

Greetings!

Knee High by the Fourth of July

Here we are in the thick of summer, with the garden looking great and the air conditioner blasting. As everyone's running off to the beach, the pool, or the lake (really anywhere that isn't the office), we're keeping *KB CommEntary* fresh and on schedule so that you have something in your inbox when vacation's over. In this issue it's a numbers game—we have what you need to know about formatting numerals and measurements.

What's Up at KB COMM?

At KB COMM, we provide mission-critical communication and learning services to clients in a variety of industries. Thanks to our established and new clients for keeping us busy. Recent and ongoing projects include:

- Creating technical documentation for a financial-transaction system developer
- Creating and revising job descriptions for the Careers website of a high-tech manufacturer
- Writing and editing numerous information products for a healthcare diagnostics manufacturer, including communications to employees from the CEO and executive leadership team, customer letters, trade show presentations and materials, and product marketing brochures
- Writing, formatting, and performing quality control reviews of large, complex chemical residue studies intended for regulatory submission on behalf of a federally funded, cooperative research organization
- Writing supplements and formatting modules of electronic submissions to various health authorities for a pharmaceutical manufacturing company

KB COMM LLC is a certified Women's Business Enterprise. We are officially qualified to participate in corporations' woman- and minority-owned vendor programs.

Please keep us in mind for your communication or training projects.

Tips and Tales

You Know My Name (Look Up the Number)

We use numbers and measurements all the time when we write—everything from recipes to lab reports to political journalism is bound to be full of liters, inches, pounds, and percentages. But as with everything, there are rules governing how all things numerical are properly notated.

And as usual, there are different sets of standards. As we've mentioned before, most American businesses follow the *Chicago* or *Associated Press* (AP) manuals of style, but, because no one uses more numbers than scientists, this issue will include the *American Chemical Society* (ACS) rules as well.

As you will soon discover, the three guides may give conflicting advice. The most important thing is to pick one (or a combination!) and be consistent. No matter which style guide you choose, make sure you follow its guidelines every single time—or else your employees (and your readers) will become confused very quickly.

The Chicago Manual of Style:

For general and nontechnical writing, *Chicago* recommends that whole numbers less than 100, round numbers (such as hundreds, thousands, and millions), and numbers beginning sentences be spelled out completely—so one would write *seventy-six trombones*, *365 days a year*, and *ten thousand dollars*. There are exceptions for certain contexts that traditionally use numerals, such as fuel efficiency of *40 miles per gallon* and *size 6 dress*.

For technical and scientific writing, *Chicago* suggests that any number followed by a unit of measurement should be written as a numeral. Measurements typically

follow SI standards (the International System of Units, or *Système international d'unités*). SI standards do not use periods to abbreviate units, use the same symbols for both the singular and plural, and always spell out a unit of measurement used without a numeral.

In addition, SI standards use spaces rather than commas to separate three-digit sections of large numbers. This convention is more commonly seen in European scientific publications. American scientific publications use commas in numerals of ten thousand or higher but do not include commas in four-digit numbers.

So, if following *Chicago* for technical and scientific subject matter, one would write *3 mm film, 0.6 g of iron, 4'9"*, and *Measurements were recorded in grams*.

The Associated Press Stylebook:

AP suggests spelling out whole numbers less than 10, round numbers, and numbers beginning sentences. Any number followed by a unit, however, should be written as a numeral, with the name of the unit not abbreviated.

Following AP, one would write *the cat has nine lives, 76 trombones, 4 foot-long rug, and 60 degrees*.

Note: AP does not have separate rules for scientific or technical contexts, and may not be the best choice for these types of writing.

The ACS Style Guide:

Used only for scientific and technical writing, ACS suggests numerals for all numbers followed by a unit, except at the beginning of sentences or in nontechnical material (in which case both the number and the unit should be spelled out completely). Numbers with items other than units of time or measure should be written out if less than 10 (*30 flasks, seven samples*).

ACS suggests using whichever unit abbreviations are appropriate, usually SI standards. Once again, SI does not use periods to abbreviate (so *mph* and *kg* are correct; *m.p.h.* and *kg.* are not). However, the 37-page list of abbreviations, acronyms, and symbols provided in the guide do include a few with periods (for example, *in.* rather than *in* for *inches*. The period distinguishes the abbreviation from the word.).

ACS recommends using either commas or spaces in large numbers, depending on the intended publication, but using neither for four-digit numbers (additionally, commas should only be used before the decimal point, where spaces are used both before and after).

Using ACS, one would write *4 g, 0.7 in., two flasks, 6'2", 23 °C, 1595 s*, and either *31 450.809 342* or *31,450.809342 mi*.

ACS specifies use of a hyphen between a number and unit of measurement when they form a unit modifier (*3-min interval*). *Chicago* disagrees, and AP doesn't weigh in. The hyphen helps the reader and we are all about that, so we say go for it!

If one of these style guides catches your eye, we highly recommend picking up a copy. They have rules for pretty much everything you can imagine, and having a reference at hand means fewer grammar conundrums and pesky usage pitfalls—and what could be better than that?

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

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