

chicago manual of style 17th edition

numbers

The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers guide is an indispensable resource for anyone seeking clarity and consistency in presenting numerical data. Navigating the nuances of when to spell out numbers, when to use figures, and how to handle specific numerical expressions can be a challenge for writers across various disciplines. This comprehensive article delves into the core principles and detailed rules governing numbers in the 17th edition of The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS). We will explore the fundamental distinction between spelling out numbers and using numerals, examine exceptions for specific contexts like dates, ages, and percentages, and address the proper formatting of large numbers, fractions, and ordinal numbers. Understanding these guidelines is crucial for producing polished, professional, and easily readable academic, professional, and creative works.

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Spelling Out Numbers vs. Using Figures

The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers section emphasizes a foundational principle: consistency and clarity. Generally, CMOS advises spelling out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words and using figures for larger numbers or those requiring more precision. This distinction is not arbitrary; it aims to enhance readability by avoiding awkward juxtapositions and guiding the reader's eye. The choice between spelling out and using figures often depends on the specific context, the number's magnitude, and the desired tone of the writing.

The overarching goal is to make numerical information as accessible and digestible as possible for the reader. When a number is simple and its appearance as a word does not disrupt the flow of a sentence, spelling it out is often preferred. Conversely, when dealing with complex figures, data, or measurements, numerals provide a more direct and unambiguous representation.

Numbers Below One Hundred

According to the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers guidelines, numbers from zero through one hundred are typically spelled out. This rule applies unless a specific exception dictates otherwise, such as in scientific or technical writing where figures might be preferred for consistency with other numerical data. For instance, "He brought twenty-five cookies to the party," is the preferred style over "He brought 25 cookies to the party."

This principle extends to compound numbers that are less than one hundred and are written with a hyphen. Examples include "twenty-one," "fifty-six," and "ninety-nine." These are treated as single units for the purpose of this rule. It's important to remember that this is a general guideline, and context can sometimes override it, particularly when numbers are used in close proximity to larger figures or in statistical contexts.

Numbers One Hundred and Above

For numbers one hundred and greater, the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers generally recommends using figures. This aids in clarity and avoids overly long words in sentences. For example, "The stadium can accommodate 75,000 spectators," is preferred over spelling out "seventy-five thousand." This practice helps in quickly conveying large quantities without interrupting the reading experience.

However, there are nuances. CMOS suggests that if a number one hundred or above begins a sentence, it should be spelled out. This rule is in place to prevent an abrupt start to a sentence with a numeral. For instance, "One hundred and fifty students enrolled in the course," is the correct form. This ensures a smoother and more grammatically sound sentence construction.

Handling Large Numbers

When dealing with very large numbers, such as those found in financial reports, scientific data, or historical accounts, the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers advocates for the use of figures for clarity and conciseness. Commas are used to separate thousands, millions, and billions, making these large figures more readable. For example, "The company's annual revenue exceeded \$2.5 billion," is standard practice.

CMOS also provides guidance on how to handle numbers that are not round figures, such as \$1,234,567. It also addresses the use of the ampersand and the word "and" in large numbers. For instance, a number like "one hundred twenty-three thousand four hundred fifty-six" would be written as "123,456."

Fractions and Percentages

The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers has specific rules for fractions and percentages to ensure clarity and consistency. For simple fractions that can be expressed in one or two words, it

is generally recommended to spell them out. Examples include "one-half," "three-quarters," and "two-thirds." These should be hyphenated when used as adjectives (e.g., "a two-thirds majority") but not when used as nouns (e.g., "two thirds of the pie").

For more complex fractions or those in technical contexts, figures are often used. Percentages are typically expressed using figures and the percent sign (%). For example, "The sales increased by 15 percent," or "15%." However, when a percentage begins a sentence, it should be spelled out: "Fifteen percent of the participants agreed."

Dates and Times

Dates and times have their own set of conventions within the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers. For dates, the common format is month day, year. For example, "July 4, 1776." When referring to a date without a specific year, the comma is omitted: "July 4." If the date is presented in order-day-month, then the year is not preceded by a comma: "4 July 1776."

Times are generally expressed using figures and a colon to separate hours and minutes, often with AM or PM. For example, "3:45 PM." When referring to the exact hour, it can be spelled out or written as a figure, with "o'clock" sometimes used for informality. For instance, "at three o'clock" or "at 3:00 PM."

Ages

In the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers, ages are typically expressed using figures, especially when they are specific measurements. This applies to both people and objects. For example, "The child is eight years old" can be written as "The child is eight years old" or, more commonly in prose, "The eight-year-old child."

When ages are used as part of a compound adjective before a noun, they are hyphenated: "a twenty-year-old student." If the age is a round number and used illustratively, it might be spelled out, but the general preference for precision leans towards figures. For example, "She celebrated her thirtieth birthday."

Currency

The presentation of currency adheres to specific standards within the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers to ensure clarity and avoid ambiguity. Monetary amounts are generally expressed using figures preceded by the currency symbol (\$ for US dollars, £ for British pounds, € for euros, etc.). For example, "\$25.50" or "£100."

When dealing with very large sums, consistency is key. It is common practice to use figures for amounts above one thousand. For instance, "The donation was \$5,000." Round numbers can

sometimes be spelled out for stylistic reasons in certain contexts, but the default for precise financial figures is to use numerals.

Ordinals and Cardinals

The distinction between cardinal numbers (e.g., one, two, three) and ordinal numbers (e.g., first, second, third) is maintained in the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers. Cardinal numbers indicate quantity, while ordinal numbers indicate position or order. Generally, cardinal numbers below one hundred are spelled out, as previously discussed.

Ordinal numbers are typically spelled out up to "ninth." For example, "the fifth day," "the twenty-first century." Beyond ninth, it becomes more common and often clearer to use figures for ordinal numbers, especially in formal or technical writing, such as "the 25th anniversary" or "the 101st Congress."

Numbers in Series

When a series includes both numbers that would be spelled out and numbers that would be written as figures, the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers advises choosing the style that offers the most consistency and clarity for the entire series. Often, the decision is dictated by the largest number in the series.

For instance, if a series includes numbers above and below one hundred, it's usually best to use figures for all of them to maintain uniformity. For example, "The group consisted of five members, 20 visitors, and 150 attendees." This approach prevents a jarring mix of spelled-out numbers and numerals within the same enumeration.

Consistency and Context

Ultimately, the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers emphasizes that consistency and context are paramount. While general rules exist, writers must exercise judgment to ensure their numerical usage enhances, rather than hinders, the reader's comprehension. In scientific, statistical, or technical documents, figures might be used more liberally to align with established conventions in those fields. Conversely, in creative writing or less technical prose, spelling out numbers might contribute to a softer, more narrative tone.

The goal is always to serve the reader. If a particular style choice, even if it deviates slightly from a general rule, leads to greater clarity or a more pleasing reading experience within the specific context of the work, it is often the preferable option. Careful consideration of the audience and the purpose of the writing will guide effective decisions regarding numbers.

FAQ

Q: When should I spell out numbers in Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: Generally, you should spell out numbers that can be expressed in one or two words, particularly those below one hundred. This includes simple fractions like "one-half" and ordinal numbers up to "ninth." However, this rule can be overridden by context, such as when a number begins a sentence or when consistency with other numbers in a series requires figures.

Q: When are figures preferred for numbers in CMOS 17th Edition?

A: Figures are generally preferred for numbers one hundred and above, for precise measurements, dates, times, ages, currency, percentages, and in scientific or technical writing. They are also used for clarity when numbers are complex or when consistency within a series demands it.

Q: How does CMOS 17th Edition handle numbers that start a sentence?

A: According to the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers, any number that begins a sentence should be spelled out, regardless of its magnitude. For example, "One thousand participants attended the conference."

Q: What are the rules for writing fractions in Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: Simple fractions that can be expressed in one or two words, such as "one-third" or "three-quarters," should be spelled out. These are hyphenated when used as adjectives (e.g., "a one-third share") and unhyphenated when used as nouns (e.g., "one third of the budget"). More complex fractions or those in technical contexts typically use figures.

Q: How should I format currency in Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: Currency should be presented using figures preceded by the appropriate currency symbol, such as \$25.50 or €100. For large amounts, consistency with figures is the standard. Round numbers can occasionally be spelled out for stylistic reasons in less formal contexts, but precise financial figures always use numerals.

Q: What is the rule for writing out ages in CMOS 17th Edition?

A: Ages are typically expressed using figures in the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers. For example, "the 25-year-old student" or "She is 40 years old." When used as a compound adjective before a noun, the age is hyphenated.

Q: How do I handle numbers in a series according to Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition?

A: When a series includes numbers that would typically be spelled out and numbers that would typically be figures, the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers suggests choosing the style that provides the most consistency and clarity for the entire series. Often, this means using figures for all numbers if the largest number requires them.

Q: Are there specific rules for ordinal numbers in CMOS 17th Edition?

A: Yes, ordinal numbers are generally spelled out up to "ninth," such as "the fifth annual report." Beyond that, it is usually clearer and more consistent to use figures, for instance, "the 21st century" or "the 105th Infantry Regiment."

Q: What is the general principle for numbers in the 17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style?

A: The overarching principle in the Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition Numbers is to prioritize clarity and consistency. Writers should choose the method of presentation (spelling out or using figures) that best aids the reader's understanding and maintains uniformity throughout the text.

Q: How does Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition handle percentages?

A: Percentages are typically expressed using figures followed by the word "percent" or the percent sign (%). For example, "The success rate was 85 percent," or "85%." If a percentage begins a sentence, it should be spelled out: "Eighty-five percent of the respondents agreed."

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