



WHYY News Style Guide

Updated in August 2023

Entries in black are directly from AP. **Parts in green are specific to our newsroom.**

AP Style — with exceptions

WHYY News adheres to AP style, with exceptions as determined by the newsroom's Style Committee, which is overseen by the VP of News and Civic Dialogue.

Your first stop for a style question should be the AP Stylebook, but be sure to double-check this guide in case our style deviates from AP.

Guiding principles for coverage and style

1. Our priorities are accuracy, clarity, specificity, and cultural competency.
2. Use [person-first language](#).
 1. For example, “people experiencing homelessness” rather than “homeless people” or “the homeless” and “people with disabilities” rather than “disabled people” or “the disabled.”
3. For diversity tracking purposes, reporters should be asking sources how they identify in terms of race and gender. It is our principle to **refer to people the way they refer to themselves**.
 1. For example, a source who is Dominican-American might refer to themselves as Dominican, as Latino/a/x, Afro-Latino/a/x or as Hispanic. Use their preferred terminology.
 2. Similarly, a transgender person may refer to themselves as a trans woman, as a trans man, as nonbinary, or simply as trans. Use their preferred terminology (assuming it's even relevant to the story). It's easy to make a mistake when you make assumptions about someone's racial or gender identity, so be sure to ask (politely).
4. In stories about policing/crime/criminal justice, try to **avoid repeating police jargon and using law enforcement** as the only source to find out what happened. Even state sources need to be verified. Police/DOC jargon includes non-specific terms such as “officer-involved shooting” and criminalizing terms such as inmate, suspect, felon, and convict.
5. **Avoid passive voice**. Use active voice as much as possible. Passive voice: John Doe was murdered in 1973. Active voice: Jane Doe murdered John Doe in 1973. Active voice shows us who did the action, whereas passive voice just tells us the action happened.

Most recent style changes

- We don't use the word inmate to describe incarcerated people. “Incarcerated person” is preferable. “Prisoner” is also OK. (We made this change in 2020.)
- We no longer hyphenate ethnicities, including African American. (AP made this change in 2019.)
- Avoid the term “officer-involved shooting.” Try to be more specific about what happened and how the officer was involved. (AP made this change in 2020.)
- When referring to race, Black and Indigenous start with capital letters, but brown does not. (AP made this change in 2020)
- Avoid using “minorities” as a term for people of color. (We made this change 2020.) Use “people of color” or a more specific term if you can find an accurate one.
- Do not refer to African Americans as “Blacks.” “Black people” or “African Americans” is preferred. (We made this change in 2021.)
- We prefer Latino and Latina over Latinx. We only use Latinx when someone asks for it (tells us they identify that way), or when it's part of a direct quote or organization name. (We decided this in 2020. Consistent with AP style, but not with NPR style.)

Friendly style reminders

- Use person-first language whenever possible
 - **Example:** People experiencing homelessness is preferable to “homeless people” or simply “the homeless.” Similarly, people with disabilities is preferable to “disabled people” or simply “the disabled”
- We don't italicize words from other languages
- Be sure to check for accents on names and words from non-English languages
- Race-related coverage:
 - Don't assume white is the norm. If you mention one person's race in a story, you should mention everyone's race
 - Avoid the terms “people of color” (when you can be more specific), “BIPOC” (because not everyone knows it's an acronym for Black/Indigenous/People of Color) and brown (when you can be more specific) as racial designations
 - Use “people of color” when you are referring to ALL nonwhite people
 - If what you mean is “Black” or “Black and Latino,” just say “Black” or “Black and Latino”
 - A single person or thing cannot be diverse, only a group of people or things can be diverse
 - **Example:** Nia is not diverse, Nia's family is diverse

A guide to the guide

This is the type of content you'll find:

- **Common mistakes**
 - This is exactly what it sounds like. Includes words that are commonly misspelled or misused, words that should be written as two words but are often written as one (like health care and day care), and words that people either should capitalize but forget to (Black and Indigenous) OR shouldn't capitalize but do (civil rights movement); also includes entries like composition titles, addresses, and numerals
- **Formatting**
 - This expansive category includes everything from how to use punctuation to style rules for to headlines
- **Specific to our region**
 - The purpose of region-specific entries is to standardize the way we refer to ;pca; places and things and to make sure we don't sound like tourists in our own coverage area.
- **Identities and other politicized terms**
 - Words have power; therefore it's especially important to be careful when choosing the words we use to describe people in marginalized communities; such entries include words to avoid (**examples:** inmate, illegal immigrant) and more comprehensive guidance on how to write about subjects like mental illness and drug addiction

The guide

acronyms and abbreviations

Most acronyms and abbreviations must be fully identified on first reference and abbreviated only on subsequent references. Exceptions include:

- ABC (6abc locally)
- Amtrak
- CBS
- CIA
- FBI
- GOP
- NBC
- PATCO
- PECO
- PennDOT
- Project HOME
- SEPTA
- 9/11

AP recommends not following a full name with an abbreviation or acronym in parentheses, stating that if the short form is not clear on second reference, it should not be used. It may be possible to use an alternative, e.g., "the agency," "the council," "the union," etc. The key is clarity. Use best judgment. Use periods in most two-letter abbreviations, e.g., "U.S.," "U.K." ("AP," a trademark, is an exception!) Use all caps but no periods in longer abbreviations when the individual letters are pronounced, e.g., "FBI," "CIA," "USA."

In abbreviating decades, e.g., "the '80s," place an apostrophe before the numerals.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

addresses

Use the abbreviations *Ave.*, *Blvd.* and *St.* only with a numbered address: *1600 Pennsylvania Ave.* Spell them out and capitalize when part of a formal street name without a number: *Pennsylvania Avenue.* Lowercase and spell out when used alone or with more than one street name: *Massachusetts and Pennsylvania avenues.*

All similar words (*alley*, *drive*, *road*, *terrace*, etc.) always are spelled out. Capitalize them when part of a formal name without a number; lowercase when used alone or with two or more names.

Spell out and capitalize *First* through *Ninth* when used as street names; use figures for *10th* and above: *7 Fifth Ave.*, *100 21st St.*

Examples:

- 1500 Market St.
- The parade went down Broad Street.

advocate

Used as a verb, it is "advocate" (without a preposition), not "advocate for." The definition of advocate is "to be in favor of," so the preposition is built into the meaning. Adding "for" is redundant.

When used as a noun, be clear what the person or organization is an advocate of. Avoid phrases like "Advocates say ...". Therefore, used as a noun, you may need a preposition to state that a person or organization is an advocate *of* something.

Examples:

- "I do not advocate threats of violence against children."
- "An advocate for homeless veterans ..." or "Gun rights advocates ..."

African American

"No hyphen (a change in 2019 for this and other dual heritage terms). Acceptable for an American Black person of African descent. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as Caribbean American. Follow a person's preference."

alt-right

Avoid using this term. It is a PR euphemism (see [background from "Morning Edition"](#)).

Adapted from AP and NPR:

The "alt-right" is a label currently embraced by some white supremacists and white nationalists to refer to themselves and their ideology, which emphasizes preserving and protecting the white race in the United States in addition to, or over, other traditional conservative positions such as limited government, low taxes, and strict law and order. Its members reject the American democratic ideal that all should have equality under the law regardless of creed, gender, ethnic origin, or race. "Alt-right" includes racists, neo-Nazis, white supremacists, white nationalists, anti-Semites, and others who contend that whites are suffering economically because "others" are being given unfair advantages.

"White nationalist" is the most concise description and a better term.

"Alt-right" (in quotation marks, with a hyphen, and lowercase) may be used in quotes or modified as in the "self-described" or "so-called alt-right" in stories discussing what the movement says about itself.

Be sure to include a definition, e.g.: "an offshoot of conservatism mixing racism, white nationalism, and populism."

When writing on extreme groups of any kind, be precise and provide evidence to support the characterization. We should not limit ourselves to letting such groups define themselves, and instead should report their actions, words, associations, history, and positions to reveal their actual beliefs and philosophy, as well as how others see them.

Black

Use the capitalized term as an adjective in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense: *Black people, Black culture, Black literature, Black studies, Black colleges*.

African American is also acceptable for those in the U.S. The terms are not necessarily interchangeable. Americans of Caribbean heritage, for example, generally refer to themselves as *Caribbean American*.

Follow an individual's preference if known, and be specific when possible and relevant. *Minneapolis has a large Somali American population because of refugee resettlement. The author is Senegalese American.*

Use of the capitalized *Black* recognizes that language has evolved, along with the common understanding that especially in the United States, the term reflects a shared identity and culture rather than a skin color alone.

Also use *Black* in racial, ethnic and cultural differences outside the U.S. to avoid equating a person with a skin color.

Use Negro or colored only in names of organizations or in rare quotations when essential. (The above comes from AP. What's below is specific to our newsroom.)

We do not refer to Black people as "Blacks." Preferred alternatives include "Black people," "Black Americans," and "African Americans."

Bucks

Appropriate for "Bucks County" in headlines. Spell out "Bucks County" in story copy.

bullets

For each bulleted item, capitalize the first letter. If each bullet completes a sentence, end with a period or other terminal punctuation. If not, don't use terminal punctuation.

All bullets in a list should have parallel construction. (One notable exception is this style guide, which will include bulleted lists that show different use cases and examples and which will not always have parallel construction.)

What to do:

The best things to do when you catch on fire are:

- Stop
- Drop
- Roll

She made her way back to Kansas after:

- Stealing some shoes.
- Befriending a scarecrow, a tin woodsman, and a lion.
- Killing a witch.
- Clicking her heels together three times.

What not to do:

Jobs listed on his resume included:

- Hand model
- a zookeeper
- He worked at a video store, too.

(In this example, the second item is not capitalized, and none of the three items has similar construction.)

Camden

Does not need "New Jersey" in WHYY News copy.

capitalizing shortened names of institutions

Do not capitalize "committee" in shortened versions of long committee names: The "Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee" becomes the "Senate banking committee."

Retain capitalization of governmental agencies, departments, and offices when referring to a specific body if the jurisdiction is clear. "The U.S. Department of State" can be written as "the Department of State" if it is clear from context that you are referring to the federal agency. It is "the City Council" or "the Fire Department" or "the Police Department" or "the School District" if the city is clear. Further condensations, however, should be lowercase, e.g., "the department," "the council," "the district."

If the name of the entity is flipped to omit the word "of," retain capitalization, e.g., "the U.S. Department of State" becomes "the State Department," and "Harvard School of Dental Medicine" becomes "Harvard Dental School."

If a generic term has become the proper name in popular use, treat it as a proper name, e.g., "State Correctional Institution – Graterford" can be written as "Graterford State Prison."

Use lowercase for internal elements of companies, corporations, and institutions, such as departments and boards of directors.

Chesco

Appropriate for "Chester County" in headlines. Spell out in story copy.

child care

Two words, despite what autocorrect may think.

children's names

In general, call children 15 or younger by their first name on second reference. For ages 16 and 17, use judgment, but generally go with the surname unless it's a light story. Use surname for those 18 and older.

city

Capitalize city if part of a proper name, an integral part of an official name, or a regularly used nickname: *Kansas City, New York City, Windy City, City of Light, Fun City.*

Lowercase elsewhere: *a Texas city; the city government; the city Board of Education;* and all *city of* phrases: *the city of Boston.*

Capitalize when part of a formal title before a name: *City Manager Francis McGrath.* Lowercase when not part of the formal title: *City Health Commissioner Frank Smith.*

City Council

For quick reference:

- Capitalize when part of a proper name, e.g., "Philadelphia City Council."
- Retain capitalization without including the city name if the reference is to a specific council, but the city is already clear in context, e.g., "City Council meets on Thursday ..."
- Lowercase when referring to multiple city councils or city councils in general. Also lowercase in a headline when not the first word if the city is not specified.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

civil rights movement

Lowercase.

colon

The AP Stylebook has some [great guidance on the use of colons](#). Please remember this: Capitalize the first word to follow a colon only if it is a proper noun or if it is the beginning of a complete sentence. (See what we just did there?)

See guidance for [colons in headlines](#).

commonwealth (of Pennsylvania)

commonwealth does not get capitalized in this instance, as per AP.

composition titles

Capitalize principal words, including prepositions and conjunctions of four or more letters. Capitalize an article or a word of four or fewer letters only if it is the first or last word of the title. (Note: AP hates italics almost as much as it hates acronyms. ONLY use them to illustrate the emphasis given to a word in a direct quote.)

Please note that radio programs, like "Studio 2," get quotation marks. Verticals, like PlanPhilly, do not. Use quotation marks (not italics) to offset the titles of:

- Books
- Computer games
- Movies
- Operas
- Plays
- Poems
- Albums
- Songs
- Radio programs
- TV shows
- Lectures
- Works of art
- Articles

Don't use quotation marks for:

- Newspapers and magazines
- Websites
- Holy books (e.g. the Bible, the Quran, etc.)
- Catalogs
- Reference materials (almanacs, directories, dictionaries, handbooks)
- Art exhibitions

For newspapers: Some, but not all, capitalize the "the" in the name. Check AP Stylebook for a list. Barring that, check the publication's masthead.

- The Philadelphia Inquirer
- Daily News
- The Star-Ledger
- The New York Times
- New York Post
- USA Today
- The Wall Street Journal
- The Washington Post
- Chicago Tribune
- Los Angeles Times

For magazines: Capitalize the initial letters of the name. Lowercase "magazine" unless it is part of the formal title, e.g., Harper's Magazine, Newsweek magazine.

compound modifiers

When a compound modifier — two or more words that express a single concept — precedes a noun, use hyphens to link all the words in the compound except the adverb *very* and all adverbs that end in *-ly*: a first-quarter touchdown, a bluish-green dress, a full-time job, a well-known man, a better-qualified woman, a know-it-all attitude, a very good time, an easily remembered rule.

Many combinations that are hyphenated before a noun are not hyphenated when they occur after a noun: The team scored in the first quarter. The dress, a bluish green, was on sale. She works full time. His attitude suggested that he knew it all.

But when a modifier that would be hyphenated before a noun occurs instead after a form of the verb *to be*, the hyphen usually must be retained to avoid confusion: The man is well-known. The woman is quick-witted. The children are soft-spoken. The play is second-rate.

See also hyphens.

comprise vs. compose

- *Compose* means *to create or put together*. It commonly is used in both the active and passive voices: *She composed a song. The United States is composed of 50 states. The zoo is composed of many animals.*
- *Comprise* means *to contain, to include all or embrace*. It is best used only in the active voice, followed by a direct object: *The United States comprises 50 states. The jury comprises five men and seven women. The zoo comprises many animals.*

corrections, clarifications, editor's notes, and updates

If you make a material or factual correction in a story, you must note the change at the end of a story in a shirttail. Be clear about the error without repeating it. Separate it from the body of the story with an em dash and style it in italics.

Example: *Correction: In a previous version of this story, Mayor Jim Kenney's name was misspelled.*

If the correction is due to an editing error and not the fault of the reporter, say so.

Example: *Editor's note: Because of an editing error, Mayor Jim Kenney's name was misspelled in a previous version of this story.*

Do not delay posting a correction in order to determine the responsible party. You can add that detail later when it is known.

If the correction is particularly notable or egregious or fundamental to the understanding of the story, flag it in italics at the top of the story.

When a story is rewritten, e.g., when the news changes shortly after a story is published, and it can no longer stand as is, add an update note at the top of the story, and add an editor's note at the bottom indicating that this story is an update on a previously published item.

Example: *Editor's note: When this story was published, the ban on the book "The New Jim Crow" had not yet been lifted. It has since been updated to reflect the news.*

When the news changes shortly after a story is published, but the story does not need to be rewritten, it is enough to add an italicized update not at the top indicating what has changed since publication.

Example: *Update: The Trump administration said Monday it is ending special protections for Salvadoran immigrants, an action that could force nearly 200,000 to leave the U.S. by September 2019 or face deportation. Hugo Martinez, El Salvador's foreign minister, says this action underscores the need for legislation that would let them stay. He says he is confident that Congress will develop a permanent fix.*

councilman, councilwoman, council member

"Councilmember" (one word) is the style for Philadelphia City Council, never "councilman" or "councilwoman" except in a direct quote. e.g., "Councilmember Jamie Gauthier and other council members..." (It's two words when not being used as a title.) For other city councils, you have to check their websites to see their style, as they vary from city to city.

dash "—"

Not "--" (two hyphens next to each other). And to avoid awkward line breaks, always include a space on either side of a dash.

Here is how to make one:

- **On a Mac:** shift-option-hyphen
- **On a PC:** Hold down the alt key and type 0151 on the numeric keypad. (Only the numbers on the right-hand keypad do this.)
- **Pro tip:** Copy and paste from elsewhere. Also, WordPress has a handy "custom characters" menu. Click the "Ω" button in the editor tool.

dates, days

For quick reference:

- Months are always spelled out and capitalized when used alone or when used with a year alone, e.g., "January 2016."
- When used with a specific date, the months March, April, May, June and July are never abbreviated. The other seven always are: Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., Jan., Feb. (Note the periods.)
- Never abbreviate days of the week in text. However, you can do so in tabular-type material, such as a calendar, list, or data visualization.
- Set off date from day of the week with commas, e.g., "Today is Wednesday, Sept. 7, all day long." (Note the second comma.)

"Yesterday/today/tomorrow": See **Times and time elements** entry elsewhere in this guide for further details. Use the day of the week or a more precise date, as the tone of the story requires.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

day care

Two words, despite what autocorrect may think.

Delco

Appropriate for "Delaware County" in headlines. Spell out in story copy.

diverse

A single person or thing cannot be diverse, only a group of people or things can be diverse.

fewer vs. less

In general, use "fewer" for individual items, "less" for bulk or quantity.

Examples:

- "The trend is toward more machines and fewer people." ("People" refers to individuals.)
- "She was less than 60 years old." ("Years" refers to a period of time, not individual years.)
- Fewer than 10 applicants called. (Individuals.)
- I had less than \$50 in my pocket. (An amount.)
- I had fewer than 50 \$1 bills in my pocket (Individuals.)

freeholder

Until August 2020, county leaders in New Jersey were known as "boards of chosen freeholders." Gov. Murphy signed a bill abolishing the term, which dates back to a time when Black people and women were excluded from government and property ownership was limited to white men. Now, all "boards of chosen freeholders" are to be known as "boards of county commissioners" and the title of "chosen freeholder" has been changed to "county commissioner."

governmental bodies

Full names: Capitalize the full proper names of governmental agencies, departments and offices: *The U.S. Department of State*, *the Georgia Department of Human Resources*, *the Boston City Council*, *the Chicago Fire Department*.

Without jurisdiction: Retain capitalization in referring to a specific body if the dateline or context makes the name of the nation, state, county, city, etc. unnecessary: *The Department of State* (in a story from Washington), *the Department of Human Resources* or *the state Department of Human Resources* (in a story from Georgia), *the City Council* (in a story from Boston), *the Fire Department* or *the city Fire Department* (in a story from Chicago).

Lowercase further condensations of the name: *the department*, *the council*, etc.

Grays Ferry

NOT Gray's Ferry, Greys Ferry or Grey's Ferry.

health care

Two words, despite what autocorrect may think.

hyphen

Hyphens are joiners. Use them to avoid ambiguity or to form a single idea from two or more words.

Use of the hyphen is far from standardized. It can be a matter of taste, judgment and style sense. Think of hyphens as an aid to readers' comprehension. If a hyphen makes the meaning clearer, use it. If it just adds clutter and distraction to the sentence, don't use it.

If the sheer number of hyphens in a phrase, or confusion about how to use them, can daunt either the writer or the reader, try rephrasing. *It's a guide about how to use hyphens wisely*, not *it's a how-to-use-hyphens-wisely guide*.

AP no longer hyphenates ethnicities, like African American.

See also "compound modifier."

illegal immigrant vs. undocumented immigrant

Do not use the phrase "illegal immigrant." Except in direct quotes essential to the story, the word "illegal" should only describe actions, not people. Immigration can be illegal, but not the immigrant.

The AP does not like "undocumented immigrant" either, because it is imprecise. They prefer "person living in [or entering] a country illegally" or "without legal permission." However, usage of "undocumented" is common enough that it is acceptable in our copy.

Avoid describing without attribution people as having violated immigration laws. Specify wherever possible how someone entered the country illegally (e.g., overstayed a visa) and from where.

People who were brought into the country as children should not be described as having immigrated illegally. For people granted a temporary right to remain in the U.S. under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, use temporary resident status, with details on the program lower in the story.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for full further guidance.

inmate

Avoid this term because of its dehumanizing connotations. Preferred terms include incarcerated person, incarcerated people, formerly incarcerated person (instead of ex-con), formerly incarcerated people, and prisoner.

Indigenous

Capitalize this term used to refer to original inhabitants of a place. *Aboriginal leaders welcomed a new era of Indigenous relations in Australia. Bolivia's Indigenous peoples represent some 62% of the population.*

Jersey Shore/the shore

“Jersey Shore” is acceptable on first reference to the Atlantic coastline of the state of New Jersey. North Jersey and South Jersey also acceptable in headlines and copy. But be sure to identify the exact town somewhere in your story.

People should only capitalize shore when it is preceded by the word Jersey.

“The Shore” is often used colloquially to refer to the Atlantic shoreline of New Jersey. Unless the context makes it absolutely clear, try to specify “Jersey Shore.” The analogous Delaware coastline is most often referred to as “Delaware beaches.”

Latino/Latina/Latinx

We use Latino/a instead of Latinx in most cases. There are only three instances where we would use Latinx. 1.) In a direct quote 2.) in an organization name. 3.) if a person explicitly refers to themselves as “Latinx.”

legislative bodies

The bicameral bodies of state government:

- **Pennsylvania General Assembly:** contains the Pennsylvania Senate (the Senate) and the Pennsylvania House of Representatives (the House). In reference to Pennsylvania’s bicameral legislative body, “legislature” is always lowercase, as it’s not part of the proper name of the body.
- **Delaware General Assembly:** contains the Delaware Senate (the Senate) and the Delaware House of Representatives (the House). In reference to Delaware’s bicameral legislative body, “legislature” is always lowercase, as it’s not part of the proper name of the body.
- **New Jersey Legislature:** contains the New Jersey Senate (the Senate) and the New Jersey General Assembly (the General Assembly). In reference to New Jersey’s bicameral legislative body, “Legislature” is always capitalized.

Capitalize all specific references to governmental legislative bodies, regardless of whether the name of the state is used, e.g., “the New Jersey Senate,” “the Senate,” “the state House.”

Lowercase plural uses, e.g., “the Delaware and Pennsylvania general assemblies” — but, “the New Jersey General Assembly and the Pennsylvania House” (the names are different, and cannot be lumped into one plural).

legislative districts

Congressional districts:

- Use figures and capitalize “district” when joined with a figure, e.g., “the 1st Congressional District,” “the 1st District.”
- Lowercase “district” whenever it stands alone.
 - See **party affiliation** elsewhere in this guide.

Court districts and court names:

- Capitalize the full proper names of courts at all levels.
- Retain capitalization if “U.S.” or a state name is dropped, e.g., “the U.S. Supreme Court,” “the Supreme Court,” “the state Superior Court,” “the Superior Court,” “Superior Court.”
- For courts identified by a numeral: “2nd District Court,” “8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.”

See AP Stylebook **for** complete guidance on [judicial branch](#). See AP Stylebook for complete guidance on [judges](#).

local

Never use this word when you should be more specific. Our news coverage area includes three states. “Local” can mean a lot of things.

LOVE Park

Acceptable on first reference, except when JFK Plaza makes more sense in the context of the story.

medication-assisted treatments

Lower case; spell out on first reference, MAT acceptable on second and subsequent references.

mental illness

Don’t use generic references such as “the mentally ill.” Strive for people-first language when writing about mental illness. It may not always be possible. Clarity is the priority; avoid awkward wording. For example, don’t write something like “a bipolar person” or “an autistic person.” Instead, say “a person with bipolar disorder,” “a person with autism,” “an individual with schizophrenia,” “people with mental illnesses.”

- Do not describe an individual as having a mental illness unless it is clearly pertinent to a story and the diagnosis is properly sourced.
- When used, identify the source for the diagnosis. Seek firsthand knowledge derived from a medical examination; ask how the source knows. Don’t rely on hearsay or speculate on a diagnosis. Avoid anonymous sources. On-the-record sources may be family members, mental health professionals, medical authorities, law enforcement officials or court records.
- *Mental illness* is a general term. Specific conditions are disorders and should be used whenever possible: *He was diagnosed with schizophrenia, according to court documents. She was diagnosed with anorexia, according to her parents. He said he was treated for depression.* Avoid wording such as *he is a schizophrenic, she was anorexic* or *he is mentally ill*.

- Avoid descriptions that connote pity, such as *afflicted with*, *suffers from*, *victim of*, *battling* and *demons*. Rather, *he has obsessive-compulsive disorder*.
- Avoid terms such as *the mentally ill*. Instead: *people with mental illnesses*.
- Do not use derogatory terms, such as *insane*, *crazy/crazed*, *nuts* or *deranged*, unless they are part of a quotation that is essential to the story.
- Avoid using mental health terms to describe unrelated issues. Don't say that an awards show, for example, was schizophrenic.
- Do not assume that mental illness is a factor in a violent crime, and avoid unsubstantiated statements by witnesses or first responders attributing violence to mental illness.
- Studies have shown that the vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent, and experts say most people who are violent do not have mental illnesses.
- Nevertheless, a first responder often is quoted as saying, without direct knowledge, that a crime was committed by a person with a "history of mental illness." If used, such comments must be attributed to law enforcement authorities, medical professionals, family members or others who have knowledge of the history and can authoritatively speak to its relevance. In the absence of definitive information, there should be a disclaimer that a link had yet to be established.
- Double-check specific symptoms and diagnoses. Avoid interpreting behavior common to many people as symptoms of mental illness. Sadness, anger, exuberance and the occasional desire to be alone are normal emotions experienced by people who have mental illness as well as those who don't.
- When practical, let people with mental disorders talk about their own diagnoses.
- Use the term *mental* or *psychiatric hospital*, not *asylum*.
- Here is a link that can be used as a reference: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

#MeToo, #MeToo movement

Aims to hold accountable those involved in sexual misconduct and those who cover it up.

millennial

Lowercase. AP doesn't actually define this generation (neither does NPR). It just says "baby boomers" are those born between 1946 to 1964, the generation following baby boomers is Generation X, and the generation following Gen X is millennials (or Gen Y). AP does not use the terms "zoomers" or "Generation Z."

minority

This is a word to avoid except in a few cases: 1.) In a direct quote 2.) in an organization name (or the name of a government program) We decided to stop using this word after [a call made by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists](#).

Montco

Appropriate for "Montgomery County" in headlines. Spell out in story copy.

neighborhoods, regions

Here is the list of [neighborhood names](#) we use.

Capitalize neighborhood names, e.g., Germantown, Mount Airy, Chestnut Hill. Separate from "Philadelphia" with a comma (as you would a city/state combination), or work into context as early as possible, e.g., "the Francisville section of Philadelphia."

Capitalize directions in well-recognized regions of the city, e.g., "North Philadelphia," "West Philadelphia," "South Philadelphia," but not when used to simply designate a wide area of a city, e.g., "central Philadelphia." Same with sections of a state, e.g., "South Jersey" but "western Pennsylvania."

Treat all neighborhoods with the same level of specificity. Northeast Philly in particular tends to be treated as a monolith.

Used as compass directions, the words should be lowercase, e.g., "north of Market Street."

none (is/are)

It usually means *no single one*. When used in this sense, it always takes singular verbs and pronouns: *None of the seats was in its right place*. Mass nouns — things that can't be counted — also are singular: *None of the coffee was poured*.

Use a plural verb only if the sense is *no two* or *no amount of these things*: *None of the consultants agree on the same approach*. *None of the taxes have been paid*.

nonprofit

One word. Not "non-profit." "Not-for-profit" as an adjective has hyphens.

Examples:

- "The nonprofit food service company hopes its model will catch on."
- "They manage a group of not-for-profit health care providers."

numbers, numerals

Spell out all numerals below 10, i.e., one, two, three. Starting at 10 and higher, use numeric figures, i.e., 10, 23, 500. There will be cases where numerals and spelled-out numbers appear in the same sentence.

Do not start a sentence with a numeral. Either spell it out or recast the sentence. There are two exceptions: Headlines may begin with a numeral; and sentences may begin with years.

Always use numerals for dollar amounts, ages of people, measurements, dimensions, percentages. Use numerals in headlines.

To denote 1,000, you may use "K" in a headline, but not body copy, e.g., \$100K is \$100,000. Same with million ("M") and billion ("B"). The K, M, and B are always capitalized.

Examples:

- a 7-year-old boy; a 7-year-old
- three years ago
- 1%

- third grade
- size 9
- 6-by-8-foot rug; 68,000-square-foot facility
- 5 ounces
- **Headline:** Philly secures \$1B grant

See [AP Stylebook](#) for full guidance.

obscenities, curse words, epithets

Unlike WHYY-FM, WHYY.org is not bound by the FCC's obscenity rules. In general, you may use obscenities in copy only in direct quotations. If obscenities must be used, style them with the first letter and asterisks, but be sure the intent is understandable: s***; motherf*****. But: bull****, f****ing, a**hole. (We go by [NPR style](#) here instead of AP.)

If you are unsure about whether a word is OK, ask the News Director. In general, anything as nasty as "f**k" requires approval of the News Director.

Racial epithets and other hate speech: In the rare instance that these words must be used, they always require the approval of the News Director.

oxford comma, serial comma

We use a comma before the conjunction in all cases. It's the easiest thing to remember, and it's the least likely to cause confusion. (This differs from AP style.)

party affiliation

If it is relevant, strive to indicate a political figure's party affiliation early in a story. It will depend on the scope and context of the story. Include party affiliation if readers need it for understanding or are likely to be curious about what it is.

- Use any of these approaches as logical in constructing a story:
 - "Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., said ..."
Note: The preferred form is to set apart with commas, not parentheses.
 - "Democratic Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania said ..."
 - "Sen. Bob Casey also spoke. The Pennsylvania Democrat said ..."
- **U.S. House members:** For national copy, the AP prescribes identifying U.S. House members by party and state. In a regional context such as ours, state affiliation is likely to be more evident, in which case the home city or county is more relevant, e.g., U.S. Rep. Bob Brady, D-Philadelphia.
- **State legislators:** Short-form listings showing party and home county are appropriate in state stories.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

percent

In body copy and full headlines, use the symbol, "%." Avoid using % for social headlines due to known URL issues on those platforms.

Philly

"Philly" (not "Phila.") may be used as an abbreviation of "Philadelphia" in headlines. It is not a requirement to use the abbreviated "Philly."

"Philly" may be used in body copy, but try to use "Philadelphia" on first reference.

PlanPhilly

PlanPhilly is part of WHY? It is not a "partnership," but rather a project of WHY?.

pleaded

Past tense of "plead." Do not use "pled."

police department

In communities where this is the formal name, capitalize police department with or without the name of the community, e.g., "the Los Angeles Police Department," "the Police Department."

If a police agency has some other formal name such as "Division of Police," use that name if it is the way the department is known to the public. If the story uses "police department" as a generic term for such an agency, put "police department" in lowercase.

If a police agency with an unusual formal name is known to the public as a police department, treat "police department" as the name, capitalizing it with or without the name of the community. Use the formal name only if there is a special reason in the story.

If the proper name cannot be determined for some reason, such as the need to write about a police agency from a distance, treat "police department" as the proper name, capitalizing it with or without the name of the community.

Lowercase "police department" in plural uses, e.g., "the Los Angeles and San Francisco police departments."

Lowercase "the department" whenever it stands alone.

protesters

Not protestors.

pull quotes

If it is a quotation from a speaker in the article, include single quotation marks and attribution set off with an em-dash. If it is from words written by the author, there is no need for quotation marks or attribution.

The Pulse

"The Pulse" is a health, science, and innovation radio program airing on WHYY-FM.

quotations

- Take care when rewriting a transcription as quotations. People don't always speak in complete sentences, but do your best with punctuation to break up the sentences in a way that reads well.
- The AP discourages correcting grammatical errors or improper word usage. Yet the preference also seems to be to avoid non-standard spellings such as "gonna" and "wanna," unless it is helpful or necessary for emphasis. Use best judgment with a preference for clarity above all else.
- Casual minor tongue slips may be removed by using ellipses but even that should be done with caution. If there is a question about a quote, either don't use it or ask the speaker to clarify. If the person says something that doesn't make sense, or if what they say means the opposite of what they actually mean, the solution is to paraphrase.
- Avoid using a colon to introduce a quotation. Using a colon may be acceptable, but the preference is a more conversational, traditional newspaper- and magazine-writing style.
- For a quotation within a quotation, use single quotation marks, e.g., "I never heard her yell 'Get out of the house,'" Joe said.
- To add information to quotations, use brackets, not parentheses. These are brackets: []
- To remove words from quotations, replace with an ellipsis (three periods with a space on either side). If the ellipsis comes at the end of a sentence, use four periods.
- When quoting spoken material, use standard style, e.g, abbreviate "Gov." and "Mr."; use numerals for dollar amounts. When quoting written material, retain the style used by the writer even if it does not match AP or WHYY style.
- Always double check the transcription against the tape, especially if someone is using "nonstandard" English, to make sure the transcription is accurate.
- **Full vs. partial quotations** (AP Style): Avoid using fragmentary quotes. If a speaker's words are clear, favor the full quote. If cumbersome language can be paraphrased fairly, use an indirect construction, reserving quotation marks for sensitive or controversial passages that must be identified as coming specifically from the speaker.
- **Long quotations:** Break up the text by identifying the speaker at the first natural pause. Break up a long quotation (three sentences or more) to make it easier to read. Avoid large, gray blocks of text.
- **Running quotations** (AP Style): "If a full paragraph of quoted material is followed by a paragraph that continues the quotation. Do, however, put open-quote marks at the start of the second paragraph. Continue in this fashion for any succeeding paragraphs, using close-quote marks only at the end of the quoted material."

Example:

Do this — "You can stay really warm with just a hat and gloves, or a dry wicking ear warmer/headband. A great deal of vital body heat is lost through your hands and the top of your head, like a chimney. Each season, I start with a cheapie, \$3 pair of black cotton knit gloves. Later, I switch to the Nike lightweight running gloves," Lauren Boggi said.

Don't do this — "You can stay really warm with just a hat and gloves," said Lauren Boggi, "or a dry wicking ear warmer/headband. A great deal of vital body heat is lost through your hands and the top of your head, like a chimney.
"Each season, I start with a cheapie, \$3 pair of black cotton knit gloves. Later, I switch to the Nike lightweight running gloves."

- **Ellipsis:** Use an ellipsis to indicate the deletion of one or more words in condensing quotations. If an entire sentence is removed, replace it with an ellipsis. Don't use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of a quotation.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

rowhouse/townhouse

NOT row house, rowhome, row home, town home, townhome or town house

school district, school board

For quick reference:

- Capitalize when part of a proper name, e.g., "the Philadelphia School District," "the Philadelphia School Board."
- Retain capitalization without including the city name if the reference is to a specific council but the city is already clear in context, e.g., if Philadelphia or some other municipality is clear from context, then "... a meeting of School Board officials ..."
- Lowercase only when referring to plural school districts or school districts in general (not a specific one).
- Use the correct name if the body is not known as a school board, e.g., "the Lower Merion Board of School Directors"

semicolon

Usually two shorter sentences is better than one long sentence. Don't overuse semicolons.

shirrtails

A "shirrtail" is a brief addendum, styled in italics, at the end of an article. Use this to include additional information useful to the reader, such as:

- Date, time, venue, and price of an event, and any contact information, including the website.
- A short bio of an author or freelancer.
- Names of contributing reporters and writers.

sound bites

Try to avoid ending a story with a sound bite or quotation. The chief reason: Ending with a bite gives more weight to that person's point of view. Just be warned that people do feel this effect. So be careful with this sensitivity, especially with more controversial subjects.

This is not an absolute rule. Sometimes, especially on less controversial stories, ending with a bite is effective.

South Jersey

Acceptable on first reference to the southern region of the state of New Jersey. "North Jersey" is also appropriate on first reference.

For purposes of our coverage area, South Jersey refers to the lower eight counties of the state: Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, and Salem.

StateImpact Pennsylvania

StateImpact Pennsylvania is a joint project of WHYY, WITF, WESA, and The Allegheny Front, reporting on energy and environment in the state. "StateImpact" is one word; Pennsylvania is spelled out.

state names

See AP Stylebook for complete guidelines.

For quick reference:

- The names of all 50 states should be spelled out when used in the body of a story, whether standing alone or in conjunction with a city. States may be abbreviated in photo captions, as per [NPR style](#).
- State abbreviations should be used in short-form indications of party affiliation, e.g., D-Ala., R-Mont. (See **Party Affiliation** elsewhere in this guide.)
Ala., Ariz., Ark., Calif., Colo., Conn., Del., Fla., Ga., Ill., Ind., Kan., Ky., La., Md., Mass., Mich., Minn., Miss., Mo., Mont., Neb., Nev., N.H., N.J., N.M., N.Y., N.C., N.D., Okla., Ore., Pa., R.I., S.C., S.D., Tenn., Vt., Va., Wash., W.Va., Wis., Wyo.
- Eight states are never abbreviated: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, Utah.
- Set off the state from the city with commas, e.g., "Midland, Michigan, has a population of 41,863." (Note the second comma.)
- **Only Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware may be abbreviated in headlines — as Pa., N.J., and Del., respectively. (This differs from AP style, which prescribes avoiding abbreviations in headlines and avoiding periods in abbreviations when they are used.)**

subheads

Longer stories should be broken up into smaller segments to make them appear more digestible. Each section should have a unique subhead, a 4- to 5-word headline for that discrete section of the article. Rule of thumb: If the article is longer than one screen length, it's long enough to take subheads.

Subheads are not full sentences and are not punctuated as sentences. They should be no more than one line deep. Use single quotation marks in subheads.

supervised injection facility

In stories that refer to facilities at which intravenous drug users are able to inject themselves under medical supervision, use "supervised injection facility" on first reference. On subsequent reference, "safe injection site" (no hyphen) is acceptable.

tense

Verb tense: "said" vs. "says"

Generally in news writing, use the past tense verbs of attribution, e.g., "said." The action of the story is almost always, by default, in the past.

Generally in feature writing, you may use present tense verbs of attribution, e.g., "says" — or in cases where it makes sense to lay out the action of the story as if it is unfolding before the reader's eyes. Use present tense verbs of attribution when quoting or paraphrasing something someone says habitually.

times

- To denote time, always use numerals, except for "noon" and "midnight." Use "o'clock" only in direct quotations.
- "a.m." and "p.m.," not "AM" and "PM," or "A.M." and "P.M."

titles, honorifics

In general, confine capitalization to formal titles used directly before an individual's name.

A formal title generally is one that denotes a scope of authority, professional activity or academic activity.

Capitalize formal titles if they precede a name, e.g., "Executive Director Chris Bartlett," "Carrie Jacobs, executive director." This includes corporate, nonprofit, and government titles as well as religious and military titles.

Occupational descriptions more generally describe what a person does for a living. Occupational descriptions are not capitalized even when positioned directly before an individual's name.

- astronaut Sally Ride
- actor Ronald Reagan
- professor Barack Obama

Legislative titles: Use on first reference before the person's full name, e.g., "Mayor Michael Nutter." Words like "president" and "mayor" and "senator" are not capitalized when they appear on their own. Only capitalize them when they precede a name as a title. Only a few are abbreviated before the person's name on first reference: Gov., Lt. Gov., Rep., Sen. (Note the periods.) Ditto military titles and Dr. All other titles should be spelled out.

Courtesy titles: Do not use Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc., except in quotations.

Minister: not a formal title in most religions and not capitalized (with exceptions, such as the Nation of Islam). Where it is a formal, governmental title, it should be capitalized before the name, e.g., "Minister John Jones."

Doctor: Use Dr. (or Drs. in a plural construction) for first-reference use before a name, including direct quotations.

Professor: Never abbreviate. The AP Stylebook does not recognize "professor" as a formal title. "Professor emeritus," however, is a formal title.

Military: Capitalize a military rank when used as a formal title before an individual's name. On first reference, use the appropriate title before the full name. Spell out and lowercase a title when it is substituted for a name, e.g., "Gen. John J. Pershing," "the general." Words such as machinist, radarman, torpedoman, etc. are job descriptions, not titles. AP has a list of military titles for officers and enlisted personnel that can be abbreviated on first reference. Here are a few: Gen., Lt. Gen., Maj. Gen., Brig. Gen., Col., Lt. Col., Maj., Capt., 1st Lt., 2nd Lt., Sgt. Maj., 1st Sgt., Sgt. 1st Class, Sgt., Cpl., Spc., Pfc., Pvt., Adm., Vice Adm., Rear Adm., Cmdr., Lt. Cmdr.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

transgender

From the [NLGJA style guide](#):

Generally, *transgender* describes people whose gender identity and/ or expression may not match the sex they were assigned at birth.

But the word can mean different things to different people. Journalists covering transgender people must ensure they correctly understand and communicate the parameters of the community or communities about which they are reporting.

In a strict sense, the term *transgender* includes people who were assigned as male or female at birth and later identified as the other. But it often is understood as an umbrella term covering other people with nontraditional gender identities, possibly including but not limited to nonbinary, genderqueer, and agender people.

Some *cross-dressers*, *drag queens* and *kings*, *female* or *male impersonators*, and *intersex* people may also identify as transgender, but it's best not to assume they do.

In news coverage, identify people as *transgender* only when relevant to the subject matter and only if they are widely known or describe themselves as such. Otherwise, describe *trans men* as men and *trans women* as women.

Using it as a noun — as in *a transgender* or *a conference of transgenders* — is inaccurate and offensive. Do not use *transgendered*, which is offensive and implies something must have happened to make a person transgender. People can be transgender regardless of age, but journalists should take the usual legal and ethical precautions when reporting on children.

See [AP Stylebook](#) for complete guidance.

Terms and phrases to avoid (from the [Trans Journalists Association Style Guide](#))

biological women/men or born male/female

Avoid the terms “biological gender,” “biological sex,” “biological woman,” “biological female,” “biological man,” or “biological male.” These terms are inaccurate and often offensive. When necessary, you can refer to someone’s assigned sex at birth using terms like “assigned male at birth” or “assigned female at birth.” These can be abbreviated as “AMAB” and “AFAB” after first reference. Think seriously about whether a story requires this information.

Instead use: assigned male/female at birth, assigned sex at birth or raised as a boy/girl

crossdresser

A term that’s considered outdated and offensive when referring to trans people. Avoid using this language unless an individual uses it for themselves.

female/feminine pronouns, male/masculine pronouns

Not all people who use she/her are women, and not all people who use he/him are men.

Instead use: pronouns, she/her pronouns, he/him pronouns

gender identity disorder

This is an outdated term that is no longer relevant and often considered offensive. Gender identity disorder used to be the official psychological diagnosis from the American Psychological Association for trans people seeking transition-related care in the U.S. In 2012, it was changed to gender dysphoria.
Instead use: gender dysphoria

gender nonbinary

This language is awkward, grammatically incorrect and should not be used. We would not say “gender woman” to describe a woman. Writers should use the same grammatical conventions we use for woman or man when writing about other genders.
Instead use: nonbinary

identify as/identifies as

Avoid the phrase “identifies as” to write about a trans person’s gender when replacing it with “is” doesn’t change the meaning of the sentence. This language questions a trans person’s gender by calling it an “identity” instead of just stating someone is non-binary or a man/woman. Journalists never write about cis people’s genders this way. Extend the same respect to trans people. It is only acceptable to use this language when quoting a trans source.
Instead use: is

male-bodied/female-bodied

“Male-bodied” and “female-bodied” are inaccurate terms and are often considered offensive. Male and female bodies come in all shapes in sizes with various primary and secondary sex characteristics.
Instead use: assigned male/female at birth or raised as a boy/girl

male-to-female (MtF), female-to-male (FtM)

These terms used to be a common way to describe a trans person. In recent years, they’ve come to be considered outdated and sometimes offensive descriptors. Journalists should avoid this language unless quoting a trans source.
Instead use: trans woman, trans man

nonbinary pronouns

Avoid the term “nonbinary pronouns.” This is inaccurate because not all nonbinary people use the same pronouns, and people of other genders use they/them pronouns. While many nonbinary people use they/them pronouns, many nonbinary people also use he/him, she/her, ze/hir, and other pronouns.
Instead use: gender-neutral pronouns, they/them pronouns, or pronouns

opposite sex/gender

This language reinforces the gender binary and inaccurately positions men/males and women/females as opposites, rather than merely different genders/sexes.
Instead use: different gender/sex

preferred pronouns

Avoid using the term “preferred pronouns.” Someone’s pronouns are not a preference, but rather the only appropriate way to refer to that person. The term “preferred pronouns” is only appropriate when someone uses more than one set of pronouns and has a preference for one over the other.
Instead use: pronouns

sex change/sex reassignment

These are outdated terms and sometimes considered offensive. Don’t use them unless quoting a trans source.
Instead use: transition, gender-affirming care, or transition-related care

stealth/passing

Avoid using the terms “stealth” or “passing” to describe someone who is not generally perceived as trans unless you are quoting a trans person who uses those words. These terms imply trans people are deceptive by simply existing. Similar phrases like “you’d never be able to tell she was trans” are similarly inappropriate in most cases. Journalists should also avoid making assessments about how trans someone appears to be. When this information is necessary to understand a story, use language like “generally perceived as trans” or “not generally perceived as trans.”

Instead use: out as trans, not out as trans, publicly disclosed as trans, not publicly disclosed as trans, generally perceived as trans, not generally perceived as trans

transgenderism/gender ideology/trans ideology/trans agenda

Far right and anti-trans activists use these terms in disinformation campaigns against trans people. They are politically loaded terms that such activists use to describe what they believe to be a radical trans agenda. This is similar to anti-gay activists fearmongering about “the gay agenda.”

transgendered

This is not a word and is widely considered offensive.

Instead use: transgender

Uber/Lyft

Ride-hailing services such as Uber and Lyft let people use smartphone apps to book and pay for a private car service or, in some cases, a taxi. They may also be called *ride-booking services*. *Ride-sharing* refers to app-based services that let people book a shared shuttle. Zipcar and similar companies are *short-term car rental services*.

WHYY News and self-reference

“WHYY News” is the news-gathering entity and a brand name of WHYY. Use when crediting ourselves, not “WHYY.”

[Example](#): Nearly half of those shot were Black in a state where Black people make up just 22% of the population, according to a WHYY News analysis. That finding reinforces concerns by many First State residents that systemic racism in police forces puts a target on Black suspects.

Reporters, avoid putting yourself in stories as much as possible. When self-reference is unavoidable, write “WHYY News asked” or “WHYY News reached out for comment,” as opposed to “WHYY” or “your correspondent.”

When possible, try instead constructions like this:

- “When asked about [___], she said [___].”
- “He did not respond to requests for comment.”

Wilmington

Does not need “Delaware” in WHYY News copy.

woman vs. female as modifier

Both words can be used to modify a noun.

We disagree with the AP on this count. The AP holds that "woman" should be used only as a noun and that "female" should be only as an adjective, e.g., "female nurse" (as opposed to "woman nurse"). However, if "police dog," "bedroom window," and "income tax" are acceptable, then "woman president" must be as well — not to mention "man purse."

Please note, however, that plural agreement between nouns and their modifiers is not a feature of the English language. In other words, "female presidents" or "woman presidents" is acceptable, but "women presidents" is not.

Be certain that the modifier is necessary. For example, in the case of reporting about the potential for Hillary Clinton to become the first female president, it makes sense as a matter of historical significance.

But usually, to mark a profession by "woman" or "female" suggests that it is more natural for that profession to be held by a man, which usually is nonsense. For instance, we would not say "Jane Smith is a female doctor," just as we would not say "John Smith is a male nurse." The distinction is irrelevant, and the gender is understood.

Do not use "female" as a noun unless it refers to an animal.

young people and youth

"Young people" is generally preferable to "youth," as the latter is sometimes used to criminal young people of color.

Youths is the plural form in AP stories: e.g., youths and young adults.

However, youth in the collective sense is also used in some terms: e.g., youth pastor, at-risk youth, youth baseball.

ZIP code

Use all-caps ZIP for Zone Improvement Plan, but always lowercase the word code.
