

chicago style numbers ordinals

chicago style numbers ordinals, like all elements of scholarly writing, require careful attention to detail and adherence to established guidelines. Understanding how to correctly format numbers and ordinal numbers within the Chicago Manual of Style is crucial for academic integrity and clear communication. This comprehensive guide will delve into the nuances of Chicago style for both cardinal and ordinal numbers, exploring when to use numerals versus spelling out, specific rules for dates and times, and common pitfalls to avoid. We will cover the principles governing the representation of numbers in text, the specific conventions for ordinals, and how these rules apply across various contexts within Chicago style documentation. Mastering these guidelines ensures your work meets the rigorous standards expected in academic and professional writing.

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Understanding Chicago Style for Numbers

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) provides detailed guidance on the presentation of numbers to ensure consistency and readability. While there isn't a single, overarching rule that dictates whether to spell out or use numerals for every number, CMOS offers a framework based on clarity, context, and the avoidance of ambiguity. Generally, numbers below 10 are spelled out in prose, while numbers 10 and above are rendered as numerals. However, this basic guideline is subject to numerous exceptions and considerations that aim to enhance the reader's experience and maintain stylistic coherence.

The rationale behind these guidelines often centers on the visual impact of numbers within a text. Spelled-out numbers can sometimes disrupt the flow of a sentence, especially when they are lengthy. Conversely, a string of numerals can appear abrupt or overly technical. Chicago style seeks a balance, promoting clarity by using numerals for larger numbers where they are more easily recognized and understood, and spelling them out for smaller numbers where they integrate more smoothly into the narrative. The goal is always to make the information accessible and professional.

Cardinal Numbers in Chicago Style

Cardinal numbers, also known as cardinal figures, refer to the basic counting numbers (one, two, three, etc.). Chicago style has specific recommendations for their use in prose. The general rule of thumb, as mentioned, is to spell out numbers zero through nine and use numerals for numbers 10 and above. This principle serves as a foundational element in applying Chicago style to numerical data presented in text.

However, this rule is not absolute and often depends on the context. For instance, if a sentence contains both a number under 10 and a number 10 or above, Chicago style typically advocates for using numerals for both to maintain consistency within that specific sentence. This ensures that a series of numbers doesn't look uneven or distracting. For example, "The project involved five team members and 15 new interns" is the preferred Chicago style over "The project involved five team members and fifteen new interns."

When to Spell Out Cardinal Numbers

There are specific instances where spelling out cardinal numbers is preferred, regardless of their magnitude. These often involve common phrases or approximations where the exact numeral is less important than the general idea being conveyed. For example, it is customary to spell out numbers that are part of a common idiom or expression.

- Numbers at the beginning of a sentence are generally spelled out, even if they are 10 or greater, to avoid starting a sentence with a numeral which can be jarring.
- Numbers that represent approximations or general quantities are often spelled out for a softer, more narrative feel.
- Fractions are typically spelled out, especially common ones like "one-half" or "two-thirds."
- Large, round numbers, such as "a million" or "a billion," are often spelled out to avoid overwhelming the reader with digits.

When to Use Numerals for Cardinal Numbers

The use of numerals is generally encouraged for numbers 10 and above in most prose. This aids in quick recognition and comprehension, especially when dealing with statistical data or precise measurements. Numerals are also

preferred when they appear in close proximity to other numerals, as discussed earlier, to maintain stylistic uniformity.

- Numbers 10 and above in standard prose.
- Numbers representing precise measurements, distances, weights, or dimensions.
- Numbers used in statistics or technical contexts where precision is paramount.
- Numbers in tables, charts, and figures, which are often presented in a purely numerical format.
- Numbers in mathematical equations or formulas.

Ordinal Numbers in Chicago Style

Ordinal numbers indicate position or order in a sequence, such as first, second, third, etc. Chicago style has specific rules for formatting these as well, often mirroring the conventions for cardinal numbers but with their own distinct considerations. The primary goal remains clarity and consistency in presentation.

Similar to cardinal numbers, the convention for ordinal numbers in Chicago style often involves spelling out smaller ordinals and using numerals for larger ones. However, the threshold for this can vary, and context plays a significant role. The use of "st," "nd," "rd," and "th" also requires careful application.

Spelling Out Ordinal Numbers

Generally, ordinal numbers up to and including "ninth" are spelled out. This ensures they blend smoothly into the prose and do not create an overly numerical feel when referring to everyday sequences. Common usage dictates that these smaller ordinals are best presented in their word form for readability.

- First, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth.
- These are used when referring to the order of events, ranks, or positions in everyday contexts.

- For example, "This is the fifth time we have discussed this issue."

Using Numerals for Ordinal Numbers

Ordinal numbers 10 and above are typically rendered as numerals with the appropriate suffix (e.g., 10th, 11th, 12th). This convention is adopted for consistency with cardinal numbers and for better readability when dealing with higher-order positions. The suffixes are usually attached directly to the numeral.

- 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, etc.
- These are used when referring to higher positions in a sequence or when statistical accuracy is important.
- For instance, "The team secured the 15th position in the championship."

Specific Ordinal Number Considerations

There are a few specific scenarios that warrant particular attention when formatting ordinal numbers in Chicago style. These involve dates, centuries, and specific terminology. For instance, centuries are often treated differently than typical ordinal numbers.

- **Dates:** In formal writing, when referring to dates, the ordinal number is often followed by the month (e.g., January 1, 2023). In less formal contexts or when the day is not the primary focus, the numeral may be used without the suffix, though Chicago style generally prefers spelling out the day when it stands alone or is part of a clear date. However, for style consistency in dates, the general rule of spelling out up to ninth and using numerals thereafter often applies. For example, "the first of January" versus "the 10th of January."
- **Centuries:** Centuries are usually spelled out, such as "the nineteenth century," and not written as "19th century."
- **Royalty and Popes:** Ordinal numbers used with the names of monarchs and popes (e.g., Queen Elizabeth II, Pope John Paul II) are typically written using Roman numerals, not Arabic numerals or spelled-out forms.

Numbers in Dates and Times

Chicago style provides clear guidelines for the representation of dates and times to ensure precision and ease of understanding. These conventions aim to standardize how temporal information is presented across different types of academic and professional documents.

Dates

When writing out a full date, the day of the month is typically presented as an ordinal number, though the suffix is often omitted when the day follows the month in a full date. For example, "May 1, 2024," is the standard. If the day is mentioned separately or as the primary focus, the ordinal number is usually spelled out up to ninth and written as a numeral with suffix thereafter.

- **Full Dates:** Use the format Month Day, Year (e.g., July 4, 1776). The day is typically written as an Arabic numeral.
- **Partial Dates:** When referring to just a month and day, the ordinal number is often spelled out if it's under ten (e.g., the fifth of May) and used as a numeral with suffix if it's ten or higher (e.g., the 15th of May).
- **Decades:** Decades are typically written with numerals and an apostrophe, such as "the 1990s," or spelled out as "the nineties."

Times

The representation of time in Chicago style also follows specific conventions. Whether to use numerals or spell out the time depends on the level of formality and precision required.

- **Formal Times:** For precise times, numerals are used with "a.m." and "p.m." or "A.M." and "P.M." (Chicago prefers lowercase). For example, 3:30 p.m. or 10:00 a.m.
- **Informal Times:** Vague or approximate times can be spelled out, such as "half past three" or "around noon."
- **Military Time:** Military time (e.g., 1530 hours) is generally avoided in standard prose unless the context specifically demands it.

Special Cases and Exceptions

Beyond the general rules, Chicago style addresses several special cases and exceptions for numbers and ordinals that authors should be aware of. These nuances ensure that even in less common scenarios, a consistent and clear style is maintained.

Numbers in Statistics and Figures

When presenting statistical data, tables, or figures, Chicago style generally favors the use of numerals for all numbers, regardless of their magnitude. This is because clarity and precise data representation are paramount in such contexts. The goal is to make the data as accessible and unambiguous as possible.

Probabilities and Percentages

Probabilities and percentages are typically expressed using numerals. For instance, "a probability of 0.75" or "a 25 percent increase." The word "percent" is usually spelled out in prose, rather than using the "%" symbol, unless it appears in a table or figure where space is limited.

Addresses and Phone Numbers

Addresses and phone numbers are almost always presented using numerals, as these are specific identifiers. Chicago style does not deviate from this common practice. For example, "1600 Pennsylvania Avenue" and "555-123-4567."

Money

Amounts of money are typically written using numerals, with the appropriate currency symbol or abbreviation. For example, "\$50," "£20," or "100 euros."

Numbers in Tables and Figures

As mentioned, when numbers are presented in tables, charts, or figures, Chicago style strongly recommends the use of numerals for all values. This facilitates quick comparison and analysis of data. Consistency within the

table or figure is key, so mixing spelled-out numbers with numerals is generally discouraged. The headings and labels within tables and figures should also be clear and concise, often employing numerals where appropriate for precision.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Despite the detailed guidelines, authors can sometimes fall into common traps when applying Chicago style for numbers and ordinals. Awareness of these pitfalls can help prevent stylistic inconsistencies and improve the overall quality of the writing.

- **Inconsistency:** The most common error is inconsistency in applying the rules. For example, spelling out a number in one sentence and using a numeral for a similar number in the next sentence without a clear stylistic reason.
- **Starting Sentences with Numerals:** While Chicago style generally uses numerals for 10 and above, starting a sentence with a numeral can be awkward. Always spell out numbers that begin a sentence, even if they are 10 or greater.
- **Misapplying Ordinal Suffixes:** Incorrectly adding or omitting suffixes ("st," "nd," "rd," "th") can lead to errors. Remember that for ordinals ending in "1" (except 11), the suffix is "st" (1st, 21st, 31st); for those ending in "2" (except 12), it's "nd" (2nd, 22nd, 32nd); for those ending in "3" (except 13), it's "rd" (3rd, 23rd, 33rd); and for all others, it's "th" (4th, 10th, 20th).
- **Overuse of Numerals:** While numerals are essential for precision, their excessive use in prose can make the text appear dry or technical. Use judgment to ensure smooth readability.
- **Not Following Contextual Rules:** Forgetting that context, such as when a sentence contains both small and large numbers, often dictates using numerals for all to maintain consistency.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary rule for spelling out numbers in Chicago style?

A: The general rule in Chicago style is to spell out numbers zero through nine and use numerals for numbers 10 and above in prose. However, this rule has several exceptions based on context and clarity.

Q: When should ordinal numbers be spelled out versus written as numerals in Chicago style?

A: Similar to cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers up to and including "ninth" are typically spelled out (e.g., first, second, ninth). Ordinal numbers 10 and above are usually written as numerals with the appropriate suffix (e.g., 10th, 15th, 21st).

Q: How are dates formatted for ordinal numbers in Chicago style?

A: In full dates, the day is typically written as an Arabic numeral (e.g., January 1, 2023). When referring to the day of the month separately or as the primary focus, the ordinal number is spelled out if it's under ten (e.g., the fifth of May) and used as a numeral with suffix if it's ten or higher (e.g., the 15th of May).

Q: What is the Chicago style convention for centuries?

A: Centuries are generally spelled out in Chicago style, such as "the nineteenth century" or "the twenty-first century," rather than using numerals like "19th century" or "21st century."

Q: How should numbers at the beginning of a sentence be handled in Chicago style?

A: Numbers at the beginning of a sentence should always be spelled out, regardless of their value, to avoid starting a sentence with a numeral, which can be stylistically jarring. For example, write "Twenty-five participants attended the workshop," not "25 participants attended the workshop."

Q: Are there differences in how numbers are presented in prose versus in tables and figures?

A: Yes, there is a significant difference. In standard prose, the rules for spelling out or using numerals for numbers below 10 and above 10 are generally followed. However, in tables, charts, and figures, Chicago style strongly recommends using numerals for all numbers to ensure clarity, precision, and ease of data comparison.

Q: What is the Chicago style recommendation for

common fractions?

A: Common fractions are typically spelled out in Chicago style, especially when they are used in prose and do not require extreme precision. Examples include "one-half," "two-thirds," or "three-quarters."

Q: How are numbers representing royalty or popes formatted in Chicago style?

A: Numbers used with the names of monarchs and popes (e.g., Queen Elizabeth II, Pope John Paul II) are typically written using Roman numerals, not Arabic numerals or spelled-out forms.

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