

# USING NUMBERS IN WRITING



College of the  
Siskiyous  
WRITING LAB

**INTRODUCTION:** Follow the conventions in your discipline for spelling out or using numerals to express numbers.

**In the humanities, which generally follow MLA style:** Use numerals only for specific numbers larger than one hundred: *353; 1,020*. Spell out numbers one hundred and below and large round numbers: *eleven, thirty-five, fifteen million*. Treat related numbers in a passage consistently: *The survey found that 9 of the 157 students had not taken a course on alcohol use.*

**In the social sciences and other disciplines that follow APA style:** Use numerals for all but the numbers one through nine. Spell out numbers from one to nine even when they are used with related numerals in a passage: *The survey found that nine of the 157 respondents had not taken a course on alcohol use.* (An exception is the abstract of a paper, where numerals are used for all numbers.)

**If a sentence starts with a number, spell out the number or rewrite the sentence.**

**Use numerals according to convention in dates, addresses, and so on:**

Dates July 4, 1776; 56 BC; AD 30

Addresses 77 Latches Lane, 519 West 42nd Street

Percentages 55 percent (or 55%)

Fractions, Decimals  $7/8$ , 0.047

Scores 7 to 3, 21—18

Statistics average age 37, average weight 180

Surveys 4 out of 5

Exact Amounts of Money \$105.37, \$106, 000

Divisions of Books volume 3, chapter 4, page 189

Division of Plays act 3, scene 3 (or act III, scene iii)

Time of Day 4:00 p.m., 1:30 a.m.

Note: When not using a.m. or p.m., write out the time in words (*two o'clock, twelve noon, seven in the morning*).

### **Numbers in Non-Technical Papers:**

- In non-technical papers, numbers may interrupt and obstruct continuity. The clearest system is to spell out numbers that can be stated in one or two words.

six cartons BUT 181 cartons

twenty-four dollars BUT \$23.88

forty thousand children BUT 39, 658 children

three million chickens BUT 4, 623 chickens

- Hyphenated numbers are counted as one word.

Twelve o'clock (one-word number)

Thirty-eight battles (one-word number)

Forty-five thousand miles (one-word number)

### **Numbers in Technical Papers:**

- In business, technical, or scientific papers, numbers are more efficient and more emphatic than word

On 31 August, Raley's Supermarkets ordered 10,000 Foster Farms 10-lb Tom turkeys at a pre-Thanksgiving savings of 7 percent. Unfortunately, refrigeration costs totaled \$.07 per 100 lbs., thus wiping out the savings.

- Adjacent numbers are easier to read when one number is a figure and one is a word.

We need ten 12-foot planks.

James wrote two 20-page papers.

They bought 5,000 thirteen-cent stamps.