

The Portable Editor

Tips for Improving Your Writing

Volume 1, No.5

APA has a plethora of rules that govern figures or words are used to express numbers. Although these rules may seem picky and overwhelming, they are aimed at saving space and conveying technical information in an easily understood format. This page covers just the most common applications. See the Numbers section (pp. 122-130) of the APA manual for more.

APA Numbers in an Nutshell

Use Arabic figures	Spell out numbers
for numbers ≥ 10	one thru nine when not used with units of measurement or used in comparisons with numbers 10 or greater
any number used with a precise unit of measurement	one or zero
for statistical or mathematical functions, proportions, ratios, percentages (use %)	common fractions
for measures of time, ages, dates, exact sums of money	common expressions
to describe a sample size, specific number of participants	used to begin a sentence
to denote a specific place in a numbered series, parts of book, tables	
ALL numbers in an abstract of a paper	
Use a combination of words and numerals	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• for large sums (787 trillion dollars, 1.5 million dollars, 3 million people)• when numbers appear back-to-back (ten 5-point Likert scales, 30 four-year-olds)	

Examples of when to express numbers in words:

- numbers <10 **not** used with units of measurement **OR** grouped in comparison with numbers < 10 .
 - eight pages, three stages, six chapters, two-tailed *t* test, **but** five items using a 7-point Likert scale (because a point on a scale is a precise unit of measurement)
 - our test was repeated test two times (in this case, two times is not a proportion)
 - seven lists of nine words each; during the third of the five sessions
- numbers **zero** and **one** when words aid comprehension **OR** when not in context with numbers ≥ 10
 - zero-tolerance policy
 - only one response was valid; **but** 1 of 15 responses was valid
- for common fractions
 - one half of the text; increased by three fourths; a two-thirds majority (In this last example, two thirds is hyphenated because the fraction functions as a compound adjective modifying “majority.” Otherwise, common fractions are not hyphenated.)
- common expressions (**twenty-first century**, the Fourth of July)

- any number used to begin a sentence (Fifty states reported; Thirty-four percent of the sample; Four schools improved whereas 14 schools had increased dropout.)

Examples of when to use Arabic numerals

- numbers less than 10 grouped for comparison with numbers ≥ 10 **and** within the same paragraph:
 - ...included students in the 3rd and 12th grades but not the 4th-grade students
 - 7 of the 33 memory prompts; pages 9 through 33; pack 10 pairs of socks, 5 shirts, 3 pairs of shorts, and 1 bandana; the 1st and 9th items in all 15 lists
 - **But** four checklists, each containing 15 child behavior characteristics (in this case, the checklists are not compared to the behavior characteristics)
- when a number is used with a precise unit of measurement
 - 6 megabyte disk, 7 feet, 9 miles, 5-gallon bucket, 5-point scale
- numbers that represent statistical or mathematical functions, proportions, ratios, percentages, percentiles, decimal quantities
 - 3 times as many dropouts, 9 of the 18 programs (proportion)
 - divided by 3 and multiplied by 9
 - deposits were matched at a ratio of 7:1
 - those in the upper 5th percentile
 - 5% of students, between 20% and 30% of the population, 0.5% improvement

[APA uses the % sign with numerals (e.g., 5%, not 5 percent). If you must begin a sentence with a percentage, write out the word percent such as, “Forty-five percent.”]
- numbers that represent measures of time, ages, dates, exact sums of money
 - 9 seconds, 8 minutes, 4 hours, 3 days, 1 week, 3 months, 2 years,
 - 9 to 18 year-old participants
 - between the 1st and 15th of each month
 - 12:30 p.m. on May 1, 2009
- when reporting scores on a numbered scale,
 - an average rating of 3 on a 10-point scale
- when describing a sample or subsample size, giving specific numbers of participants
 - the responses of 9 participants reviewed by two raters
 - randomly selected 6 of the 9 participants
- numbers that denote a specific place in a numbered series, parts of books, tables
 - see chapter 7 for more discussion; turn to page 3; see Table 1

SOSW Writing Support

Drop-in Every Monday, Noon–1 p.m. **Office 548E**

One-on-One Writing Support by appointment

Please e-mail or call to schedule an appointment. These hours are reserved for students, but other times may be available.

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