

The Portable Editor

Updated for APA Manual 6th Edition

APA Numbers in a Nutshell

The APA manual has one general rule governing whether numbers are expressed with Arabic numerals or words—and a plethora of exceptions to that rule! Although these rules might seem picky, they are intended to help a writer present numbers in a way that aids comprehension and is reader-friendly. See Sections 4.31 thru 4.38 of the APA Manual for the complete guidelines for number formats.

General Rule: Use Arabic numerals for numbers 10 and greater and use words for numbers less than 10 (i.e., one through nine).

Examples:

- In just one half hour, my five-page paper ballooned to 15 pages.
- The seven participants received a \$20 gift card for completing the 33-item survey, including the six open-ended questions, within 24 hours of their last session.
- The family of six consists of two adults (both 32 years old), one adolescent (15 years), and 11-year-old triplets (one boy, two girls). The family has 14 house pets (seven cats, six dogs, and one goat).

Exceptions to the General Rule & Examples

Use Arabic figures for any number...	Use Words for...
...preceding a precise unit of measurement 3 feet; 7 cm, 5 gallons; 2 ml. dose	...one or zero one response; zero returns
...used in statistical or mathematical functions, proportions, ratios, percentages 6%; 3 of 5 groups; divided by 3; 7 times as many; ratio of 9:1 [But , “we repeated the test two times”; in this case, two times is not a proportion.]	...common fractions one half, one third; one fifth of the class; a two-thirds majority [hyphenate fractions only when functioning as a compound adjective e.g., a two-thirds majority]
...used as a measure of time, ages, dates, points on a scale, exact sums of money, numerical scores 2.5 hours; 5 yuan; 7-point Likert scale; 9-year-olds; average rating of 3 on a 10-point scale	...approximate times Data collection took about three months; follow-up occurred approximately six years after study enrollment
...in the abstract of a paper unless at the beginning of a sentence We ran 3 analyses and found 2 anomalies...	...nearly universal accepted usage the Twelve Apostles; Five Pillars of Islam; twelve-step programs [12-step program also acceptable]

Exceptions to the General Rule with Examples

Use Arabic figures for any number...	Use Words for
...used to describe a sample size, or subsample with a specific number of participants 4 participants; randomly selected 6 of the 9 participants; responses of 9 participants were reviewed by two raters...	...any number used to begin a sentence Twenty-three participants dropped out, leaving 12 mothers in the final sample. [Better strategy: rewrite the sentence!]
...used to denote a specific place in a numbered series, parts of a book, tables Table 3, Level 2 of the model; Chapter 8; Grades 3 and 4; row 5; page 3;	...ordinal numbers less than 10 The third- and fourth-grade students were matched with 10th-grade student mentors; after the sixth CBT session

Use a Combination of Words and Numerals

- for large sums; 7 trillion-dollar stimulus; 1.5 million dollars; 3 billion people; 787 zillion mosquitoes
- when numbers appear back-to-back and the mix works to increase readability; responses were recorded using ten 5-point Likert scales; the 30 four-year-olds ruined the display
- spell out both words if the mix doesn't increase readability; The first two items on the list; The first three sets of questions were asked four times.

Roman Numerals

Maintain Roman numerals that are part of an established terminology

Type I and Type II error, Class III life preserver, Title IX mandates, Type II diabetes (also Type 2)

Change in the APA Manual 6th Edition

Previous editions of the APA Publication Manual included an exception to the general rule that allowed Arabic numerals for numbers less than 10 when used in the same context or in comparison with numbers 10 or greater.

Old format: We conducted 11 focus groups, of which 2 were mother-only groups, 4 were father-only groups, and 5 were grandparent groups.

The new edition of the APA Manual **does not** include this exception.

New format: We conducted 11 focus groups, of which two were mother-only groups, four were father-only groups, and five were grandparent groups.

When NOT to Use Numbers

Do not use numbers for a series or list within a sentence or paragraph. APA requires the use of lowercase letters enclosed in parentheses for this type of inline seriation: (a)... (b)..., and (c).... See Sec. 3.04 (pp. 63-65) of the APA Publication Manual.

Example: Our project had a three-pronged recruitment strategy using (a) social media, (b) provider referral, and (c) peer recommendations from past participants.

For Writing Support: SOSWwritingsupport@gmail.com