

# Broadcast Style Sheet

**Abbreviations:** Avoid using initials of organizations unless they are well known (F-B-I, Y-M-C-A, I-R-S). When the abbreviation makes a word, do not use hyphens (ex: NATO).

**Active voice:** Always use active voice instead of passive. Ex: “His leg was broken” should be “He broke his leg.”

**Addresses:** Do not use the address unless it is absolutely necessary to the story. (Instead, try major cross streets.) Spell out street, avenue, road, etc.

**Attribution:** Attribution goes at the beginning of a sentence. This is for clarity sake. Ex: “Police say the man murdered his roommate.”

**Contractions:** Use them to help your writing be more conversation, but be careful. (Ex: can and can’t sound very similar)

**Length:** Stories are typically 15, 20, 30 or 45 seconds.

**Miles-per-hour:** Spell out miles per hour instead of MPH.

**Months:** Never abbreviate months. Always spell them out.

**Names:** Never start a story with an unfamiliar name because the listener or viewer may miss it. Set up the name first. If a person is well known, the first name may be omitted (President Obama, Governor Perry, etc.). Use a person’s title before his or her name. In the case of a married woman, use Mrs. only if the story mentions both the husband and wife. Only use Mr. on rare occasions (to separate husband and wife in a story involving both). Spell out Junior and Senior after a man’s name and do not separate from the name with a comma (ex: Martin Luther King Junior)

**Numerals:** Spell out numbers 1-11. Use figures for 12-999. Never start a story with a number, but you may begin a subsequent sentence with a number if you spell it out. Avoid using long lists of numbers. Round off long, detailed numbers where the story content allows, and use words like “nearly,” “almost,” “approximately” etc.

**Age:** Only use exact age if it is a part of the story. Put the person’s age before his or her name (25-year-old John Johnson). Avoid redundancies like “young girl.”

**Address, dates and ordinals:** Use figures when mentioning a specific address. (ex: 9 Coats Road). Spell out “first” through “eleventh” and use figures from 12 and above, followed by the appropriate suffix “th,” “st,” “nd” and “rd.” Hyphenate address numbers the way you want them pronounced (ex: 27-18 University Drive).

**Currency:** Forget the \$ sign. Write out “dollars” at the end of the amount.

**Decimals:** Spell out decimals and hyphenate (ex: three-point-seven)

**Fractions:** Spell out fractions and hyphenate (ex: three-fourths)

**Large numbers:** Use words for thousand, million, billion, etc. When writing thousands, you can use hundred if it sounds better (ex: 12-hundred). Put a hyphen before hundred, thousand, million, etc.

**Percent:** Write out “percent” after the amount

**Phone numbers:** Use figures for phone numbers with a hyphen between every number (ex: (5-1-2) 2-4-5-1-0-5-5).

**Singular:** Do not substitute “a” for “one” when it can sound like “eight.” For example, “a million dollars” can sound like “eight-million dollars.” Write out “one-million dollars.”

**Time:** Use figures followed by the time of day. (ex: 8 in the morning, 4 in the afternoon, 11:30 last night). Using A-M or P-M is allowed, but use it sparingly.

**Obscenities, profanities and vulgarities:** If the use of these is necessary to the story, put a warning at the top of the story

**Pauses:** Use dashes or an ellipsis to indicate a pause

**Pronouncers:** Use pronouncers for names or words difficult to pronounce. Put the phonetic spelling after the word in parenthesis. Use the AP phonetic symbols:

#### **Vowels**

a – bad, apple

ah – father, arm

aw – raw, broad

ay – fate, ace

e, eh – bed

ee – feet, ease

i, ih – pin, middle

oh – go, oval

oo – food, two

ow – scout, crowd

oy – boy, join

u – curl, foot

y, eye – ice, time, guide

yoo – fume, few

#### **Consonants**

g – got, beg

j– job, gem

k – keep, cap

ch – chair, butcher

sh – shut, fashion

zh – vision, mirage

th – thin, math

**Punctuation:** Five main punctuation marks are used in broadcast news – the period, comma, question mark, hyphen and dash (the dash is two or three hyphens --- )

**Hyphen:** Hyphenate words such as semi-annual, anti-pollution, co-defendant, non-fiction, etc. for the ease of the news reader, despite what the dictionary may tell you. Use the hyphen between letters of a word when you

want it pronounced that way on air. Use hyphens between numerals for phone numbers. Do not split or hyphenate words at the end of a line.

**Dash:** The dash calls for a longer pause than the comma. (An ellipsis can be used for this same purpose.)

**Quotation marks:** Avoid the use of quote marks. Use soundbites instead. If you must read someone's quote, don't say "quote" "unquote." Instead say things like, "As Jenny David put it," or "Garcia continued to say."

**Commas:** Commas are generally not your friend in broadcast writing. Avoid them when possible.

**Say:** Use say or says instead of said

**Sentence structure:** Should be written in subject-verb-object order. Who did what...

**Tense:** Use present tense when available, especially for the lead (find a fresh angle for the lead). After that, you will probably switch to past tense when things have already happened. This is perfectly acceptable for broadcast news.

**Wording:** Use conversational, easy-to-understand words. Your audience has one chance to understand the story. Make sure it is clear and simple. Your audience's attention span is also likely divided (especially in the morning and dinner time). Grab their attention.