

# AP Style and Writing Guide

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## Style-weary? Or style-wary? You be the judge — after you look it up!

The following is a list of common problem areas in AP Style. Once you stop chuckling about the headings, grab a stylebook and start familiarizing yourself with the AP categories listed under the headings.

### Alphabet soup

- Abbreviations and acronyms
- Company, corporate names
- Capitalization

### Geographic pursuit

- States, cities, countries, datelines
- United States
- Directions, regions
- Addresses

### Grammar guts (also see word usage)

- Its, it's
- Lay, lie
- Who, whom
- Your, you're
- Plurals vs. possessives

### Don't punt the punctuation

- Commas, semi-colons, apostrophes
- Quotation marks — single and double
- Hyphens and dashes

### Legal eagles

- Council, counsel
- Robbed, burgled, or just plain stole?
- Ordinance, resolution, law
- Are you a “bloc”-head?
- Trademarks and copyright

### Check out the blond(e)!

- Blond, brunette, redheaded
- Boyfriend, girlfriend, fiance, fiancée
- Pupil, student
- Man, boy, woman, girl
- Ages

### The party line

- Legislature, legislator
- Political divisions
- Political parties and philosophies
- Legislative titles

### The “front” lines

- Weather
- Weapons

### A matter of time

- Dates, months, times, zones
- TDP — time-date-place (always in that order)

### Master math

- Ratios, margins
- Percentages, numerals
- Vote tabulations
- Average, mean, median, mode
- Millions, billions
- Dollars, cents,
- Polls, surveys

### The Bible Belt

- Mass, sacrament, denominations
- Preachers, pastors, reverends, ministers, priests
- God, gospel, Bible

### How trivial can this get? Pretty dang trivial!

- Flier, flyer
- Flair, flare
- Amok, amuck
- Leery, weary
- Colander, calendar
- Embarrass, harass
- Podium, lectern, pulpit

# Sentence structure

All sentences have a subject and verb, and many times, they also have prepositional phrases and both necessary and unnecessary clauses. If they have more than one subject and verb, these are separated by conjunctions, semicolons or a period. If you see more than one subject and verb in a sentence, such as

Alex sat in the *Pacer* office trying to think of a run-on sentence all she could come up with was this sorry excuse for one.

That is a run-on sentence, or in fancy terminology— a comma splice. It's confusing and without a proper conjunction, semicolon or period, it becomes a sloppy mess that is difficult to read.

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# The Oxford Comma

The Oxford Comma is the last comma in a series of items that comes right before the conjunction.

Alex ate two McDoubles, Bagel Bites, and Ramen Noodles.

The comma in red (which might be difficult to see), is the Oxford Comma. In AP Style (which is what *Pacer* and all newspapers use), we do not use this comma. I know; it's strange, but it's just a procedure thing.

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# Basic word usage

The following are a few basic words that are commonly confused or misused.

## Its versus it's

- *Its* shows possession, *it's* is a contraction for "it is." If "it is," can't replace it, then you should more than likely use *its*.

## They're, their, there

- *They're* is a contraction for "they are;" *their* shows possession; and *there* refers to a place.

## You're, your

- *You're* is a contraction for "you are," and *your* shows possession.

## Than, then

- *Than* is used for comparison; and *then* is used as the next step in a series of actions.

## To, too, two

- *To* is used to convey intent; *too* is used to denote an addition; and *two* is the proper spelling of the number 2.

## Affect, effect

- *Affect* is the verb form; *effect* is the noun form.

## Between, among

- *Between* is used when there are only two people or objects being referenced; and *among* is used when three or more people or objects are being referenced.

## Definitely, defiantly

- *Definitely* is used to denote something positive; *defiantly* is an adjective that describes rebellion.

# Names

With names in articles, always use first and last names with a title on first reference and then only last names on second reference.

Managing Editor Alex Jacobi chased the squirrel across campus.

“It was a fiesty creature,” Jacobi said.

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# Quotes

With quotes, you want to make sure to have transition sentences between the quotes you put in your stories, and you want to make sure to always only use the verb *said*, not *stated* or *claimed*. Quotes are also standalone sentences in AP style.

Alex Jacobi, a non-athletic and nerdy girl, thought that she was only destined to live a life behind computer screens and in offices, but after her adventures at Lambert’s, she found her true athletic calling.

“I have found my athletic calling: roll catching. I caught 12 rolls in a row, with one being an interception,” Jacobi said.

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# Paragraphs

Paragraphs are good, because paragraphs break up different facets of the story to help readers follow the story better. In journalism, we use short paragraphs, because when you have long paragraphs,

Then your information gets all jumbled into one large mass of text that no one wants to read, because it’s so monotonous. Isn’t this boring? There are no line breaks, just text, and you can’t tell where the idea is going and where it stops and when another one is going to begin, and it’s just one super-dee-duper long column full of boringness. Yes, I just used the word super-dee-duper. I’m pretty sure that word doesn’t exist in the literary world. Well, it does now. I am running out of things to say to make my point and to make this column long enough. But essentially, if you make paragraphs too long, then you will make readers want to quit reading and it will just look like blah blah blah.

## Labels

Be careful about the words you choose to describe various groups. Use neutral terms that won’t cause a ruckus among your constituents!

*Credits: First page created by UT Martin  
Communications faculty member Tomi M. Parrish.  
Second and third pages were taken from The Pacer student  
newspaper writing guide created by alumni staff members  
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