

Guidelines for writing with numbers and talking about statistics

1. Cardinal numbers (numerals) are used in:

- Addresses. Always use numerals for street addresses: *1322 N. 10th St.*
- Ages. Always use numerals, even for days or months: *3 days old; John Burnside, 56.*
- Aircraft and spacecraft: *F-4, DC-10, Apollo 11*; exception: Air Force One.
- Clothes size: *size 6.*
- Dates. Always use the numeral alone – no *-rd, -st, or -th* behind it.
- Dimensions: *5-foot-6-inch guard* (but no hyphen when the word modified is one associated with size, such as *3 feet tall, 10 feet long*).
- Highways: *U.S. 63.*
- Millions, billions, and trillions use a numeral before the word: *1.2 billion.*
- Money. Always use numerals, but starting with a million, write like this: *\$1.4 million.*
- Numbers: *No. 1, No. 2.*
- Percentages. Always use numerals except at the beginning of a sentence. And, **always** write out the word percentage when used in a sentence, avoid using % except in tabular data.
- Recipes. All numbers for amounts take numerals, including less than 10.
- Speeds. *55 mph, 4 knots.*
- Sports. Use numerals for just about everything: *score 8-6, 2 yards, 3-under-par, 2 strokes.*
- Temperatures. All are numerals but **zero**: *below zero*, spell out **minus**: *minus 6* not *-6* (except in tabular data).
- Times: *4 a.m., 6:32 p.m.*; but *noon, midnight, five minutes, three hours.*
- Weights: *7 pounds, 11 ounces.*
- Years. Use a numeral without commas: A date is the only numeral that can start a sentence: *1988 was a good year; decade of the '80s.*

2. Numerals with the suffices *-nd, -rd, -st,* and *-th* are used for:

- Political divisions (precincts, wards, districts): *3rd Congressional District.*
- Military sequences: *1st Lt., 2nd Division, 7th Fleet.*
- Courts: *2nd District Court; 10th circuit Court of Appeals.*
- Streets after Ninth. For the first through Ninth, use words; *Fifth Avenue, 13th Street.*
- Amendments to the constitution after *Ninth*. For *First* through *Ninth*, use words.

3. Words are used instead of numerals for:
 - Numbers of less than 10, (be aware of exceptions noted above).
 - Any number at the start of a sentence except for a year (though it would be good practice to avoid starting a sentence with a number which should be written as a numeral if it can be helped).
 - Casual numbers: *about a hundred or so*.
 - Fractions less than one: *one-half*.
4. Mixed numerals are used for fractions greater than one:

1 1/2
5. Roman numerals are used for a man who is the third or later in his family to bear a name, and for a king, queen, pope or world war.

John D. Rockefeller III, Pope John Paul II, Queen Elizabeth II, World War I
6. Always use the dollar sign, \$, instead of writing out *dollar*.
7. Do not report tenths of percentages or smaller decimals, unless the story justifies it, and round appropriately . I.e. *63 percent* not *62.8 percent*
8. Except for years, always use commas to separate the thousands place from the hundred, the millions from the hundred thousands, etc. E.g. 1,650
9. Only report 3 significant digits for averages etc. E.g. *an average income of \$35,600*. NOT *an average income of \$35,578.18*.
10. Only report the size of the poll (if at all) toward the end of your article: never at the beginning. Do not round the size of the poll on which you are reporting it.
11. Do not let a number stand alone naked. Always indicate what the number means.
12. Avoid using technical jargon as much as possible. If talking about means, it's preferable to say **average**. Your reader isn't a student of statistics and therefore can not be expected to know what any of the following mean: *standard deviation, mode, median, confidence level, level of significance, confidence interval, hypothesis test, etc.* Occasionally, it may be necessary (or even desirable) to take about the mode, median, or level of significance, or some quartile. In this case, a brief explanatory sentence or even just phrase should be included.