic events for summer and winter sports. Lowercase the games on second reference. Do not use Roman numeral designators for specific Olympics.

Examples: *The Summer Olympics will be in Los Angeles in 2028. Simone Biles was the star of the last Olympic Games in Paris. The council will vote on where the games will be held next.*

overtime, double overtime, triple overtime

OT is fine in headlines and on second reference.

MLB games that are tied after 9 innings go into extra innings. NFL, NBA, MLS and NHL games tied after regulation play then go into overtime to determine a victor. Once past the first extra session, the overtimes are called double or triple, but change to numbers after that. Example: *The Capitals won in triple overtime in Game 1, then won in four overtimes in Game 2.*

Regular-season NHL games that remain tied after an overtime go into a shootout, where each team chooses five different players to attempt to score on the opposing goaltender as the teams alternate attempts in a best of 5 format. Playoff games play full periods until one team scores a goal.

MLS games that remain tied after an overtime go into penalty kicks, with the same format as NHL shootouts.

Paralympic Games

Series of events similar to the Olympics for athletes with disabilities, including physical and intellectual. Governed by the International Paralympic Committee. Paralympic Games alternate between summer and winter events every two years and take place shortly after the Olympic Games in the Olympic host city.

pingpong

Preferred term is table tennis. Ping-Pong is a trademark term.

power conference

The premier leagues in NCAA Division I sports, primarily for football and men's and women's basketball. The ACC, Big 12, Big Ten and SEC are considered power conferences.

racket

Term for the equipment used in tennis, badminton and racquetball. Not racquet.

record

Use as a noun when describing a mark that surpasses others. Don't say something is a new record. Example: *On Sunday, Tom Brady set the NFL record for career touchdown passes (580), breaking the mark formerly held by rival Peyton Manning.*

rowing

Events at Olympics for men and women: single sculls, double sculls, lightweight double sculls, quadruple sculls, coxless pairs, coxless fours, eights. Coxless fours and eights can be referred to as four and eight. Example: *The United States won bronze in the men's double sculls during the last Olympics. The United States won gold in the men's four for the first time since the 1960 Games in Rome. The women's eight race will be competitive.*

series

Lower case unless part of a formal title. Example: *The Reds will play a series against the Cubs this weekend. The Reds will play in the World Series.*

softball

Played from the scholastic to the professional level, primarily by girls then women. The Athletes Unlimited Softball League (AUSL is OK on first reference) is the professional women's softball league in the United States.

soccer

List of terms: coach (not manager like in the United Kingdom), defender, forward, friendly (or exhibition game), goalkeeper, handball, midfielder, offside, penalty area or penalty box (not just box), sideline, striker

Associations: Bundesliga (top tier in German pro soccer), Champions League (annual competition for the top teams in the first tier of European leagues, hosted by UEFA), CONCACAF (Confederation of North and Central American and Caribbean Football; acronym is fine on first reference and in headlines. Spell out name of organization somewhere in story), CONMEBOL (Confederacion Sudamerica de Futbol; Use acronym instead of spelling out Spanish name. Can also refer to the group as South America's governing body), FIFA, Major League Soccer (the top men's pro league in the United States), English Premier League (top pro league in England, can be called Premier League but make sure it's clear. The top league in Scotland is also called the Premier League), Serie A (the top division of pro soccer in Italy), and Union of European Football Association (UEFA is fine on first reference and in headlines).

The NWSL (National Women's Soccer League) is the women's pro league in the United States. The Women's Premier League is the highest level of professional women's soccer in England.

Special Olympics

A global organization that gives people with non-physical impairments the chance to train with and compete in individual or team sports against fellow athletes with similar abilities. The other goals of the organization include promoting acceptance, understanding and inclusion for its athletes.

The organization is recognized by the International Olympic Committee and holds World Games every two years while alternating between summer and winter events like the Olympics.

Stanley Cup Final

The series to determine the National Hockey League champion, played by the teams advancing from the conference finals. The name is singular, unlike the NBA Finals.

Super Bowl

See entry in main style guide section.

swimming

Use distance and system of measurement (meters, yards) in first reference.

Timing: Winners are determined in minutes, seconds, tenths of seconds and hundredths, if needed. Spell out minutes and seconds on first reference. Additional times should use numerals.

Example: *Michael Phelps won gold in the 200 meter freestyle at the 2008 Olympics with a then-world record time of 1 minute, 42.96 seconds. South Korea's Park Tae-Hwan took silver in 1:44.85.*

team nicknames, offensive

See entry in main style guide section.

tennis

Key terms: deuce, fault, double fault, game, love, match, point, racket, set Numbers: Both players start a game at 0-0. The first point scored by a player is scored as 15; the second point is 30; the third point is 40. Four points wins a player the game. If players are tied at 40-40, or 3 points apiece, it's called a deuce. A player wins a tie game once they have a two-point advantage. A match is determined by the number of sets won. In a best-of-three match (all women's and most men's matches), a player must be the first to win two sets. In a best-of-five match (used only in the Australian, French and US Open play, as well as Wimbledon), a player must win three sets. Associations: International Tennis Federation is the governing body of tennis around the world and runs the Olympic tournaments as well as the Davis Cup, Billie Jean King Cup and Hopman Cup. Association of Tennis Professionals is the governing body for men's professional tours. Women's Tennis Association is the governing body for women's professional tours. Men's and women's tennis play four majors each year (referring to them as grand slams is also acceptable). They are (in order): Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open (note there are no periods, in contrast with golf's U.S. Open, but consistent with the USTA's style for US Open as a proper name). Each has a major nation vs. nation team competition: For men, the Davis Cup; for women, the Billie Jean King Cup.

Tommy John surgery

Procedure to repair the ulnar collateral ligament in the elbow, a common injury for baseball pitchers. Tommy John pitched for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 1974 when he tore his UCL. Dr. Frank Jobe, the team physician, performed the first such surgery on John. In 1976, John became the first player to successfully return from the surgery, eventually winning 20 games in 1977.

Best to include full phrase. UCL is OK to use on second reference and in headlines.

Example: *John Smoltz, who underwent Tommy John surgery ahead of the 2000 season, became the first player to have the procedure and be elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame.*

track and field

Winners are determined by time or distance depending on the event.

Timing: Spell out minutes and seconds on first reference. Additional times should use numerals. Example: *American Cole Hocker took gold at the Paris Olympics, winning the 1,500-meter dash in 3 minutes, 27.65 seconds. Josh Kerr from the United Kingdom took silver in 3:27.79.*

Distances: For running events, most use metric units in Olympic settings. For high school events, most running events will be in U.S. standard units like yards. Clearly state the unit of measurement in the first reference, subsequent references can just state the distance of the event. The same rule applies for hurdles and relay races. Example: *Usain Bolt won the final in the men's 100-meter dash. He then won the final in the men's 200.*

For field events, numerals should be used, especially when fractions are involved. When using U.S. units, 25 1/2 stands for 25 feet, one-half inch; 22-3 1/2 stands for 22 feet, 3 1/2 inches. Examples: *Ryan Crouser of the United States won gold in the shot put with a distance of 22.9 meters. The world record in the shot put is 77-3 1/2 feet.*

transgender athletes

Do not publish a person's deadname (their name before transitioning). Use the pronouns the subject wishes to use. If unsure, just ask the subject, like you would clarify a person's title and name spelling. This indicates your care for these details and normalizes the practice of asking for pronouns. Consult an editor when covering transgender athletes. There are plenty of resources, both written and via colleagues, to ensure we're covering with nuance and sensitivity. (See: *Gender and Sexuality Issues chapter*)

Ultimate Fighting Championship

Spell out on first reference. UFC is OK on second reference and in headlines. See *mixed martial arts*. When referencing specific events, use of official titles like *UFC56* is acceptable on first reference.

untracked

In horse racing, it means to remove a horse from an event.

In recent years, the term has become slang for a player breaking out of a slump.

Try to avoid the term with less-confusing language such as *getting back on track* or *getting out of a slump*.

volleyball

Team sport where the object is to be the first team to win three sets in a five-set match, as is traditional in international and U.S. college play. High schools typically play three-set matches. Sets are played to a score of 25 points. If a match is tied, the deciding set is played to 15 points.

weightlifting

Governed by the International Weightlifting Federation.

Classes for competitors are determined by body mass. Competitors will then perform the "Olympic lifts," called a snatch and clean and jerk, at the highest weight possible. Both

lifts must be completed to win. Failure to do so means a competitor receives an “incomplete” instead of a final total score.

World Athletics

Governing body for international track and field and running events. Formerly known as the International Association of Athletics Federations.

wrestling

Olympic wrestling is comprised of two kinds: Greco-Roman wrestling and freestyle wrestling.

In Greco-Roman, there are prohibitions on holding below the waist. This results in “throws” being a major way to score points. A throw is when a wrestler grabs their opponent, lifts them off the ground and is able to throw them onto the mat. Some ways a match can be won: by a fall (also known as a pin), on technical superiority (winning the most points in a match) or by decision (when neither wrestler has an advantage in points, other factors are then calculated).

In freestyle wrestling, competitors are allowed to utilize legs in offense or defense, unlike in Greco-Roman.

High school and collegiate wrestling use the rules of folkstyle wrestling, which emphasizes control over an opponent on the mat instead of the throws that are major ways to score points in Olympic styles of wrestling.

yachting

Team event involving sailing vessels that use sails as the main means of propulsion and that are at least 33 feet in length.

America’s Cup is the most famous yachting and sailing match race that began in 1851. Not to be confused with Americas Cup, which was a golf tournament in the 1950s and 60s involving amateur teams from the United States, Canada and Mexico.



DISABILITY ISSUES

able-bodied

Refers to someone without a physical disability. Consider the use of *nondisabled* instead, while adhering to the language the source uses to refer to themselves.

afflicted with, stricken with, suffers from, victim of

Avoid using these and other such terms to introduce a disability in a story unless it's relevant. Most of the time, simple and neutral language is sufficient: "She has Ehlers Danlos syndrome" or "He has muscular dystrophy."

albinism, albino

A genetic condition resulting in lack of pigmentation in a person's body, considered a disability by some because of eye and vision problems that can occur. Refer to *a person with albinism*, not *an albino*, unless the person prefers that.

amputation, amputee

Removal of a limb or digit. Consult with the subject of the story to find out if they prefer the term *amputee* or *person with an amputation*.

Asperger's syndrome

A diagnosis outdated since 2013, when it was folded into autism spectrum disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. Autism advocates suggest avoiding this term both because it is no longer a diagnosable condition and because the man after whom it's named has been implicated in eugenics schemes perpetrated by the Nazi party.

autism, autism spectrum disorder, autistic

A neurodevelopmental disorder that can result in difficulties with communication, sensory processing, social interactions and other areas of daily life. As with mental health, mention a person's diagnosis only if relevant and from a source who actually knows. Unless impossible, consult with the person in question to determine if they (not their parents, spouse or caregivers) prefer *autistic person* or *person with autism*. Avoid labels like *high-* or *low-functioning* in favor of saying the person has *low* or *high support needs*.

bipolar disorder

A clinical mental illness, formerly "manic depression," characterized by extreme mood shifts, from "manic" elation and hyperactivity to low-energy depression and hopelessness.

Do not refer to someone as bipolar, instead they have bipolar disorder, and only when relevant.

blind, legally blind, limited vision, low vision, partially sighted, visually impaired

Legally blind refers to someone whose visual acuity is 10/200 or less even with glasses or corrective lenses. In general, *blind* or *legally blind* is used for people with complete or almost complete vision loss. Those with a lesser degree of vision loss may prefer terms such as *low vision* or *partially sighted*. Check with the source on what terms they prefer.

Deaf, deafness, hearing loss

A person who is *deaf* cannot hear. A person who is *hard of hearing* can hear with difficulty. The line between *deaf* and *hard of hearing* is fuzzy; a person who is *deaf* may still be able to hear very loud things like a fire alarm or gunshot. Avoid using *hearing impaired*. Check with the source to see what terms they prefer and, if possible, ask if the person or group uses identify-first language (deaf athlete) or person-first language (athlete who is deaf). When referring to the shared community and culture influenced by deafness the D in *Deaf* is capitalized. A person who is blind and deaf is deafblind, one word.

disabled, disability

A mental or physical condition, disorder, disease or syndrome that adversely affects someone's senses, movements or activities. *Disabled person* and *person with a disability* are both acceptable phrasings; check with the source and use the terms they use for themselves. Use *disabled* to describe the parking spaces and bathroom stalls.

dyslexia, dyslexic

Dyslexia is a learning disability characterized by problems connecting speech sounds with letters and words. Symptoms can include trouble reading, spelling, pronouncing and processing words. Only reference if relevant to the story. Ask people how they want to be described: Some prefer people-first language, such as "person with dyslexia" while others might prefer "dyslexic."

interpreter, signer

Use *interpreter* only for those who have qualified as interpreters. For others communicating through American Sign Language, use *signer*.

person-first language

Confer with the subject of the story to find out if they prefer person-first language or not. For example, some may prefer "person with autism," while others prefer "autistic person." Check individual style entries for exceptions, as with *albinism/albino*.

wheelchair use

Don't mention a disability unless it is relevant, and it is better to be specific. Don't say *confined to a wheelchair* or *wheelchair-bound*. Instead, say a person *uses a wheelchair*.





GENDER AND SEXUALITY ISSUES

As always, aim for accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener rather than relying on phrases whose definitions are in dispute.

Always confirm with a source what terms they use to describe their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, disability status, or other relevant information. Use those terms unless accuracy and clarity for the reader/viewer/listener requires additional information.

biological sex

Reference to a person's sex identified at birth. Use of the phrases "biological male" and "biological female" is acceptable in direct quotes and in writing by opinion staff, letters to the editor and outside voices. Flexibility in approach is permitted to ensure clarity for the reader/viewer/listener.

deadname

- (n) A name, typically but not always a birth name, no longer used by a trans person
- (v) The act of using that name against a trans person's will.

Do not publish a deadname without permission unless relevant to the story. For example, in a story that references actions/documents/filings connected to the former name, and as such could cause confusion, it is acceptable to use. Questions of relevance should be discussed with an editor.

Pronoun listings

The most common pattern for pronoun listings follows the subjective/objective format, e.g. "she/her," "he/him," "they/them." Use this pattern to indicate the pronouns a person uses if germane to the story. Some people also list a possessive form as a third pronoun, as in "she/her/hers" or "they/them/theirs"; this is usually not necessary in stories and for consistency not preferred. However, when a person uses neopronouns, spell out all three forms, as in "ze/hir/hirs," because readers may not otherwise know the declension of the pronouns.

To avoid confusing readers, do not compress multiple pronoun sets into a single format such as "she/they." Instead, if it is germane to the story, explain that the person uses more than one set of pronouns, for example: "Jo Smith uses he/him and they/them pronouns."

Writers should use the set of pronouns the subject or source chooses. When a person uses more than one set of pronouns and no preference is available, choose one set and use it consistently throughout the story; do not alternate.

They/them or other gender-neutral pronouns are acceptable when that is what a person uses. Reporters and editors can explain they/them pronouns in stories if doing so helps to

clarify who is speaking or otherwise informs the reader. A person's last name can be substituted. When covering the federal government, it's important to understand that the federal government (by executive order) recognizes two sexes: male (he/him) and female (she/her).

PrEP

Short for *pre-exposure prophylaxis*, a regimen of medication (pills or injections) prescribed to HIV-negative people to help prevent infection if exposed to the virus. Refers to the regimen, not the medication itself. PrEP is acceptable on second reference.

queer

Originally a pejorative term for gay people, now reclaimed by some in the LGBTQ+ community as either an individual identity or a broader term encompassing the general LGBTQ+ community. May be used to describe someone if they use it to describe themselves and in direct quotes when the speaker does not intend to harm.

transgender, trans

Relating to a person whose gender identity does not conform with their sex assigned at birth. *Trans* is acceptable. In breaking news stories that involve people who are or could be transgender, treat unconfirmed information about their gender identity as you would any other unconfirmed information.

The following resources are recommended for more details on reporting around these topics. Click the link to go there.

- [GLAAD MEDIA REFERENCE GUIDE](#)
- [NLGJA STYLEBOOK ON LGBTQ+ TERMINOLOGY](#)
- [TRANS JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION STYLE GUIDE](#)



NETWORK ETHICS & ACCURACY GUIDELINES

Facts-Forward Journalism

Summary: This section emphasizes accuracy and thoroughness in news gathering and reporting.

- Be accurate in gathering, reporting, and presenting news - with relevancy, persistence, context, thoroughness, balance and fairness in mind.
- Seek to gain understanding of the communities, individuals, and issues we cover to provide an informed account and context of activities.
- Hold editorials and opinion pieces to the same accuracy standards as news stories.
- Make sure when information is attributed to a source that the person quoted is in a direct position to know.
- Don't assume, don't guess. Verify all facts, big and small, and always be skeptical. Always be aware of motivations behind why that source is speaking out.
- Avoid loaded, opinionated or imprecise language (*don't use claimed instead of said; refuted should not be used when you mean responded*). Be wary of unwarranted superlatives. If someone states that something is the first, best, greatest, etc., verify that it is true and put descriptions in quotes attributed to the person who is saying it so that it is clear where it is coming from.
- Use equal care in writing headlines, captions, lead-ins, promotions, summary and any explanatory text. Never stretch beyond the facts of the story.
- Be especially careful with technical terms and statistics. Verify this content with the source or documents where practical and make it clear to the reader who is providing the information.

Correcting & Clarifying Errors

Summary: This section highlights the importance of being clear with readers when information needs to be corrected or clarified.

- Correct errors promptly and transparently.
- Consult with senior editors and legal counsel when necessary.
- When a concern about accuracy is received, first determine if an error was made. The reporter and the appropriate editor/platform manager/producer should confirm that a mistake was made, and the correction request should be reviewed by the most senior manager of that team.

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

- If the error appears egregious and/or if an outside attorney has contacted the newsroom about the error, then the news organization should contact its attorney or the Legal Department and the standards editor.
- A clarification is more appropriate than a correction when the facts are accurate, but the context of the information might lead readers to draw the wrong conclusion.
- Print correction style: A story on Page XX on (DATE) about (subject)...
- Corrections or clarifications should be worded in a manner that does not repeat the misinformation or go into detail about how the mistake occurred.

Example: A newsroom publishes a cover story about fatherhood and says John Doe is a divorced father. He's married. Instead of: A story said John Doe is divorced. He is married. (Repeats the error.) Say: A story on March 4 about fatherhood misstated John Doe's marital status. He is married. (Identifies what we got wrong and what we should have said instead.)

- Corrections and clarifications should be easy to find in the newspaper and online. Append to the top of the stories published digitally. Anchor them in the newspaper to a consistent page that readers are familiar with. Placement exceptions can be made with consultation of senior editors to avoid confusing the audience.
- For online content, we label explanations "**Corrections & Clarifications: Xxxxx**" when setting the record straight. The label "**Editor's note: Xxxx**" should be reserved for a major correction or problem with the story where a more detailed explanation is required. This should be approved by the most senior editor in the newsroom.
- Errors on social media and video should be corrected promptly, with an explanation of the correction (without repeating the error).
- In the event a mistake occurs on video/audio produced by a content partner, alert the partner of the error before making a final decision on whether to correct the record. Errors of common knowledge can be addressed immediately but alert the partner.
- For online photos, the appended correction/clarification information should follow the corrected text and should be italicized and placed in parenthesis. Example: Randy Jackson and Ryan Seacrest are American Idol holdovers. Mariah Carey, Nicki Minaj and Keith Urban are the newcomers. *(An earlier version of this photo information misidentified one of the show's new judges.)*
- If the foundation of the story is erroneous, or if the inaccuracy resulted from an egregious ethical violation, it may be best to correct the error with another story admitting the error. Any such case requires consultation with the Legal department, as does any case in which a legal vulnerability appears to exist, or a lawyer's letter of complaint has been received. This should be handled working with a senior newsroom editor.
- We do not remove archived material or "unpublish" content from our digital platforms, except in rare instances when simply correcting/clarifying information may not be enough. Any decision to take down a story should come only after a broader conversation with a top news leader in the newsroom. Some situations may involve consultation with the Legal department.

Using Confidential Sources

Summary: The use of anonymous sources should never be the default position. We must exhaust all reasonable efforts to find individuals willing to speak on the record.

The use of unnamed sources should be vetted by a senior newsroom editor at the director level or above to determine whether it is appropriate and necessary.

If a decision is made to use a confidential source, take the following steps:

- All facts and assertions, regardless of source, must be rigorously verified.
- Make sure the source has first-hand knowledge of the issue – did they attend the meeting? Personally review the document? Have direct involvement in the situation?
- Seek and consult a diverse range of sources to provide balance and context to your reporting.
- Whenever possible, rely on documented evidence and primary sources to support your reporting.
- Inform sources that their identity will be disclosed to a senior newsroom leader.
- Make an agreement with the source on how they will be identified so there are no surprises and make sure the identification is accurate. Push for the most information that can be used to describe the source – for example, a top company official who was on the phone call where the information was revealed.
- Do not go with a single unnamed source in a story. There may be exceptions such as a top government official giving a background briefing for a group of reporters on a highly sensitive issue.
- Get a full picture of why the person wants to remain anonymous. Real and imminent danger to the source's physical safety? Fear of reprisal that would jeopardize their employment or basic welfare? The information is crucial to the public understanding and unobtainable on the record? Consult with your editor on how to handle.
- Do not double dip by quoting a person as an unnamed source in a story and elsewhere in the same story including a quote from that same person by name.
- Ensure confidentiality agreements are clear and honored.
- Ensure your reporting provides sufficient context for readers to understand the full scope and implications of the information presented.

When considering publishing or using content that has anonymous sourcing from another newsroom, a wire service or through aggregating other news providers, make sure a senior editor approves bringing that content into your site. Everyone in the newsroom should be informed about which editors are authorized to approve unnamed sources.

- Hold managers who approve sourcing and the journalist working directly with the source accountable when unnamed sources are used. When a significant story to be published relies on a source who will not be named, it is the responsibility of the approving manager to confirm the identity of the source and to review the information provided. The manager must be fully comfortable with approving

the source, which for a potentially explosive story may mean talking to the source or even meeting them.

- The same principles apply to the use of confidential documents. It is not enough to know and sign off on the identity of the source of the documents. The approver must be satisfied that the documents are authentic and trustworthy and that chain of custody of the documents can be traced to their originators.
- Share the source's name verbally with the approving manager. Avoid email, text or other written communication to reveal the identity.
- Do not use anonymous criticism, praise and speculation.
- In most cases, paraphrase information provided to us confidentially – unless a direct or partial quote more accurately describes that information for the reader.
- The organization will not name the source unless compelled to do so by a court.
- Make sure both sides have the exact same understanding of the sourcing terminology used during the interview. The reporter should be very clear with the source on what the terms mean and how the information will be used.
- On-the-record means the person will be identified by name and title and the comments will be quoted.
- Off-the-record means the information will not be used in the story from that source. If similar information is uncovered from an entirely different source, then it will be used attributed to the other source.
- Help the audience evaluate the credibility of what the source has said or provided by explaining why an anonymous source is being used and why the source does not want to be identified. The approving manager should agree to that description in advance.
- Wire reports and other media reports that rely upon confidential sources should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the credibility of the media source and our own best practices.

No-Surprises Journalism

Summary: This section emphasizes the importance of being clear with the subject of the story on what will be reported, particularly if there are accusations of wrongdoing.

- Do not share drafts of your story before publication with anyone outside our news organization but run the facts and any accusations by the subject of the story and give them adequate time to respond.
- Every person or institution criticized in a story should be contacted, told what the story is reporting, and given adequate time to respond.
- If the criticisms or accusations are major, contact the person or a representative of the institution multiple times through multiple means (phone, text, email, DM).
- If after multiple tries there is no response, make clear in the story that multiple attempts were made to reach the person but without a response. If the person has previously commented on the criticism or allegations, add a line in the story saying previously they have said xyz on the issue.

USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

- A story with a reasonable expectation of reputational harm requires extra effort, including multiple requests for comment by phone, in person or in some cases by letter. Affected parties should be made aware of when such stories will be posted and how they will be portrayed.
- **No party should be surprised by our content.** We must use judgment on the timing of notification.
- For people who decline to comment, consult with your editor about how to represent that in copy. There is not one way to write this in a story because every situation is different, and it should be made clear what exactly the official is not commenting on.

Serving the Public Interest

Summary: This section focuses on being vigilant watchdogs and promoting understanding and civil discourse.

- Uphold First Amendment principles.
- Act as vigilant watchdogs of government and institutions.
- Seek solutions and expose problems to effect positive change.
- Provide public forums for diverse views.
- Encourage views that foster understanding and civil discourse.

Maintaining Independence

Summary: This section stresses the importance of remaining free from outside influences and conflicts of interest.

- Avoid outside interests, investments or business relationships that may compromise credibility.
- Disclose potential conflicts of interest to supervisors right away.
- Ensure neutral relationships with individuals and organizations seeking to influence the news.
- Do not support political campaigns or causes publicly through the display of bumper stickers, signs, pins, public/private donations, participation in demonstrations, petitions or in social media posts.
- Individual viewpoints that might cause readers to question our impartiality in news coverage should remain private. This principle does not apply to those who are paid to write and share opinion.
- Avoid conflicts of interest and improper obligations to news sources, newsmakers and advertisers.
- Clearly distinguish between advertising and editorial content - provide appropriate disclosures, exercise transparency and avoid actual or implicit commercial endorsements by our journalists.

Ensuring the Truth Principle

Summary: This section details practices for maintaining truthfulness in reporting.

- A reporter should always identify themselves by name and news organization and make clear that they are working on a story.
- Accurately attribute the work and thoughts of others used in a story.
- Do not use content from other sources verbatim unless it is in quotes, and again always attribute where the content came from.
- Plagiarism is a serious violation of journalistic standards. Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of someone else without full acknowledgment. It can involve copying an entire story, copying a sentence or two from another published work, or a writer presenting another person's interpretation of facts as their own. It can also include copying a quote without attribution.
- Information from another published work can be used with proper attribution, but every effort should be made first to independently confirm the information.

Conducting Investigative Reporting

Summary: This section provides guidelines for thorough and ethical investigative reporting.

- Involve multiple editors in planning and editing.
- Document information thoroughly.
- Give subjects of accusations a substantial opportunity to respond.

Aggressive, hard-hitting reporting is part of our accountability mission. Investigative reporting by its nature raises issues not ordinarily faced in routine reporting. Here are some suggested procedures to follow when undertaking investigative reporting:

- Involve more than one producer, editor, or coach at the early stages of planning and shaping coverage and in the editing of the stories, videos, and other content elements.
- Question continually the premise of the stories and revise accordingly.
- Document the information in stories to the satisfaction of the senior news executive.
- Make certain that care, accuracy and fairness are exercised in headlines, lead-ins, videos, photographs, interactives, presentation and overall tone. Make sure enough time is allowed for all the checks to be performed before publication.
- Make certain that subjects accused of wrongdoing are given an opportunity to answer accusations.
- Be careful about trading information with sources or authorities, particularly if it could lead to an impression that you are working in concert against an individual or entity.
- Scrutinize the motivations of sources used for the story and report that in the story. For example, this person has previously sued the other person.
- Maintain a regular practice for handling any information or notes used or not published related to the investigative pieces. Seek advice from a coach, and legal counsel as needed, on best practices.

- Make sure investigative stories are sent to the Legal department for review before publication.

Addressing problems

There may be times when coverage or conduct falls short of the principles outlined. When that happens, newsroom leaders will promptly weigh the nature and severity of circumstances to determine next steps. Additional guidance:

- Claims of egregious errors, such as plagiarism and fabrication, or actions that may cause serious harm to individuals or groups of individuals, should be shared as soon as possible, but no later than within 24 hours with their designated editor for review and next steps. This includes content situations that prompt public backlash or unwanted media attention.
- Some situations may involve input from human resources, legal and communications teams.

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NETWORK STANDARDS FOR CRIME REPORTING

Many standards for how crime is reported, and at what level, reside with the local newsroom. What might be a notable crime in Newark, Ohio, might never earn a mention in Detroit. But there are collective standards for crime reporting that we all share:

- We don't run booking mug shots unless the case involves a public official or involves a high-profile case.
- We don't name juveniles unless they are charged as an adult in a major crime.
- We properly identify authorities quoted in stories, or whose records are being cited (avoid vague “authorities said”).
- We do not print simple arrest record lists.
- We don't report on the criminal background of crime victims unless it is integral to the story.
- We don't run suspect descriptions unless they are specific enough to be useful. (See also: style guide criminal justice entries.)

If running a police blotter, we recommend limiting coverage to crimes where an individual has been charged (not just arrested); crimes relevant to the entire community; and crimes that will be followed with coverage through the court process.



PUNCTUATION

Punctuation is how we show the relationships between words, phrases and clauses when word order can't do it alone. If you find it difficult to determine the appropriate punctuation, it's likely the sentence is poorly constructed. Err on the side of caution, and recast the sentence in a way you can punctuate confidently. Direct spoken quotes can be prickly because correct punctuation requires a degree of interpretation by the hearer. If the sentence can't be punctuated confidently, it is best to paraphrase it in a way that can be. Punctuation is subjective, but unnecessary punctuation should be avoided. For questions about punctuation not addressed in this Style Guide, [the Online Writing Lab \(the Purdue OWL\)](#) at Purdue University is a useful source of information.

Ampersand (&)

Use in proper names and only if "&" – not "and" – is the correct part of the proper name (Ben & Jerry's, H&M, "Kenan & Kel") or in abbreviations in contexts where they are commonly understood, such as R&B (rhythm and blues) in an entertainment story, or R&D (research and development) in a business story.

Also use when quoting a written source such as online posts verbatim.

apostrophe

Use the apostrophe for omitted letters and figures: *I've*, *can't*, *rock 'n' roll*, *a ne'er-do-well*, *a '57 Chevy*, *the Roaring '20s*. (An apostrophe is not necessary in this construction, however: *the 1989-90 school year*.)

Use the apostrophe to form the plurals of a single letter or numeral: *the three R's*, *three A's*, *a B and two C's*, *the Oakland A's*, *they were all size 7's*.

But plurals of multiple-letter or numeral combinations do not take apostrophes: *three 747s*, *the ABCs*, *music from the '50s*, *they were all in their 40s*.

For other uses of the apostrophe, see the entry on "possessives."

brackets

Use brackets rather than parentheses within direct quotations to indicate when we are inserting or replacing information, including signaling a word has been changed for a grammatical fit.

Use brackets within parentheses, if needed, where parentheses would have otherwise been used (nested parenthetical information). When quoting written sources, such as online posts or government documents, use brackets where the source uses brackets.

colon

In general, capitalize the first letter after a colon only if it is a proper noun or if it is the start of a complete subject-and-verb sentence. Exceptions: In headlines, the first letter after a colon is *always* capitalized.

The most frequent use of a colon is at the end of a sentence to introduce lists, tabulations, texts and so forth. *There were three considerations: expense, time and feasibility.*

The colon also may be used for:

- **Emphasis** – *He had only one hobby: eating.*
- **Biblical citations** – *John 3:16.*
- **Dialogue, as in the coverage of a trial** –

Burger: What were you doing the night of the 19th?

Mason: That's irrelevant and immaterial.

- **Introducing quotations** – Introduce quotations of more than one sentence within a paragraph with the colon. Use it also to end all paragraphs that introduce a paragraph of quoted material. Quotations of one sentence within a paragraph should be introduced with the comma, not the colon.

Avoid double-colon constructions such as the following.

The court also ruled:

Libel: That journalists are ...

Desecration: That the flag ...

Colons go outside quotation marks.

comma

- **In a series** – Separate items in a list with commas. However, in a simple series, do not place a comma before the final conjunction: *The flag is red, white and blue.* Put a comma before the concluding conjunction in a series, however, if an integral element of the series requires a conjunction: *I had orange juice, toast, and ham and eggs for breakfast.* A series of independent clauses takes a comma before the conjunction: *George went to Yale, Sandra is an alumna of Stanford, and Regis graduated from Notre Dame.*
- **With equal adjectives** – When you have multiple adjectives that equally describe a noun, separate them with commas. A good test: If you can insert the word “and” between the adjectives without changing the meaning, they are equal in rank: *a thoughtful, precise manner; a dark, dangerous street.* However, don’t use a comma when the final adjective is part of a fixed phrase with the noun – essentially forming a single idea or unit: *a cheap fur coat* (the noun phrase is fur coat); *the old oaken bucket; a new, blue spring bonnet.*
- **With nonessential clauses and phrases** – Nonessential clauses and phrases should be set off with commas.
- **With introductory clauses and phrases** – Use a comma after an introductory phrase or clause to set it apart from the main part of the sentence: *After growing weary of New York’s frantic pace, he relocated to Dubuque.*

For short introductory phrases, the comma is often optional – as long as the sentence remains clear without it: *During the night he heard many noises*. If leaving out the comma would make the sentence harder to understand, it's best to include it: *On the street below, the curious gathered*.

- **With conjunctions** – When a conjunction such as *and*, *but* or *for* links two clauses that could stand alone as separate sentences, use a comma before the conjunction in most cases: *He was glad he had looked, for a man was approaching the house*. As a rule of thumb, use a comma if the subject of each clause is expressly stated: *We are visiting Washington, and we also plan a side trip to Williamsburg*. But do not use a comma when the subject of the two clauses is the same and is not repeated in the second: *We are visiting Washington and plan to see the White House*.
- **Introducing direct quotes** – To introduce a single-sentence quote within a paragraph, use a comma before the quotation. If you're introducing a quote that includes multiple sentences, use a colon.
- **Before attribution** – When a quote is followed by an attribution (like “she said” or “he replied”), use a comma at the end of the quote instead of a period. However, if the quote ends with a question mark or exclamation point, don't add a comma.
- Commas always go inside quotation marks.

dash

USA TODAY Network uses en dashes (aka short dashes) in all cases, not the em dash (long dash). The dash takes up more space than any other punctuation mark except the ellipsis (em dashes are actually longer than ellipses). When quoting written material, change long dashes to short dashes. Use the short dash in datelines following the location, before the lede. Use dashes sparingly but where appropriate in other situations:

- **Abrupt change** – Use en dashes to signal a sharp turn in the sentence or to create a strong, dramatic pause: *We will fly to Paris in June – if I get a raise. Gomez offered his plan – it was unprecedented – to raise record campaign funds*.
- **Emphasis** – Use dashes to set off parenthetical information (both essential and nonessential elements) when commas or parentheses do not provide enough emphasis. Remember, dashes *increase* emphasis and parentheses *lessen* emphasis.
- **Series within a phrase** – When a phrase that would typically be surrounded by commas includes a list that also uses commas, it's clearer to use en dashes to set off the entire phrase. This prevents confusion caused by too many commas in close proximity: *He listed the qualities – intelligence, creativity, drive – that he liked in employees*.
- **Attribution** – Use an en dash followed by a space before the name of an author or composer at the end of a quotation: *"Who steals my purse steals trash." – Shakespeare*.
- **Spacing** – Put a space on both sides of a dash in all uses except in some sports agate summaries.

Editors: The dash too often is used improperly where a comma or colon is called for. Its persistent overuse dilutes its impact.

ellipsis

Do not end an independent clause with an ellipsis, except to indicate that a sentence trails off before the end. Use an ellipsis to indicate omission of material within a quotation, omitting internal punctuation unless needed for clarity. If the material before an ellipsis replacing omitted material can be read as a complete sentence, end it with terminal punctuation (a period, question mark or exclamation point) and a space before the ellipsis regardless of whether the end of the original sentence was omitted or not. To make an ellipsis type three periods without spaces in between. The first period of an ellipsis is always preceded by a space and the last is always followed by a space. Example: “Men especially are becoming more conscious of self-care. ... I just think we need to make it more commonplace.” No ellipsis is necessary before or after a partial quote, but use an ellipsis if words are omitted anywhere between the first and last words of the partial quote. If a partial quote can be read as a complete sentence, capitalize the first word of the partial quote even if the word was not capitalized in the original text.

exclamation point

Don’t use exclamation points outside of quotations. Use your words to sell the emotion of a sentence or headline, not punctuation.

Within quotes, use the exclamation point to show a high degree of surprise, incredulity or other strong emotion only when not doing so would lead to a misrepresentation of how the quote was said. Avoid its overuse. As with other punctuation, retain the style of a written source being quoted directly.

Put the exclamation point inside quotation marks if it is part of the quoted material.

hyphen

Use sparingly, to clarify a phrase or word if it can be read in more than one way. Few “-ly” words need a hyphen to join them to another word. “There are no publicly available numbers on how much Michael Jackson made on his Dangerous-tour merch” means the same as “There are no publicly available numbers on how much Michael Jackson made on his Dangerous tour merch.” The hyphen is not needed.

- **To avoid ambiguity** – Use a hyphen whenever ambiguity would result if it were omitted: *The president will speak to small-business men.* (As opposed to small businessmen.) *He re-covered his leaky roof after he recovered from his illness.* *Chicago created a violent-crime task force.*
- **Compound modifiers** – Generally use hyphens to link all the words that express a single concept preceding a noun. Exceptions: the adverb *very*, most adverbs that end in *-ly* and some well-known phrases, such as *civil rights*, that would look odd hyphenated: *a first-quarter touchdown*, *a bluish-green dress*, *a full-time job*, *a well-known man*, *a better-qualified woman*, *a know-it-all attitude*, *a very good time*, *an easily remembered rule*, *civil rights leader*.

- **After a verb** – Word pairs that are hyphenated when placed before a noun often lose the hyphen when they appear after the noun in a sentence: *She's a full-time employee. She works full time.*
When a descriptive phrase that would normally be hyphenated before a noun appears after a form of the verb *to be*, the hyphen is typically still needed to maintain clarity: *The woman is quick-witted. The children are soft-spoken. The play is second-rate. He's not a well-known writer. His works are not well-known.*
- **Other compounds** – Hyphens are used to form two-thought compounds, such as *serio-comic* and *socio-economic*. If a pair of words is seen as such a unit (such as high school or civil rights) that a hyphen would look out of place, do not hyphenate. This applies to noun phrases describing dual heritage people. For example, the meaning of “Mexican American culture” is “the culture of Mexican Americans” and therefore needs no hyphen.
- **Suspensive hyphenation** – The form: *He received a 10- to 20-year sentence in prison.*

parentheses

Parentheses can be jarring to the reader and should be avoided when possible. When one is tempted to use parentheses, it is often a clue that a sentence is becoming contorted. Try recasting the sentence. If a sentence must contain incidental material, then commas or dashes usually are the preferable alternatives.

- **In features** – In feature writing, parentheses can be used to insert brief, supplementary information that would otherwise interrupt the flow of a sentence or require a separate one. For example: “She somehow convinces black market tech trader Joe (Alden Ehrenreich, ‘Solo: A Star Wars Story’) to let her raid his stash, seemingly because he’s lonely and she’s nice.” This avoids a more cumbersome construction like: “Joe, who is played by Alden Ehrenreich, known for ‘Solo: A Star Wars Story.’” They are also useful for providing details of when and where a show is on, star ratings and MPA ratings for movies, and other such information. Examples: “*The Bear*” and its return-to-form fourth season (now streaming on Hulu, ★★½ out of four); Springsteen’s voice veers from sandpapery growl (“Repo Man,” “Detail Man”) to silky twang (“Poor Side of Town,” “Silver Mountain”). In all cases, the goal is to enhance clarity and context without cluttering the prose.
- **Punctuation** – Place a period outside a closing parenthesis if what’s inside doesn’t constitute a complete sentence (such as this fragment). (For an independent parenthetical sentence such as this one, put the period before the closing parenthesis.) If a phrase within parentheses (this one is an example) might normally qualify as a complete sentence but is dependent on the surrounding material, it should not begin with a capital letter or end with a period.
- **Insertions in a proper name** – Use parentheses around information such as a state name added into a proper name: *The Huntsville (Alabama) Times*.

- **Not used** –Do not use parentheses set off information denoting a political figure's party affiliation and jurisdiction. Use commas. Do not use parentheses to introduce abbreviations immediately following a term that is spelled out on first reference. See the entry on acronyms/initialisms.

periods

Using periods with initials: Generally, use periods after initials in a name: W.E.B. Du Bois. But we place greater emphasis on how a person wants their name spelled: JD Vance, JB Pritzker. Don't end headlines with periods. This applies to single sentence headlines and multiple sentence headlines, regardless of whether they are digital or in print.

Examples:

**Americans are struggling to pay for health care. Here's why
Ford is recalling hundreds of F-150s. How to know if you're affected
Is AOC running for president? Not yet
Do people really eat iguana meat? They sure do.**

question mark

Interpolated questions inserted mid-sentence – *You told me – Did I hear you correctly? – that you started the riot.* Set off the question with en dashes. If the question is a full sentence, capitalize the first letter for emphasis, but lowercase if deemphasis is desired. If the question is not a complete sentence, lowercase its initial letter.

- Multiple questions – Use a single question mark at the end of the full sentence: *Did you hear him say, "What right have you to ask about the riot?"* (The two questions here are "*What right have you to ask about the riot?*" and *Did you hear him say it?* Only one question mark is needed, at the end of the quote that ends the sentence, within the quotation marks because the quote is a question.)
Did he plan the uprising, employ protesters and give the signal to begin? (In this example, elliptical expressions condense three questions – *Did he plan the uprising?* *Did he employ protesters?* and *Did he give the signal to begin?* – into one sentence.)
Or, to cause full stops and throw emphasis on each element, break into separate sentences: *Did he plan the uprising? Employ protesters? Give the signal to begin?* (The latter two questions are elliptical expressions that represent full sentences. Don't confuse them with sentence fragments, which are incorrectly treated as independent sentences that should be incorporated with adjacent words to make a complete sentence.)

Whether a question mark goes inside or outside quotation marks, depends on the meaning: *Did he really say "I am not a crook"?* *He asked, "How long will it take?"*

For SEO, question headlines do well. For print, headline writers should edit to make a statement not ask a question, because if the reader answers "no" or "I don't care," then they will stop reading.

quotation marks

Double quote marks around direct quotes in body copy, single quote marks around direct quotes in headlines (main heads, secondary heads or subheads). Books, songs, podcasts, TV series and movies use quotation marks in most cases. The Bible does not, and it is capitalized. The Quran and the Torah follow that same style. “How I Met Your Mother” does have quotes, as it is the title of a TV series.

- **Titles of books, poems, songs, etc.** – Use quotation marks around formal composition titles such as books, poems, songs, albums, television and radio shows, movies, operas, lectures, speeches and most works of art (except for sculptures). For other exceptions, see the separate entry on “Composition titles.”
- **Running quotations** – If a full paragraph of quoted material is followed by a paragraph that continues the quotation – and provided no attribution is repeated in successive paragraphs – do not put closing quote marks at the end of the first paragraph. Do, however, put opening quote marks at the start of the second paragraph. Continue in this fashion for any succeeding paragraphs, using closing quote marks only at the end of the quoted material. *As soon as you introduce fresh attribution, though, you must close the quote at the end of the paragraph, even if the speaker is the same.*

When a quotation beginning midway through a paragraph ends the paragraph and the quotation continues to a new paragraph, do not use closing quote marks at the end of the introductory paragraph if the quoted material constitutes a full sentence. However, if the quoted material is not a full sentence, use closing quote marks.

For example:

He said, “I am shocked and horrified by the incident.

“I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty.”

But:

He said he was “shocked and horrified by the incident.”

“I am so horrified, in fact, that I will ask for the death penalty.”

- **Unfamiliar terms** – A word or phrase being introduced to readers may be placed in quotation marks on first reference. Usually, the quotation marks may be dropped on subsequent references.
- **Quotes within quotes (within quotes)** – Use single quote marks around quoted material within quoted material (within double quotation marks). If a third level of quotation marks is needed, use double quotation marks for material quoted within single quotation marks:

She said, “I’m quoting his letter: ‘I agree with Kipling that “the female of the species is more deadly than the male,” but that doesn’t mean it’s a fixed law of nature,’ a comment he never clarified.”

Use a single mark followed immediately by a double mark if two quoted elements end at the same time. In print, a thin space may be used to separate the single quote mark from the double quote mark: *She said, “He told me, ‘I love you.’”*

In Presto, do not use a space between a single quote mark and a double quote mark

at the end of a sentence because it will often change what should be a closing quotation mark to an opening quotation mark when it is sent to print.

- **Not used** – Quotation marks are not used as part of the Q&A format, but they are used for any quoted material within a question or answer. Nor are quotation marks required when full texts, condensed texts or textual excerpts are published.
- **Placement of other punctuation** – 1) The period and the comma always go within the quotation marks. 2) The colon and the semicolon go outside the quotation marks. 3) The dash, the question mark and the exclamation point go within the quotation marks when they apply to the quoted matter only. They go outside otherwise.

Examples: *“Where is the ship going?” he asked. Have you ever read “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo”?* Sometimes it goes in between: *He asked her, “Have you ever read ‘The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo’?”*

semicolon

In general, use the semicolon for a greater separation of information than a comma conveys but less than what a period implies.

- **To clarify a series** – Separate elements of a series with semicolons if those individual elements include commas:
The committee includes Alex Rivera, a software engineer from Austin; Priya Desai, a marketing director based in Columbus, Ohio; Jordan Lee, a data analyst from Toronto; and Mei Chen, a product manager in San Francisco.
Note that the semicolon is used before the final *and* in such a series.
- **To link closely related independent clauses:** When a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but* or *for* is not present: *The package was due last week; it arrived today.* In other words, use a semicolon when joining two complete sentences that *could* be separated by a period, if for flow/voice/emphasis reasons you want to link them together. *I was 12 when my parents married; I didn’t realize until then that they weren’t.*

If a coordinating conjunction is present, use a semicolon before it only if extensive punctuation also is required in one or more of the individual clauses: *They pulled their boats from the water, sandbagged the retaining walls, and boarded up the windows; but even with these precautions, the island was hard-hit by the hurricane.* The semicolon goes outside quotation marks.



RELIGION

Great care needs to be taken when writing on religious topics to be accurate, fair and sensitive. There is good reason for the adage “Never talk about politics or religion in polite company.” And what’s more, politics and religion often intersect on topics such as abortion, same-sex marriage, social justice, etc. Journalists are not considered “polite company,” but we can keep it civil if we follow a few guidelines. Do not assume or ascribe a religion to someone. Include a person’s faith, religion, philosophy, etc., only when relevant. Take care to use the terms a specific religion or sect uses when reporting on them as long as it would not confuse our readers. Explain lesser known details, such as religious observations, that are germane to our reporting without being condescending. Don’t take sides in theological disputes. Attribute beliefs to followers of a faith tradition rather than stating them as facts. When referring to religious beliefs and practices, be respectful and inclusive. Avoid stereotypes of religious groups. For specific issues of style on religious topics that are not directly addressed in the USA TODAY Network Style Guide, please refer to the Religion Newswriters Association’s online [Religion Stylebook](#), and if not addressed there, Merriam-Webster.

African Methodist Episcopal Church vs. African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

These are two separate Protestant Christian denominations with similar roots, but distinct histories and organization. The African Methodist Episcopal Church may be referred to as AME or AME Church (no periods) after first reference. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church may be referred to as AME Zion Church (no periods) after first reference.

Antichrist

Capitalize when referring to the adversary of Jesus Christ in apocalyptic literature of the Bible. Lowercase other uses. Use the adjective form *anti-Christ* to describe opposition to Christ and his Gospel.

The apostles

This group refers to those sent out by Jesus to preach his message of salvation after his resurrection. They include the Twelve Disciples minus Judas Iscariot, plus Matthias, Judas’ replacement. Paul is also considered an apostle because of his direct commission by Jesus shortly after Paul’s conversion in Acts 9. Some traditions include others among the apostles. Because “the apostles” is less well-defined than the Twelve Disciples, do not capitalize apostles or spell out twelve before the word apostles. Capitalize apostle when used as a title before a name (the Apostle Paul, the Apostle John). See the entry on “Twelve Disciples.”

Catholic, Catholicism

Use *Roman Catholic Church*, *Roman Catholic* or *Roman Catholicism* in the first references to the Latin Church, the largest body of Christians, who accept the authority of the Bishop of Rome, aka the pope. Most subsequent references may be shortened to *Catholic*. But retain the *Roman* if the context requires a distinction between Roman Catholics and members of other denominations who often describe themselves as Catholic. Lowercase *catholic* when used to mean general or universal.

Christian Science

The church's official name is the *Church of Christ, Scientist*, but the *Christian Science Church* is acceptable in all references. *Christian Science* is the religion. A *Christian Scientist* is a follower of that religion, not to be confused with "a Christian scientist," which is a scientist who is a Christian.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The

Use the church's full name on first reference. Note the hyphen and the lowercase "d" that follows it. Do not refer to the church as the Mormon Church, but *LDS Church* is fine on subsequent references. Also, members of the church may be referred to as *Mormons* or as *Latter-day Saints*. In adjectival form, use *Mormon* (other than for the church), *LDS* and *Latter-day Saint*: *Mormon missionaries*, *Latter-day Saint doctrines*.

Community of Christ (formerly Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)

The *Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* changed its name to *Community of Christ* in 2000. The terms Mormon and Mormon Church are not properly applied to this (the largest) and other splinter groups of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When using Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in historical contexts, note the lack of the hyphen and the capitalized "Day."

devil, Satan

Lowercase the word *devil*, but capitalize *Satan*.

Episcopal, Episcopalian

Capitalize in reference to the *Episcopal Church*, the Protestant denomination representing the Anglican Communion in the United States. *Episcopal* is the adjective. Members of the Episcopal Church are *Episcopalians*. Lowercase *episcopal* in general references to bishops or government by bishops, when unrelated to the Episcopal Church.

Islam

The world's second-largest religion. The adjective is *Islamic*. The preferred term for its adherents is *Muslim*, not *Moslem*. Although the language of its holy book and prayers is

Arabic, not all Arabs are Muslims and not all Muslims are Arabs. Muslims worship in mosques and their holy day is Friday.

Beliefs: Muslims believe their holy book, the Quran, is the word of the one true God (Allah) as revealed to the prophet Muhammad. Islam also has many of the same traditions and beliefs as Judaism and Christianity.

Allah is the Arabic word for God and is used by Arabic-speaking Muslims, Christians and Jews. The word God should be used, unless the Arabic name is used in a quote written or spoken in English.

There are two main divisions within Islam. By far the largest is the *Sunni*. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and most other Arab nations have Sunni majorities. The *Shiite* group is in the majority only in Iran, though there are comparatively large Shiite communities in Lebanon and Iraq. Though the term Shiite is the preferred term in Western texts and journalism, it is important to understand that *Shia* is gaining popular usage globally. In recognition of this, an acknowledgement of this term may be used in stories (*Shiite Muslims, aka Shia Muslims*). The split between Sunni and Shiite stems from early arguments over successors to Muhammad.

Clergy: Titles vary according to group and country. Capitalize them when used before a name. Some of the most common are:

- **Ayatollah:** Used by Shiites, especially in Iran, to denote senior clergymen.
- **Grand Mufti:** Often the highest religious authority in a country, used mostly by Sunnis.
- **Hojatoleslam:** A rank below ayatollah.
- **Imam:** Often a title for the prayer leader at a mosque. Among Shiites it usually has a more exalted connotation.
- **Mullah:** Used in some regions (such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia) to denote a learned person or religious teacher.
- **Sheikh:** The spelling *sheikh* is preferred over sheik. It is broad term that can refer to a tribal leader, an elder, a religious scholar and just a title of respect. It is especially common among Sunnis and is used by clergymen much in the same manner *the Rev.* is used in Christendom. Its use and meaning vary by region, and it is often used in secular contexts.

Islamism, Islamist

Islamism is a political movement, rather than a religious term, and should not be treated as a subcategory of Islam. Islamism seeks to integrate Islamic principles into all aspects of government and society. An Islamist is an advocate of this political movement, but is not synonymous with Islamic fighters, Islamic militants, Islamic extremists, etc. All of those may or may not be Islamists. In referring to Islamists, specificity is always preferred, so if we can say which groups such Islamists are affiliated with, we should. Groups often categorized as Islamist include Hamas, Hezbollah and Muslim Brotherhood.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Note the plural use of the word in the name. Members may be called Witnesses on second reference.

Jewish congregations

The word *Jew* applies to both men and women. Do not use *Jewess*. When referring to individuals, consider using “Jewish person” instead, if the context or tone would make use of the noun “Jew” sound harsh or pejorative.

Most Jewish congregations are self-governing, without a centralized religious authority. The congregations and the buildings that house them are called *synagogues*. Some congregations use the term *temple*, but *synagogue* is the safest generic term. Capitalize either word when used as part of a formal name.

Beliefs: Beliefs among Jewish people vary widely. Some Jews believe that a divine kingdom will be established on Earth, marking the messianic era. Interpretations of the Messiah and messianic age differ across denominations and individuals. Many also view working toward a more just world as part of a divine mandate.

Jewish Scripture includes the *Tanakh*, comprising the *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The *Talmud*, a central text of Rabbinic Judaism, contains discussions and interpretations of Jewish law, ethics, customs, and history, and plays a key role in religious practice and thought.

In the United States, these are the three largest expressions of Judaism:

- **Reform Judaism:** Adherents often believe in a messianic age rather than a personal Messiah. While traditional laws and rituals may be reinterpreted, many Reform communities embrace elements of tradition in ways that reflect modern values.
- **Orthodox Judaism:** Adherents expect the coming of the Messiah, who is to be a descendant of King David. They are strict followers of biblical dietary laws, ritual forms and traditional holy days.
- **Conservative Judaism:** Adherents take a middle position, generally following traditional customs of diet and ritual but stressing that faith is not static and should adapt to the needs of contemporary culture.

Other expressions include Reconstructionist and Humanistic Judaism.

Clergy: The common formal titles in use are *rabbi*, for the spiritual leader of a congregation, and *cantor*, for the individual who leads the congregation in song. Capitalize before an individual's full name on first reference. On second reference use only the person's last name.

Mass

The ceremony is celebrated, said or sung. Uppercase *Mass*, but lowercase any preceding adjectives: *high Mass*, *low Mass*, *requiem Mass*.

In Eastern Orthodox churches, the correct term is Divine Liturgy, which is celebrated (the most common term), chanted or sung. “Said” is less commonly used for Divine Liturgy. Capitalize the term.

Nation of Islam

A religious and political group founded by Wallace Fard Muhammad in 1930, it is not considered part of mainstream Islam by most Islamic scholars and institutions, even though it identifies itself as Muslim and holds some of the same tenets. However, there are major theological differences. Nation of Islam was essentially dismantled in 1975 by the founder's grandson, W. Deen Mohammed (note the different spelling of the last name), who moved the organization toward mainstream Sunni Islam. In 1978, Louis Farrakhan and his supporters rebuilt the organization, and he remains its leader today. Followers are *members of the Nation of Islam*. The term *Black Muslim* was once used in reference to members of the Nation of Islam, but the term is now considered derogatory. Do not use it. Nation of Islam clergy use the title minister, which should be capitalized before a name.

nones

Use this term within quotation marks on first reference to refer to people who answer “none of the above” to survey questions asking them what religion they follow. Define the term when using it. Subsequent references do not need to be in quotation marks. Nones lack an affiliation with a religion, and are different from the “unchurched,” who generally come from a Christian background but are no longer attending religious services. See the entry on “unchurched.”

Nuns

On first reference, nuns should be identified with the title *Sister* before their name, or *Mother* if they hold that position. If the nun does not use a last name – such as *Sister Mary* – then use *Sister Mary* on second references. If she uses a last name – such as *Sister Mary Houser* – then use *Houser* on second references.

pontiff, pope

Pontiff is a synonym for *pope*, which most commonly refers to the head of the Roman Catholic Church. Pontiff is not a formal title and should not precede a name. It is always lowercase. Churches other than the Roman Catholic Church are led by popes, notably the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria, and they do *not* use the Latin-derived term *pontiff*.

Capitalize *pope* when used as a formal title before a name; lowercase in all other uses: *Pope Leo XIV spoke to the crowd. At the close of his address, the pope (or pontiff) gave his blessing.*

Use Roman numerals to differentiate popes of the same name when necessary to avoid ambiguity, but context often makes it unnecessary, even on first reference.

Quakers/the Religious Society of Friends

Quaker may be used in all references. The term Friends may also be used for adherents and should be capitalized.

Rev., the

As with other courtesy titles, do not use *the Rev.* routinely before a person's name. *The Rev.* may be used in tight spaces as shorthand for minister or other clergy members.

When it is used before an individual's name, always precede *Rev.* with *the*: *the Rev. Billy Graham*. Use only the last name on second reference. Do not use “the Rev. Dr.” before a name. If a person’s academic credentials are important to the story, provide them in separate phrasing, such as “the Rev. Jon Edwards, who holds a doctorate in systematic theology.” Never spell out the word “reverend” before a name. Also, “the Very Rev.” and “the Most Rev.” are religious titles.

Not all religious traditions use “the Rev.” as a title for ministers or other clergy, so make sure they do before appending it to a name. For specifics on what religious titles are used by specific faith traditions refer to the official website of a group or to the religious titles entry of the Religion Newswriters Association’s online [Religion Stylebook](#).

Seventh-day Adventist Church

Note the hyphen and the lowercase “d” that follows it. Adherents are Seventh-day Adventists or simply Adventists if the reference is clear by context.

sharia

The Islamic law based on the Quran should be lowercase. This spelling and treatment is consistent with Merriam-Webster, and is an exception to ReligionStylebook.com, which uses the spelling *Shariah*, capitalized. For clarity, “sharia law” is acceptable, even though it may be technically redundant. In common usage, *Islamic law* and *sharia* are generally interchangeable but be aware that some sources may draw a distinction between the two, with *sharia* referring to the broader divine ideal and *Islamic law* referring to the human attempt to codify that ideal.”

Twelve Disciples

The Twelve Disciples refers to the 12 men Jesus chose to be his closest followers during his earthly ministry. Uppercase and spell out “twelve” in references to the group composed of Simon Peter, Andrew, James (son of Zebedee), John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddeus (also called Judas, son of James), Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot. Though Jesus also referred to this group as apostles well before his death, they are more commonly known as disciples in the Scriptures before his death, with apostles becoming the more prominent term after Jesus’ resurrection. The word *disciple* is not capitalized when it appears before a name or by itself, but only in the reference to the *Twelve Disciples*. See the entry on the “apostles.”

unchurched

Different people understand this term to mean different things, so be careful to define what is meant by the term in a story. It usually belongs in quotation marks, but not necessarily within quotation marks within a longer quote. In a broad sense, it refers to people who are Christians but not connected to a church. The “unchurched” are different

from the “nones,” which indicates the lack of affiliation with a religion, rather than Christians who do not attend religious services. See the entry on “nones.”

Zionism

An international political and cultural movement originally for reestablishment of a Jewish homeland in the historic land of Israel. Today, it encompasses multiple ideologies and views in support of modern Israel. It should be capitalized. Also Zionist, Zionistic.





RECOMMENDED REFERENCE GUIDES

Our preferred source for dictionary-related information is Merriam-Webster's. You can find it here: <https://www.merriam-webster.com>

For grammar-related guidance, we recommend the following resources made available by Purdue University:

- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/grammar/index.html
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/index.html
- https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/mechanics/index.html

The following resources are recommended for more details on reporting around underrepresented communities. You can click on these to take you there.

- [ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION STYLE GUIDE](#)
- [DIVERSITY STYLE GUIDE BY THE SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS](#)
- [GLAAD MEDIA REFERENCE GUIDE](#)
- [INDIGENOUS JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION REPORTING GUIDES](#)
- [NATIONAL CENTER ON DISABILITY AND JOURNALISM DISABILITY LANGUAGE STYLE GUIDE](#)
- [NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS STYLE GUIDE](#)
- [NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HISPANIC JOURNALISTS HANDBOOK](#)
- [NLGJA STYLEBOOK ON LGBTQ+ TERMINOLOGY](#)
- [TRANS JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION STYLE GUIDE](#)



NOTE

This is a dynamic resource with planned quarterly updates, with more frequent updates possible if the situation demands.

The document is maintained by the USA TODAY Network Style Committee, under the guidance of Michael McCarter, vice president of ethics and standards and USA TODAY Co. opinion editor.

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