

# AP Style versus Chicago Style

By Bobbie Christmas

Writers of articles for newspapers and magazines often learn to follow AP style, as set out in *The AP Stylebook*. This report is for writers who want to switch from AP style to Chicago style, the style preferred by book publishers. It also gives writers some insight into Chicago style, which sometimes differs from the style we learned in school.

*The Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) sets out all the details in Chicago style, but the book is expensive and more than a thousand pages long. On the bright side, CMOS is written for publishers, so writers don't need to know everything in the book. This report gives you a big start in understanding Chicago style, though. A simple report cannot cover everything in the book, so for greater detail, buy the book, subscribe to it online, or research it online at [www.chicagomanualofstyle.org](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org). I use a combination. I own the latest edition of CMOS, but I also use the website as a search tool. Looking up specific issues in the book can be frustrating, because I'm not always sure how a subject might be listed. I therefore use the free website portion to look up subjects. I jot down the section it references and then look up the details in the book. Sometimes I can find the answer on the website without looking it up in the book, too. I don't pay the annual fee to subscribe, yet I can always find what I'm looking for, either online or in my copy of the book.

When I switched from AP to Chicago style back in the 1970s, I found a few major differences, which I outline in this report. I am making a huge assumption that AP is basically the same as it was back then, but it probably changes a bit from edition to edition, as Chicago style does. For details in current AP style, consult the latest edition of *Associated Press Stylebook*. I will also address a few other issues that trip up some writers.

Okay, here we go.

## Numerals

AP writes out numbers one through nine and uses numbers for 10 and above. (*Joe had 10 reasons for staying home and 200 reasons to leave.*) Chicago Style writes out numbers one through one hundred and uses numbers for 101 and above. (*Joe had ten reasons for staying home and 200 reasons to leave.*)

Dates are always in numerals. (*We wanted to find an area in America that was still living in the 1960s, so we left town on October 16, 2006, to begin our search.*) Dates are also in cardinal numbers, not ordinal numbers. (*November 1, not November 1<sup>st</sup>*)

In dialogue, all numbers are written out, with exception of dates. (*"I'll meet you December 10 at ten-thirty at one oh three Dude Street."*)

Always spell out numbers at the beginning of a sentence. *Four thousand people attended the rally.*

Approximate numbers above one hundred are also written out, whereas exact ones are in numbers. (*We spent a thousand dollars on airfare, but only \$242.50 on food for the trip.*)

## Abbreviations

Chicago style has few abbreviations, but AP does, especially when it comes to states, and the AP abbreviations for states do not always follow postal style. For example, the post office uses *TN*, whereas AP Style calls for *Tenn.* Chicago style, however, uses *Tennessee*.

In Chicago style, avoid abbreviations or symbols for abbreviations in fiction and in most nonfiction, if possible. For example, avoid MPH, etc., lb., or #. Examples of what to avoid: *Melissa drove sixty MPH to get two lbs. of candy, so she could finish # four in the contest.* Correct: *Melissa drove sixty miles an hour to get two pounds of candy, so she could finish number four in the contest.*

Some technical or other terms, such as the title of a book, as I have done with CMOS, can be abbreviated, especially in nonfiction, but rules still apply. The first time a word for which there is a common abbreviation is used, spell out the word or words and show the abbreviation in parentheses immediately after it. Thereafter, use the abbreviation except when it begins a sentence, and then spell it out. Don't switch back and forth between the word and the abbreviation inside sentences. (Correct usage: *The **radio frequency (rf)** emitted by the device was off target. After recalibrating it, the **rf** was normal.*)

Do not introduce an abbreviation if it is never used again. (Incorrect: *The radio frequency (rf) emitted by the device was off target. After recalibrating it, the radio frequency was normal.*)

Although AP style uses designations for businesses such as *Inc.*, CMOS says that *Inc.* and *Ltd.*, whether spelled out or abbreviated, be eliminated from corporate names, unless the terms are an inseparable, integrated part of the name. (Incorrect: *John worked at Smith Builders, Ltd., but Marsha had her own construction company, Rooms, Inc.* Correct: *John worked at Smith Builders, but Marsha had her own construction company, Rooms Incorporated.*

## Capitals

In Chicago style, if a title precedes a name or replaces a name, the title is capitalized. (*I met Sergeant Bob Beddingfield when he was fresh out of college. The jury rose for Judge Bryan Golson. I loved Mom's cooking.*)

If the title follows the name or stands without a name, it is not capitalized. *Years later, Bob Beddingfield became a colonel. The jury rose for Bryan Golson, judge.*

If an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) or a possessive pronoun (*my*, *his*, *her*, *their*) precedes the replacement, do not capitalize. *I loved my mom's cooking. Let's call your dad.* The one exception covers Native American names, if an article is part of the name. *Mildred, known as the Laughing Water in her tribe, raised her hand.* Note that the article (*the*) remains in lowercase.

Class titles and fields of study are not capitalized unless they would normally be capitalized, such as English, Spanish, or Latin. (*Cassie signed up for Latin, history, economics, and algebra. He got his degree in nuclear physics.*)

Plant names are not usually capitalized, although divisions higher than genus—phylum, class, order, and family—are capitalized. (*Spiders, scorpions, insects, millipedes, and centipedes belong to the phylum Arthropoda.*)

Other words that are capitalized include T-shirt, TV (with no periods or spaces), and Internet.

Capitalize the first and last words in titles and subtitles (also called headings and subheadings) as well as all other major words (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and some conjunctions), but lowercase articles *the*, *a*, and *an*, unless they come first in the title or subtitle. Lowercase the conjunctions *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, and *nor*, as well as prepositions, but there are some exceptions, especially when a word is important to the heading.

Chicago style does not capitalize academic degrees when written out (*bachelor of arts, doctor of dental surgery, juris doctor, master of science, master of arts*). Chicago style also omits periods in abbreviations of academic degrees (*BA, DDS, and so forth*). The exception is Ph.D.

When referring to a civil war in general, it is not capitalized. When referring to the American Civil War, it must be capitalized. (*The students started a civil war over the new grading method. John's great grandfather fought in the Civil War.*)

### **Commas**

Chicago Style calls for a serial comma, whereas AP does not. (AP Style = *Red, white and blue banners hung off the building*; Chicago Style = *Red, white, and blue banners hung off the building*.)

### **Thoughts**

As writers of articles, we never had to deal with thoughts, but fiction writers sometimes want to show what a character is thinking. CMOS allows authors to decide how they prefer to treat direct thoughts. Some writers put quotation marks around thoughts. Others use italics. Others add attribution, such as this: Eric thought, *I'll be damned if I'll go along with that*. Be sure thoughts are clearly distinctive from narrative, and be consistent. Pick one style and stick to it throughout the manuscript. I prefer italics, myself.

While we're on the subject, let me mention that I see the following in many of the books I edit. *He thought to himself. Thought to himself or herself* is redundant. Use only *He thought* or *she thought*.

Indirect thoughts do not call for italics or quotation marks, as in this indirect thought: Joe thought he would never get home.

## Other Things

Chicago style uses no space before or after a dash. (*Las Vegas—gambling Mecca that it is—features casinos that stay open twenty-four hours a day.*) Use two hyphens (--) to indicate a dash, if you do not have a dash on your computer. (*I would like to tell you--emphatically--you are brilliant.*) Whether using the true dash or two hyphens, be consistent.

Creative-writing hint: Use dashes sparingly and never use them to avoid using correct punctuation.

In Chicago style, *Nonfiction* is one word, not hyphenated, but *e-mail* and *e-book* are hyphenated.

Chicago style does not hyphenate African American or Native American.

Chicago style dictates one space after a period. If you have a two-space habit left over from the old typewriter days, you can break the habit or use the tip below to delete those extra spaces in an instant, after you finish your first draft.

My book *Write In Style* explains my Find and Refine Method™. To use that method to find and delete all the extra spaces in your draft, type Ctrl+H, and a dialogue box appears. Put your cursor in Find line and press the space bar twice. Next put the cursor in the Replace box and press the spacebar once. Click on the button that says Replace All, and in moments, the computer makes all the changes for you. On the chance that some places have more than two spaces, I run this program through the manuscript twice, or at least until it says it has made zero replacements.

This brief report gets you started on the major points of Chicago style, but my reference book titled *Purge Your Prose of Problems* gives much more information, not only on style but also on grammar, punctuation, creative issues, and much more. To order the book, go to [http://zebraeditor.com/book\\_purge\\_your\\_prose\\_of\\_problems.shtml](http://zebraeditor.com/book_purge_your_prose_of_problems.shtml).

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Bobbie Christmas is a book doctor and the author of *Write In Style*, *Ask the Book Doctor*, and *Purge Your Prose of Problems*.

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