

AP style guidelines most frequently used by writers and editors of *fairfaxgardening.org*

Writers and editors for *fairfaxgardening.org* should strive to produce clear, concise articles for the website. To help guide us, we use the Associated Press Stylebook, as well as the good grammar and writing rules we have all learned along the way.

The AP Stylebook contains nearly 500 pages of rules. Don't be alarmed: We will never have to employ most of these. However, several style questions do keep coming up. Here, according to the AP, is how to handle them:

Punctuation

Comma

Serial comma: “Use commas to separate elements in a series, but do not put a comma before the conjunction in a simple series: *The flag is red, white and blue. He would nominate Tom, Dick or Harry.*”

“Use a comma also before the concluding conjunction in a complex series of phrases: *The main points to consider are whether the athletes are skillful enough to compete, whether they have the stamina to endure the training, and whether they have the proper mental attitude.*”

Equal adjectives: “Use commas to separate a series of adjectives equal in rank. If the commas could be replaced by the word *and* without changing the sense, the adjectives are equal: *a thoughtful, precise manner: a dark, dangerous street.* Use no comma when the last adjective before a noun outranks its predecessors because it is an integral element of a noun phrase, which is the equivalent of a single noun: *a cheap fur coat* (the noun phrase is fur coat): *the old olden bucket: a new, blue spring bonnet.*”

Exclamation point

“Use the mark to express a **high** degree of surprise, incredulity, or other strong emotion. **Avoid overuse:** Use a comma after mild interjections. End mildly exclamatory sentences with a period.”

Period

“Use a single space after a period at the end of a sentence.”

Numerals

“In general, spell out one through nine . . . Use figures for 10 or above and whenever preceding a unit of measure or referring to ages of people, animals, events or things.” Examples:

- a 2-year-old lilac bush
- a 1-inch planting depth
- a 12-foot tree
- six tomato plants
- ready for harvest in three months

Fractions

“Generally spell out amounts less than 1 in stories, using hyphens between the words: *two-thirds, four-fifths, seven-sixteenths, etc.*

When using fractional characters, use a forward-slash mark: $1/8$, $1/4$, etc. For mixed numbers use $1\ 1/2$, $2\ 5/8$ etc. with a full space between the whole number and the fraction.”

Percent

“Use figures for percent and percentages : *1 percent, 2.5 percent* (use decimals, not fractions), *10 percent, 4 percentage points*. For a range, *12 to 15 percent or between 12 and 15 percent.*”

Dimensions

“Use figures and spell out inches, feet, yards, etc. to indicate depth, height, length and width. Hyphenate adjectival forms before nouns. *He is 5 feet 6 inches tall, the 5-foot 6-inch man, the basketball team signed a 7-footer. The car is 17 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 5 feet high. The rug is 9 feet by 12 feet, the 9-by-12 foot rug. The storm left 5 inches of snow. The building has 6,000 square feet of floor space.*”

Temperature

“Use figures, except zero. *It was 8 degrees below zero or minus 8. The temperature dropped from 38 to 8 in two hours.*”

Fahrenheit: “Use these forms: *86 degrees Fahrenheit* or *86 F* (note the space and no period after the F) if degrees and Fahrenheit are clear from the context.”

Miscellaneous

Directions and regions

“In general, lowercase *north, south, northeast, northern*, etc. when they indicate compass direction; capitalize these words when they designate regions. Compass directions: *He drove west. The cold front is moving east.* Regions: *A storm system that developed in the Midwest is spreading eastward. It will bring showers to the East Coast by morning and to the entire Northeast by late in the day.*”

Plants

“In general, lowercase the names of plants, but capitalize proper nouns or adjectives that occur in a name. Some examples: *tree, fir, white fire, Douglas fir, Scotch pine, clover, white clover, white Dutch clover.*”

And . . .

- Catalog, not catalogue
- Backyard, not back yard
- Such as, not like: Herbs include plants *such as* rosemary, tarragon, basil and sage – NOT Herbs include plants *like* rosemary, tarragon, basil and sage. Use like for comparison.