

Numbers

From dates to page numbers to percentages; how to use numbers correctly.

Table of contents

1. Writing numbers
2. Number rounding
3. Generalised numbers
4. Millions and billions
5. Page numbers
6. Plus and minus
7. Fractions
8. Percentages
9. Dates
10. Time
11. Ages
12. Money
13. Measurements and units

Write all numbers 10 and over as numerals, up to 999,999.

Write numbers one to nine as words unless they are technical or precise, such as dates, figure or table titles, or relate directly to the statistics being presented.

EXAMPLE

On the one hand...
This is the most effective of the two measures...
7 March 2017
1,000
Figure 1

Where a range crosses the 10 boundary, use numerals.

EXAMPLE

9 to 12 respondents, not nine to 12 respondents

Write out rankings first to ninth, then use numerals. Don't use superscript for "st", "nd", "rd" and "th".

EXAMPLE

first
10th

A sequence of numbers should use the same format for both, which should follow the higher number.

EXAMPLE

6th out of 12

Don't use abbreviations of "numbers", such as "no" or "nos". They can be read incorrectly.

Use commas after every three decimal places in numbers of four digits or more, and never spaces. Years should have no punctuation.

EXAMPLE

100,000
2,548
1995

Avoid writing sets of numbers together.

EXAMPLE

In 1961 just over 2,500 births were recorded

Not

In 1961 2,543 births were recorded

Use a 0 where there's no digit before the decimal point in a number.

EXAMPLE

0.6%

Don't start a sentence with a numeral. Rearrange the sentence accordingly.

EXAMPLE

The number of people who drive a car is 52.4 million

Not

52.4 million people drive a car

Don't use a hyphen to indicate a range of numbers, separate with "to".

EXAMPLE

Around 15 to 20 people attended the event.

Rounding numbers can make them easier to read and compare, although this must be balanced against the loss of precision.

The level of rounding you use (for example, one decimal place or two significant figures) should be effective, and chosen according to the intended use. It should also be consistent throughout your piece of writing.

For more detail about intended users, go to [Number rounding in the Data visualisation section](#).

For more information about presenting tables and graphs (including rounding on page 7), see the [Government Statistical Service's Good Practice Team guidance](#).

Write out generalised numbers.

EXAMPLE

hundreds of years
in their thousands

Write out and use lower case.

EXAMPLE

2.5 million
148 billion

Don't use "0.xx million" for numbers less than 1 million, unless part of a sequence of numbers

Use the fewest digits possible while remaining clear. Separate them with "to".

EXAMPLE

1 to 4

10 to 18
132 to 148<

In text, when referring to positive and negative numbers, write out “positive” and “negative” in full.

EXAMPLE

positive 7
negative 3

In a dataset, use the symbols with no space between them and the number.

EXAMPLE

+7
-3

Write out and hyphenate fractions.

EXAMPLE

two-thirds
three-quarters

Avoid using too many fractions as it can be difficult to compare several together.

Also avoid using large denominators.

EXAMPLE

three-sixteenths

Write out decimal fractions as numerals. Use the same number format for a sequence of fractions and decimals.

EXAMPLE

0.75 and 0.45

Use the symbol with no space between it and the number.

EXAMPLE

6%

Always write “percentage” and never %age.

Use the same number of decimal places for a sequence of decimal numbers.

EXAMPLE

6.25% and 7.60%

A percentage point is the difference between percentages. A value of 10% falling by one percentage point becomes 9% (10% has ten percentage points). A fall of 1% would result in a value of 9.9%

Use the format “[Date] [Month] [Year]” (depending on what information you have) written out with no commas. If the day of the week is relevant, then put it before the date. No “st”, “nd”, “rd” and “th”.

EXAMPLE

12 March 2014
Monday 3 March 2014

Write out months in full. If space is limited (such as in a table) use the shortened version with no punctuation, but not for June and July. Do not use shortened versions of months in titles.

EXAMPLE

Jan
Apr
Sept
Retail sales in Great Britain: September 2017

Date spans

Use the format “[date] to [date]”. If using months, repeat the year after each month if the period spans years.

EXAMPLE

2009 to 2010
July to September 2014
July 2013 to September 2014

For a period between two dates, use the format “between [date] and [date]”.

EXAMPLE

between 1986 and 2014
between July and September 2014

Decades

Decades should only have an apostrophe when they are a possessive, not a contraction.

EXAMPLE

a 1960s' child
the 1960s were great

Centuries

Use ordinal numbers.

EXAMPLE

21st century

Quarters

Use “[Quarter 1]” only. Always explain which months are included in the quarter.

EXAMPLE

Business Investment, Quarter 1 Jan to Mar 2014 provisional results

Financial years

For financial years, write the period out in full the first time you use it in each section, followed by the abbreviation FYE for “financial year ending” in brackets. After that, use the abbreviation. This will need to be written out in full again the first instance in each section of your article or page.

EXAMPLE

financial year ending (FYE) 2011
FYE 2011

Don't use the 24-hour clock. Don't insert spaces between the number and the letters, and don't use any punctuation except as shown.

EXAMPLE

9am
10:30am
midday
midnight
11:30pm

Use the same number format for time spans.

EXAMPLE

8:00am to 5:30pm
1pm to 3pm

Use the format "aged [age] years"

EXAMPLE

aged nine years

Use the format "aged [age] to [age] years".

EXAMPLE

aged 10 to 11 years

Include the months or weeks for ages under a year.

EXAMPLE

aged nine weeks

If you refer to ages as "[age]-year-old", include the hyphens.

EXAMPLE

24-year-old

16- to 24-year-old men

Write decades as an age as numerals.

EXAMPLE

women in their 40s

Limits for age restrictions should use “aged [age] and over” or “aged under [age] years”. Don’t use the plus sign.

EXAMPLE

aged 75 and over

aged under 18 years

Use the major currency unit before the amount. Don’t use decimals unless using smaller units.

EXAMPLE

£15

\$76.56

In a sequence of numbers, use the same number of decimal places, even if every number doesn’t have a smaller unit.

EXAMPLE

£10.43 rising to £12.00.

Don’t use “0.xx million” for amounts less than 1 million, unless in a sequence of numbers.

EXAMPLE

£3.5 million, £6.5 million and £0.9 million

Write out the smaller unit in full.

EXAMPLE

15 pence

Currency should use lower case.

EXAMPLE

The euro is stronger than the pound.

Write out currency as “British pounds”, or “American dollars”.

Use metric units of measurement, except in specific cases where imperial units are still used as standard.

EXAMPLE

miles
yards
feet and inches
pints (for beer, cider and milk)
acres (for land registration)

Write out measurements at first mention, then abbreviate. If it's only mentioned once, don't abbreviate.

EXAMPLE

12 kilometres per hour (kph)

Abbreviations shouldn't have full stops and are always singular. Use a space between the number and the abbreviation, except with one-letter abbreviations.

Write out “miles” and “metres” in full.

EXAMPLE

12 kph
9L
10 miles