

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.





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 23rd in the class.





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 5th and 23rd in the class, respectively.

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

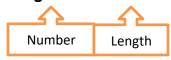
Ex. Thirteen is a number often associated with bad luck.

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.



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 10th, 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.