

## Rules for Writing Numbers

Rules regarding numbers in writing differ from one academic discipline to the next. For example, many **scientific disciplines** prefer to use **numerals** because of their emphasis on quantities and measures, while by comparison many of the disciplines in the **Arts and Social Sciences** insist on **words**. The rules listed below are applicable to the context of **general writing**.

### Numbers as Nouns or Adjectives:

A number should be expressed as a word if that number is **twelve or under**. This rule applies to both **cardinal and ordinal** numbers.

**Ex. Lisa made four spelling errors on the test, and so Lisa placed fifth in the class.**

↑  
Cardinal Number

↑  
Ordinal Number

However, when the number is **13 or higher**, numerals should be used.

**Ex. Mike made 17 spelling errors on the test, and so Mike placed 23<sup>rd</sup> in the class.**

↑  
Cardinal Number

↑  
Ordinal Number

**Note:** When a sentence includes numbers both higher and lower than twelve, use only numerals for the sake of consistency.

**Ex. Lisa made 4 spelling errors on the test, while Mike made 17, placing them 5<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> in the class, respectively.**

All numbers of any value should be expressed as words when they begin a sentence.

**Ex. Thirteen is a number often associated with bad luck.**

Any indefinite numbers, including large approximations, should be expressed as words.

**Ex. Over a billion people live in India.**

Any number preceding another number expressed as a numeral should be written out as a word.

**Ex. To complete the power relay, the engineers needed eighteen 100-meter long cables.**

↑      ↑  
Number      Length

## **Numbers as Time Expressions:**

Usually, expressions of time should use words.

**Ex. Let's meet at two o'clock.**

However, if the time expression includes AM or PM, or if it is based on a twenty-four hour clock, then numerals should be used.

**Ex. Let's meet at 2pm, or, if you prefer, 14:00.**

When describing complete dates, including the year, use numerals.

**Ex. Classes will begin on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015.**

The first twelve days of any month can be expressed as words if not accompanied by a year.

**Ex. Remember, remember the fifth of November...**

## **Numbers as Monetary Figures**

Express any amount of money rounded to the nearest standard unit of currency as a word.

**Ex. My brother still owes me fifty dollars.**

However, if **currency symbols (\$, €, £, ¥)** are used, then numerals should be used instead of words.

**Ex. My brother still owes me \$50.**

And if the total sum is not rounded to the nearest standard unit of currency, then numerals should be used.

**Ex. In fact, my brother actually owes me \$50.75.**

## **Numbers as Fractions and Percentages**

As a general rule, **all fractions and percentages should be expressed as numerals**. However, the following exceptions should be taken into consideration:

Fractions less than one and used commonly to express values can be expressed as words. This rule applies particularly to **halves, thirds and quarters**.

**Ex. I have been writing for over two hours now, but I have completed only about one-third of my exam.**

In most kinds of technical writing, especially in the Sciences, **the symbol % is used for percentage values**. However, in other disciplines the preferred form is to **write the word "percent"** rather than use the symbol, and this is true even when the "percent" is accompanied by a numeral.

**Ex. Less than 26 percent of young people surveyed had high hopes for future employment.**