

Numbers in Academic Writing

The rules for using numbers in academic writing vary across many styles. The conventions described here are for NON-TECHNICAL academic prose where numbers are not a significant focus. It is based on APA 7th conventions. Scientific and technical writing have their own conventions, and students should consult a manual dedicated to those standards. The main rules about the use of numbers in standard academic writing are about:

1. When to write numbers in words
2. How to avoid confusion with numbers in a sentence
3. When to use digits for numbers
4. How to write numbers correctly



GRAMMAR CHECKERS will not help you with the acceptable presentation of numbers in academic writing. You need to know and use the conventions for writing numbers correctly when you are writing and proofreading your work.

1. When to write numbers in words

For general academic writing, use words for:

- all numbers under 10 (e.g., nine)
- rounded numbers (e.g., four hundred, two thousand, six million).
- ordinal numbers less than 10th (e.g., fourth, second)
- common fractions (e.g., one third of the group)
- universally accepted usage (e.g., Seven Wonders of the World)
- numbers beginning a sentence, title, or heading (rewrite sentence if possible)
- approximate numbers and some times of the day (full, half, and quarter hour times).

Exceptions: See 3. When to use digits for numbers

Examples

- ✓ The country had been at war for nine years. (numbers under 10)
- ✓ Over four hundred soldiers were sent to the war zone. (rounded numbers)
- ✓ The 38th battalion was sent to the war zone for the fourth time. (ordinal numbers)
- ✗ 130 student volunteers joined the university peace mission. (numbers beginning sentence)
- ✓ One hundred and thirty student volunteers joined the university peace mission. (in words)
- ✗ 75 percent of the rental properties were occupied by students.
- ✓ Students occupied 75 percent of the rental properties in the town. (rewrite)
- ✓ about half the students; a quarter of the university; four times as often; hundreds of times (approximate numbers)
- ✓ six o'clock, half past six, quarter past seven, quarter to nine, midday, midnight (times of day).

2. How to avoid confusion with numbers in a sentence

- **Avoid confusion when using two numbers together (run-on numbers) or when dealing with several numbers in a single sentence**

Examples

- ✓ There were 32 third-grade students participating in the test. (run-on numbers)
- ✓ The computer laboratory has 24 thirty-centimetre monitors. (run-on numbers)
- ✓ At least 28 million people lived in the region where a 1500 dollar a year support allowance was given for each student's education fees. (Be consistent—write both numbers in digits or words)

3. When to use digits for numbers

- Use digits for numbers greater than 10 and in the following situations

Use digits for	Examples
Numbers 10 and above both cardinal and ordinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ For cardinal numbers (e.g., I counted 3,968 books). ✓ For ordinal numbers (e.g., He was the 12th in line). Use either 12th or 12th but be consistent.
Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use digits for exact amounts (e.g., \$24.28), but use digits and words for rounded and large amounts (e.g., 98 dollars; \$15 million).
Measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Numbers that precede a unit of measurement (e.g., 32 °C or 32 degrees centigrade; 6 cm or 6 centimetres).
Percentages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use 5% or 5 percent (e.g., Over 5% of students passed the examination.).
Fractions & decimals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fractions: Write in digits or words. If you use words, join the fraction parts with a hyphen (e.g., $\frac{2}{3}$ or two-thirds). ✓ Decimals: Give exact amounts in digits (e.g., 0.45 not .45; 2.36).
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Write survey results in digit form (e.g., A survey of participants revealed that 4 out of 5 students worked.).
Scores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Write scores in digit form (e.g., Students scored from 8 to 75 out of 100.). ✓ Points on a scale (e.g., scored 3 on a 5-point scale)
Statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use digits to describe statistical information (e.g., The survey focused on 90 teachers, 10 principals, and 24 auxiliary staff from 20 different schools.).
Eras & time spans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use numbers for centuries (e.g., the 18th century or the 18th century). ✓ Time spans (e.g., from the 1960s to the 1990s; during the 2000s; in 2300 BC [before Christ]; in 1770 AD [<i>anno Domini</i>, after Christ]).
Date & time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use this order (day/month/year) consistently (e.g., Tuesday 23 February 2008). ✓ Choose from a variety of formats but be consistent (e.g., 9 am or 9.00 am or 8.22 pm or 4 o'clock).
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ e.g., 2-year-olds, ages 5–7 years, was 6 years old.
Spans of numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use digits (e.g., pages: 56–74, 115–117; years: 1864–1899, 1998–2008; streets 36–99 Spa St). Use an n dash for the span.
Specific place in a numbered series if placed 1after the noun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Divisions in books and plays (e.g., Volume 5, Chapter 6, page 45; Act 2, Scene 4). ✓ School grades (e.g., Year 1, Grade 4) ✓ Sequence of tables, figures, questions (e.g., Table 2, Figure 3, Question 1)

4. How to write numbers correctly

- Use particular conventions if you are required to **write digits**
 - In general, use commas between groups of three digits in numbers of 1,000 or more (e.g., 1,360; 566,420; 10,235,362).
 - To create a plural, add an 's' (e.g., 20s, 5s).
- Use particular conventions if you are required to **write numbers in words**
 - To create a plural, add 's' or 'es' (e.g., twos, sixes).
 - Use hyphens for fractions and if necessary to write a two-digit number in words such as at the beginning of a sentence (e.g., 94 = ninety-four; $\frac{3}{8}$ = three-eighths).