Addresses and street names
With specific addresses, capitalize and abbreviate Ave., Blvd. and St., as in 1435 Jayhawk Blvd. If you are referring to a street but not a specific address, don’t abbreviate: The School of Journalism is on Jayhawk Boulevard. Always spell out road, terrace, drive.

Ages
Always use numerals when referring to people: She turned 21 last week. The boy is 3 years old.

Hyphenate when used as an adjective or a noun: The 3-year-old boy fell down. The 12-year-old is in middle school.

Capitalization
Proper names are capitalized, as is the first word of a sentence. Formal titles are capitalized if they come before a name, as in President Harry Truman. But that same title is lowercase if it comes after a name or is used generically:

Harry Truman was once president. How many presidents have visited Kansas?

Also see Titles.

The proper name of a group, an institution or an organization is capitalized: the National Committee to Use Style Correctly. (Note that the is lowercase. Most of the time, that’s how you’ll use it.) But lowercase the group’s name when referring to it informally: the style committee.

In all your writing, take a close look at words and phrases and ask whether they should really be capitalized. Unnecessary capitalization diverts attention from the writing itself, and that’s not what you want.

Cities
The names of many cities stand on their own, without a state or country name, such as Philadelphia, Denver, Beijing and Paris. See AP’s list in the Datelines entry. Also see individual state names.
Collective nouns
Words such as committee, group, team, class and company are considered singular and take singular verbs and pronouns.

Correct: The company is closing on Thursday. It will reopen on Tuesday.
Incorrect: The company hired a consultant to help them evaluate their budget.

Commas
Don’t use a comma before and in a simple series:
I went to the movie with Bill, Jane and Jack.
Germany’s flag is black, red and yellow.

Always use commas to separate a city from its state: He lives in Wahoo, Neb.
If the sentence continues, use a second comma after the state name:
He drove to Reno, Nev., before heading north toward Walla Walla, Wash.
The same principle applies to dates and to nonessential phrases and clauses.

Company names
In general, follow the company’s preference for spelling and capitalization. Do not render a name in all capital letters unless it is initials (such as IBM or AIG). Always capitalize the first letter if the name starts a sentence. Abbreviate and capitalize Corp., Co. and Inc. and use them without commas if they follow a company name, although you often don’t need them at all. Also see the entries for company, companies; corporation; and incorporated. The stylebook contains individual entries for many companies. See, for instance, J.C. Penney Co., Microsoft Corp. and Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

Composition titles
This is the entry to consult when deciding how to render the names of books, movies, plays and the like. In general, capitalize these titles and put quotation marks around them:

After finishing “The Grapes of Wrath,” he went to “The Rocky Horror Picture Show.”

AP favors quotation marks to italics. (Examples here are in italics to set them apart from the guidelines.) Some publications and organizations use italics instead of quotation marks, though, so make sure you know your local style guidelines.

Dates, days, months and years
Always spell out March, April, May, June and July. Otherwise abbreviate the names of months and use numerals in specific dates: She was born on Oct. 23. He was in New York City on Sept. 11, 2001. We will leave on April 3. Note that the numbers in specific dates do NOT take suffixes such as th, rd or nd (as in April 3rd).

When using months alone, spell them out: Halloween is in October. I’m planning to go on a big trip in December. Do the same if you use a month and a year but not a specific date: I went to Italy in August 2003.

Always put a comma between a specific date and a year. If the sentence continues after such a date, use a comma after the year: She turned 21 on May 5, 2008. Once the law takes effect on July 1, 2011, the state may never be the same. But do not use a comma with just a month and a year: We took a trip in May 2006. If you refer to something in the previous 11 months or the coming 11 months, don’t include the year (usually):

School will start on Aug. 18. She left for Europe on Dec. 26.

Always spell out the days of the week: He didn’t go to work on Monday.
Essential and nonessential phrases and clauses:
Entries on these grammatical points will help you punctuate your work properly. Read them and ask for help if you don’t understand them. Basically, if a phrase or clause is not essential to the meaning of a sentence, it should be set off by commas. If it is essential to the meaning of a sentence, it should not have commas.

For example: Students who read every day become better writers. The clause who read every day is essential to the meaning of the sentence. You wouldn’t say Students become better writers or Students, who read every day, become better writers. Those sentences don’t mean the same thing.

These guidelines trip up many people when they use that and which. Remember this: That never takes a comma. Which almost always does. But make sure you know what you want to say.

For example: The snow that fell Monday needs to be shoveled. That suggests that we have had more than one snowstorm, that previous snow has been shoveled but that the snow from Monday has not.

But: The snow, which fell Monday, needs to be shoveled. In this case, we have had only one snowstorm. It was Monday and that snow needs to be shoveled.

Hyphens
When you use a compound modifier before a noun, usually hyphenate it.
He waded through waist-high water. She drove on a one-way street.

When those same modifiers are used after a noun, though, they are usually not hyphenated: The water was waist high. The street runs one way.

There are many exceptions, though, so always check the stylebook.

Don’t use a hyphen with most adverbs. The thinking is that –ly acts the same way a hyphen does to connect words:
The United States sent some badly needed supplies. He ran a poorly financed campaign.

But not all words that end in –ly are adverbs, so be careful: –ly adjectives usually take a hyphen when part of a compound modifier:
The unit was plagued by friendly-fire incidents. She loves early-morning flights.

Money
Use numerals most of the time. Use the $ with a figure, but spell out cents with amounts less than $1:
He had only 3 cents in his pockets. Grandma gave me $20 for my birthday. He paid $21,000 for his new car.

But spell out dollar or dollars in a casual reference: He saved a few hundred dollars.

With amounts larger than $999,999, use a figure and the words million, billion, trillion: $4.38 billion, $1 trillion. (There are exceptions.)

See AP’s entries on dollars, cents, and millions, billions.

Names
On second reference, use only a person’s last name. Smith and Jones celebrated after their victory. Most of the time, don’t use courtesy titles such as Mr., Mrs. or Ms. The stylebook lists some exceptions, though. See AP’s entry on courtesy titles.
Numbers
In general, spell out numbers below 10:
She graduated in four years. The building is eight stories high. I met three students from Alaska.

Use numerals for 10 and above:
He drove 70 mph on the interstate. He cut down 26 trees last week.

With numbers between 1,000 and 999,999, use commas:
He collected 1,436 political buttons. Enrollment at the University of Kansas exceeded 30,000 this year.

Numbers of a million or more
Most of the time, use only the first few digits (rarely more than two decimal places) followed by million, billion or trillion:
The population of the United States is 307 million. The governor offered a budget of $48.87 million.

If a story needs the exact amount of a large number, use numerals: 301,468,593.

In casual uses, don’t use numerals:
He said he could give a million reasons for avoiding math class.

There are many exceptions, so check AP’s numerals entry.

Periods
Use them often. AP shows you how. Don’t let yourself fall into the trap of overly long sentences or run-on sentences like these:
He’s going to the grocery store, he needs to buy bread.
That’s really two sentences separated with a comma. It’s an error known as a comma splice.

Punctuation
AP has an entire chapter on punctuation. Read it thoroughly and refer to it often.

Quotation marks
Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks:
“I’m tired of punctuation marks,” he said. “Case closed.”

Semicolons and colons almost always go outside closing quotes. Other punctuation marks go inside if they apply only to the quoted matter, outside if the punctuation applies to the full sentence.
For instance: Have you seen “Rain Man”?
But: Jones stirred up the crowd by asking, “Haven’t you had enough of this place?”

State names
Spell out the names of the states when they stand alone:
I went to Montana last month. How far is it to Pennsylvania?

When used after city names, state names are spelled out in body copy but abbreviated in datelines and headlines:
He went to Scranton, Pennsylvania, for a meeting.
Cheyenne, Wyo. – A 21-car pileup on I-80 during a blizzard killed three people, police said.

Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Texas and Utah are never abbreviated.

Important note: AP’s abbreviations for state names are not the ones used by the U.S. Postal Service, so look them up if you’re not sure.
Time
Use numerals and lowercase a.m. or p.m.: He went to work at 7 a.m.
But always use noon or midnight, never 12 p.m. or 12 a.m.

Titles
Short formal titles are capitalized when used before a name. Some are abbreviated. If a title is used before a name, it should not be set off by commas:
**Right:** Vice President Joyce Laskowski met with state Sen. Vicki J. Epstein.
**Wrong:** Vice President, Joyce Laskowski, met with state Sen., Vicki J. Epstein.

When used alone or after a name, those same titles are spelled out and used lowercase:
Each state has two U.S. senators. Al Gore, vice president under Bill Clinton, isn’t in the news much anymore. When did you last see the secretary of state?

When a title is longer than a couple of words, place it after the name, lowercase it and set it off with commas:
**Right:** Jeremy Jones, treasurer of the homecoming committee, spoke at the meeting.
**Wrong:** Treasurer of the Homecoming Committee Jeremy Jones spoke at the meeting.

**Informal titles:** AP also allows short, descriptive phrases to be used as informal titles before names: Lawrence store owner Emily Wilmoth. Be careful with them, though. They often sound more natural after the name, set off with commas: Emily Wilmoth, owner of Emily’s Boutique, said she planned to expand her store.

**The “good morning rule”:** The New York Times uses what is informally called the “good morning rule” in deciding whether to put a title before or after a name. AP isn’t as strict, but the idea is still useful. If a title before a name sounds natural when you say good morning to someone, you can safely use it as a title in print: Good morning, President Obama. Good morning, Chancellor Gray-Little.

But you wouldn’t say: Good morning, Vice Chairman for Academic Affairs Smith. Or: Good morning, Secretary of the Lodging Committee Nelson.

In those cases, you’d lowercase the titles and put them after the names.

Attribution
This isn’t in the stylebook, but it’s an important thing to keep in mind. Said is the best word of attribution most of the time. Other words of attribution can easily imply additional, usually editorial, meaning. They are appropriate only if that additional meaning is proper and accurate. Even stated carries some baggage: It implies formality, something read from a prepared script. The phrase according to is generally neutral, but use it sparingly with human sources. In most cases, use charged in attribution only in the context of a formal legal action.

**Placement of attribution:** Almost always place the word of attribution after the proper name of the speaker: Jones said, NOT said Jones. But place the attribution before the speaker’s name when the name is followed by a long identification, an appositive or a nonessential clause:
The train had sounded its whistle and had flares burning on the back car, said H.D. Muldoon, a brakeman on the train.

See AP’s entry on quotations in the news.
Other important stylebook entries

abbreviations and acronyms
academic degrees
accept, except
accident, crash
admit, admitted
adviser
among, between
anybody, any body, anyone, any one
average, mean, median, norm
bad, badly
chairman, chairwoman
city council
compared to, compared with
complement, compliment
convince, persuade
courtesy titles
damage, damages
datelines
decades
demolish, destroy
dimensions
directions and regions
disabled, handicapped
disinterested, uninterested
do’s and don’ts
drunk, drunken
drug
emigrate, immigrate
entitled
federal
felony, misdemeanor
female
fewer, less
flaunt, flirt
flier, flyer
fractions
full-
geographic names
good, well
governmental bodies
gray
half-
hike
imply, infer
in, into
internet
it’s, its
last
lawyer
lay, lie
-like, like-
like, as
millions, billions
newspaper names
none
obscenities, profanities, vulgarities
off-
one-
or-organizations and institutions
-out, out-
-over, over, over-
people, persons
percent
plurals
possessives
post-
prefixes
principal, principle
prior to
pro-
prove, proved, proving
race
re-
reign, rein
sentences
should, would
sub-
suffixes
teen, teenager, teenage
temperatures
that (conjunction)
their, there, they’re
time element
tonight
total, totaled, totaling
toward
U.S.
verbs
well
who, whom
web, website, web page, etc.