

writing time in ap style

writing time in ap style is a crucial aspect for journalists, editors, and writers who adhere to the Associated Press (AP) style guidelines. Understanding how to correctly express time ensures clarity, consistency, and professionalism in news writing and other media communications. This article explores the rules and conventions of writing time in AP style, including formatting, punctuation, and usage nuances. Additionally, it covers common mistakes to avoid and provides practical examples to illustrate proper application. Whether reporting event times, deadlines, or schedules, mastering AP style time conventions enhances the readability and credibility of content. The following sections will guide readers through the essentials of time expression according to AP standards.

- Basic Rules for Writing Time in AP Style
- Using a.m. and p.m. Correctly
- Expressing Time Ranges and Intervals
- Special Cases: Midnight, Noon, and O'Clock
- Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Basic Rules for Writing Time in AP Style

Writing time in AP style follows specific standards designed to maintain uniformity across journalistic writing. The guidelines emphasize simplicity, clarity, and ease of reading. Time is generally written using figures rather than spelled-out words, except for casual or narrative contexts. The use of lowercase letters with periods for a.m. and p.m. is standard, distinguishing morning and afternoon times clearly. In addition, AP style avoids unnecessary zeroes before hours and favors concise presentation.

Numerals and Format

AP style dictates that time should be expressed using numerals for the hour and minutes when necessary. For example, "8 a.m." and "3:30 p.m." are correct, whereas "eight o'clock in the morning" is discouraged in news writing. The hour is written without a leading zero, so "9 a.m." is preferred over "09 a.m." When the time is on the hour, minutes are omitted.

Punctuation and Spacing

Proper use of punctuation is essential. AP style requires periods in both "a.m." and "p.m." and a space between the numeral and the abbreviation. For example, "10 a.m." is correct, but "10a.m." or "10 A.M." are incorrect. This spacing rule ensures better readability and aligns with AP's overall style preferences.

Using a.m. and p.m. Correctly

The abbreviations "a.m." and "p.m." are fundamental in writing time in AP style, indicating before and after midday, respectively. Their correct usage prevents ambiguity, especially in 12-hour clock formats commonly used in American English. Understanding when and how to apply these abbreviations is key to accurate time reporting.

Lowercase with Periods

AP style mandates that both "a.m." and "p.m." be lowercase and include periods. Uppercase versions such as "AM" or "PM" are not acceptable. This rule applies universally within AP-compliant texts, including headlines, body copy, and captions.

When to Use a.m. and p.m.

Use "a.m." for times from midnight until just before noon (12:00 p.m.) and "p.m." for times from noon until just before midnight. For example, 6:45 a.m. refers to morning hours, while 7:30 p.m. refers to evening. Do not use "a.m." or "p.m." with times that clearly indicate the time of day, such as noon or midnight.

Expressing Time Ranges and Intervals

Writing time in AP style also covers how to present time ranges and intervals. This is common in news stories about schedules, events, and deadlines. AP style provides clear guidelines to avoid confusion and maintain a streamlined format.

Using Hyphens and the Word "to"

Time ranges can be expressed using a hyphen without spaces or the word "to." Both formats are acceptable but must be consistent within a document. For example, "The meeting is scheduled from 3 to 5 p.m." or "The meeting is scheduled 3-5 p.m." are both correct. However, AP style prefers the use of

"to" over hyphens, especially in formal contexts.

Repeating a.m. or p.m.

When a time range spans a.m. and p.m., AP style requires repeating the abbreviations for clarity. For example, "11 a.m. to 2 p.m." is correct, while "11 a.m. to 2" is incomplete without specifying the second period.

Examples of Time Ranges

- 8 a.m. to 10 a.m.
- 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
- Noon to 1 p.m.
- Midnight to 6 a.m.

Special Cases: Midnight, Noon, and O'Clock

Certain times have unique treatments in AP style to avoid ambiguity. Midnight, noon, and expressions involving "o'clock" are handled with specific conventions that differ from standard numeric times.

Writing Midnight and Noon

AP style spells out "midnight" and "noon" rather than using 12 a.m. or 12 p.m. This practice prevents confusion since 12 a.m. and 12 p.m. can be ambiguous to readers. For example, a news release might state, "The deadline is midnight Sunday," rather than "12 a.m. Sunday."

Use of O'Clock

The phrase "o'clock" is rarely used in formal news writing but may appear in feature stories or direct quotes. When used, it should be lowercase and spelled out, such as "3 o'clock." However, AP style prefers numeric time expressions for most journalistic purposes.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even seasoned writers can stumble when writing time in AP style. Awareness of frequent errors helps maintain professionalism and adherence to AP guidelines.

Omitting Periods in a.m. and p.m.

One of the most common mistakes is leaving out the periods in "a.m." and "p.m." AP style requires these periods for both abbreviations. Writing "6 AM" instead of "6 a.m." is incorrect and detracts from the publication's credibility.

Using Leading Zeros

Another frequent error involves adding a zero before hours less than 10, such as "09 a.m." AP style specifically rejects leading zeros for hours. The correct form is "9 a.m."

Failing to Repeat a.m. or p.m. in Time Ranges

When indicating a time range that spans different parts of the day, it is important to repeat "a.m." or "p.m." This avoids confusion, such as in "10 a.m. to 2 p.m." rather than "10 a.m. to 2."

Incorrect Use of 12 a.m. and 12 p.m.

Using "12 a.m." to indicate midnight and "12 p.m." for noon can confuse readers. AP style's recommendation is to use "midnight" and "noon" spelled out instead of these numeric forms.

Summary of Common Errors

- Writing "AM" or "PM" in uppercase without periods
- Including leading zeros before single-digit hours
- Omitting space between the time and a.m./p.m.
- Not repeating a.m. or p.m. in ranges crossing noon or midnight
- Using 12 a.m. and 12 p.m. instead of "midnight" and "noon"

Frequently Asked Questions

How do you write time in AP style?

In AP style, use figures for times except for noon and midnight, and use a.m. and p.m. with lowercase letters and periods, for example, 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Should I use a colon when writing time in AP style?

Yes, use a colon to separate hours and minutes in AP style, such as 8:15 a.m. However, omit the colon if the time is on the hour, for example, 9 a.m.

How do you write noon and midnight in AP style?

Write 'noon' and 'midnight' in lowercase without using figures or a.m./p.m. in AP style.

Do you include zeros for single-digit minutes in AP style time?

Yes, in AP style, always include two digits for minutes, even if it is zero. For example, write 7:05 p.m., not 7:5 p.m.

How do you handle time ranges in AP style?

In AP style, use an en dash without spaces to indicate a time range, and include a.m. or p.m. after each time if they differ. For example, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; if both times share the same period, only include it after the second time, such as 9–11 a.m.

Additional Resources

1. *Mastering AP Style: A Guide to Writing Time and Dates*

This comprehensive guide offers clear instructions on how to properly write time and dates according to AP Style. It breaks down common rules, such as using figures for time, when to use a.m. and p.m., and how to handle time zones. The book is ideal for journalists, editors, and anyone looking to sharpen their writing skills with AP conventions.

2. *AP Style Time Essentials: Writing Clocks and Calendars Right*

Focused specifically on time and date formatting in AP Style, this book provides practical examples and exercises to reinforce learning. It covers everything from expressing time ranges to handling time zones and daylight saving time. Readers will gain confidence in producing clear, consistent, and professional content.

3. *The AP Stylebook Explained: Time and Date Rules*

This resource delves into the nuances of AP Style time and date rules, explaining exceptions and special cases. It includes tips on avoiding common mistakes and how to adapt to updates in the style guide. Perfect for students and media professionals seeking a deeper understanding of AP Style standards.

4. *Writing Time in AP Style: A Practical Handbook*

Designed as a quick reference, this handbook simplifies the process of writing time in AP Style for busy writers. It outlines the dos and don'ts, with examples ranging from event scheduling to news reporting. The concise format makes it easy to consult on the go.

5. *AP Style Clock: Mastering Time and Date Formatting*

This book presents an in-depth look at the AP Style's approach to time and date formatting, including how to handle military time and time in headlines. It offers strategies for maintaining clarity and consistency across different types of media. Journalists and content creators will find this especially useful.

6. *The Journalist's Guide to AP Style Time Writing*

Targeted at reporters and editors, this guide addresses the practical challenges of writing time in AP Style under tight deadlines. It includes real-world examples and advice on how to quickly verify time-related details. The guide emphasizes accuracy and readability in fast-paced news environments.

7. *AP Style Time and Date Formatting for Digital Media*

As digital platforms evolve, this book explores how AP Style's time and date rules apply to online content and social media. It discusses best practices for clear communication and audience engagement while adhering to established standards. Content managers and digital journalists will benefit from its insights.

8. *Clear and Concise: Writing Time in AP Style*

This title focuses on clarity and brevity when writing time in AP Style, helping writers avoid ambiguity. It also covers stylistic choices like when to spell out times and how to handle approximate times. The book is a helpful tool for writers aiming to enhance their precision and style.

9. *Time Telling and AP Style: A Writer's Reference*

Serving as a handy reference, this book compiles all AP Style guidelines related to time and dates in one place. It includes charts, quick tips, and common pitfalls to watch out for. Writers, editors, and students will appreciate its straightforward approach to mastering AP Style time conventions.

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