

# **style** USA TODAY NETWORK **guide**

# USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE



GANNETT CO., INC.

FIRST EDITION  
©2025

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	4
WHERE TO TURN IF YOU DON'T FIND WHAT YOU'RE AFTER .....	5
GENERAL GUIDE ENTRIES.....	6
A .....	6
B .....	19
C .....	24
D .....	38
E .....	51
F .....	57
G .....	62
H .....	68
I .....	72
J .....	76
K .....	78
L .....	79
M .....	82
N .....	89
O .....	96
P .....	100
Q .....	106
R .....	107
S .....	110
T .....	119
U .....	122
V .....	124
W .....	125
X-Y-Z .....	128
CRIMINAL JUSTICE .....	130
SPORTS .....	136
DISABILITY ISSUES .....	150
GENDER AND SEXUALITY ISSUES .....	153
NETWORK ETHICS & ACCURACY GUIDELINES .....	155
NETWORK STANDARDS FOR CRIME REPORTING .....	162
RECOMMENDED REFERENCE GUIDES.....	163
NOTE .....	164
CREDITS .....	165



## 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*  
*Gannett / 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.



## 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.

## 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, not abuses 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 next month.*

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 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 had 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 longstanding consequences of discrimination by allowing race and gender as possible factors in hiring, 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.”

## **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 U.S. 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, or 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 they are popularly known by, 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 both sides agree in advance to abide by; *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. military are the *Army*, *Navy*, *Air Force*, *Marine Corps* (which may be shortened to *Marines* in all uses), *Coast Guard* and *Space Force*. Capitalize the names of these U.S. forces. 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 U.S. 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*).

## **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.

## **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.

## **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 divisive 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

Capitalize and spell out on first reference 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 UK's 2016 vote to leave – and 2020 departure from – the EU. 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.

### **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.*

## **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. 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 *Gannett 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.

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 under-sea 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 U.S. 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.

## **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.

## **cynic vs. skeptic**

A cynic believes a person's conduct is motivated by self-interests. 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 country prefers Czechia.

## 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	BOSTON	CLEVELAND	DES MOINES
AUSTIN	CHICAGO	DALLAS	DETROIT
BALTIMORE	CINCINNATI	DENVER	HONOLULU

## USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

HOUSTON	MINNEAPOLIS	PHOENIX	SAN FRANCISCO
INDIANAPOLIS	NASHVILLE	PITTSBURGH	SEATTLE
LAS VEGAS	NEW ORLEANS	ST. LOUIS	WASHINGTON
LOS ANGELES	NEW YORK	SALT LAKE CITY	
MIAMI	OKLAHOMA CITY	SAN ANTONIO	
MILWAUKEE	PHILADELPHIA	SAN DIEGO	

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	Indonesia	Solomon Islands
Fiji	Netherlands Antilles	
French Polynesia	Philippines	

## **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.

**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 Maldivé 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.

**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.

**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 *N.Y.*

**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.

### **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. Overseen by Elon Musk, it is working 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. *Musk's team* or *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 Defense (DOD acceptable on second reference)  
Department of Education  
Department of Energy (DOE acceptable on second reference)  
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS acceptable on second reference)  
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)

### **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*.

USA TODAY NETWORK  
styleguide  
Version 1.2 – 6/21/2025

## 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**

Only the first is capitalized.

## **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.

## **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.

### **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* (*I licked every one of the pizza slices*). 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.

USA TODAY NETWORK  
**styleguide**  
Version 1.2 – 6/21/2025

## 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**

The accurate name for the more than 400 schools created by the federal government to forcibly assimilate Native American children during the Indian boarding school era. Do not refer to them as *Native American boarding schools*. The reason for this is analogous to how we describe World War II concentration camps as “Nazi concentration camps” rather than “Jewish concentration camps,” because Jewish people had no part in creating or operating them. Native Americans were the ones affected by the boarding schools, not the ones who created or operated 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.

## **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.

### **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.

## **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 the official title before a name but lowercase it when it stands alone. Abbreviate as *Gov.* before a name, including when plural: *Govs. Gretchen Whitmer and Brian Kemp.*

## 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*.

## Hammas

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 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*.

### **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*.

## 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.

### **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.

### **initials**

In a name, initials are followed by periods, 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.

### **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 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*.

## 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**

A trademark for a personal watercraft.

### **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*.

## **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

### **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*.

**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.

## **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*).

## **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 initials**

Use to differentiate individual people; use if the person prefers it.

## **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.

Don’t refer to Marines as soldiers. Use troops. Use former Marine, not ex-Marine.

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*.

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.

## USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

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.
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.

### **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.

### **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*. On second reference, using just their names is sufficient: *Charles, Catherine, William*. Princess Catherine may also be referred to as Kate Middleton.

## **nonlethal bullets, nonlethal munitions, crowd control munitions**

Refer to these as *projectiles that law enforcement describe as nonlethal*. Due to the number of documented deaths from these munitions, more clarity is needed. *Projectiles* is acceptable on subsequent references.

## **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.*

**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.*

**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 ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  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, 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.

**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*).

**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*.

## USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

**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.

USA TODAY NETWORK  
**styleguide**  
Version 1.2 – 6/21/2025

## 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.

### **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*.

## 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.

## **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 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.

## **provinces**

Offset names of provinces from cities with commas. Don't capitalize the word *province*.

## **PTA**

OK in all references for *Parent Teacher Association*.

## 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

### **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*.

### **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.

## **ROTC, Reserve Officers' Training Corps**

*ROTC* can be used in all instances.

## **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*.

## USA TODAY NETWORK STYLE GUIDE

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.



## 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(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, 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.

### **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 lunchmeat.

## **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.

## **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 Veteran 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	Montana.....	MT
Alaska .....	AK	Nebraska .....	NE
Arizona .....	AZ	Nevada .....	NV
Arkansas.....	AR	New Hampshire.....	NH
California.....	CA	New Jersey .....	NJ
Colorado .....	CO	New Mexico.....	NM
Connecticut.....	CT	New York.....	NY
Delaware .....	DE	North Carolina.....	NC
District of Columbia .....	DC	North Dakota.....	ND
Florida .....	FL	Ohio.....	OH
Georgia.....	GA	Oklahoma .....	OK
Hawaii .....	HI	Oregon.....	OR
Idaho .....	ID	Pennsylvania .....	PA
Illinois.....	IL	Rhode Island .....	RI
Indiana .....	IN	South Carolina .....	SC
Iowa .....	IA	South Dakota .....	SD
Kansas .....	KS	Tennessee.....	TN
Kentucky.....	KY	Texas .....	TX
Louisiana.....	LA	Utah.....	UT
Maine .....	ME	Vermont.....	VT
Maryland .....	MD	Virginia.....	VA
Massachusetts .....	MA	Washington .....	WA
Michigan.....	MI	West Virginia .....	WV
Minnesota.....	MN	Wisconsin .....	WI
Mississippi.....	MS	Wyoming.....	WY
Missouri.....	MO		

## 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*.

# 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.

## **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.

# 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**

UAE on second reference.

## **United Kingdom, U.K.**

Comprises Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Great Britain is England, Scotland and Wales. Ireland is altogether separate.

## **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.* is acceptable in all references. In digital headlines, *US* may be used without the periods.

## **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**

### **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.

## **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*.

## **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.

## 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.

## 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 two thousand years ago.

Zionism as a political movement had a rebirth in the late 1890s established by Austro-Hungarian 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 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 then known 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

USA TODAY NETWORK  
**styleguide**  
Version 1.2 – 6/21/2025



## 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 U.S. 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, Oklahoma. Spell out 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 U.S. 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, Indiana. 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 U.S. won bronze in the men's double sculls during the last Olympics. The U.S. 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 U.K.), 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 the 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 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 U.S. 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 U.S. Open. Each have 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 U.K. 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 U.S. 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 U.S., 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.

### 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*.

### 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: Xxxx**" 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.

- 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.



## 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.



## 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/grammar/index.html)
- [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/punctuation/index.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/index.html)
- [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/mechanics/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 Gannett opinion editor.

USA TODAY NETWORK  
styleguide  
Version 1.2 – 6/21/2025



## CREDITS

### CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER

Kristin Roberts

### SENIOR EDITORS

Michael Anastasi • Caren Bohan • Tracy Collins •  
Stacey Martin • Michael McCarter • Michelle Washington

### ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Jodie Lau • Felecia Wellington Radel • Ray Rivera • Tom Taylor • Karey Van Hall

### ASSISTANT EDITORS

Jamie Anderson • Alaina Beautiful Bald Eagle • Lance Bergeson • William Cain •  
Eve Chen • Raven-DaJon Coleman • Shannon Coleman • Terry Collins •  
Romando Dixon • Becca Dyer • Michael Feeley • Timothy Gardner • Janet Graham •  
Gregg Hampton • JJ Hensley • Susan Jobe • Michael Kilian • Karen Kurtz • Megan Lane •  
Michelle Maltais • Michael McDermott • Chris Moorman • Scott Muller • Krystal Nurse •  
David Oliver • Jess Phelps • Morgan Ringel • Tiffany Rodgers • Romina Ruiz •  
Mark Russell • Cherie Saunders • Roxanna Scott • Michael Shearer • Lisa Strattan •  
Timothy Swarens • Christopher Thomas • Leah Trinidad • Kathy Tulumello • Jeff Verbus •  
Tabassum Zakaria • Jim Zvonec

### COVER DESIGN

Joanne Sosangelis