

## Numbers: Digits or Spelled Out?

The rule for numbers isn't always concrete—you may use the figure style for some writing, and the word style for others. Sometimes a publisher will have a style handbook, and no matter what, you'll follow those guidelines. If they don't, hopefully these explanations will help:

1. **Figure Style.** This is used most often in a commercial business, scientific, financial, or technical setting. Spell out numbers between one and ten, and use figures for everything over 11.

Some exceptions where you always use a figure:

- a. In page numbers: *page 2*
  - b. In tables and statistics: *4 out of 5 doctors prescribe this*
  - c. In sports scores: *31-7*
  - d. In grades, percentages, and measurements: *5 out of 100, 5%, 5 percent, 4 degrees*
  - e. With indefinite numbers: *one in a million*
2. **Word Style.** This is used in more formal and literary material. Spell out all cardinal numbers between 1 and 100, and numbers over 100 that require no more than two words. Just an FYI: hyphenated numbers count as one word, so *sixty-seven thousand* is the equivalent of two words and not three, but you would say *550 miles* and not *five-hundred and fifty miles* because that is three words (and not four). This also applies to ordinal numbers: *third* string, *ninety-ninth* year, *102<sup>nd</sup>* floor  
Some specifics:
    - a. In numbers over a million, you can use either: *315 million* or *315,000,000*
    - b. With large, fractional numbers, use numbers: *26.3 million* out of *315 million*
    - c. Percentages always use numbers: *6%* or *6 percent*
  3. **Time.** There are a few different rules:
    - a. Use words for even, half and quarter hours of time: be there at *eight, quarter after two, nine thirty*
    - b. Use numbers with a.m. and p.m. if it is an exact time: *10:01 a.m., 9:49 p.m.*
    - c. With "o'clock", always use words: *ten o'clock*
  4. **Money.** There is also more than one rule here:
    - a. If you spell out the number, spell out *dollars* or *cents*. If you use numbers, use \$ and ¢: *seven dollars, \$7, twenty-five cents, 25¢*
    - b. Use numbers when there is an exact amount of money or more than two words: *\$9.99, \$25,800*
    - c. Use words if it is an indefinite amount of money: *several hundred dollars, about six thousand dollars' worth*

- d. For large sums of money, you can use numbers or words: the house is worth *\$10 million*, or the house is worth *ten million dollars*
5. Dates. Use either ordinal or cardinal numbers:
    - a. Ordinal numbers: when the day comes before the month or stands on its own, use an ordinal figure (*1<sup>st</sup>*, *3<sup>rd</sup>*, *5<sup>th</sup>*), or ordinal words (the *first*, the *third*, the *fifth*)
    - b. Cardinal numbers: when the day comes after the month, use a cardinal figure (*1*, *3*, *5*): on December *25*
    - c. For periods of time, use numbers for technical purposes: *40-hour* workweek, *15-year* loan, and words for nontechnical purposes: *three* hour tour
    - d. Centuries and decades can use numbers or words: *1950s* or *nineteen-fifties*
    - e. For a specific year, always use numbers: *2001* unless it begins a sentence
  6. Beginning a sentence. Always use words:
    - a. *Twenty-five* students attended the seminar.

Remember that numbers are used in both formal and informal documents and you need to use the proper style for the situation!